

Report to Cabinet

7 June 2023

Subject:	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy and Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environments Councillor Rollins
Director:	Director for Housing Gillian Douglas
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Assistant Director for Housing Management and Solutions Nigel Collumbell Nigel_collumbell@sandwell.gov.uk Business Manager Community Partnerships & Support Services Manny Sehmbi Manny_sehmbi@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to adopt the revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy as set out in Appendix A and the Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing as set out in Appendix B.
- 1.2 That in connection with 1.1 above, the Director for Housing be authorised to implement the new policies.





2 Reasons for Recommendations


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

- 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.
- Revise policies to expand and maximise opportunities for improving the homes of vulnerable and 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.
- Introduce a more customer centred approach by offering residents more bespoke and easily accessible service irrespective of tenure
- 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
- 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>The 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: The policy will:</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:



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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>Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents of all tenure including Council tenants are supported to remain independent and safe in their own home.

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 the proposed Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
Appendix B is the proposed Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing.
- 4.3 Both the above documents are underpinned by the Guidance for the Provision Equipment. This document provides the guidance as to the provision of equipment and adaptations for disabled residents.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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.

- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 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 Position

- 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 The front door to the service is through Adult Social Care with the Occupational Therapy Team undertaking the initial assessments and then referring accordingly to the HIA Team.
- 5.4 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.

- 5.5 The HIA and AMM Teams are working together and developing a pathway where AMM are leading contract management and co-ordination and management of building works including major adaptations. The HIA Team continuing 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.
- 5.6 Currently council tenants must apply for a grant and go through a DFG based process, and there is no clear framework as to how decisions are made whether to adapt a council property, which increases the need for a specific policy to enable consistency and guidance.

6 Financial Position

- 6.1 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
 - The yearend reserve is £12.5 which has predominantly developed through the impact of covid, however a key focus of the policy is to enable further spend.
 - £3m of Housing Revenue Account funding is allocated for major adaptations to council housing.
- 6.2 A key focus of the policy revisions is to enable the reserves discussed above to be effectively spent. The Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy outlines a range of offers of assistance, and **Appendix C** provides a proposed outline as to how the reserves could be allocated.



7 Proposed Revisions

7.1 It is proposed the Housing Assistance Policy will be replaced by two policies, one will focus on Council Housing, the Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing and the second will be a Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy. In addition, the separation supports the changes with AMM as discussed above.

7.2 Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing will be led by the Tenancy & Estate Management Team and will enable the team to consider requests relating to council housing directly and explore all options open to the tenant.

7.3 The key benefits of the revised Private Sector Housing Assistance 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

7.4 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 maximise the impact of resources and make best use of stock.

7.5 To support the proposed changes and implementation of housing assistance the HIA Team has undertaken a redesign where resources have been realigned to support the changes with AMM. In addition,



discussions are continuing as to further reshaping of the HIA Team to further support the implementation and develop the offers

8 Consultation:

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 Foundations have been engaged as a critical friend throughout the process and assisted with shaping the policy and sharing good practice.
- 8.3 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 were:
 - Agewell
 - Ideal for All
 - SCIPs (Sandwell Community Information & Participation Services)
 - Murray Hall
 - Kaleidoscope Plus
 - Communities in Sync
 - St Albans
- 8.4 Discussions took place with the above partners during December 2022, and then further discussions took place with residents/service users during January/February 2023 through face to face discussions and managed through this to engage over 150 residents. Initial feedback indicates that residents agree with what is being proposed and supportive of changes to policy. However, a clear action to be followed up is to do more promotion and raising awareness of the grants and this is an action that will be taken forward upon implementation of the policies.
- 8.5 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 and have been supportive of the process.



- 8.6 Consultation has taken place with relevant service areas, to ensure joined up working but also to check any legal aspects of the policy.
- 8.7 The draft policies have been placed online on the SMBC website as well as on the consultation platform, Citizenspace. The links were promoted and invited further feedback from residents, voluntary sector partners, and other partners as well as promoting internally with colleagues. Also, the links were added to newsletters circulated by SCVO (Sandwell Council Voluntary Organisation) and SCIPS (Sandwell Community Information and Partnership Services).

The consultation formally commenced on 20 March 2023 and ended on 2 May 2023.

- 8.8 The draft policies have been shared and discussed at Safer Neighbourhood and Active Communities on the 23 March 2023 and at Leadership Team meeting on the 11 April 2023.
- 8.9 At the close of the consultation we had received feedback via Citizenspace and included 16 responses to the online survey and received an additional 5 emails from one tenant providing further feedback, a summary can be found in **Appendix D** outlining the nature of feedback received.
- 8.10 The Citizenspace data highlights that there is mostly consensus to support the propose changes:

93.75% supportive of increasing the threshold for minor adaptations and agreeing that it will not only benefit residents but also is a positive change.

93.75% also agree with the proposed change to top up to grants up to £60,000, to enable works to continue without further delays in waiting for approvals and is seen as a positive change.

87.50% agree that it is a positive change in amending the means test so the first £15,000 of any application contribution to be waived. However, a respondent did raise that potentially it could '*mean that support is being given to more affluent households*'.



81.25% were supportive of offering a grant to support relocation where an adaptation is not suitable. Offering up to £10,000 for owner occupiers and £2,000 for private tenants, although 18.75% didn't think it would make a difference. However, comments by 2 respondents were raised about whether relocating a resident could inadvertently place a resident in 'social isolation'. Residents would have a caseworker/point of contact who would support the resident through this process and support with the wider community networks.

100% agreed with the support with home from hospital.

87.50% agreed with the definition of Disability, although 2 respondents queried whether the definition included autism and neurological conditions. For clarification the definition does not just refer to a physical disability, but also considers aspects where a resident considers themselves to have a disability and we would work with and support with advocacy services throughout process.

100% agreed with the proposed support that the council will provide where a tenant needs to move in order to meet their needs and the proposed criteria that the council may use to refuse an adaptation.

8.11 The feedback in Appendix D was collated and discussed with colleagues across Housing Management and Adult Social Care on 4 May and as a result of the consultation the following changes have been adopted or have provided further reassurance regarding proposals:

Reassurance:

- As to role of caseworkers/point of contact for the customer through the customer journey
- Contract management and delivery to be delivered through Asset Management and Maintenance
- Overall direction

Changes adopted:

- Within the Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing, 14.1 refers to timescales tenants may expect for adaptations to be completed, being within 90 days from the date when the work is approved. However, further narrative has been



added as to where there are more complex cases and it could take longer than this period.

- Colleagues within the Children’s Trust also feedback as to suggesting further emphasis within the policies concerning children and young people with disabilities and eligibility. This request has also been further emphasised within the narrative and have added the strategic objective for Best Start in Life for Children and Young People to both policies.

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

<p>Resources:</p>	<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, DFG and other available resources 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. • The yearend HRA spend has been £5.46m • The DFG is an allocation to the Council to fund the provision of adaptations to disabled
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	<p>resident's homes that are privately-owned and non-council rented housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To date DFG spend has been in the region of £3.5M. • The Council plans to spend £450,000 from the DFG to fund handyperson/minor adaptations contract and £3M to deliver major adaptations.
<p>Legal and Governance:</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 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 • The private Sector Housing Assistance Policy sits alongside the Housing Strategy Statement. Under the Council's Constitution, whilst the latter requires approval by full Council the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy requires approval by Cabinet. The Director of Housing is delegated to undertake/exercise and discharge the strategy as part of the Scheme of Delegation of executive functions to officers.
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are risks that the policy objectives could become unaffordable, however this has been mitigated by outlining the discretionary grants are subject to available resources. In addition, the policy will be subject to further review.
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 based on 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:	Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the major adaptations contracts, social value will be achieved through the inclusion of an Employment and Skills Plan (ESP). The plan includes contractual performance indicators such as work experience placements, apprenticeships in addition to school engagement and community activities.
Climate Change:	The policy will invest in new technologies to support the energy efficiency of homes for vulnerable residents, and to support wider regeneration projects where resources allow and doing so contribute towards the objectives of the policies.
Corporate Parenting:	The policy will support improving the lives of young people.

11. Appendices:

Appendix A. Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

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

Appendix C. Summary Proposed Funding Allocation

Appendix D. Summary of Consultation Part 1 and Part 2

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/>

