

HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD – 11TH NOVEMBER 2020

Report of the Head of Landlord Services

ITEM 7 DISABLED ADAPTATIONS UPDATE

Purpose of Report

To:

- provide an update on the position in respect of major adaptations
- seek the Boards' endorsement of an amendment to the policy
- propose a pilot scheme to support tenants needing adaptations to move to alternative accommodation which better meets their needs.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to note the update, and comment on the proposed amendment to the policy, and pilot scheme set out below.

Background

The policy for disabled adaptations can be found at appendix 1.

Performance

The current average waiting time for major adaptation works (excluding stairlifts) is 226 days.

The average waiting times for completed works are set out in the table below.

Year	Completed Works	
	Average waiting time for works - average number of days from receipt of Occupational Therapist recommendation to completion of works.	Average time of works at the home from start to completion
2018/19	199	40
2019/20	157	24
2020/21	420	21

Performance improved in 2019/20, however Covid-19 has caused delays in 2020. The level of work taking place in tenants' homes is now increasing. It is expected the current average waiting time in 2020/21 will reduce over the remainder of the year. The existing data is based on two completions.

Proposed Policy Amendment

Proposed amendment:	Reason why
Adaptations involving the installation of a level-access shower at a first floor (or above), where there is no existing lift, and whether the property is under-occupied by two or more bedrooms may not be considered reasonable or practicable to undertake;	<p>Under occupation alone is unlikely to be a reasonable basis for refusal of adaptation.</p> <p>Consideration around under occupation of the property is present elsewhere in the policy, under <i>Property Considerations</i>:</p> <p><i>The current and likely future under or over occupancy of the property;</i></p>

Outline of Proposed Pilot Scheme to Support Tenants to Move to Alternative Accommodation which Better Meets their Needs

In some instances, adaptations at the tenant's property may not be deemed reasonable or practicable to undertake, or the cost of adaptation may be high.

There may be properties in the Council's stock which better meet the needs of the tenant / their household.

In these instances, where the tenant is already living in the Council's stock, and a suitable alternative property is available, it is proposed that support is offered to tenants to move to the new property.

This approach needs to be handled with considerable care and sensitivity. The needs and wishes of the disabled person, their carers and family will be considered to ensure that the outcome does not create difficulties, for example, with schooling and potential interruption of support networks. Where the existing property may reasonably and practicably be adapted, the offer will be presented as an alternative option, rather than the only option.

The assistance offered will be like that offered under the Council's existing decant procedure i.e. the Tenancy and Estate Management Officer will arrange (as appropriate):

- a) Removals to new address
- b) Telephone connection
- c) Aerial connection
- d) Connection of appliances
- e) Re-direction of mail
- f) Lifting and relaying of carpets or installation of new floor coverings
- g) Other costs may be considered including travel costs

Decoration of the property offered may also be offered.

Any alternative offer of accommodation will be provisional and in accordance with the Council's Allocations Policy, and subject to:

- a) A current recommendation for adaptation having been received from an occupational therapist within the last six months.
- b) The cost of the adaptation must be significantly higher than the likely cost of the move to the Council / or the adaptation is deemed not reasonable or practical to undertake.
- c) The Adaptations Review Panel consider the move will support the best use of the Council's housing stock and finances.

The assistance as detailed above will be offered at the discretion of the Chair of the adaptations review panel.

Provisional offers of suitable properties will be made on a time limited basis to reduce the likelihood of rental income loss through holding a property empty.

If the tenant qualifies for a payment under the Council's Assisted Transfer Policy, then the costs incurred by the Council in arranging the move would be deducted, along with any other sums due under the Policy i.e. rent arrears, recharges for damage etc.

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Appendix 1



Charnwood Borough Council

**Policy for Funding Council Housing
Adaptations through the Housing Revenue Account**

2019-2024

**Version 3.2
Updated October 2020**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy will ensure that the Council's Landlord Service provides an adaptations service that meets the needs of disabled people, accords with the social model of disability, and fulfils the Council's legal requirements.

Adaptations to council homes are funded through the council's housing revenue account. The best use of limited HRA finance and housing stock is therefore a key consideration and the policy sets out how the Council will make decisions on the funding of adaptations.

The budget for adaptations is determined on an annual basis and funds the following works:

- Minor adaptations
- Major adaptations
- Stair lifts

- 1.2 The purpose of an adaptation is to modify the home environment in order to restore or enable independent living, privacy, confidence and dignity for tenants and their families.
- 1.3 The council's landlord service works closely with its partners in the provision of adaptations. Occupational therapists (OTs) and Housing support co-ordinators¹ carry out assessments of needs in tenants' homes. Leicestershire County Council (LCC) has statutory responsibility for OT assessments and performs this service for the council's tenants.
- 1.4 Assessment for adaptations will take into account the needs of individuals and their carers/households.
- 1.5 This policy will be supported by clear operating procedures, standard forms and letters in order to achieve the objectives set out in section 2.

2. Objectives of the policy

The objectives of this policy are to:

- support tenants and any permanent members of their households to live comfortably, safely and independently at home;
- make best use of the council's housing stock and budgets;
- provide an accessible and cost effective adaptations service based on a fair and objective assessment of individual needs on a case by case basis;

¹ Roles undertaking the statutory assessment of needs function will be referred to as OT

- ensure that as far as reasonably practicable tenants are aware of the options available to maintain and sustain independent living;
- give priority to mandatory adaptations work, works within the dwelling and those that support access and egress;
- support speed of decision making and minimise waiting times for adaptations work to be carried out;
- ensure that as far as reasonably practicable the council's housing stock is future proofed;
- Ensure that appropriate technical consideration is given to recommendations, and that the need to comply with any statutory obligations in respect of building control and other relevant legislation is identified.

3. Scope of the policy

- 3.1 This policy applies to all current tenants of council-owned dwellings, and prospective tenants of the council with a reasonable prospect of an offer of accommodation.
- 3.2 Secure tenants have the legal right to request permission to undertake alterations and improvements to their homes, including home adaptations. Written permission from the council must be obtained before improvements are undertaken. Permission to undertake alterations and improvements is not covered by this policy.
- 3.3 In practice², there are two categories of adaptations work: minor and major. This policy covers both minor and major adaptations work.

4. Policy statement

4.1 Minor adaptations

These are generally works that costs below £500, and will be subject to an assessment and report from the OT at LCC.

Examples of minor adaptations are:

- handrails at the front and/or rear entrance of the property;

² The framework for mandatory adaptation works is set out in section 23(1) of the 1996 Act, subsequently been added to by The Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes)(England)Order 2008 as allowed for by section 23(1)(l) of the Act.

- an additional stair rail;
- grab rails;
- half steps;
- lever taps;
- key safes;
- fillet ramps (small internal timber ramp)

4.2 Major adaptations

Adaptations costing £500 and over are generally classed as major adaptations, require a report from an OT at LCC with a recommendation and a decision from the Council. Examples of major adaptations work are:

- level-access showers or other modifications to the bathroom;
- over-the-bath showers;
- major structural conversions;
- re-modelling of rooms and layout of the property;
- stair lifts/vertical or through-floor lifts and platform lifts;
- concrete ramps for wheelchair use;
- shower screens;
- alterations to kitchen surfaces (i.e. lowering surfaces for wheelchair users);
- installing patio doors in flats;
- the widening of paths around the property;
- widening doors.

4.3 Advice, information and support

- 4.3.1 Advice, information and support will be provided where tenants are considering what options are possible in relation to their individual circumstances.

- 4.3.2 Where tenants request adaptations work, they will be asked to contact LCC for an initial assessment, which is usually undertaken by phone.

4.4 Eligibility

Any council tenant can apply for adaptations to their home either in person or via a member of their family. Generally only recommendations from LCC will be considered. The adaptation requested must meet the needs of the tenant or another permanent member of the household.

4.5 Assessment

- 4.5.1 The OT at LCC will contact the tenant to make arrangements to assess their requirements. This will be done in the tenant's home. Dependent Upon the nature of the works, if a joint visit is required by Repairs and Investment staff, this will be arranged.
- 4.5.2 Following the home visit, the OT will send an assessment report to the Council. This information will include a recommendation as to the works and materials required and an indication on the priority (i.e. urgent, ASAP, or standard).
- 4.5.3 The repairs and investment staff will be the key contact for tenants from this point onward.

4.6 Decision-making process

- 4.6.1 Minor adaptations work of a standard nature will generally be approved and ordered. Tenants successful in their application will be dealt with in date order within the priority recommended by the OT. Requests for minor adaptations of a non-standard nature would generally require a survey by a surveyor from the council to assess feasibility for the works.
- 4.6.2 Major adaptations work of a standard nature such as level-access showers, over-the-bath showers, stair lifts, and ramps will generally be approved and ordered when they are received.
- 4.6.3 Requests for major adaptations of a non-standard nature would generally require a survey by a surveyor from the council to assess feasibility for the works.
- 4.6.4 Any decisions on major adaptations work, or where there is a case that requires more in-depth consideration, including, but not limited to, those listed below will be referred for consideration by the Adaptations Review Panel:
- Major internal alterations/external alterations;

- Through-floor lifts;
- Hard-standings and dropped kerbs;
- Adaptations with an estimated cost in excess of £7,000;
- Adaptations with a non-standard design or concept;
- Adaptations at properties of non-standard construction, and / or where there are significant site complexities.

4.6.5 Following the Panel's consideration of the case, the decision to undertake the adaption will be made by the officer with the appropriate level of delegated authority.

4.7 Maximum value of adaptation/s

4.7.1 The Council will not authorise the use of HRA finance for works in excess of £30,000 unless there are exceptional circumstances. Generally, exceptional circumstances will include where:

- all possible alternative options have been fully explored and exhausted;
- there are no suitable alternative properties within the Council's stock;
- it is reasonable and practicable to undertake the adaptations requested.

The Council may not be able to fund adaptations due to financial constraints, and costs may therefore need to be spread across more than one annual budget.

4.8 Considerations

4.8.1 The council will consider whether it is reasonable and practicable to carry out the adaptations as recommended by the OT.

4.8.2 When considering adaptation requests all potential options will be explored to meet the specific needs of the tenant (and their household), including a transfer to more suitable housing, particularly where this would prevent spending significant sums on major alterations to the existing home.

4.8.3 While the circumstances of each case will be different in some aspects and will therefore have to be considered on the basis of individual need, the rationale for the decisions on major adaptations work will be based on the following considerations including, but not limited to:

- (a) Tenant/Tenancy considerations:

- The tenant's views and preferences;
- The property to be adapted must be the main residence of the person who will benefit from the adaptations and likely to remain so in the foreseeable future;
- Adaptations should address the immediate and longer term needs of the disabled person;
- The type of tenancy held by the tenant: non-secure, introductory, secure tenancy;
- Whether there is an imminent risk of the tenancy ending i.e. through eviction or notice to quit;
- Any pending right to buy, transfer, or mutual exchange application;
- Whether the tenant has moved from a property that would have been more suitable for their needs compared to their current property, and they are deemed to have deliberately worsened their circumstances.

(b) Property considerations:

- The property type and its construction;
- Properties of a non-standard construction type are generally not considered reasonable or practical for major structural adaptation works e.g. installation of a through-floor lift;
- Where reasonable to do so, applicants may be offered a suitable alternative property that better meets their needs;
- The current and likely future under or over occupancy of the property;
- If the property is suitable for adaptation;
- Properties with narrow doorways, halls, stairways and passages may make wheelchair use in and around the dwelling difficult; or with difficult or limited access e.g. steep flights of steps making access for wheelchair use difficult and therefore making continued or prospective occupation of the dwelling open to question;
- If space in the current property is being used to its maximum benefit;

- If alterations can be made to the internal layout;
- The number of living rooms on the ground floor of the property;
- If the property has previously been adapted for the tenant and the amounts spent on the adaptations;
- If any existing adaptations can be recycled;
- Where the adaptation concerns a communal area, whether the adaptation presents a hazard to users of the building e.g. stair lift obstructing means of escape.
- Conservation considerations and planning constraints may prevent certain types of adaptation being carried out.

(c) Other considerations

- If the works are supported (or not) by the OT;
- Whether there is a statutory obligation for the Council to undertake the works;
- Where substantial work is recommended, the potential delays resulting from any planning and building regulations approvals and the design and completion of the works;
- The consideration of all other housing options;
- If there is another property that would be more suitable (rehousing option);
- Would the tenant and household have to be decanted on a temporary basis for the works to be completed (and, if so, is there suitable housing for the tenant to move to during the period of the works)?
- Full exploration of any viable alternatives;
- The impact on other occupants of proposed works which will reduce or limit the existing facilities or amenities in the dwelling;
- The budget available for adaptations work;
- The cost of the works;

- Extensions are likely to cost in excess of £30,000, and therefore generally will not be considered reasonable or practical to undertake.

4.9 Requests to Remove Adaptations

Requests from tenants or their representatives that the Council remove adaptations will generally be refused.

4.10 Post inspection of works

To ensure that adaptations work is carried out to the appropriate standards and to the satisfaction of the tenant, we will carry out:

- post inspections on 100% of major adaptations work;
- aftercare contact to the tenant on completion of the major adaptations work;
- follow-up contact by the customer liaison officer after four weeks from the completion of major works to check that there are no problems with the work.

4.11 Appeals and Complaints Process

4.11.1 Decisions on whether adaptations work is approved can be appealed.

Appeals must be received within 90 days of the issue of the original decision. A review of the decision will be undertaken by a senior Council officer with no prior involvement in the case. Only one appeal will generally be considered.

4.11.2 Complaints will be dealt with through the Council's complaints process.

5. Timescales, performance monitoring, target setting and reporting

5.1 Tenants requesting adaptations will be notified of a decision as soon as is reasonably practicable and no later than three months after the date of receipt of the OT's recommendation.

5.2 An order with a suitable contractor for the approved works will be placed as soon as reasonably practicable after the decision is made, taking in to account the need to undertake designs and define the scope of work.

5.3 We will monitor performance using the following performance indicators:

- Average waiting time for a decision on an adaptation request (from receipt of recommendation);

- Average time to carry out minor adaptations (following the decision to proceed.);
- Average waiting time for major adaptations (following order of works);
- Average time to carry out minor adaptations (from receipt of recommendation);
- Average waiting time for major adaptations (from receipt of recommendation).

5.4 Annual targets will be set on a team and individual basis.

5.5 We will compare our performance with that of other organisations, and we will seek to identify and implement good practice.

5.6 Equalities data will be captured for applications that are refused.

6. Multi-agency and team working

We will strive to foster and nurture excellent relationships with such teams and organisations that include (but are not limited to):

- OTs;
- Adult and Children's Social Care;
- Building control and planning;
- External support agencies such as The Bridge and the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

7. Review of the policy

This policy will be reviewed every four years or at an earlier period if there are legislative, regulatory or corporate policy changes.

8. Responsibility and accountability

Responsibility and accountability for this policy lies with the Head of Landlord Services.

9. Other policies

The following policies need to be taken into consideration in respect of this policy:

- Complaints policy;
- Choice-based lettings housing allocations policy;
- Equality strategy;
- Housing asset management strategy;
- Housing revenue account business plan;
- Housing strategy;
- Private sector grants policy.

10. Training

Appropriate training will be provided to officers delivering the adaptations service.