



Housing and disabled people

A toolkit for local authorities
in England: Adaptations



Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

Habinteg
Accessible homes
Independent lives

Purpose

This toolkit has been designed to provide guidance on the provision and management of housing adaptations.

It is principally aimed at leaders and practitioners in housing, adult social care, occupational therapists and tenant engagement teams.

Overview

Local authorities have legal obligations to help children and adults who need home adaptations to meet a range of needs resulting from physical, sensory and cognitive impairments, neurodiversity and mental health conditions.

Minor adaptations include items such as rails, small ramps, door intercoms or door widening and may not always require assessment by an occupational therapist. Major adaptations include more expensive items such as a larger ramp, level access shower, stair lift, through floor lift, step-lift, kitchen alterations or extending a property to accommodate a ground floor bedroom and shower room.

There are significant barriers for disabled tenants in the private rented sector, as short-hold assured tenancies provide limited security of tenure and can make people ineligible for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding.

Securing the permission of private landlords to make adaptations to an individual property or a building's 'common parts' can also present a further barrier. While the Equality Act 2010 refers to landlords making 'reasonable adjustments', tenants may be reluctant to approach their landlord for fear of their tenancy being terminated.

Funding and policy context

Disabled Facilities Grants

DFGs provide the main source of funding for home adaptations. The average one-off DFG is priced at £7,000, which compares favourably against the average cost of one year in residential care (£26,500 - £38,500, depending on location).

The upper limit for DFGs in England is £30,000. Applicants may receive a full grant or be required to pay a contribution. Application decisions should be made within six months of receipt and, once approved, payment must be made within 12 months.¹

Unless the adaptation is for a disabled child, an application will usually be means-tested. Local authorities do have some discretion in their means-testing policies and some use this to waive the means-test for specific adaptations or works below a certain value.

The national government funding for DFGs is paid through the Better Care Fund (BCF), a joint health and social care budget. Authorities have flexibility to use the funding across health, care and housing schemes with an expectation of improving performance in four ways:

- reduce delayed transfers of care (for example, hospital discharge)
- reduce non-elective admissions (General and Acute)
- reduce admissions to residential and care homes, and
- improve effectiveness of reablement.²

Regulatory Reform Order

(2002) – housing renewal

Local authorities with a Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) policy in place can allocate DFG funding to provisions such as repairs and adaptations to people's homes through grants or loans. These may, or may not, require a means-test. This principle can also be used to 'top-up' DFG funding. Foundations, the organisation which oversees the national network of home improvement agencies, has provided [guidance on how to prepare a policy](#).



Good practice approaches

Advice and information

Providing clear information about home adaptations and funding options is fundamental to addressing immediate and future housing needs. It is important for such information to be accessible to people across all tenures in a range of formats.

✓ Good practice example

Knowsley Centre for Independent Living

The **Knowsley Centre for Independent Living** is a partnership of organisations and local services working together to promote independence and mobility.

The centre is a 'one-stop shop' with integrated service provision, including occupational therapists, an interactive showroom, an in-house DFG team, Care and Repair and a handyman service, Knowsley Housing Trust's adaptations team, sensory services, assistive technology, a children's team, wheelchair services, rehabilitation, Blue Badge assessments, a wheelchair repair facility and an equipment recycling centre. People can also purchase smaller items of equipment.

As well as this range of services on the premises, the centre's website provides clear links with other relevant organisations and services including the council, the Clinical Commissioning Group and advice services.

Processing applications

Most applications for adaptations are likely to be directed via social care or occupational therapy assessments. Some authorities have a home improvement agency or in-house adaptations team and in some areas services are co-located to help streamline the process.

✓ Good practice example

Home Environment and Assessment Response Team (HEART)

HEART is a partnership scheme between six Warwickshire councils. It provides advice and support to disabled people who require adaptations to their homes.

Residents contact HEART using the advice line. After an initial telephone assessment they are assigned a caseworker, who assesses and determines the needs of each resident. The caseworkers coordinate appropriate support and help residents to apply for funding.

Various funding programmes for building adaptations and repairs have been created.

Thanks to the scheme, average waiting times for adaptations have been reduced. Adaptions are usually installed in under 100 days.



Tools

1. Promoting adaptations

This Q&A can be used to develop a current picture of how adaptations are promoted in your area.

Questions to ask	Yes	No
Is information about adaptations available on your website?		
Is information about adaptations available in alternative formats?		
Do you include photos and images in your publicity material to show what adaptations look like?		
Do you advertise adaptations services in non-digital formats (i.e. posters in GP surgeries)?		
Do you promote the home improvement agencies in your area?		
Do you promote handyperson and repairs services available to disabled people in your area?		
Do your front-line staff and local third party organisations know where disabled people can get information about applying for home adaptations?		
Do you have designated, trained staff or partner organisations to help people identify and access adaptations?		
Do you promote adaptation services to home owners and people living in private rented accommodation? Do you promote adaptation services to people who can self-fund?		
Do you have distinct strategies for working with landlords across tenures, including housing associations and private landlords?		

2. Delivering adaptations

This table can be used to develop a current picture of how adaptations are delivered in your area.

Questions to ask	Potential activity to undertake
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you currently collate feedback on adaptation services? - Do you have formal processes in place to ensure that customers are kept updated on the progress of their applications? 	Conduct a survey of current and past service users.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How long do people wait for adaptations from first enquiry to installation? - Do installation times differ for different types of adaptations, and if so why? 	Conduct an end-to-end review of delivery times from point of assessment to installation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the referral routes for adaptations? 	Engage front-line workers and service managers from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - occupational therapy - social work - housing improvement agencies - health - housing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the impact of your eligibility criteria on rates of delivery? 	Review drop-out rates. Collate feedback from front-line staff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there disparities between the take up of adaptations across tenures? 	Review the allocation of adaptations across tenures to identify gaps in provision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is DFG processing performance monitored? 	Review current KPIs and data reported to central government. Sign up to the DFG analytics tool from Foundations .

The following examples provide models of service delivery:

One-stop-shop model

A one-stop-shop provides customers with a single point of contact through which they can access home improvement services across all tenures. It can:

- a. provide information and advice about multiple sectors including health, housing and social care
- b. support people to complete housing and housing adaptation forms
- c. signpost home improvement agencies, handyman services and trusted traders
- d. signpost information about how to access alternative housing options

Handyperson service

A handyperson service can commission minor adaptations as well as undertake minor repairs and maintenance. Such services can be funded by the discretionary element of the DFG policies in accordance with the RRO (further guidance on this can be found on the [Foundations website](#)).

Integrating services

Combining services across boundaries can streamline the process for accessing adaptations. This can be achieved by integrating key functions and unifying the management structure of staff involved in delivery of adaptations, such as caseworkers, occupational therapists and grants officers.

You may also consider undertaking the following activity:

- Centrally recording information about adaptations made to housing stock.
- Building the capability of non-specialist staff to enable them to carry out assessments for minor adaptations.

3. Strategic relationships

Consider undertaking the following activity to improve your strategic approach:

Private landlords:

- Produce an information pack for private landlords demonstrating the demand for accessible homes and the benefits of installing adaptations.
- Reduce the licensing sign-up fee for landlords who agree to permit adaptations and/or adapt appropriate properties.
- Develop options for landlords to complete some minor adaptations themselves, with possibility of sign-off by a qualified person.

Social landlords

- Develop adaptations agreements with Registered Social Landlords to agree the delivery process for minor and major adaptations. See [Royal College of Occupational Therapists](#), 'Minor Adaptations without Delay', for examples.

Wider stakeholders

- Work with other local services to promote adaptations and develop referral routes, for example, the Fire Service 'healthy home' initiative. Further guidance and information about existing initiatives can be found online at the [Royal College of Occupational Therapists website](#) and the [Making Every Contact Count website](#).
- Work with local private sector organisations, such as retailers, builders and suppliers, to support and facilitate the development of inclusively designed products.

4. Adaptations funding strategy

Use the checklist below to assess whether there are untapped sources of funding, or links that can be made between sources that can support the delivery of adaptations services in your area.

Questions	Yes	No
<p>1. RRO policy</p> <p>Do you have a specific policy under the RRO to allow you to provide discretionary assistance?</p>		
<p>2. Health and social care contributions</p> <p>Do health and social care bodies in your area contribute to a local budget? If not, explore the development of an integrated approach in line with preventive principles and the Better Care Fund policy framework.</p>		
<p>3. Housing provider contributions</p> <p>Do housing authorities and registered providers contribute towards adaptations?</p> <p>Is information about their contribution rates readily available to tenant advisory services?</p>		

¹ Home Adaptations Consortium (2013) 'Home adaptations for disabled people – a good practice guide' [accessed: 4 June 2018]

² BCF Policy Framework 2017-2019 [accessed 24 March 2018]

Contacts

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