

Southampton City Council

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Homes Adaptation Policy



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HRA Homes Adaptation Policy			
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Introduction

Housing adaptations can often play an important role in enabling people with disabilities, to remain in the comfort and safety in their own homes, by restoring or promoting independent living or to use their home more effectively.

The link between housing and wellbeing is increasingly acknowledged. 'The right home environment is essential to health and wellbeing, throughout life.' (Association of Directors of Adult Social Care 2014 p3). A suitable, well adapted home can improve quality of life, wellbeing, enable safe access and increase independence to prevent, reduce or delay care needs. Appropriate, accessible housing is vital in addressing people's needs and enabling them to meet their chosen outcomes efficiently and cost effectively.

There is greater focus on supporting people with disabilities to consider how their housing needs can be met in the longer term. The council will look at the best use of resources by looking to keep tenants in their own home where possible, or through options to relocate to a more suitable property.

Purpose statement

This policy sets out how Southampton City Council will approach requests for property disabled adaptations to the homes of Council residents. The council is committed to supporting residents to live independently within their own home where possible. The increase in demand for social housing requires a greater focus on supporting residents to consider how their housing needs may be met in the longer term and as their needs change.

It recognises that residents' needs may be more suitably met in a different property. This policy is aligned with the council's Housing Allocation Policy and the objectives of making best use of the council housing stock whilst responding to housing needs within the City.

The aims are to:-

- Ensure that all residents have access to accommodation that enables independent living, privacy, dignity and promotes the wellbeing for the individual and their families. This may include offers of alternative accommodation, Extra Care Housing or Supported Living or modifying the existing property
- Maximise the impact of available funding by delivering best value. This means providing a service that offers suitable, practical, and cost-effective solutions that meet residents' assessed needs, ensuring their safety, well-being and quality of life.
- Make effective use of the council's property assets so that the long-term benefit derived from the housing stock is preserved for future use.

- The process will utilise the skills and experience of a wide range of disciplines and includes consultation and choice for the person with a disability.
- To provide a service that seeks to best meet the needs experienced and identified by a person with a disability, with regard to the persons own views, wishes and feelings.
- The appropriateness and acceptability of the adaptation is measured by the extent to which it meets the needs of the individual.

Scope

The policy addresses requests for disability adaptations to residential properties owned by the Council and leased under the Housing Act 1985, including associated communal areas. This policy also applies to non-secure tenancies under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 and introductory tenancies under Part V of the Housing Act 1996.

It includes provision of minor adaptations such as hand- rails, lever taps and intercoms as well as major adaptations such as level access showers, stair lifts and major structural alterations.

The Policy will be applied to all new and pending cases from the date of implementation. This will include cases that have been assessed by an OT but have not yet had works confirmed by the Council.

Under the terms of this Policy, we have used the definition of disability from the Equalities Act 2010, which states a person is disabled 'if they have a physical, mental or sensory impairment that has a substantial and long-term (i.e. more than 12 months) adverse effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.'

Under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 the Council has wide 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. It is therefore the policy of the Council to examine all the options available to the individual before immediately embarking on plans to adapt the current property where major adaptations are required.

Legislative Context and other Related Documents

Legislation:

- The Care Act 2014
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970
- The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended)

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Housing Regulators Consumer Standards
- The Children's Act 1989
- National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990
- The Protection of Eviction Act 1977

Strategy:

- Housing Strategy 2025 (in development)

Policy:

- Housing Allocations Policy 2025
- Disabled Adaptations Financial Assistance Policy 2023

Policy Commitments

Consistency

Each case will be considered in the context of the policy framework to ensure consistency and fairness. The suitability of the accommodation for the type of adaptation requested will be considered along with the long- term viability to meet the current and future needs of residents.

Optimum Use of Stock

To assess the suitability of any adaptations, the Council will consider the wider issue of providing homes to those in need. Therefore, it will not normally undertake any adaptations that may limit the future use of family homes. Where this occurs, the Council will support households to move to more suitable accommodation in line with their specific needs. If a household is not able to be rehoused within a reasonable time scale, then the case will be reviewed as required.

Feasibility and Cost

To assess whether the adaptations are reasonable, the Council will take into consideration the cost of the works. Should the construction type of the property result in excessive costs, or the property is not conducive to implementing adaptations, the Council will look into alternative housing solutions to meet the needs of the applicant.

Equality

Each case will be considered on its merits, paying due regard to the individual circumstances of the applicant and the property. The Council will also have due regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty pursuant to Section 149 of Equality Act 2010 when making any decisions under this policy.

Our aim is to continue to maintain equality and ensure that we adapt our homes in a non-discriminatory way based on meeting housing need. We also anticipate that the transparency of this will not let any customer be treated less favourably on the grounds of gender, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, faith or gender reassignment. Southampton City Council Housing teams will treat all applications adaptations in a sensitive and supportive manner.

Policy Statement:

Applications must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be a Southampton City Council tenant, and/or a partner or member of their family who has been a permanent resident within the household for at least 12 months prior to the application and provide proof of this.
- Adaptations for children will be ordinarily within their principal home, unless there are exceptional reasons as outlined in the assessment carried out by the Housing Occupational Therapist.
- The applicant or relevant family member must have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long- term impact on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities in their home, or access essential areas within their home such as cooking facilities where the applicant is the main person who prepares food within the household or toilet facilities.
- Be living in accommodation that is an appropriate size and type to meet the household's need.

Alternative Options:

Other options will be considered where extensive adaptations have been requested. These may include:

- Adapted council properties, which become available, will be offered in the first instance to those most in need of this type of property before consulting the general needs housing and transfer list.
- Sheltered or Extra Care Homes.

It is the Council's policy to discuss at an early-stage other options available to meet the tenant's needs. This will include offering a transfer to more appropriate alternative accommodation.

For all major adaptations, the council will first discuss with the tenant the option of a transfer to alternative accommodation that better meets the needs of the disabled person before considering the possibility of carrying out adaptations to the current home.

If available, the alternative accommodation would need to meet the following suitability conditions:

- Consideration should be given to allow the tenant to remain in or nearby to the area they currently live if this is where their support needs are fulfilled and cannot be delivered elsewhere.
- The new property must be suitable, or capable of being made so to meet the tenant's needs within the maximum financial threshold for major adaptations to local authority owned housing stock.
- Consideration should be given as to whether this accommodation is likely to become available within 18 months of the assessment for major adaptations.

If the tenant refuses the option of move to suitable alternative accommodation, major works to adapt their current property will only then be considered in exceptional circumstances. This would include where a move is not considered advisable by a medical practitioner.

Circumstances when a home adaptation request will be refused:

- Where the adaptation is unlikely to meet the person or household's long- term housing needs
- The total cost of the adaptation(s) is over £30,000 (the maximum value of an equivalent Disabled Facilities Grant).
- Where the tenant is in rent arrears of over 1 month and has not demonstrated a commitment to re-paying the debt (i.e. by making regular agreed payments of rent and instalments to reduce the debt over the previous 6 months).
- Where the tenant has been served with a Notice of Seeking Possession or is the subject of legal proceedings in relation to their tenancy
- Where there is an active request for a transfer to alternative accommodation on the Housing Register

- Properties that are subject to an active Right to Buy application. In these circumstances the tenant will be advised about the Disabled Facility Grant process that they can access once they have purchased their property.
- Where the applicant and their family are under occupying a property by more than one bedroom, or if the accommodation is not best suited to meet their needs, and there are alternative accommodation options to consider. In these circumstances support and advice will be provided in relation to moving to a more suitable property. This might be sheltered housing or a smaller general needs property.
- Requests for vehicular access or hard standings (unless approved by the Housing Adaptations Panel due to significant exceptional circumstances)
- Requests for works that would present a significant health and safety hazard or are not feasible for other substantial reasons
- Installing a level access shower to a flat above the ground floor which cannot be accessed by an existing lift.
- Where an adaptation would adversely affect the council's ability to make best use of the stock and re-let the property in the future.
- Where an adaptation would place others at risk e.g. a stairlift installed in a communal stairway which could impede access for other residents.

Exceptional Circumstances

In certain situations, exceptional circumstances may arise. If sufficient evidence is provided and the Housing Adaptations Panel deems that a major adaptation is the most suitable solution to meet the individual's needs, approval may be granted. This decision is at the discretion of the Housing Adaptations Panel and will only occur after all other options have been thoroughly considered and reasonably discounted. A recommendation will be made by the Panel to the Director of Housing to make the final decision.

For major adaptations within council homes, funding is provided within the Housing Revenue Account, rather than using Disabled Facilities Grant (which is available to people living in privately owned, rented or Housing Association properties).

However, the council follows the rules applied to Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) adaptation policy whereby a maximum limit of £30,000 is available to fund a major adaptation. In circumstances where the proposed works are above this limit, the Disabled Adaptations Panel can recommend discretionary powers are enacted by the Director of Housing under Delegated Authority to exceed the maximum limit. This will be considered

on a case- by- case basis.

Currently, council tenants are not subject to means testing, because funding comes directly from the Housing Revenue Account and adaptations can provide long term benefits for the property as well as the tenant. However, this is subject to review should budgetary pressures require the council to reflect a more equitable distribution of funds to its funding

The Application Process

Referrals and requests for housing adaptation assessments are made either directly from the person or from other teams such as Wellbeing and Adults Services and Children's Social Care

The team of Housing Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Occupational Therapy Assistants (OTAs) are responsible for assessing cases where the applicant has a disability and needs help managing daily activities within the home.

They assess needs and provide specialist advice on:

- Getting in and out of the home
- Managing the stairs
- Getting in and out of chairs and beds
- Getting and out of the bath or shower
- Getting on and off the toilet
- Managing kitchen activities eg: standing at the sink, preparing food
- Using the home safely and preventing hazards such as falling

Cases where the applicant meets the eligibility criteria and following assessment with the person a home adaptation is considered the most appropriate solution, the OT/OTA will provide advice and recommend the most appropriate adaptation solution along with approximate costs.

In all cases, officers will work together to ensure that:

- Cases are assessed fairly and equally
- Exceptional individual needs are considered
- Public money is used responsibly
- Alternative options to meet the applicant's needs are considered
- The Occupational Therapy team will work closely with the various professionals including Charge Hands and Architects, especially with complex cases, to discuss all available options for the tenant.

- Regular meetings are held between the technical and occupational therapy teams to discuss the progress of individual cases and current working practices.

The housing management service (i.e. the landlord) has the final decision on whether to accept an OT recommendation and ultimately, carry out adaptation work to its properties.

For cases where the total cost of the adaptation(s) is under £7,500 the Head of Supported Housing has authority to authorise or refuse the request.

For cases where the total cost of the adaptation(s) is £7,500 or above, the case will be referred to the Housing Adaptations Panel (HAP) for consideration.

The HAP will meet on a monthly basis to consider cases over the £7,500 total threshold.

The HAP will assess each case in line with the Policy. The panel will either approve, refuse or request further information. Note: officers bringing cases to the HAP must provide evidence that all alternatives have been considered.

Membership of the HAP:

- Head of Supported Housing and Community Support (Chair)
- Deputy Chair
- Housing Adaptations Team Manager
- DFG Team Manager
- Allocations and Advice Manager
- Adult Social Care Representative (TBA)
- Tenant Panel Representative (to be developed)

Minor Housing Adaptations

The Council will provide minor adaptations (up to the total value of £2,500 for all recommended adaptations per property). These will include but are not limited to:

- Lever Taps
- Grab Rails
- Mop stick handrails
- Toilet handrails
- Half steps
- Over-bath showers
- Door entry systems

- Removal of thresholds
- Installation of specialist lighting
- Installation of flashing doorbells or smoke alarms
- Window opening technology

Note: stair lifts, regardless of cost, will be considered as a major adaptation (see below)

Waiting times for completion of works will vary according to need, budget availability and capacity to undertake works.

Major Adaptations:

Major adaptations include, but are not limited to:

- Level access/step in showers
- Widening doors
- Stairlifts
- Ramping
- Extensions and property conversions (exceptional circumstances only)

Major adaptation works will be considered where they assessed as being necessary and appropriate and where it is reasonable and practicable to carry out the works having “regard to the age and condition” of the property

The cost of supplying and installing major adaptations is funded entirely from the Housing Revenue Account and applicants are not asked to make a financial contribution regardless of their financial circumstances. The equipment remains in the ownership of the Council.

Where required, the Council will be responsible for the maintenance and annual servicing of equipment. The tenant is responsible for using equipment in line with the manufacturer’s instructions, ensuring that the equipment is not misused or wilfully damaged and reporting any maintenance issues to the Council. The equipment will remain in the ownership of the Council.

Parity With the Disabled Facilities Grant Conditions:

It is the Council’s intention to match wherever possible the same provision for those living in Council housing with the private sector (who are able to access adaptations through the Disabled Facilities Grant). Therefore, this policy reflects the provisions set out within the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, as follows:

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to and from the dwelling, the building in which the dwelling or, as the case may be, flat is situated;

There is a need to remove or help overcome any obstacles which are preventing the disabled person from moving freely in and out of the property, including common parts, in and around the garden and any yard, outhouse or “other appurtenance” (e.g. a balcony or the land adjacent to the mooring of a qualifying houseboat).

Access can also include works outside the normal curtilage of the dwelling, such as a dropped kerb pavement crossing

Making the dwelling safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with him/her;

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to a room used or usable as the principal family room;

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room used or usable for sleeping;

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a lavatory, or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a bath or shower (or both), or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a wash hand basin, or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;

Facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled occupant;

Improving any heating system in the dwelling to meet the needs of the disabled occupant or, if there is no existing heating system there or any such system is unsuitable for use by the disabled occupant, providing a heating system suitable to meet his needs;

Facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of a source of power, light or heat by altering the position of one or more means of access to or control of that source or by providing additional means of control;

Facilitating access and movement by the disabled occupant around the dwelling in order to enable him to care for a person who is normally resident there and is in need of such care;

Such other purposes as may be specified by order of the Secretary of State.

Prioritisation and Waiting Times

Capital funding from the Housing Revenue Account for adaptations is limited and the demand for adaptations will continue to grow. This will inevitably have an impact on how many adaptations the Council are able to complete, hence having waiting lists. It is therefore necessary to consider requests not just in date order, but in order of priority need and risk.

Major adaptation cases are defined in two distinct categories:

Priority cases are cases where the client falls into one or more of the following:

- Palliative diagnosis
- Hospital discharge delayed without adaptation
- Fast progressive medical condition eg MND
- In an exceptional high- risk circumstance

Standard cases are those that do not fit into the above definition.

Within this category each case has an individual risk rating attached to it, as defined by the referring practitioner or Occupational Therapist (priority tool).

These are considered when managing the waiting list - risk rating and length of time waiting for the adaptation from point of referral to installation. Waiting times will also vary according to size and complexity of the work.

Tenancy Sustainment following major adaptation:

Where a major adaptation above £2,500 has been completed at a property, the expectation is that the disabled tenant remains living at that property for a minimum of five years. However, there may be circumstances where this is not possible e.g. due to a change in need from a deterioration or new medical condition the property is no longer suitable and cannot be adapted further.

Where extensive adaptations have been carried out at a property and the disabled tenant dies, or is unable to remain at the property, the remaining household members may be encouraged to consider alternative accommodation to allow the adapted property to be let to a disabled person.

Mutual Exchanges

Where a property has had major adaptations implemented an exchange of tenancies will only be approved if the other party has an identified need for these adaptations.

The Council may refuse an exchange in accordance with the Grounds laid out in Schedule 3 of the Housing Act 1985.

New Lettings

To ensure adapted homes are available to those in most need, the Council will not remove major disabled adaptations when the property is handed back to the Council. The preference will be to let the property to another household who will benefit from the adaptation. Where this is not possible it will be removed free of charge by the Council. Equipment will be re-used wherever practically possible.

Governance:

Budgetary Control

Responsibility for the Housing Adaptations Budget is with the Director of Housing

Responsibility for the implementation of this Policy is with the Head of Supported Housing

Authorisation Levels for each case (the total cost of adaptations for the individual) are as follows:-

- Up to £7,500 – Head of Supported Housing
- £7501 - £30,00 – Housing Adaptations Panel
- Over £30,000 – Director of Housing

Housing Adaptations Panel (HAP)

The panel will consider all cases over £7,500 collaboratively and make recommendations to the Head of Supported Housing.

All decisions will be clearly communicated to the customer with reasons and including information on the right to review.

Right to Review

Customers will be advised of their right to request a review of the decision and are asked to provide reasons and evidence where possible to support their reasons.

All requests will be considered by the HAP, with the outcome communicated to the customer. In the event of the customer being dissatisfied with the decision following review, the matter can be escalated through the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.