

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

23rd March 2023

Subject:	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 Consider and comment on the update revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
- 1.2 Consider and comment on the Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing









2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The focus for revising the policy is to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To continue to provide adaptations and housing improvements to disabled residents, offering the most cost effective and best value solutions, targeted at those with the greatest need.
- b) Revise policies to expand and maximise opportunities for improving the homes of disabled people. These changes are designed to promote independence and reduce/prevent demand on health and social care services and fundamentally improve quality of life.
- c) Introduce a more customer centred approach by offering residents more bespoke and easily accessible service irrespective of tenure
- d) Align the policy with objectives of the Better Care Fund (BCF) to assist with the prevention of admissions to hospital and social care, support hospital discharge and reduce social care interventions
- e) To reflect good practice as set out in the Adult Social Care Reform White Paper 2021 and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England (2022).



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting children and young people to live independently in their home • Supporting to improve quality of life • Both policies apply to adaptations for disabled children and young people as well as adults
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support more people of all ages to live in suitable housing so they can stay independent for longer and • Potentially prevent the need for care and support and help maximise independence. It can also prevent the need for additional support in the future by: • Supporting disabled residents to remain living independently in their own homes • Reduce the number of home accidents • Reduce the number of avoidable hospital admissions and readmissions
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p> <p>Sandwell needs new areas of quality housing in places where people want to live and bring up their families and can easily get to jobs across the region by public transport. Residents of all tenure including Council tenants are supported to remain independent and safe in their own home.</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p>
	<p>A connected and accessible Sandwell</p>



4 Background:

- 4.1 The current Housing Assistance Policy was formed in June 2012 and can be accessed here:
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/33125/smbc_policy_for_assistance_june_2012
- 4.2 The revised policy proposes a fresh approach that creates a home environment enabling disabled people to live a full life. It will reinforce a person-centred approach and a focus on prevention.
Appendix A is a draft of the proposed Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
Appendix B is a draft of the proposed Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing.
- 4.3 Since 2003 the Council has the discretion to develop and maintain its own housing financial assistance policy in compliance with the Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. Every Housing Authority in England must publish and maintain a policy to allow them to provide assistance.
- 4.4 Government funding for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) changed significantly in 2015/16 when it became part of the Better Care Fund (BCF), a single pooled budget to support health and social care services to work more closely in local areas. The aim of the fund is to provide more joined-up and customer focused services to reduce hospital and care admissions and enable people to return home more quickly. There is now an opportunity to better align the Council's policy with the objectives of the BCF.
- 4.5 The home environment plays a major role in a person's health and wellbeing and Sandwell Council can contribute to the BCF's objectives by providing assistance to adapt, repair or modify the homes of its residents. The policy seeks to support a timely and streamlined service which aims to prevent, reduce or delay the need for interventions by health and social care services, and support vulnerable individuals to remain safe and well in their own homes.



4.6 Guidance from Foundations (the National Body for Home Improvement Agencies) encourages Local Authorities to adopt policies to reduce the bureaucracy around the DFG process. Foundations report 'The Disabled Facilities Grant: Before and After the Introduction of the Better Care Fund' (June 2016) stresses the need to have a fast and nimble service to match the aims of the BCF plan to have services assembled around the individual, regardless of provider and funding source.

5 Current Structure:

5.1 The Home Improvement Agency (HIA) Team helps residents through the process of applying for grants and assistance, and manages works carried out if requested.

5.2 Examples of the types major adaptations carried out are:

- Lifts (straight and curved stairlifts, through floor lifts and step lifts)
- Ceiling Track Hoists
- BOSI (Bath Out Shower In)
- Level Access Showers
- Ramps
- Extensions

5.3 In May 2021 the HIA moved directorates from Adult Social Care to Housing, and this presented an opportunity to develop a closer working relationship with the Asset Management & Maintenance (AMM) Service, particularly when discussing council housing. But also, AMM hold vast amount of experience, skills and knowledge regarding large contract management relating to buildings and manage the repairs and maintenance of council.

5.4 The HIA and AMM Teams work together, with AMM supporting contract management and co-ordination and management of building works including major adaptations. The HIA Team continue to offer housing assistance to residents living in the private sector housing, and administrating applications for assistance under the council's policy. Also providing advice and information on the extent of assistance available



5.5 Adaptations are funded through two separate funding streams; owner occupiers, private tenants and housing associations through a DFG and local authority tenants through the housing revenue account (HRA).

- The government provide funding annually to local authorities, and currently this is £4.75m
- Currently there is a reserve of £11m which has developed through the impact of covid, however a key focus of the policy is to enable further spend.

6. Proposed Revisions:

6.1 See **Appendix C** for a summary of proposed changes within the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy. Key benefits of the new policy are:

- Supporting affordable warmth
- Supporting assisted technology
- Assisting people getting home from hospital quicker
- Supporting areas where rapid delivery of essential minor adaptations is enabled
- Faster process for low cost adaptations

6.2 The Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing aims to bring greater parity between the way housing adaptations are managed through the housing revenue account (HRA) and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) regime applied to other social housing and the private sector. The key features of this policy include:

- A focus on supporting people to consider how their housing needs can be met in the long term.
- Financial assistance to support people with the costs of relocating where needed.
- Support to meet older people's overall well-being including safety in the home, access to welfare benefits, social inclusion and referrals to sensory services and other healthcare services.
- Ensure we maximize the impact of resources and make best use of stock.



7 Consultation:

- 7.1 Engagement sessions and workshops have taken place with staff groups, which includes Adult Social Care and Housing Management, including officers who work across the adaptations pathway. The feedback received has helped shape the changes to the policy.
- 7.2 Foundations have been engaged as a critical friend throughout the process and assisted with shaping the policy and sharing good practice.
- 7.3 Initial targeted consultation has taken place with the voluntary sector and their service users, particularly those that provide a service to people with disabilities and or mobility issues. In addition, the bottom 4 of the below are also part of Adult Social Care's Community Offer programme. The organisations engaged to date are as follows:
- Agewell
 - Ideal for All
 - Murray Hall
 - Kaleidoscope Plus
 - Communities in Sync
 - St Albans
- 7.4 Discussions took place with the above partners during December 2022, and then further discussions took place with residents/service users during January 2023. Initial feedback indicates that residents agree with what is being proposed and supportive of changes to policy. It has been agreed that further promotion and raising awareness needs to be undertaken and is an action that will be undertaken upon implementation of the policies.
- 7.5 In addition, SCVO (Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations) and SCIPS (Sandwell Community Information Partnership) have been approached as infrastructure organisations and have been part of the consultation process.
- 7.6 Also consultation has taken place with relevant service areas, to ensure joined up working but also to check any legal aspects of the policy. Hence Legal have been engaged.



7.7 Current draft of the policies are due to be on SMBC website and will be inviting further feedback. In addition, we will promote and share the link wider internally and externally to encourage feedback as well as raising awareness. Once posted online, it will remain there for 6 weeks.

8 Next Steps:

8.1 The policies will be discussed at Leadership in April 2023.

8.2 A report will go to Cabinet in June 2023.

8.3 Following cabinet, if approved the policy will be adopted and implemented and further promoted.

8.4 To support the implementation and changes within the teams, staff will continue to be supported regarding learning and development

9 Alternative Options

9.1 The policy could remain unchanged and Sandwell Council would continue to deliver adaptations in the same way. The introduction of the Better Care Fund in April 2014 and the Care Act in April 2015 is leading to the creation of new integrated services centred on the home. This could potentially make grant delivery more effective, efficient and customer-focussed. There is a need to balance the preventative role of the DFG in keeping people living safely and independently with the need for the grant to be used in more flexible and responsive ways to help reduce pressures on health and social care and improve quality of life.

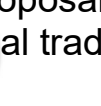


10 Implications

Resources:	<p>Financial, staffing, land/building implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funds to support these services and works are delivered from the HRA and DFG allocated to the Council.• The HRA is an allocation of funds to the Council to fund the management, maintenance and major improvements of council housing. The HRA funds the provision of Major Adaptation / Improved Works and Bath Out Shower In (BOSI)/ Level Access Shower (LAS) works to Council owned properties.• To date council has spent in the region of £4.5M from HRA to fund these services and works.• The DFG is an allocation to the Council to fund the provision of adaptations to disabled resident's homes that are privately-owned and non-council rented housing.• To date DFG spend has been in the region of £3.5M.• The Council plans to spend £450,000 from the DFG to fund handy person/minor adaptations contract and £1,800,000 to fund the major adaptation contract.
Legal and Governance:	<p>Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Council is required by the Housing Grants and Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to approve a valid application for Disabled Facilities Grant and to pay the grant. The Council operates an agency service to facilitate the grant aided works and the administration of the grant.• The Council is under a duty under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and the Children Act 1989 (in respect of children) and the Care Act 2014 (in respect of adults who may be in need of care and support) to provide support where it has assessed that such support is needed, this includes practical



	assistance in the home and adaptations to the home
Risk:	<p>Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no specific resource implications arising from this report.
Equality:	<p>Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When deciding as to changes in service provision the local authority must comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and in particular section 149 (the public-sector equality duty). The protected characteristics to which the duty applies includes age as well as disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief and sex. • An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. It concluded that the policies would not adversely affect equality on the basis of any of the protected characteristics. Any unforeseen adverse impacts will be identified through monitoring processes and statistical/other data analysis. • Increased efficiency in service delivery will provide a far more effective service to all vulnerable households and improve quality of life.
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The investment of housing adaptations and improvements significantly improves the quality of life of disabled people by preventing avoidable accidents such as falls that may result in potential hospital admissions and the prevention of social care and support that may result in potential residential placement. The investment also has the added value of improving the quality of life for carers and other family members.
Social Value	<p>Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)</p>



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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are no specific social value implications arising from this report |
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11. Appendices:

Appendix A. Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

Appendix B. Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing

Appendix C. summary of proposed changes within the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

12. Background Papers

The Disabled Facilities Grant: Before and After the Introduction of the Better Care Fund - Foundations, June 2016

Adult Social Care Reform White Paper December 2021 -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-at-the-heart-of-care-adult-social-care-reform-white-paper>

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England (2022) -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england>

Housing Associations and Home Adaptations -

<https://www.foundations.uk.com/library/housing-associations-and-home-adaptations/>

