

THE HOUSING SERVICE AIDS & ADAPTATIONS POLICY

Cabinet Member Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer Housing Services Manager

Reason for Report: The Council is expected to provide an adaptations service that meets the needs of its tenants.

RECOMMENDATION(S): The Cabinet adopts the draft aids and adaptations policy.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Relates to the pledge entitled: "Better Homes", where the long term vision is: "To ensure that the housing needs of our residents are met through the provision of affordable homes and good quality housing in both the public and private sector". As part of this pledge, the Council needs to ensure that our own tenants have access to any aids and adaptations they need and that this service is managed efficiently and effectively to deliver the specific outcome expected by the regulator and value for money.

Financial Implications: The Repairs Manager holds a budget of £105,570 for disabled adaptations and manages a team of operatives which works to deliver the service. A Private Sector Housing Officer works closely with this team, the Neighbourhood teams and the Housing Allocations team when responding to requests for aids and/ or adaptations.

Legal Implications: The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) regulates social housing and there are national standards contained within the regulatory framework. The Home Standard contains a specific expectation that states that "Registered providers shall co-operate with relevant organisations to provide an adaptations service that meets tenants' needs". The delivery of aids and adaptations is allied to government policies relating to social inclusion, accident prevention and quality of life, amongst others. The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

Risk Assessment: Failure to provide adaptations can lead to a number of risks. For example, tenants may experience a deterioration in their health if they have to wait too long. Failure to have a published policy in place can lead to a lack of clarity and understanding amongst those waiting for or in possession of specific aids and/ or adaptations, leading to confusion about ownership and repairs responsibilities.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Housing Service, as a Registered Provider of social housing, deals with vulnerable people. There is an aging population living in our homes; 43% of lead tenants (1324) are aged over 61. Our database shows that 26% of lead tenants (785) have advised this Authority of their disability. These statistics do not take account of other family members who may also meet these criteria.
- 1.2 The Department for Communities and Local Government has published good practice guidance relating to the delivery of adaptations

which advocates the social model of disability. This is the alteration of disabling environments to restore or enable independent living. The focus of this approach is to deliver individual solutions for people, providing housing that is tailored to the needs of the people who live there.

- 1.3 Most tenants aspire to live in their own homes and to live independently for as long as they can. The provision of aids and/ or adaptations can be beneficial for these tenants. For example, it can allow them to remain in their existing community where they have support and this can improve their health and stress levels. Accidents are less likely to happen if a home has been adapted and this can reduce admissions to hospital and/ or residential care.
- 1.4 Having a stated policy relating to aids and adaptations makes the service transparent and gives clarity. This policy clearly states what has been happening in practice for some years, now.

2.0 Funding for aids & adaptations

- 2.1 Local authorities with retained stock are expected to fund adaptations required by their own tenants using funding derived from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) or capital allocations. It is not permitted to use major repairs allowances for this purpose. There is no other funding available. For this reason, a budget has been made available within the HRA which is managed by the Repairs Manager.
- 2.2 Local authorities need to work with other agencies when delivering services for older people, those with disabilities and those with long term illness. The Council has a good working relationship with the Occupational Therapists in the District.

3.0 The delivery of greater value for money

- 3.1 The Council is now building up a database with information relating to all the adapted properties in the District. This is important because it enables the Allocations team to make the best use of stock by matching people in need of an adapted property with the property most suitable for them.
- 3.2 When adapted homes are advertised, the adaptations will be detailed so that those bidding for homes through Devon Home Choice will be able to identify those that best meet their needs.
- 3.3 To deliver greater value for money, the Council may need to recycle items such as stair lifts and the policy addresses this issue.
- 3.4 Delivering a good adaptations service can lead to lower void, repair and re-letting costs.
- 3.5 The Scrutiny and Improvement Group discussed the draft policy on 13 May 2013.

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Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley, Cabinet Member for Housing, the Housing Scrutiny & Improvement Group

List of Background Papers: DCLG: Delivering housing adaptations for disabled people: a good practice guide

Mid Devon District Council

Housing Service

**Draft Aids and Adaptations
Policy**

June 2013

Version Control

Title: Aids and Adaptations Policy

Purpose: To confirm the Council's position on aids and adaptations in Council Housing.

Owner: Housing Services Manager

Date: May 2013

Version Number: 1

Status: Draft

Review Frequency: Four yearly

*Next review date: **June 2017***

Consultation

This document obtained the following approvals:

Who	Date
Tenant Scrutiny and Improvement Group	13/5/2013
Management Team	2/7/2013
Decent and Affordable Homes Policy Development Group	

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Policy Statement

Mid Devon District Council recognises that in some instances its tenants are living in accommodation that is no longer suitable for their support needs.

We will:

- Work with tenants and provide advice in order to support independent living solutions to sustain their tenancy.
- Offer effective support to tenants requiring adaptations.
- Consider each major adaptations request on an individual basis.
- Ensure that access to services is available to all sections of the community.
- Adopt a partnership approach to seeking an effective adaptation solution and achieving all the objectives listed, this may involve liaising with other landlords regarding alternative suitable accommodation.
- Ensure that value for money is a key consideration in delivering new adaptations and retaining existing adaptations.
- Liaise with and take advice from professional advisors e.g. Occupational Therapists.

Any adaptation funded or part funded by the Council will remain in the property and should not be removed by the tenant or anyone acting on their behalf without the agreement of the Council.

Legal Framework

The Council has to operate within the framework created by legislation and these include:

- The Housing Act 1985
- Equality Act 2010
- Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970
- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

Who is considered under this policy?

A person is regarded as being disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A long-term effect refers to disabilities:

- that have lasted for at least 12 months;
- the effects of which last for at least 12 months;
- which are likely to last for the remainder of a person's life.

We will normally only consider a request for aids and adaptations if the disabled person is the tenant, or their partner, or a member of the immediate family who is permanently resident in the household.

Where applicants are on the transfer list then each request will be considered on its individual merits.

We will look at options in our housing stock that may be more appropriate in order to offer Value for Money and free up possible family homes.

Homeowners, leaseholders and private sector tenants are not included within the scope of this Policy as they are eligible to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant from the Council if they require financial assistance.

Aids and Adaptations

For the purpose of this policy an aid or adaptation is the provision of fixed equipment and/ or modification to the property or associated land where there has been an identified need to enable tenants or other members of the household to live independently and safely in their home.

Minor Adaptations

Minor adaptations involve non-structural alterations or additions to a property, which normally do not exceed £1,000.

Works under £250

Where a tenant feels that they may require minor works to their property so they can live more independently then they can contact our Repairs Service directly or through their Neighbourhood Officer.

Examples of this type of work include:

- Special taps
- Special handles
- Grab-rails
- Additional external lighting
- Flashing doorbells

Works costing £250 to £1,000

If an adaptation is required, a referral from the Occupational Therapist will be needed before any works can start. Examples of this type of work include:

- Ramps
- Hard-standings
- Handrails
- Over-bath showers (shower, curtain, tiling, no flooring)
- Minor internal alterations
- Minor kitchen or bathroom works
- Shower seats
- Safety glass

We will agree a timescale for the work with the tenant.

Major Adaptations

Major adaptations are carried out to provide improved access into and out of the property and to help with access to facilities within the home. It may also provide the essential facilities themselves. Major adaptations can involve extensive structural alterations and will normally cost more than £1,000.

Types of major adaptations include:

- Installation of ramps or widening door ways
- Installation of improved lighting or adapting a room specifically to make it safer for a disabled person
- Improvements to access facilities such as a stair lift
- Improvements to the facilities such as replacing a bath with a level access shower
- Adaptation of heating or lighting controls for easier use

Before adaptations are carried out, we will consider whether they are reasonable and practicable, taking into the account the type, age and condition of the property. Alternatives, such as a transfer to a more suitable property will be considered if the works are not reasonable or practicable.

We will arrange for all major adaptations to be inspected to ensure they have been carried out in accordance with the original specification and that the tenant is satisfied with the works.

Servicing and Maintenance

We will meet the costs of all routine repairs and maintenance to any equipment supplied by us through this policy.

If equipment is wilfully damaged by the tenant, members of their household or anyone else visiting the property, we will recharge the tenant for any repairs required.

We will maintain an up to date record of all major adaptations installed. A programme will be in place to undertake annual servicing and maintenance of stair lifts and lifting equipment.

Funding

As a Housing Service, we will pay for works up to the value of £1,000 and will normally fund adaptations up to a maximum limit of £30,000. Tenants may need to contribute towards the cost of works over £1,000 but an assessment will be made based on an individual's financial circumstances. Even if the tenant contributes towards the cost of works, the adaptations must remain in the property unless otherwise agreed with the Council.

Approval of works that exceed £1,000 will be made on the condition that:

- An Occupational Therapist completes an Assessment of Need which outlines clear recommendations that the work is necessary to sustain independent living;

- An assessment is carried out with the tenant to check whether a move to a more suitable property may resolve the need for adaptations and present a better long-term solution to their circumstances; and
- The proposed works comply with all Planning Permission and Building Regulation requirements.

Where top up funding is required for major adaptations to a property we will work with other agencies to make any recommendations necessary to support additional funding and to evidence that other long-term options and other funding sources have been explored.

Where major adaptation works are not practicable to a tenant's home we will work closely with the tenant and other agencies to find a more suitable property to ensure that the best use is being made of the housing stock.

What if the tenant wants to install their own aids or adaptations?

A tenant wishing to undertake an adaptation is required to make a written request to their Neighbourhood Officer stating what adaptation they wish to carry out. Any adaptation to the property will need written consent from us before the work is carried out.

If following approval a tenant installs his or her own aids or adaptations these will not normally be maintained by us. The tenant will be advised of their responsibilities for any servicing or repairs that are required.

At the end of the tenancy the tenant may be required to remove any approved aid or adaptation they have fitted and make good any damage to the property. Alternatively, if we agree to take responsibility for the alterations the tenant will be required to sign over ownership free of charge. Where we agree to take on future responsibility of an adaptation then this would be included in the conditions of any permission that is granted to the tenant to undertake an adaptation.

Alternative solutions

Not all major adaptation requests received will be considered to be the most effective and efficient use of the housing stock. If the decision is made that it is not reasonable and/ or practicable to carry out a recommended adaptation, we will endeavour to offer suitable alternative accommodation that meets a tenant's needs as soon as reasonably possible. The tenant may also be signposted to other social landlords who could provide alternative suitable accommodation.

Examples of cases where it will generally be considered **not reasonable or practicable** for major adaptation works to be undertaken include:

- In a family dwelling (general needs) where under or over occupation exists.
- Where there is a requirement to provide an additional bedroom or living room and suitable alternative accommodation exists within the near locality.
- Where a level access shower is required in properties at first floor or above, where there is no lift, or in bathrooms of family sized accommodation, which is under occupied.
- Where parking bays and access ramps would adversely affect the amenity of the area.
- Where the works would significantly affect our ability to let the property in the future and there is suitable alternative accommodation.
- To provide access ramps or major adaptations for tenants with a terminal condition when safe and temporary, but effective, solutions can be undertaken quickly.
- Where we are seeking possession of a property because of a breach of tenancy conditions.

The above list is not exhaustive and individual circumstances will be taken into account. Factors affecting the decision on whether it is reasonable or practicable include:

- The extent to which the property is capable of being adapted.
- The cost of the work.
- The availability of suitable alternative accommodation.
- The degree of occupation in the premises.
- The extent to which the tenant is complying with the tenancy agreement.

Will the adaptation be removed?

Where adaptations have been carried out to a property designated for elderly people or disabled people, these will not normally be reversed e.g. where a bath has been replaced with a level access shower.

Where General needs accommodation has been adapted, we will seek to find a suitable applicant using the Council's approved Allocations policy.

What if the tenant wants a transfer after the adaptations have been carried out?

Following a major adaptation, we would normally expect the tenant to remain in the property for a minimum of five years. However, there may be exceptions where the individual's needs have changed and the occupational therapist and we agree a move is necessary e.g. if the family size changes or there is a need to move into supported housing. Then, if the new home

requires any adaptations, we will assess and adapt the property in accordance with this Aids and Adaptations Policy.

Letting adapted properties

We recognise that the re-let time is a key stage in the successful delivery of the adaptations process. In order to ensure properties are allocated to make efficient and effective use of the housing stock and reduce costs in delivering adaptations, it is important that key issues have been considered prior to re-let.

We will identify details of any major adaptations for all properties that become vacant.

We will allocate properties to make the most appropriate use of any existing adaptation. Significantly adapted properties e.g. properties with internal lifts, wet rooms or low-level kitchens fitted may be allocated as a Direct Let to the most appropriate applicant whose needs can best be met by allocating the property to them. Properties allocated in this way will be advertised as a Direct Let and other applicants will not be able to bid for the property.

Where a move may be possible we will support the tenant with the cost of moving. This amount offered will depend upon individual circumstances up to a maximum of £1,000. This funding will be provided from the aids and adaptations budget.

Where a new tenant who is not disabled accepts an offer to move into an adapted property, adaptations such as level access showers will not usually be removed.

Recycling Adaptations

Where possible, adaptations will be recycled on re-letting a property by allocating the adapted property to a person needing the adaptation.

If this is not possible, we have in place a process to remove adaptations from locations where they are no longer required.

Examples of equipment that can be removed and recycled include:

- Stair lifts
- Hoists
- Through floor lifts

We do not remove structural adaptations that have been carried out to a property, e.g., door ramps, level access showers and widened doors. If a new tenant accepts a property that has been adapted, they do so on the basis that

the adaptations remain in situ. All adaptations of this nature will be classed as an attribute to the property and treated as such.

Review of the policy

Mid Devon District Council will review its policy regularly in light of changes to legislation, regulatory guidance, best practice and customer feedback.

We will review this policy to ensure that it continues to reflect principles of best practice. The next review is due June 2017 and every four years thereafter.