



Turning the Corner: managing the use of mobility vehicles from a housing perspective

This Case Study highlights the key issues and findings from a research project commissioned in December 2011 by First Wessex, a Hampshire-based housing association managing over 20,000 affordable homes in three main areas, to research and develop design and management options for older and disabled people in First Wessex housing stock to use or continue to use Mobility Vehicles.

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Introduction

This case study highlights the key issues and findings from a research project commissioned in December 2011 by First Wessex (FW), a Hampshire-based housing association managing over 20,000 affordable homes in three main areas, to research and develop design and management options for older and disabled people in First Wessex housing stock to use or continue to use Mobility Vehicles (MVs). The research was undertaken on account of:

- Demographic trends signalling very substantial increases in the numbers of older people and an associated rise in Mobility Vehicle use
- The growing restrictions on the storage and charging of Mobility Vehicles stemming from Fire Safety requirements in particular
- The need to identify, within built environment constraints, storage and charging solutions that support the safe use of Mobility Vehicles, and
- A need to better understand the housing management, maintenance and development issues for a large housing association in relation to Mobility Vehicles.

Factors driving future Mobility Vehicle need

A body of evidence, including data gained from the several surveys conducted as part of this project, confirms that MV use is increasing for all age groups and particularly among those aged over 65. It should also be recalled that there are associated debates as to what extent ownership of a MV is a 'lifestyle choice' as opposed to representing a critical mobility aid and a key to continued independence. However, given the nature of available information sources, there are clear limitations to assessing accurately how many MVs are currently in circulation let alone how many there will be in the future.

The case study found that despite some regional variations, POPPI data shows significant projected growth in the number of older people overall and this will equate to many more older people with mobility issues, a factor that will have a direct bearing on demand for MVs.

Current and potential Mobility Vehicle markets

This section sets the MV market in context and considers the key issues facing First Wessex.

Mobility Vehicles – some facts

The MV is classed as an 'invalid carriage' and therefore there is no requirement to:

- Prove that the vehicle is roadworthy
- Insure the vehicle
- Pay a road fund licence (MVs that can exceed 4mph need to be registered with the DVLA but no tax is payable as they come within the 'disabled taxation class')
- Ensure competence, e.g. health assessment, eye test
- Take a driving test or undergo training.

Defining Mobility Vehicles

Mobility Vehicles (MVs) are also commonly referred to nationally as Mobility Scooters and the term is interchangeable and refers to the same types of vehicles.

Firstly, it is important to differentiate between MVs and electric wheelchairs which are shorter than MVs and have front castor type wheels making them very manoeuvrable with turning circles generally well within the 1500mm standard. Unlike MVs, these may be supplied by the NHS to residents who need them and during site visits we did not see any examples of these being stored in the communal areas of the blocks of flats visited. Also, anecdotal evidence suggests that these are normally kept inside residents' flats, so the storage problem appears to be with MVs only.

It is estimated there are over 400 different types of MVs on the market today and these are broken into two groups and defined as either:

- Class 2 - with a top speed of 4mph and are either 3 or 4 wheeled
- Class 3 - with four wheels with a top speed of 8mph

Both types are common in the UK and are electric powered with the Class 3 MVs having larger and heavier batteries. Battery technology has been advancing over the last decade so that the original 'lead acid' batteries, which needed to be charged in a ventilated space, are being replaced by 'lithium-ion' batteries (as used in computer laptops and in the newest electric vehicles) which can be charged without requiring ventilation.

MVs are typically based around a pair of 12v batteries and the size and weight of these varies with the size of the MV. While the batteries have to be removable for replacement, MVs have generally not been designed so that the batteries can be easily removed. Batteries on the larger Class 3 MVs are heavy and so can be difficult to lift out. Batteries typically need to be recharged over an eight hour period so overnight charging is typical.

The vast majority of MVs are designed to be driven through single doors and so can be taken inside blocks of flats and the flats themselves relatively easily. It has to be remembered that the MV has to be turned round to leave the building but they typically have very large turning circles with a minimum of 2000mm so that even flats designed to accommodate conventional wheelchairs are unlikely to have sufficient hallway area for turning MVs.

Why is it important to look at this area?

There are several considerations that have a distinct bearing on the effective management of MV use and the scope for older and disabled people to become MV users:

Mobility Vehicles and fire risk

One of the major issues that is causing concern to landlords is the perceived fire risk posed by the storage of MVs and this was one of key drivers for this research. National statistics show that poorly maintained electrical equipment is a major source of fire so there is an obvious basis for concern and there is existing anecdotal evidence of accidental fires associated with mobility vehicles reported in the media at a rate of one or two fires per year. Some of these are connected with MVs in use and the dramatic fire associated with an incident in a street in Melton Mowbray in 2011 was widely reported in the national press.

However, during this research we have been unable to locate any academic research papers to date on the fire risk MVs pose while being charged and/or stored and how this risk might be reduced. One or two fire service websites are highlighting risks on the basis of one or two fires without any attempt to put these in context of domestic death and injury statistics as a whole. There have been fires involving the recharging of laptop batteries and it seems likely that the highest risk is while the MVs are being recharged from the mains electrical supply.

Fire regulation in relation to blocks of flats

One of the principal issues with MV storage in the communal areas of flats is the risk created by endangering the safe means of escape of other residents in the case of a fire. This might either be a fire caused by the MV itself or the obstruction caused to other residents as they escape.

In fire terms, it is assumed by the authors of the Fire Safety Order guidelines⁽¹⁾ that in the case of purpose built or properly converted flats or maisonettes, built in accordance with modern building regulations, a fire will generally be confined to the dwelling. This is because there is a high degree of compartmentalisation and a low probability of fire spreading beyond the dwelling of origin. It is further assumed that there will be good risk reduction and arson reduction measures and that the materials and construction of the escape routes will prevent the fabric of the building from being involved. For these reasons, common areas are not usually fitted with a fire detection and warning system (although self-contained smoke alarms should normally be fitted within each accommodation unit) as simultaneous evacuation of the building is unlikely to be necessary.

In flats and maisonettes, people can be expected to have more detailed knowledge of the layout of the premises and its escape routes which gives them a lower risk profile by comparison with other buildings. However, the fact that a fire may occur while people are asleep increases risk levels and there is also the risk of a delayed response for reasons such as attempting to get fully dressed, gathering other family members together and collecting personal belongings.

If the need to store MVs in the communal areas was not taken into account when the building was designed (which is unlikely in even the newest general needs flats), their subsequent appearance will be covered under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – generally referred to as the FSO. This places responsibility on landlords to carry out and record fire risk assessments in order to ensure that their premises are safe for their occupants and this applies to all types of buildings, including the communal areas of blocks of flats (although excluding houses and the flats themselves). This has directly led to the need to carry out and record fire risk assessments in order to ensure blocks of flats are safe and this has highlighted fire safety concerns.

Following the publication of the FSO, guidance on carrying out the fire risk assessments was given via eleven advisory A4 documents published by DCLG in 2006⁽²⁾ – each some 150 pages long and each covering a different type of building. Advice relevant to the common areas of flats and maisonettes is given via the third of these entitled ‘Fire Safety Risk

¹ - ‘The Regulatory Reform’ (Fire Safety) Order 2005; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2005/1541/contents/made

² - HM Government Guide ‘Fire safety risk assessment: sleeping accommodation’, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), May 2006; www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/151339.pdf

Assessment – Sleeping Accommodation’. The guide suggests in its text that it is intended for use by managers of blocks of flats and will help in carrying out a risk assessment and identifying the general fire precautions that should be in place.

However, the very essence of carrying out a risk assessment is to be confident in identifying and accepting risk, in this case on behalf of others. Where the person carrying out the assessment is lacking in experience as to what constitutes high and low fire risk, especially if there are items such as MVs which are not specifically referred to in the published guidance, the outcome in our current accident averse and litigious society is likely to be to want to remove anything perceived as a risk.

It has been recognised nationally that the application of the FSO to the communal areas of blocks of flats has proved problematic and has led to widely varying outcomes. Of particular concern has been the variation in the findings of fire risk assessments carried out by third parties on behalf of landlords and others responsible for fire safety in blocks of flats. In some buildings, significant work to upgrade fire safety standards within the common parts has been undertaken to satisfy this legislation. In others, none has been considered necessary.

In order to address these concerns, new national guidance was published in 2011 under the auspices of the Local Government Group called *‘Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats.’*⁽³⁾ This sets out two policy options for landlords in regard to storage of residents’ belongings in common parts, i.e. *‘zero tolerance’* and *‘managed use’*. There is recognition of the fact that while the zero tolerance option is the easier one for landlords to adopt, residents may be put to significant inconvenience which can lead to infringements of the policy through frustration. For the first time, MVs are referred to a number of times in the publication. Guidance is clearer and more helpful than in the FSO advisory documents and some very specific guidance is given.

Purchasing / hiring Mobility Vehicles

Although there are many commercial companies selling / hiring MVs within the Country, the prices for these vehicles vary considerably and caution should be stressed in this respect. A good source of information on purchasing MVs and other important information in relation to ownership can be sourced from the Disability Living Foundation.⁽⁴⁾ Also, The Norfolk Constabulary, in conjunction with Halfords, have developed a suite of information including a useful brochure which can be downloaded and a series of DVDs including information for potential MV users and a trainer’s guide on how to host a training course for potential users (Website: www.safescoot.co.uk). Another concern here is the fact that this research has identified that buying MVs privately is a clear choice for many residents and therefore the lack of controls on serviceability mean that safety from that point of view cannot be safeguarded.

Within the research undertaken we considered alternatives to residents purchasing MVs, particularly where storage and charging proves to be impossible within their current accommodation. This section looks at the opportunities for utilising Shopmobility schemes and provides a good practice example in respect of the ‘ScootAbility’ scheme in the London Borough of Camden.⁽⁵⁾

³ - ‘Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats’ Local Government Group July 2011; www.local.gov.uk/publications

⁴ - Disability Living Foundation (Helpline: 0845 130 9177; Website: 222; www.dfl.org.uk)

Shopmobility

Many people attracted by the independence a MV can offer are unable to store/charge one where they live or would prefer to hire rather than buy one. In these circumstances local Shopmobility MV hire services can go some way towards providing a solution, especially where there is suitable transport (e.g. Dial-a-Ride) to the point of hire and adjacent, allocated disabled parking. Shopmobility schemes are charitable organisations, run in the main by volunteers and are affiliates of the National Federation of Shopmobility.

London Borough of Camden – the ScootAbility scheme

This MV loan scheme is noteworthy in that it delivers the vehicles to hirers' homes within Camden and Islington and collects them at the end of the hire period. The service is operated in the following manner:

- The MVs are loaned for a period of one to seven days
- The membership levels are:
 - Day loan only: where the property has a secure storage area, but no suitable charging facilities
 - One to seven days loan: where the property has suitable storage and charging facilities
- A home assessment takes place to ensure that the MV can be stored / charged
 - If minor adaptations to the home are required the project may be able to pay for the work or the applicant may be asked to contribute
- Potential hirers must complete an application form prior to hiring a MV, the question topics include:
 - Medical conditions
 - Hearing, speech, communication & sight
 - Mobility details – including weight
- To be eligible hirers need to be permanent residents of Camden / Islington aged 16 and over and have a mobility impairment
- Before loaning a MV hirers need to agree to training
 - One to one training by professionals takes place in their local area
 - A training DVD is also available
- The Membership Fee is £10 per annum and currently there is no daily charge
- Terms and conditions for the service are sent to the potential hirer and signed prior to first use.

⁵ - ScootAbility' scheme in the London Borough of Camden'; www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/transport-and-streets/community-transport-initiatives/accessible-transport/scootability.en

Understanding customer's views and experience at first hand

The project structure provided for cross-tenure consultation with First Wessex customers using methodologies designed to ensure inclusion and to gather data to underpin the research evidence base. Project launch and focus group meetings were undertaken by Ridgeway, as was a postal questionnaire survey across a significant sample of potential future MV users in First Wessex provision.

The views of other housing providers

Initially this aspect of the project began with a small email survey which produced responses from Resident Involvement Managers at five other local housing providers. Subsequently, the Housing LIN disseminated the survey to members nationally using a questionnaire reformatted using an online research tool. An amazing 451 responses were received from 114 organisations!

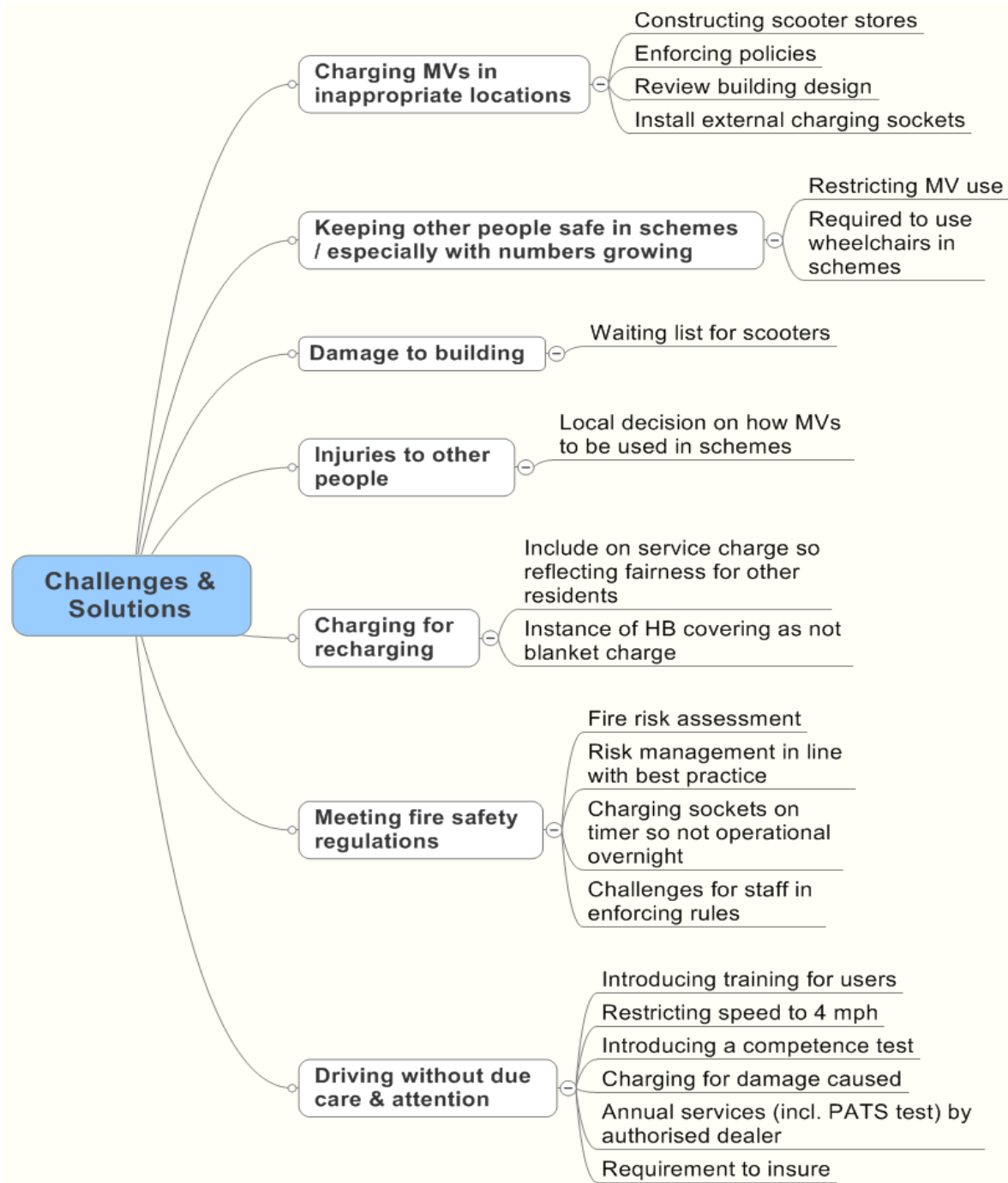
Key Findings

- Two-thirds of respondents indicated that less than 10% of residents are MV users
 - The corresponding proportion for 10 to 15% usage is just under a quarter and MV use over 15% was indicated in 10% of responses
- Two-thirds of respondents replied that MV use is increasing and, within this group, just over 60% felt that the increase is marginal, compared with the nearly 40% who regard the increase as significant
- In terms of MV acquisition, the survey result was that nearly half of users buy their vehicles while broadly equal proportions of the remainder lease or hire
- Asked about challenges caused by MV use the main issues identified by respondents were:
 - Achieving suitable MV storage/charging solutions
 - Safety – MV users can and do cause dangers/injury to other residents and themselves due to inadequate driver competencies/consideration for others and the physical limitations of the built environment
 - Damage by MVs within schemes – e.g. to walls, doors, floor coverings and lifts
- The responses regarding solutions to MV-related challenges, however, served to highlight a diverse range of approaches/intentions and a selection of these are reflected in Figure 1 below
- Where MV charging facilities are provided 55% of respondents said that they charged for the electricity involved
 - Among this group nearly 60% indicated that these electricity costs are included within the service charge for communal electricity

- Few respondents indicated the amounts MV users are charged per week for electricity and those figures given were diverse, ranging from 'around £1.40' to £8.28
 - Of note, one respondent stated: 'We will charge a one off charge of £10 per annum until token meters are in place.'
- 56% of respondents replied that there is a current, published policy regarding MV use in their housing provision
 - A sample of the responses concerning the usefulness of these policies is given in Figure 2 below
- Asked about 'Scooter Clubs' (small numbers of MVs for general use by scheme residents) 22% of respondents replied that this approach is supported within their organisation.

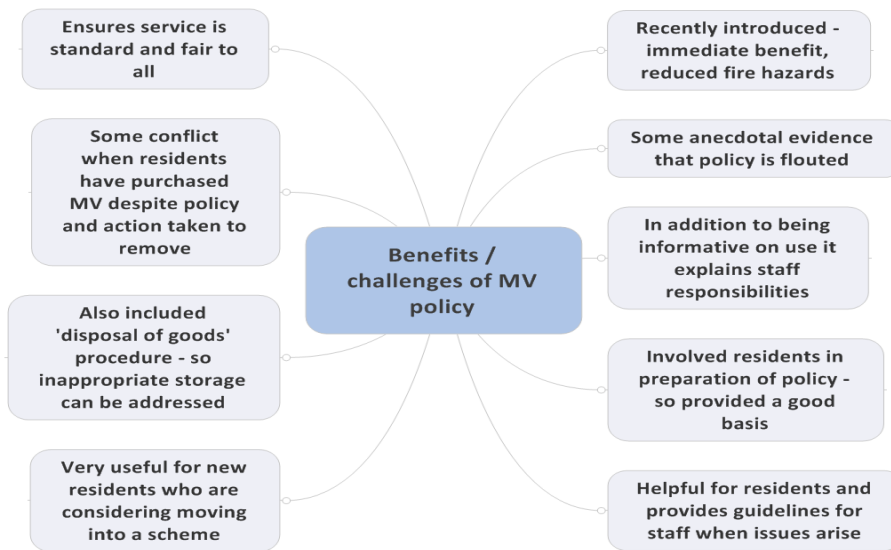
The chart below provides a selection of points raised in responses to the survey's open questions, chosen from the considerable volume made because they serve to reflect a range of mainstream circumstances – and measures adopted by providers to counter issues driven largely by growing MV numbers.

Fig. 1. Representative provider responses to the survey’s MV challenge/solution questions:



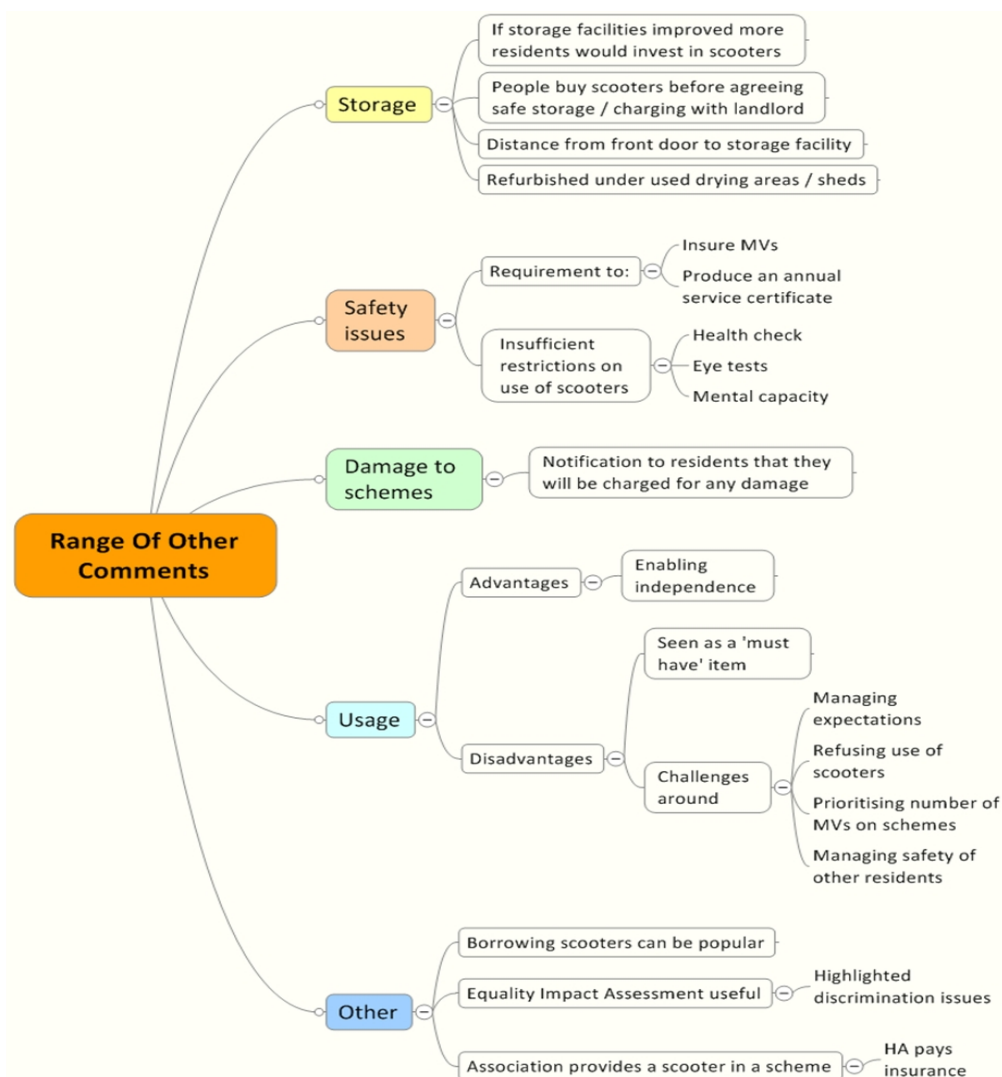
Respondents were also asked to comment on the usefulness of their MV policies and the chart below provides a range of the views expressed:

Fig 2. Benefits and challenges of MV Policies:



Other comments by providers

A significant range of general comments were recorded and the main topics that arose are illustrated in the diagram below:



Housing management, maintenance and design issues

A major reason for undertaking this project was the concentration placed on the issues facing MV storage / charging in general needs blocks of flats, many of which contain a number of 'front doors' at street level, each serving a separate single staircase and a number of flats at each floor level. The selection of the stock to be visited was based both on:

- Making sure a range of types of stock were visited, and;
- Where there had been, or continued to be, issues with MV storage.

The issues of MV storage are repetitive even within the relatively small sample (thirty seven schemes were visited) as the issue of common stairs, corridors and landings repeats in every scheme visited so that a clear picture could be built up relative to the MV issues in the stock overall based on the limitations of this exercise.

Initial Fire Risk Assessments indicated that storage of MVs in communal areas was unlikely to be acceptable because of fire risks. The survey therefore presented a mixed picture where some MVs had been relocated but other residents may have been ignoring the advice received in the absence of what they saw as acceptable storage alternatives.

Outcomes from the site surveys




The numbers of MVs in general needs accommodation is still generally quite low with a maximum of one MV per scheme. The exception to this has been where flats designed to accommodate wheelchair users have been provided within larger general needs development.

In terms of the stock profile, there were a few very large and very small schemes but both the survey visits and analysis of stock records revealed that the most common design is a two or three storey block of flats based either side of a single central stair providing access to four or six flats.

The vast majority of the blocks did not have any type of fire detection or warning system in the staircase and corridor areas and this is normal for blocks of flats as simultaneous evacuation of the building is unlikely to be necessary.

It was also noted that very few of the blocks in the sample survey had any space which could be converted to provide storage space for MVs. For example, there were no spaces which had become redundant due to changing lifestyles which could be readily adapted. The only underused spaces noted were some of the external storage areas and these did not have the electrical supplies which are an integral part of the storage requirement for MVs (see Fig 1. below).




Fig 1.

		
<p>Accommodation Details</p> <p>4 flats 2 storey Single stair, not enclosed. No level access</p>	<p>Limitations/Problems</p> <p>One MV user lives at first floor, uses an allocated external store and has built a ramp to get his MV into and out of the store. This is not a sustainable solution as the tenant ages. FW refused request for installation of an electric socket inside the external store. The tenant charges the scooter via an extension lead run down the stairs which is then put away.</p> <p>Recommendations for MV Storage</p> <p>There is a generous and possibly underused drying area where an area could be given up to create space for a standardised storage solution.</p>	

Addressing risk

Use of the space under the stairs at ground floor level for MV storage in these single stair designs was an issue which was repeatedly seen. From a fire risk point of view, the introduction of any fire risk within the common older single stair design as described above, i.e. parking and charging MVs within the stairwell, was potentially a high level of fire risk unless other steps could be taken to manage the risk (see example below).

Fig 2.

		
<p>Accommodation Details</p> <p>6 flats 3 storey Single stair w/o lobbies No lift Level access</p>	<p>Limitations/Problems</p> <p>Single stair solution will mean FRA will rule out internal storage, despite space being available.</p> <p>Recommendations for MV Storage</p> <p>External cycle stores may be adaptable. Otherwise there are other external areas where a standardised solution would be locatable.</p>	

It was pointed out that, for housing management and maintenance purposes, the level of measures which would need to be introduced to make such a risk acceptable would need very careful assessment by a competent person but would be likely to include some of the following:

- Yearly Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) electrical testing of the MVs (a concept well understood in schools, residential care homes etc.)
- The use of protected sockets as recharging points, so providing higher levels of electrical safety
- Possible modifications to the MVs electrical systems to ensure 'cut off' in the event of an electrical fault while charging
- The introduction of a fire alarm system
- A localised sprinkler system where the MV is to be parked
- Enclosure of a space beneath the stair in a fire-resisting enclosure but note that the rooms formed will be only the width of the stair and parking and removing the MV may prove difficult due to lack of access
 - Also it would be necessary to carry out trials to make sure such spaces are an acceptable solution for users.




It was also highlighted that these adjustments to accommodate an MV user would need to be balanced against their needs. A clear understanding of user disabilities is therefore a very important part of the fire risk assessment and is envisaged under the FSO in terms of the need to produce Personal Emergency Escape Plans (PEEPs) and guidance on doing this is given in a supplementary guide published by HM Government in 2006 entitled '*Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Means of escape for disabled people*'.

Where a user is found to have disabilities which would make it impossible for them to move more than a short distance, then a balance needs to be struck between their needs and the safety of others living in the building. Some of the adjustments suggested above would then need to be considered and the assistance of a fire specialist sought in arriving at what these should be.

It is likely, however, that there will be very few cases where the user's disabilities will be so severe as to require such adjustments. This is more likely to occur in conjunction with the allocation of purpose designed wheelchair flats and landlords need to accept that a creative approach needs to be found to resolving the issues.

An example noted at one block surveyed (see Fig. 3 below), where two purpose designed wheelchair flats have been located at the base of a single stair three storey block of flats, the resident has a total of three MVs, two of which are electric wheelchairs and one of which is a four wheeled MV. In this case, apart from possible internal alterations and the introduction of new fire security systems which may affect the whole block, consideration might also be given to alternatives such as creating new external doors from the flats to an external area to offer an alternative means of escape to the flats affected and drawing up PEEPs for those tenants. The eventual solution will be the most cost effective approach.

Fig 3.

		
<p>Accommodation Details</p> <p>16 flats in 3 blocks 4 storey Single stair in each block Lift – in 4 storey block 1 only Built 2006 Accessible</p>	<p>Limitations/Problems</p> <p>There are two ground floor wheelchair flats with no storage provision made for MVs. One tenant owns three MVs. There are spaces where MVs can be stored without obstructing means of escape, but they increase fire risk in the sole means of escape for adjacent flats.</p> <p>Recommendations for MV Storage</p> <p>The areas where the MVs are stored are separated from the main stair by fire doors. Subject to discussion with the fire officer it may be possible to introduce external doors to adjacent ground floor flats providing them with an alternative means of escape and possibly fit a fire alarm system to allow storage of the MVs to continue.</p>	

However, for many users, anecdotal evidence cited and consultation findings suggests that storage further away from the dwelling front door is quite acceptable provided it is secure, dry, is accessible and has an electrical supply.

It was noted that the vast majority of the blocks have some associated external areas, either in the form of amenity space, existing external storage areas or car parks and, sometimes, under buildings. There was, in the vast majority of cases, a link from the main circulation / entrance hall stairwell to this external area. This was not always fully accessible as there was often a step and a door threshold but in none of the schemes visited would these have been difficult to render accessible. Security, vandalism and theft were clear concerns for residents and users may prefer external locations that provide natural security.

Within the sample survey there were a few larger buildings where the above approach may not be appropriate based on the size of the buildings and the affect that the disconnection of external storage would have on individual residents. An example is noted in Fig. 4 below where open access decks and the possibility always to escape in two directions due to the multiple staircases creates the potential to provide MV storage close to the flats, subject to an FRA based on a suitable set of fire detection and hazard control measures.

Fig 4.

		
<p>Accommodation Details</p> <p>170 flats 4 storey Multi staircase and deck access Lifts – 13p Built 1980s?</p>	<p>Limitations/Problems</p> <p>No known MV users.</p> <p>Recommendations for MV Storage</p> <p>Corridor setbacks and stores onto deck outside flats on open decks may be capable of modification to allow storage of MVs subject to preparation of FRA in conjunction with fire specialist. N.B. multi-stair arrangement will always allow escape away from any fire. Also noted some stores may be capable of modification to accept MVs.</p>	

Conclusions and Recommendations

The outcomes and conclusions drawn from the research produced a comprehensive, independent evidence base to support the development of a future strategy for MV use. The outcomes identified below may not apply to other organisations but may provide a useful starting point for considering some of the issues that need to be addressed. These include:

The storage and charging of MVs

The majority of the blocks visited were those with single stairs and are unlikely to offer scope for adaptations to enable internal storage solutions. Single staircases with flats opening directly onto them are rightly regarded as having a very high requirement for fire safety. The options for creating MV storage in communal corridors and lobbied staircases subject to certain conditions is not extended to unlobbied single staircases. Therefore this is likely to rule out the consideration of internal MV storage in communal areas in the majority of single stair blocks of flats. Also, although internal storage of MVs in suitable multi-stair blocks may be acceptable, the provision of recharging points may not be. It is submitted therefore that, for the majority of MV users, this would not represent a suitable solution as they would be unable to take batteries to their homes for charging as, for most users, these are too heavy to lift.

- It follows that where MV numbers remain small the main consideration should fall on opportunities to implement 'standardised' external storage/charging arrangements subject to installation costs and agreement on whether residents should contribute to this.

- It should be borne in mind that MV storage, like stairlifts and other adaptations to assist with disabilities, in many cases applies at only one period in a person's life and that there is benefit where the investment in external storage units can be 'recycled'



- The storage units would therefore be for individual MVs, have a power supply, be lockable and would need to be capable of being flat packed to be brought into areas where delivery vehicles cannot reach
 - The power supply would be an extension of the landlord's supply with a charge levied on the user
- The storage unit design would also need to fit into areas with low headroom such as underground parking areas
- Vitally, the storage unit design should also allow it to be deconstructed and reinstalled on another site

Note: There are several manufacturers capable of producing such a design. These stores are metal, demountable and fit many of the required criteria.

- Larger schemes with multiple staircases need to be given more individual consideration on a case by case basis.
- These buildings often have multiple stairs or corridors within them which extend beyond the last front door to windows on the outside face of the building. The principle here is that if an area was to be used for MV storage and a fire was to begin in that area, residents would always be able to escape away from the fire towards a set of escape stairs
 - This provides a good start from which to introduce further measures to lower risk and work towards making MV storage possible
 - However, any solution needs to be developed in conjunction with a fire specialist as the issues are complex, particularly in newer buildings where windows are sometimes of an automatic opening type which play a role in the fire escape strategy for the whole building and alterations need to be carried out only if this is fully understood

- Our research suggests that it would be helpful to the social housing sector if a register of fire consultants could be established and publicised to identify those able to help with the preparation of fire risk assessments. This would therefore offer an alternative to dealing with local fire brigades.

Housing management, maintenance and development

This research has identified the potential growth in MV usage and clearly this will impact on the strategic decisions taken by RPs. Here consideration needs to be given to the scenario of 'zero tolerance' versus 'exponential growth' and how a middle course (managed use) could be pursued on both operational and strategic levels. The actions taken to address this should include:

The stock

Understanding storage / charging options in the stock:

- RPs should consider undertaking detailed analysis to identify and record across the stock:
 - The blocks where permanent solutions have already been implemented
 - The blocks where external MV storage is suitable
 - The minority of blocks where alternative types of storage is possible
 - The blocks where no solution is possible
- The implementation of outcomes would need to be costed against an agreed timeframe.

Refurbishing existing stock:

MV storage / charging should also be considered, as a matter of course, when remodelling / refurbishing existing stock. Consultation with residents is an important element in any proposals in this regard.

Development programmes:

There are two areas to consider here:

- 1) In relation to future development programmes there is a need to define within given geographical areas which of them should have provision for MVs. However, the ideal solution may be to include such provision in all developments but it should be recognised that other factors may influence such a decision, for example:
 - The location of the development
 - The demographic makeup of an area, e.g. an inner city setting where specific housing with MV provision for disabled people may be more appropriate than general MV storage / charging provision for an uncertain number of prospective users
- 2) With growing proportions of older people who are more likely to have a disability living in general needs housing, consideration could be given to including designated

older people's stock within the development programme which allows for MV storage. Additionally, this could represent an incentive for older people to move from larger general needs properties and these residents could be identified and offered the opportunity to move to the new stock.

Of note: The Shelter report, *A better fit? Creating housing choices for an ageing population*, explores this issue.

Housing Management

Allocations and lettings considerations:

The following are areas for consideration:

- Identify any changes required to internal exchange policies to prioritise those people who live in blocks where it is not possible to provide MV storage / charging facilities and where the requirement for a MV is of a medical nature rather than a 'lifestyle' choice
- Ensure that where permanent adaptations (not recyclable external provision for MVs) have been made to stock this is recorded and identified within providers' databases - as should be properties where 'no solution' is possible
- Choice Based Lettings advertisements should also include this information so that accommodation can be allocated appropriately

Note: The approach to identifying permanent MV storage / charging facilities in the database could be adopted using similar methods to those where Accessible Housing Registers are implemented, i.e. through using a data collection tool to either assess:

- *All the stock on a planned basis; or*
- *Stock as it becomes void.*

The introduction of waiting lists to meet storage / charging constraints

Although this research recommends that, where feasible, the provision of external storage / recharging facilities that can be relocated, the predicted growth in MV ownership could impose a requirement for waiting lists where MV facilities are not sufficient to meet demand.

The factors here are likely to be scarce space available for facilities and resistance from other residents who perceive an unjustified loss of open space / parking. Identifying criteria for the allocation of available storage / recharging facilities is challenging as there is a balance to achieve between those with a clear medical need and those who want a MV to enhance independence / reduce isolation. It can be argued that both of these scenarios represent valid reasons to own a MV and, as a result, it may be decided to introduce waiting lists based on a 'first come first served' basis. However:

- To provide some flexibility for those with high needs an option is to give 'further consideration', on a case by case basis, to people receiving the mobility element of DLA or possessing an OT recommendation for being allocated a higher place on a waiting list.

Paying for electricity used to charge MVs

The research identified concerns over the growth in MV use and, in particular, from a resident standpoint the importance that individual MV users should pay for the electricity used to charge their vehicles. In this regard:

- Given the likelihood of where individual storage units represent the main solution for many RPs, particularly in general needs provision, it may be that a monthly fee charged through the rental system for both the recyclable storage units and the electricity usage is the most workable and lowest cost solution
- Where there are storage units for multiple vehicles, consideration could, however, be given to the introduction of a 'smart card' payment system.

Meeting the needs of residents without storage facilities / addressing the growth of MVs

This research has identified a need to consider how MV provision can be available for those people where storage facilities cannot be provided and, on the other hand, control the growth of the number of MVs at individual schemes (perhaps in particular in sheltered housing). The recommendations we would put forward here are:

- The introduction of a Scooter Club pilot(s) to establish if this is a workable and viable model. The issues to consider here include:
 - The extent of the club – i.e. within the RP's stock or in the wider local communities
 - The funding of the MVs – sourcing charitable funding could be considered
 - Ensuring that the MVs are maintained and insured
 - Undertaking capability checks and training for potential users
 - Managing the hiring and return of vehicles.

Note: respondents to the internet survey, although positive about Scooter Clubs, raised most of the issues noted above as challenges and therefore we would recommend that any pilot is of at least 18 months duration to identify and 'iron out' any operational problems.

- Making residents who apply for permission to site a MV aware of Shopmobility or any similar schemes in their area as this may provide a more appropriate solution for their needs rather than purchasing a vehicle
- In tandem we favour consideration being given to working in partnership with other organisations to introduce MV hire schemes such as the one developed by the London Borough of Camden described in 2 above.

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The views expressed in this case study are those of the authors and not necessarily those of First Wessex or the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

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Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) is the leading 'knowledge hub' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions.

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