

Guildford Borough Council Housing Services Housing Aids and Adaptations Policy

Document Information

Version Control: Draft Version 2.0

Policy Service Owner: Housing Services

This document replaces: Draft version 1.0

Document creation date: December 2024

Next review date: December 2027

Governance route: Executive

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Guildford Borough Council (the Council) is committed to providing a high-quality aids and adaptations service that enables disabled Council tenants to live safely and more independently within our homes.
- 1.2. The Council will take all reasonable measures to provide a fair and accessible aids and adaptations service that makes best use of existing adapted properties and works closely with other external agencies.
- 1.3. The Aids and Adaptations Policy applies to disabled Council tenants and/or their immediate family members living in properties owned by the Council.
- 1.4. This policy supports the corporate priorities detailed in our Corporate Plan 2021-2025 by empowering communities and supporting people who need help, specifically 'tackling inequalities in our communities' and 'working with communities to support those in need'.
- 1.5. This policy should be used by council staff considering an application and by tenants who are considering making an application. Partner agencies such as Social Services should also be aware of the policy when advising and working with tenants.

2. Aims of the Policy

- 2.1. The policy aims to assist in the delivery of an aids and adaptation service that will be able to:
 - Provide focus of supporting people to consider how their future needs can be met and live more independently, improving their day-to-day quality of life in and around their home
 - Ensure that the reasonable needs of the Council's disabled tenants are prioritised, and appropriate aids and adaptations are implemented. Additionally, that adapted properties are let taking into account the needs of the tenants
 - Ensure integration between internal services and closer working with Surrey County Council's Adult Social Care and the Children with disabilities team
 - Comply with the legal and statutory requirements in relation to the provision of disabled adaptations (e.g. Equality Act 2010)
 - Maximise all available funding sources and ensure that the available budgets are used effectively and efficiently to maximise best use of Council housing stock and ensure that the needs of the tenants are appropriately prioritised.

3. Legal Framework and Scope of Policy

- 3.1. The Council's obligations, powers and duties in relation to the provision of financial assistance for repair and adaptations are contained within the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is available to owners and tenants of private landlords and housing associations. Council tenants are not eligible for DFG, however we will consider requests on the same grounds.

- 3.2. In determining this policy, consideration has been given to the integration with the Council's Lettings, Allocations and Mutual Exchange policies together with statutory provisions of the relevant acts.
- 3.3. Under the Equality Act 2010, councils must ensure that their adaptations service is equally accessible to all. Under the act councils as landlords, do not have to make changes which affect the structure or which would substantially and permanently alter their housing stock, however where a disabled person requests and would, but for the provision of an auxiliary aid, be put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled, the council must "take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to provide the auxiliary aid".
- 3.4. The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended) states that grant aid must be provided for adaptations that are "necessary and appropriate" to meet the needs of the disabled applicant and where the council is satisfied that it is "reasonable and practicable" to carry out the works, having regard to the age and condition of the property adaptations should be consider if they are: Necessary, Appropriate, Reasonable and Practical
- 3.5. Under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 the councils have wide reaching discretionary powers to provide financial assistance for repairs, improvements and adaptations to living accommodation. This includes help with the cost of moving and adapting or improving another property where it is deemed to be a more cost-effective option.
- 3.6. The policy scope covers how the Council's Specialist Services – Environment & Regulatory team are able to provide aids and adaptations to assist in meeting the needs of the Council's tenants. This includes:
 - The types of aids and adaptations that can be reasonably carried out
 - The definition of disabled and the situations where the Council will and will not be able to assist in providing aids and adaptations
 - Provide clarity in identifying the Council's responsibilities
 - The type and level of service that tenants may reasonably expect from the Council
 - The tenant's financial expectations and possible charges for on-going maintenance of specialist equipment and adaptations

4. Definitions and Eligibility

- 4.1. An adaptation is an alteration to an aspect of a dwelling to assist the disabled person to live as independently as possible in their home.
- 4.2. A disabled person is defined as having a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities (Equality Act 2010).
- 4.3. To be eligible a person must be a Council tenant and either they, their partner or a member of their immediate family who is permanently resident in the household, have an impairment that is likely to last for at least 12 months or for the remainder of the person's life that substantially affects their ability to carry out normal day to day activities or access facilities in or around their home.

- 4.4. Under the terms of this policy a person is regarded as 'disabled' as defined under the Housing, Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended) if they have any of the following:
- Sight, hearing or speech is substantially impaired
 - Mental disorder or impairment of any kind
 - Physically substantially disabled by illness, injury, impairment present since birth, or otherwise
- 4.5. If a person does not live in a Council owned property and are not a Council tenant, their initial enquiry should be directed to the Council's Private Sector Housing Team who facilitate all adaptation referrals for owner occupiers, housing association and private landlord tenants.

5. Adaptations

- 5.1. Adaptations are split into two categories – minor and major. These distinctions are based on the nature of the work required to implement the adaptation and do not correspond to the impact the adaptation will have on the individual requiring such work. It is understood that both minor and major adaptation work can impact significantly on an individual's quality of life.

5.2. Minor Adaptations

Includes but is not limited to the provision of adaptations such as:

- Ramps
- Handrails
- Grab rail
- Lever taps
- Sanitary ware

5.3. Major Adaptations

These require more extensive and complex work, often designed for the specific need of an individual, and including, but are not limited to the provision of adaptations such as:

- The installation of lifts and special purpose equipment
- Bathroom and kitchen adaptations, ground floor WC conversions
- Garage conversions, extensions and access

6. Minor Adaptations

- 6.1. Tenants can request (self-refer) for minor adaptations by contacting the Council. Any tenant unsure of the extent of the required adaptation will be asked to contact their Occupational Therapist (OT) in the first instance.
- 6.2. Minor adaptations (typically under £500) are easily installed and do not affect the future use of the property, for example, lever taps, grab rails, half step and mop stick handrails.
- 6.3. Minor adaptations will be raised as a routine repair job (i.e. up to 30 working Days) as long as they do not exceed £500 in total value in any one property.

- 6.4. The likely timeframe for completing minor adaptations may be less depending on critical need or if there are immediate risks to health and safety to the occupants of the property.
- 6.5. All minor adaptation requests that cost between £500 and £1,000 will be assessed by the OT and Council's Adaptations Team, within 10 working days, to assess whether a major adaptation would be more suitable.
- 6.6. The Council reserves the right to seek an Occupational Therapist's report on aids and adaptations requests below £1,000 in value on a discretionary basis, to ensure the proposed works meet the customer's individual needs in the most effective way.
- 6.7. If an assessment is required, once agreed, the Council aims to ensure all minor adaptations are completed within 4-6 weeks from the date they are approved.
- 6.8. Minor adaptations do not include non-fixed equipment to assist with a disability or mobility problem that are normally supplied by Surrey County Council Equipment Services which is run by Millbrook Healthcare.

7. Major Adaptations

- 7.1. Major adaptations (typically over £1,000) are adaptations that meet needs identified through an Occupational Therapist referral, for example, a stair lift, through floor lifts, over bath showers, a level access showers, electric opening doors, ramps.
- 7.2. Approvals for major adaptations will only be made on receipt of an Occupational Therapist's assessment and clear recommendation that the work is necessary & appropriate and reasonable & practical to sustain independent living, addressing basic needs only (with critical needs assessments receiving the greatest priority).
- 7.3. When evaluating a request for an adaptation, the Council will consider individual, technical and other relevant factors to enable a balanced decision to be taken to ensure best use is made of the available financial resources.
- 7.4. Wherever possible, and suitable for a customer's circumstances, the Council will endeavour to facilitate approved requests for major adaptations through allocations or management moves to an alternative suitable property that meets required needs. This will include consideration of the suitability of the property, where factors such as floor level and under occupation of the property will be considered. For example, if a single household requires an adaptation, but is occupying a larger family home, a transfer to a more suitable property is likely to be more appropriate.
- 7.5. We will consider the following criteria when prioritising permissions and providing funding for major adaptations works:
 - There is a completed independent Occupational Therapist referral with all relevant information to make a full assessment.
 - The work requested is to assist in meeting a long-term medical condition that is likely to continue for the near future.
 - The Occupational Therapist's eligibility criteria to decide if they have priority needs (with 'critical needs' receiving priority over those with 'substantial' needs').

- Where there is more than one applicant with the same Occupational Therapist recommendation, priority will be given on date order (i.e. those that have been waiting longest).
- Additional priority may be given where the requirement for adaptation is causing a current health and safety or fire risk.

7.6. The Council reserves the right to refuse the request for a major adaptation on the following grounds:

- Where the adaptation is requested in a property that is due for demolition or major refurbishment within two years.
- The property is unsuitable for the tenant, for example too large or too small for their household. In the case of under occupation, the Council may, on a discretionary basis, waive this condition where no other suitable housing is available.
- Where the property is underoccupied by 2 rooms or more and the adaptations exceed £7000.00
- The property is unsuitable for adaptation.
- Where the request is for the communal parts of buildings.
- The adaptation is considered unreasonable and unsuitable for the tenant's needs.
- The request is to address specialist needs recommended by the OT other than basic needs (example of specialist needs: self-washing or changing facilities).
- The request affects other areas of health and safety, for example fire safety.
- The adaptation requested is unlikely to meet the needs of a progressive condition or on-going health needs.
- A suitable, alternative or already adapted property is offered and refused (depending on individual circumstances).
- Tenants are in persistent rent arrears or are subject to a current anti-social behaviour order or injunction action against them. The Council may on a discretionary basis waive this condition in cases of critical need or where there are immediate risks to health and safety to the occupants of the property.
- If the tenant is in the final year of their flexible tenancy we will consult with the Case Officer about the likelihood of it being renewed before we decide whether or not to make any major/permanent adaptations to the property. If it has been decided the tenancy will not be renewed no adaptations will be considered.
- If the tenant has submitted an application under the right-to-buy (RTB) scheme they will be signposted to the Disabled Facilities Grant. The referral will be reassessed if the RTB is withdrawn.
- Where a tenant has transferred from another property within the last 12 months which had the adaptations that are now being requested again unless that property was

confirmed to be no longer suitable for their needs by a health professional or Council officer or if the tenant is downsizing to a smaller property.

- Where the building structure is considered integrally unsuitable for technical and practical reasons, for example widening doorways in prefab buildings, wet floor showers in beam and block floors etc.
- Where the tenant's needs may be met by a more reasonable solution. Particularly where the OT has recommended an extension or major works the tenants needs will be assessed and consideration given to applying alternative solutions, for example utilising a ground floor dining room as a bedroom, instead of building an extension, a smaller extension or rehousing.

7.7. The Council will aim to ensure all major adaptations are completed within 12-18 months from the date they are requested. Adaptations where a move to a more suitable property has been identified are deemed 'complex'.

7.8. We may consider non-permanent adaptations if it is expected to take over 6 months to find a suitable alternative property.

7.9. We will inspect all major adaptations on completion to ensure that the work has been undertaken professionally and to check that the resident is satisfied with the work.

8. Complex Adaptations

8.1. Complex adaptations require work that is more extensive, for example, major remodelling, widening of doors, off road parking and extensions, and are often designed for the specific need of the individual. These works are of high cost and affect the future use of the property.

8.2. Upon receipt of the Occupational Therapists report, a feasibility assessment will be carried out in consultation with the Occupational Therapist, along with a member of the Council's Adaptations Team, Neighbourhood Housing Team and the Allocations Team.

8.3. The feasibility assessment will seek to establish:

- If there is a possibility for the tenant to be moved to more suitable accommodation.
- The implications of the adaptation work when the property becomes available to re-let, particularly the impact on future allocations and under occupancy issues.
- If the adaptation works are suitable for the disabled tenant.
- The feasibility of the adaptation in relation to the layout and structure of the property.
- The proposed works meet all planning, estate management and building regulation requirements.
- Whether the estimated cost of the adaptation work is likely to exceed the Council's maximum budget provision.

8.4. Where it has been identified that a move to a more suitable property is both reasonable and practicable, the Council reserves the right to refuse approval for the adaptations requested for the original home.

- 8.5. In situations where a suitable alternative or already adapted property is offered and refused, approval of the complex adaptation will be subject to review by the Best Practice Panel attended by the OTs, surveyors, and the Care & Repair Team Leader.
- 8.6. We may seek advice from an independent Occupational Therapist to assist with requests for complex (and sometimes major) adaptations. This individual will be registered with a professional body, for example the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), or similar alternative.
- 8.7. We will aim to ensure all complex adaptations are approved within 12-18 months, where possible from the date they are requested. Due the detailed nature of these requests, timescales to complete complex adaptations will be discussed and agreed at the time they are made.

9. Prioritising and Timescales for Adaptations

- 9.1. Occupational Therapist reports are normally processed in chronological order. However, we recognise that on occasions we will receive a request to fast track the adaptations in exceptional circumstances. Where possible and appropriate we will fast track the works requested.
- 9.2. Minor adaptations have a target deadline of 4-6 weeks (unless part of a major adaptations request, where they may be completed at the same time).
- 9.3. Major adaptations have a target deadline of 6 months from receipt of the OT report, although we aim to complete 80% of major adaptations within 3 months.

10. Moving to a More Suitable Property

- 10.1. For those disabled tenants downsizing, we may be able to offer help to people who need financial assistance/help and/or support with the moving process. Each case will be looked at individually and the assistance/support will be tailored to individual needs.
- 10.2. Where circumstances allow, we may also offer:
 - Staff to help tenants through the process with issues such as arranging removals, reconnection of gas and electric and other practical issues.
 - Additional support via our tenancy support service for some tenants who may need extra help.

11. Policy Outcomes

- 11.1. By successfully implementing this policy we will ensure that the reasonable needs of the Council's disabled tenants are prioritised, and appropriate aids and adaptations are implemented. Additionally, that adapted properties are let taking into account the needs of the tenants
- 11.2. The effective implementation of this policy will mean that all GBC tenants/customers are treated in a fair and transparent manner, in accordance with our policy, the relevant regulatory standards and applicable legislation.

12. Monitoring and Review

- 12.1. In order to ensure that the policy is effective and delivering the intended impact, the following Key Performance Indicator's (KPI's) are in place to monitor the performance of the policy:

- Number of minor adaptations completed in the financial year
- Number of major adaptations completed in the financial year

Furthermore, in line with the Group's Policy Framework, this policy is scheduled to be reviewed every 3 years, unless due to a change in Government legislation or regulatory requirements, the review period will be brought forward in order to ensure compliance.

13. Reviews and Complaints

13.1. Any individual who is dissatisfied with the service experienced should be encouraged to provide feedback. Complaints regarding the implementation of this policy will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's corporate Customer Complaints Policy and associated procedures.

14. Equality and Diversity

14.1. GBC is committed to equal and fair treatment of all sections of the community. Accordingly, no person will be discriminated against during the implementation of this policy on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

14.2. We are committed to helping customers to access information about their homes and services in a way that suits individual needs.

14.3. The council aims to provide homes and services that meet the diverse needs of customers. We believe that all customers should be able to access housing, support and care services with the same ease and that the quality of our service is the same high standard for all.

14.4. In delivering this policy, GBC Housing's staff will comply fully with the requirements of the Council's Equalities and Human Rights Policy.

14.5. In order to comply with the Equality Act 2010, an equality impact analysis (EIA) was completed as part of the policy review. Upon completing the EIA it was found that the implementation of the policy would support and encourage the aims of the public sector duty.

15. Data Protection and Retention of Information

15.1. All information will be handled in accordance with the requirements of General Data Protection Regulations and the Data Protection Act 2018. The handling and storage of personal data will be managed and stored in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and our Record Retention Disposal Schedule.