

# **COUNCIL TENANT DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY**

## **1. BACKGROUND**

The purpose of a disabled adaptation is to modify existing disabling environments in order to restore or enable independent living, privacy, confidence and dignity for individuals and their families. It is therefore not primarily a matter of adapting housing stock, but providing an individualised solution to the problems of people experiencing a disabling environment.

The following sections of this report set out the policy for minor aids and disabled adaptations to be considered for Council tenants, involving Council tenants completing an application, including a test of resources.

## **2. MINOR AIDS, EQUIPMENT AND DISABLED ADAPTATIONS**

### **2.1 Minor aids**

Minor aids are low cost adaptations (costing below £500). Such adaptation work might include:

- Lever taps
- Half steps
- Fitting grab rails (supplied by the tenant or through the Integrated Community Equipment Store)
- Stair handrails

Fitting grab rails is a minor adaptation on a cost basis, however because Housing Officers are not qualified to assess where a tenant needs a grab rail, if there is any doubt or a possibility a greater need may be present (e.g. a shower or bathing equipment (e.g. bath lift)), then a referral should be made to Social Care for assessment.

Such adaptation work can be carried out without the need for a recommendation from Social Care following a tenant request or referral. The budget for minor aids comes from the Housing Revenue Account General Fund. The budget is limited each year and minor aids will be carried out on a first come, first served basis. Minor aids will be ordered from the Council's repairs and maintenance contractor by Housing or Repairs Officers.

Where work to fulfil a mandatory criterion is recommended by Social Care, even if it is to be dealt with as a minor aid, it might be considered that this would otherwise give rise to a mandatory DFG application.

If replacement of an element is necessary and an easier to manage alternative is requested (e.g. lever tap in lieu of cross head or paddle WC flush handle in lieu of push button if the cistern is to be replaced), this shall be undertaken and for ease of accounting funded from the responsive repairs budget.

## **2.2. Equipment**

Most items of temporary equipment such as bath or shower seats, bath lifts, WC riser seats (or potentially specialist washing and drying WC seats) and modular ramps are supplied by Social Care rather than the Council. Items available as equipment are reviewed by Social Care from time to time. If items cannot be supplied Social Care will advise on where temporary aids or devices can be obtained elsewhere or for tenants to purchase themselves.

## **2.3 Disabled adaptations**

2.3.1 Other adaptation work costing £500 or more is classed as a disabled adaptation and will only be considered once a recommendation has been received from Social Care.

Examples of disabled adaptations are:

- Level access showers
- Ramps
- Major structural conversions and extensions
- Heating
- Stair lifts or through floor lifts

The budget for Council tenant disabled adaptations is from Housing Revenue Account capital irrespective of whether a DFG is applied for or not.

2.3.2 The Package of Changes to Modernise the DFG Programme (CLC, February 2008) states the following:

“Funding adaptations to local authority tenants

The DFG framework and mandatory aspect of the grant applies across all tenures, however, the main DFG budget cannot be used for the funding of adaptations to local authority properties. The Bristol University report identified the funding of adaptations for local authority tenants as an issue.

Whilst removal of the restrictions around ring fence will create a level playing field in the funding of DFGs for all other tenures, the funding of adaptations to local authority tenants will be explored in more detail before taking this decision.

Therefore, as part of the Government’s overall review of the HRA subsidy system, the funding arrangements for the provision of adaptations to local authority tenants will be examined. The results of the review will help inform how the issue is addressed.

Until the review is complete local authorities should continue to fund adaptations to their properties through the borrowing arrangements that currently exist within the HRA system. Whilst Communities and Local Government (CLG) recognises that local authorities may have many competing demands for funding through the HRA, given the mandatory nature of the DFG, the provision of adaptations should remain a priority.”

2.3.3 Tenants shall be required to complete an application for mandatory disabled facilities grant. This includes a test of financial resources and completion of a tenant’s certificate stating the applicant’s intention that

subject to exclusions the premises will be the disabled person's home for a period of five years following completion of the work. Only disabled adaptation works eligible for mandatory disabled facilities criteria shall be considered by the Council through this route. Grants are subject to a maximum limit set by the Secretary of State, currently £30,000. Further funds (for work costing in excess of £30,000, to help meet a tenant's assessed contribution or for discretionary work) would be considered by the Council's Housing and Property Management Team.

Tenants who have submitted a right to buy or transfer application will not be able to make a tenant's application for disabled facilities grant, nor will those who have terminated their tenancy. Any tenant subject to a possession order will not be eligible.

### **3. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS**

#### **3.1 Procedures**

##### **3.1.1 Up to recommendation by Social Care**

a) Tenants should contact their Housing Officer initially to discuss the type of adaptation they are considering.

b) If the adaptation is of a minor nature it shall be referred to the Repairs section.

c) In the case of doubt or where major adaptations are being considered referral to Social Care can be made by the tenant or the Housing Officer on their behalf by contacting Lincolnshire County Council's Customer Contact Centre.

d) Social Care will contact the tenant to make arrangements for the assessment and may request a joint visit with a Housing Renewal Officer.

e) Recommendations from Social Care shall be received by the Council's Housing Renewal section in the Planning, Economic and Cultural Services Division. The recommendation should identify if the work is of an urgent nature.

f) The Housing Renewal Officer will be the tenant's point of contact from this point on.

##### **3.1.2 Following recommendation**

a) For routine work costing up to £5,000 (such as level access showers, stair lifts and ramps) the Housing Renewal Officer shall progress DFG applications.

b) Initial means testing to establish if the tenant is likely to be required to contribute to the cost of the disabled adaptation shall be undertaken at this stage.

c) For work costing £5,000 or more involving structural alterations, extension or heating alterations the recommendation shall be referred to the Housing and Property Management Team (H&PMT) to consider in liaison with

Housing Stock Group and or the Housing Allocations Review Panel (HARP) as necessary. Before enabling a tenant to proceed with an application best use of the Council's housing stock by looking at the opportunity for relocation to an already suitable property or more easily adaptable property will be considered. H&PMT will take into account under occupancy, fuel poverty, property suitability and long term use of the premises.

d) If the disabled adaptation is to be refused the tenant shall be informed and offered the opportunity to register for re-housing with the Council; and on doing so will be awarded priority through the allocation system or HARP. Where suitable alternative accommodation can be offered, the tenant will be offered a payment in line with the transfer incentive policy.

e) If proceeding with disabled adaptations is agreed, the tenant shall be sent a DFG application pack by the Housing Renewal Officer. Through vulnerability services a Housing Officer, Support Coordinator or other support officer would provide assistance in completing the application forms for older or infirm tenants (working towards use of an electronic form on tablets) if requested to do so. Potential for Tenants' Voices to fulfil this role will be explored. The application includes a formal test of financial resources if necessary. The tenant shall not be required to obtain estimates for the cost of the work. Proposals (schedule and drawings) shall be confirmed by the tenant prior to pricing.

f) Routine work costing up to £5,000 shall be priced either by the Council's appointed responsive repairs contractor according to the tendered schedule of rates (base rates currently having been increased to include a 68.5% uplift to representing management fee, profits and overheads) or by obtaining a minimum of three estimates from different contractors on the tenant's behalf. The responsive repairs contract is to be renegotiated and disabled adaptations could be incorporated within it. Alternatively, delivery mechanisms adopted following conclusion of the DFG review may be transferrable to Council tenant disabled adaptations.

g) Major work costing more than £5,000 that also requires other approvals (e.g. Planning Permission) etc shall be progressed and quotations obtained by the Design Services section or included in ongoing tendered capital improvement contracts (e.g. heating conversions).

h) On submitting a disabled facilities grant application the Council's Head of Communities (or nominated officer) shall have signed an owner's certificate and owner's consent statement. Disabled facilities grant applications are approved by the Head of Planning, Economic and Cultural Services.

### **3.2 Timescales**

The Council shall aim to progress disabled facilities grant applications in the same timescales as under current arrangements, as set out in part in the Housing Charter for tenants, subject to demand and budget availability. These timescales may be superseded by arrangements following implementation of the DFG review findings.

- Minor aid orders will be placed within 2 working days with a maximum completion date of 28 working days allowed.

- Referral to Social Care where necessary – 2 working days
- Initial inspection following receipt of a Social Care recommendation – 20 working days followed by sending out of the DFG application pack within a further 15 working days
- Completion of routine work – 3 calendar months following receipt of the DFG application

For major works it is not possible to be specific about completion times as the extent of design, Social Care liaison, obtaining permissions, tendering, and carrying out of physical works varies significantly. Completion of an extension can take in the region of 12 months from the initial request.

Please note that the time involved in receiving a Social Care recommendation following referral is outside the Council's control; however, the DFG review is working on minimising delays in this process.

### **3.3. Post works inspections**

All disabled adaptations will be post inspected by either the Housing Renewal Officer or Building Surveyor dealing with the contract upon completion of the work. On completion of all disabled adaptations the tenant shall be sent a survey form for completion.

Minor aids will be inspected as part of the overall requirement to monitor the responsive repair contractor's work.