

Housing Services

Aids & Adaptations Policy

April 2018

The Council provides funding each year for the provision of Adaptations to enable occupiers to remain in their home, for as long as it is safe and reasonable to do so. For Council Housing tenants this is solely funded from the Housing Service's Capital budget.

For Private residents, Central Government provide a Disabled Facilities Grant that is administered by a different service within the Council. Although it is generally applicable to anyone regardless of their tenure, there are restrictions which prevent Council Housing tenants from accessing this fund. Therefore, all Aids and Adaptations in Local Authority properties are funded through Right to Buy Capital receipts

This policy specifically refers to Adaptations carried out for tenants of the Council managed by Housing Services. All references within the policy document referring to tenants/customers are Council housing tenants.

Major and minor adaptation work

- Minor Adaptations

Minor adaptations are classed as any low cost (below £400) adaptation work. Such adaptation work can be carried out when we receive a referral from Social Care Services. The budget for minor adaptations comes from the Housing Revenue Account. The following are examples of minor adaptations;

- Lever taps;
- Visual smoke detectors;
- Visual door bells;
- Half steps.
- Small Ramps

Whilst grab rails are a minor adaptation (on a cost basis), because Housing staff or their contractors are not qualified to assess where a tenant needs a grab rail placed, it is required to be based upon the information received from Social Care Services.

- Major Adaptations

All other adaptation work costing £400 and over is classed as a major adaptation and will only be carried out once a referral has been received from Social Care Services, and a subsequent decision has been made by the Housing Adaptations Review Panel.

The following are examples of major adaptations:

- Level access showers

- Major structural conversions
- Stair lifts/ through floor lifts

Portable and temporary equipment

Portable or temporary appliances such as bath or shower seats, temporary ramping etc. are provided by Social Care Services, not by the Council.

Tenants installing their own adaptations, and managing existing adaptations

For all adaptations installed by the tenant or household member at their own expense, the tenant is required to obtain written permission from the Council before carrying out any works. The Council will only refuse permission with good reason, such as if the work:

- Would interfere with any maintenance to the property;
- May cause a potential health and safety risk; or
- Would breach any regulatory requirements.

The written request will need to state what works and adaptations the tenant requests to carry out and include a plan of the required works. Completed works may be inspected to ensure they have been carried out to a satisfactory standard. The tenant will be responsible for obtaining the necessary planning permissions and/or building regulations and any costs incurred by doing so.

The Council will not be responsible for maintaining, servicing or repairing any aids or adaptations installed by the tenant or household member. At the end of the tenancy, the tenant may be required to remove any approved aid or adaptation they or their household member have fitted and make good any damage to the property. Alternatively, if the Council agrees to take responsibility for the alterations, the tenant or household member will be required to sign over ownership free of charge.

The Council will not fund any alterations or adaptations that may be required to interior or exterior of the property following the purchase of a mobility vehicle. If the tenant needs to make changes to the property such as vehicle access, hard standings, pathways or shelters or electric charging points, these will need to be funded by the tenant or household member unless a statement of need is received from an Occupational Therapist making the recommendation. The tenant will be required to obtain written consent from the Council for carrying out such works.

If adaptations have been carried out at the tenant's or household member's expense without written permission, then the Council may:

- Agree to take over the ownership of the adaptations;
- Ask the tenant to seek retrospective consent;

- Ask the tenant to remove the adaptation and make good any damage to the property; or Recharge the tenant for the removal of adaptations or repair any damage after a tenancy has ended and the former tenant will be liable for any costs incurred for such works.

Removing adaptations

If a tenant moves, any adaptations fitted by the Council are to remain at the property. Any adaptations fitted by the tenant are to be removed unless agreed otherwise by the Council.

Where adaptations have been carried out to a property designated for elderly or a person with a disability, these will normally not be removed, for example where a bath has been replaced with a level access shower. Every effort will be made to re-let an adapted property to a person who has a need for that type of property.

Where this is not possible, and a non-disabled tenant accepts an offer of an adapted property, adaptations such as level access showers will not usually be removed. However, the Council reserves the right to remove the adaptation if they consider it to be unsuitable for the property.

Recycling adaptations

Where the Council has reserved their discretion to remove adaptations from the property, they will recycle adaptations where possible, for example stair lifts, hoists or through floor lifts. However, they will not remove structural adaptations that have been carried out to a property, such as door ramps, level access showers and widened doors.

Procedure

1. All customers are encouraged to contact their Estate Officer initially to discuss the type of adaptation they are considering, so that various options and advice can be discussed at this point with the customer in relation to their individual circumstances;
2. Where adaptations are already in place and they have aged or require persistent repairs, the Council will liaise with the Occupational Therapist to check that the adaptation is still required.
3. If the Adaptation request is feasible and involves certain minor works or a major adaptation they must self-refer to Social Care Services for a full assessment.

The contact details of the nearest branch are:

Adult Social Care, Essex County Council, County Hall, Market Road,
Chelmsford, CM1 1QH Telephone: 03456037630

4. A member of staff from the Social Care Service will contact the tenant to make arrangements to assess their requirements. Due to the nature of the works, if a joint visit is required this will be arranged by the Social Care Representative (usually an Occupational Therapist);
5. For all works requiring a Social Care Assessment as noted in point 2, the Occupational Therapist will send an assessment/referral for works to the Council. This information will include a recommendation as to the works and materials required as well as a score to identify an individual's priority (i.e. fast track, urgent or routine);
6. The Aids and Adaptations Officer from the Council will be the key contact for tenants from this point onward;
7. Each Individual request for works will be considered by the Review Panel (consisting of a minimum of two Officers from Repairs and Housing Management)
8. Tenants successful in their application will be dealt with in date order within the priority they have been allocated;
9. Where a tenant is discharged from hospital, and require that their home be altered, such cases will be fast tracked following agreement with Social Care Services. The fast tracking of works mainly applies to minor adaptation works.
10. If tenants feel that there is a change in their individual circumstances which would change their priority, they should ask for a re-assessment by Social Care Services.

Funding Adaptations

Before committing to expenditure, the Council will look to place the tenant in a property which already has the adaptation required (please refer to Appendix 1 guidance notes), particularly where there are concerns about under occupancy, property suitability or a tenant's intentions regarding long term use of the property, and where the specification includes any of the following:

- A level access shower
- A through floor lift
- A heating conversion
- A stair lift (depending upon the practicality of the type/ cost involved)

- Large scale adaptations such as extensions

Where alternative accommodation is being considered, the likely impact of moving to a new house should be assessed in relation to the customer's health/condition and individual circumstances to ensure that it will not have a serious adverse effect upon them.

Medical documentation may be requested from the Tenant as appropriate to allow the Council, in conjunction with a medical advisor, to fully assess the impact to a Tenants health.

Where suitable alternative accommodation can be offered, the tenant will be offered a cash incentive to take the property not exceeding the cost of the works, and not exceeding £1,000 in all cases. The level of offer will be made following agreement between the Service Managers for Housing Repairs and Housing Management.

For large scale adaptations, such as extensions, lift shafts and other structural conversion works, an already adapted property will be sought through liaison with Social Care Services, including properties owned by other social housing providers. Only once this avenue has been exhausted consideration will be given to adapting the tenant's property (subject to property suitability, below)

Tenants do have the option to arrange and self-fund the required works if their personal finances allow. Tenants would need to seek permission from the Council Housing Service prior to starting any works. Permission will not be unreasonably withheld.

Procurement of works

All Adaptations works will be procured in line with the current relevant Corporate, Financial and European Union Regulations and Requirements applicable at the time of processing the applications. Contract Procedure Rules will be adhered to unless it can be demonstrated that an exemption is required.

Property Suitability

If the tenant's property is not deemed suitable for an adaptation, the adaptation will be declined. Reasons for refusal include layout, location and future lettability should the adaptation go ahead.

Where large structural conversion works are required, providing an already suitable adapted alternative has not been found with other providers, the tenant will be offered a property suitable for minor conversion amongst the Councils stock

in the Borough. In such cases, the tenant will be treated as a high priority to ensure that the person is able to move into the alternative property as soon as practicable.

Applicants whose home is considered larger than their requirements warrant (i.e. their assessed bedroom need in line with a transfer assessment) or have submitted a right to buy or transfer application will not be eligible for adaptation works, nor will those who have terminated their tenancy or where there is a pending or failed succession. Any tenant subject to any type of possession order or hold an Introductory or demoted tenancy will also not be eligible.

Where alternative accommodation is being considered, the likely impact of moving to a new house should be assessed in relation to the customer's health/condition and individual circumstances to ensure that it will not have a serious adverse effect upon them.

Priorities and timescales for adaptations

For minor adaptations (i.e. works under the value of £400), the Adaptations Officer will aim to visit in ten working days of receiving a request for an adaptation. A works order will be issued within three further working days and a maximum completion date of 28 days allowed from the date the works order is raised.

For major adaptations, once the Council has received an assessment from Social Care Services, a review panel meeting will be scheduled and held within 20 working days. Once a case has been approved by the review board and confirmation of available funding is given, works will be completed, subject to priority rating and any statutory approvals, in the following timescales:

Major Adaptations (i.e. anything £400 and over)

- Fast Track cases- highest priority within 5 months
- Urgent Cases – medium level priority within 8 months
- Routine Cases- lower level priority within 14 months
- Sometimes large scale structural works may take slightly longer due to building and planning requirements and should be aimed to be completed within a maximum 18 months' timescale subject to available funding.

Post Works Inspections

All Major Adaptations will be post inspected upon completion of the works

15% of Minor Adaptations will be post inspected upon completion of the works. An annual programme to undertake servicing and maintenance of equipment such as stair lifts and lifting equipment will also be put in place by the Council.

Complaints and Appeals Process

The priority given to tenants seeking an adaptation cannot be appealed against because it is based on the professional opinion of the Occupation Health Therapist. However, if a customer believes that the procedure has not been properly applied in reaching the final decision they should request re-consideration to Social Care Services.

If there are any other complaints in relation to the Adaptations Service these will be dealt with in line with the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Draft

Appendix 1- Guidance Notes

Aids & Adaptations Application Processing Guidance Checklist

1. **Adaptation requested** – note details of adaptation required

2. **Estimated Cost of adaptation / associated works:**

➤ **Minor works, under £400** – Arrange works in priority/date order

➤ **Major works between £400 but under £15,000**

Check whether request includes any of the following;

- level access shower
- stair lift
- heating conversion
- through floor lift

If yes, then use the checklist (points 3-6 below) to consider all options before committing to the expenditure. Arrange works in priority/date order subject to assessment to confirm the property is suitable (property layout / structurally feasible and there are no alternative options available and the property can be adapted go ahead with works in priority/date order

➤ **Major works, over £15,000 –**

- level access shower
- stair lift
- heating conversion
- through floor lift
- Structural conversion

If yes than use the checklist (points 3-6 below) to consider all options before committing to the expenditure. Arrange works in priority/date order subject to assessment to confirm the property is suitable (property layout / structurally feasible and there are no alternative options available and the property can be adapted go ahead with works in priority/date order

3. **Property suitability** - Is the adaptation requested feasible in terms of;

- Building layout
- Structural
- Planning
- Health & safety regulations –

If not, then the request will have to be refused but support will be provided to the tenant in finding them suitable alternative accommodation either with the required adaptation already in situ or a property that was more suitable for the required adaptations to meet the applicant's needs via the Council's transfer register.

If the property could be converted, before committing to the expenditure, consider if the applicant and their family is/are likely to maximize the use of the property longer term or if other more suitable property is available (either with the existing adaptation in situ or more easily able to be converted for an adaptation). –

In such cases, the transfer application & adaptation request (if required in new property) is to be prioritized and financial assistance (up to maximum of £1K) provided to assist with the house move, on receipt of invoice or on receipt of associated house move costs paid.

4. **Occupancy levels**

In accordance with the Council's Allocation Policy

5. **Is there suitable alternative accommodation?**

When we consider an application, we will take into account the following;

- Is there suitable accommodation within the local vicinity or near to family / support network, near to similar or same amenities. e.g. schools for the children
- A move will not adversely affect the person's support/care package, health condition
- When considering the option of alternative accommodation – is suitable alternative property likely to be available within a reasonable period e.g. 6 months.

If these considerations can be satisfied, then we will assist with seeking alternative accommodation and offer financial assistance up to a maximum of £1000. Applications for alternative accommodation are to remain pending upon the adaptations waiting list and are to be reviewed on a 3-monthly basis.

If the applicant refuses a reasonable offer of alternative suitable accommodation without good reason, the case will be closed.

If suitable accommodation does not become available within 6 months consideration to be given to providing the adaptation subject to priority, date order and available funding.

6. If any of the following points apply to the tenant, then the application will be refused;

- A Right to Buy application has been made
- Tenancy termination notice has been received
- There is a possession order in place or there are eviction proceedings pending for a breach of tenancy conditions
- A transfer or mutual exchange application already exists within or out of the Borough
- The applicant's existing property is not structurally suitable or feasible for the adaptation requested.

7. If an application is refused the applicant is to be informed of the appeals / complaints process.

8. If any aids or adaptations have been wilfully damaged by the tenant, a household member or visitor to the property, the tenant will be recharged for any costs incurred for putting the property right.

Application Checklist (to be held on applicant's case file):

Name of Applicant / case ref:

Address of Applicant

<u>Application Checks (see key)</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Officer(s) making decision / date of decision</u>
1. Adaptation Requested?		
2. Est Cost?		
3. Property Suitability?		
4. Occupancy?		
5. Suitable Alternative Accommodation ?		
6. Check points noted in Key point 6 e.g. Right to Buy etc.		
Decision taken / reasons for decision?		

Draft v1