

Hartlepool Borough Council

Housing Adaptations Policy 2013

*A policy to contribute to supporting people to live
as independently as possible*



The Housing Adaptations Policy

INTRODUCTION

In 2010 Hartlepool Borough Council prioritised a review in the way that housing adaptations, Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and rehousing options are utilised to enable people to live independently in their current or future homes whilst providing services that are value for money and cost effective. A review of the 2010 position in Hartlepool is available as a separate document.¹ This review has however been updated and the 2013 position is also available.²

This policy outlines an effective framework to deliver the vision of supporting people to live as independently as possible in homes that are safe and comfortable. It intends to provide an equitable DFG policy for the future that works across tenure, is cost effective and makes full use of policy tools in the delivery of services to clients. It also details how the Council will work to the preventative agenda, thereby reducing the need for costly adaptations and improving how it works in partnership with agencies across Hartlepool.

The need for this policy is underlined by the challenges and opportunities related to improving services for people with disabilities and our need to co-ordinate the actions of a diverse range of agencies in improving the standard of living and health and well-being of our communities.

POLICY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The 2010 policy was developed due to the resource position at that time together with a long waiting list and the need to reduce the backlog, review the service delivery, make efficiencies and respond to people's needs and aspirations.

Improvements in health care means that the number of people with support needs living in the community is increasing. People are living longer and there is a preference among people with support needs to live independently in their own homes.

This updated Policy for Hartlepool sets out the strategic direction for housing adaptations and rehousing and supports the outcomes within Hartlepool's Housing Strategy 2011-2015. Its objectives are to:

One: Enable and support people to live independently in their current and future homes

Two: Promote, encourage and ensure fair access for disabled people to all appropriate adaptations services

¹ Housing Adaptations Policy Strategic Review – August 2010

² Housing Adaptations Policy Strategic Review – July 2013

Three: Work in partnership to deliver a seamless service to disabled people, providing services and equipment that are cost effective and value for money

Four: Make best use of Registered Providers' existing housing stock

Adaptations provided through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) are consistently effective. They produce significant health gains and prevent accidents and admission to residential care³.

This Policy also sets out how the Council will consider options for disabled people in addition to mandatory DFGs as prescribed by legislation.

It can also be linked to wider objectives such as:

- Reducing the number of people with disabilities living in inappropriate accommodation
- Increasing the supply of suitable and affordable housing to meet the demand of the increasing numbers of people with disabilities
- Wider agendas including social inclusion, community care and hospital discharge
- Accident prevention
- Quality of life
- Support for carers
- Reduction in child poverty

³ *Better outcomes, lower costs: implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvement and equipment: a review of the evidence*, Heywood F and Turner L, 2007

POLICY CONTENT

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)

Hartlepool Borough Council administers Mandatory DFGs to all owner-occupiers, social and private housing tenants and occupiers who are able to satisfy the criteria laid out in the main legislation that governs its provision; the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The maximum grant limit is set by Government and is £30,000 per application.

Where there is an application for assistance by a person with disabilities, an assessment of the needs of the person (and their carer if applicable) will be made by the Council's Occupational Therapist before any decisions in accordance with the Policy are made about the provision of equipment or adaptations. These assessments are made in accordance with the Department of Health's Fair Access to Care guidelines updated in 2007; superseded in 2010.⁴

Recommendations are passed to the Council's Special Needs Housing Team who process requests in waiting list order. The full eligibility criteria information for a DFG can be found in the Strategic Review document.⁵

Adaptations Operations Panel

A panel comprising of officers across the Council was established during the development of the 2010 Policy and strategic review. Its purpose is to undertake case reviews and to deal specifically with service user issues. The panel has made the process more transparent; improved partnership working across the Council and makes best use of resources by exploring all options in addition to DFG.

The Adaptations Operations Panel considers referrals to be put forward for applications for funding based on the following criteria;

- Referrals assessed necessary and appropriate but not considered to be reasonable and practicable;
- Refusal of funding by a Registered Provider that may need to be referred back (following an internal discussion within Housing Services);
- Complex Case issues - this could include but is not limited to
 - Extensions
 - Multiple Adaptations
 - Changes in circumstance of previous applications

⁴ 'Prioritising need in the context of Putting People First: a whole system approach to eligibility for social care - guidance on eligibility criteria for adult social care, England 2010'. Department of Health.

⁵ Housing Adaptations Policy Strategic Review – August 2010

The Terms of Reference for the Panel is available as a separate document.

Use of DFG funding by Registered Providers (RPs)

The Council works closely with its RP partners to deliver adaptations to tenants. In order to make best use of resources, agreements have been developed with individual RPs to decide which adaptations will be funded through DFG. Through this policy all applicants will be treated equally regardless of tenure.

Rehousing as an Option

In cases where major adaptations to a client's home are required and it is difficult to provide a cost effective solution, assistance will be offered to help the client move into suitable alternative accommodation or housing that is suitable for adaptation. Assistance for relocation costs will be considered by the Special Needs Housing Team.

Adapted social rented housing is advertised through the Compass Choice Based Lettings scheme which covers the Tees Valley. Such properties are re-let to applicants who match the requirements of the property.

Prevention

Following an assessment of need, minor adaptations (under £500) are undertaken for people who fall below the threshold for making an application for a DFG if there is a clear case that an intervention would prevent falls, reduce risk or prevent deterioration.

Financial Assistance

The Council participates in the North East Regional Loans Scheme. This scheme assists owner-occupiers and private landlords to undertake essential home improvements which help improve residents' long term health and well-being and maintaining their independence.

Working in Partnership

The Council actively works with all its partners to maximise the best use of resources in delivery of this policy. Internally the Occupational Therapy Team works in close liaison with the Special Needs Housing Team. The teams also work in partnership with the Health Authority and Registered Providers of social housing.

Recycling Equipment

The Council's Special Needs Housing Team endeavors to make savings where possible through recycling of adaptations such as stairlifts, through floor lifts and modular (metal) ramps.

Procurement

Where major adaptations are approved the Special Needs Housing Team obtains two quotes from an approved contractor except for stairlifts. Stairlifts are procured as part of a sub-regional contract which offers cost savings and value for money.

Land Charges

Depending on the nature of the work carried out the Council will seek to place a local land charge against a property. For DFGs that cost more than £5,000 Local Land Charges may be placed on the property (up to a maximum of £10,000) should the property be sold within 10 years.

Clients will be advised of the amount they will be expected to repay at the DFG approval stage. The placing of charges will allow the Council to recycle some funds back into the DFG budget.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Council is committed to delivering services to people who need them without discriminating against any client or service user. It aims to treat all clients with courtesy and respect regardless of their gender, race, age, disability, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

An Equality Impact Needs Assessment has been carried out on this policy to ensure the impact of its practices do not negatively impact upon any individual.

POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW

Monitoring of the Housing Adaptations Policy will take place through regular reporting to Hartlepool's Housing Partnership and relevant actions have been included within the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2011 – 2015. These are also monitored through the Housing, Care and Support Strategy Steering Group.

A review of the policy will also take place on an annual basis and in line with legislative or regulatory changes.