

# Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

14 March 2024

<b>Subject:</b>	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing
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## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 Consider the update on the implementation of the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
- 1.2 Consider the update on the implementation of the Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing



## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The policy was revised 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) 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).
- f) To remove the need for council tenants to apply for grant funding to adapt their homes and allow the council to deliver adaptations to directly to its own tenants when it is appropriate to do so or offer alternatives when it is not.



### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><b>Best start in life for children and young people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting children and young people to live independently in their home</li> <li>• Supporting to improve quality of life</li> <li>• Both policies apply to adaptations for disabled children and young people as well as adults</li> </ul>
	<p><b>People live well and age well</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support more people of all ages to live in suitable housing so they can stay independent for longer and</li> <li>• 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:</li> <li>• Supporting disabled residents to remain living independently in their own homes</li> <li>• Reduce the number of home accidents</li> <li>• Reduce the number of avoidable hospital admissions and readmissions</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</b></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>

### 4 Background

- 4.1 The Housing Assistance Policy June 2012 was updated to be aligned to objectives discussed above in 2.1
- 4.2 The revised policies provide a fresh approach that creates a home environment enabling disabled people to live a full life and reinforces a person-centred approach and a focus on prevention. The Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy be accessed – [Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy | Sandwell Council](#)



The Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing can be accessed - [Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing Policy | Sandwell Council](#)

- 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. Hence, the new policy is better aligned 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 supports 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 Position:

- 5.1 The HIA and Asset Management & Maintenance (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
- 5.2 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 provides Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) capital funding to local authorities, and currently this is approximately £4.75m per annum.
  - Currently there is a reserve of £12.4m which has developed through the impact of covid, however a key focus of the policy is to enable further spend, approximately £4.5m is forecast in 23/24 against this reserve.

## 6 Activity Since New Policy Implementation June 2023:

- 6.1 The following activities have been applied for adaptations to both Council and private Sector Housing
- 6.2 Review and refresh of the Adaptations Panel, which will work across all tenures using the new Aids and Adaptations Guidance. The Terms of Reference and Membership which reflects services from across Housing and Adult Social Care and have been agreed.
- 6.3 The Aids and Adaptations Guidance, which is the framework for the provision of equipment and adaptations to disabled residents has been adopted by Housing Management and Adult Social Care.



- 6.4 Moving towards a paperless approach, reducing the team's reliance on paper and agreeing a protocol for saving documents electronically. Closed cases have been archived electronically.
- 6.5 Pathways have been reviewed, refined and streamlined. Including new forms created to support the processes, along with fact sheets.
- 6.6 A new Agency Agreement and a new Private Agent's Protocol have been prepared and checked with colleagues in Legal Services.
- 6.7 A formalised Customer Managed Pathway has been developed and customer facing forms and guidance are being drafted. This supports improved communication across relevant services, particularly with Occupational Therapists by creating a new Recommendation for Adaptations Form (Form A) with greater detail included, reducing the possibility of errors and delays due to lack of information.
- 6.8 The new Appeals procedure has been formalised and implemented.
- 6.9 New Fact sheets for Caseworkers have been developed, which are to be provided to customers. In addition, an overall Customer Booklet for all tenures to explain the processes is being developed.
- 6.10 Work continues to create a dedicated intranet page to enable approved documents to be uploaded and to be accessible for all relevant teams.
- 6.11 The updated Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy has enabled programmes to be developed which are targeting vulnerable households, to support resident's health and wellbeing, improve quality of life and helping residents to remain in their homes safely as follows:
- Supporting sustainable warmth - An initial tranche of £250,000 of capital funding has been allocated to expand existing programmes delivered via the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) that are focused on improving the energy efficiency of private sector housing and reducing levels of dual poverty in Sandwell, focusing on vulnerable residents





- Supporting assisted technology - £960,000 of capital funding has been allocated to Adult Social Care to allow the transformation of the Community Alarms Service from an analogue to a digital platform. Other assistive technology projects are also under consideration including fall sensors that can trigger an alarm in a nominated mobile phone and 'Alexa' type technology specifically designed to assist residents live independently and prevent access to critical services.
- Assisting people getting home from hospital quicker - Discussions between Adult Social Care and Housing are taking place to determine if specific financial assistance would enable disabled and vulnerable residents to return home following admission to hospitals and other care facilities.
- Increasing the funding to the minor adaptations service available to private tenants and homeowners from £350,000 to £550,000 to address inflationary pressures as well as improve and expand the universally available minor adaptations offer
- A faster process for the delivery of hoists and lifting equipment has been introduced since the new policy removed the grant repayment conditions attached to grants awarded for the provision of lifts and hoists.
- Increase the availability of Disabled Facilities Grants to residents by introducing a £15,000 means test disregard. This result is more applicants being eligible for grant assistance.
- Hazard Removal – Discussions are taking place with Private Rented Sector Housing Team regarding support to vulnerable households that are experiencing severe disrepair and cannot afford the repair, with a view to preventing vulnerable homeowner occupiers requiring rehousing. Currently intervention only happens once the property has deteriorated to



the point that prohibition is required, resulting in the owner being rehoused into rented accommodation and the property being left empty and often unmanaged. In addition, some vulnerable residents are unable to return to their homes from short-term care because of disrepairs at their homes, resulting in delayed transfers of care or longer than necessary periods in residential care accommodation. Hence supporting objectives as part of the Better Care Fund (BCF) and as discussed above in section 4, this approach reinforces the fact that 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 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.

## 7 Alternative Options

7.1 We could focus on just delivery of DFG, the statutory function and no other aspect of the policy. However, 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 a more flexible and responsive ways to help reduce pressures on health and social care and improve quality of life.

## 8 Implications

<p><b>Resources:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds to support these services and works are delivered from the HRA and DFG allocated to the Council.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To date in 23/24 DFG actual spend is in the region of £3.5M, which is moving towards the forecast of £4.5m.</li> </ul>
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>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</li> </ul>
<b>Risk:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are no specific resource implications arising from this report.</li> </ul>
<b>Equality:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>Increased efficiency in service delivery will provide a far more effective service to all vulnerable households and improve quality of life.</li> </ul>
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The investment of housing adaptations and improvements significantly improves the quality of life of disabled people by preventing</li> </ul>



	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.
<b>Social Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are no specific social value implications arising from this report</li> </ul>

## 9. Appendices

None

## 10. 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>

