

Hartlepool Borough Council

Housing Assistance Policy

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



The Housing Assistance Policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 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 policy to satisfy the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) conditions ensuring any support is fit for the future, is cost effective and makes full use of resources in the delivery of services to clients.
- 1.2 The policy also details how the Council will work to support the preventative agenda, across the Integrated Care Partnership, supported by the Improved Better Care Fund and local partnership board.
- 1.3 Increased flexibilities brought about by the Regulatory Reform (Housing assistance) Order will assist in reducing the need for costly adaptations by working in partnership with agencies across Hartlepool to make best use of the available allocated budget.
- 1.4 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.

2. Legislative Framework

- 2.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 grants a power to local housing authorities to provide assistance for the purpose of improving living conditions in their area.
- 2.2 A local housing authority may provide, directly or indirectly, assistance to any person for the purpose of enabling a person:
 - To acquire living accommodation (whether within or outside their area);
 - To adapt or improve living accommodation (whether by alteration, conversion or enlargement, by the installation of any thing or injection of any substance, or otherwise);
 - To repair living accommodation;
 - To demolish buildings comprising or including living accommodation;
 - Where buildings comprising or including living accommodation have been demolished, to construct buildings that comprise or include replacement living accommodation.
- 2.3 The power may be exercised to assist a person to acquire living accommodation only where the authority:
 - Have acquired or propose to acquire (whether compulsorily or otherwise) his existing living accommodation; or
 - Are satisfied that the acquisition of other living accommodation would provide for that person a benefit similar to that which would be provided by the carrying out of work of any description in relation to his existing living accommodation.

3.0 Policy Aims & Objectives

- 3.1 The Disabled Facilities grant (DFG) is a grant paid from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to local authorities in England to adapt older and disabled people's homes to help them to live independently and safely. Assistance can include but not limited to ramps, stair lifts, level access showers and suitable heating systems. The DFG, was incorporated as part of the Better Care Fund (BCF) in April 2015.
- 3.2 The DFG aims to support disabled and older people to be independent, enabling carers to continue their role safely, preventing accidents and helping people to return from hospital. It therefore crosses the boundaries between housing, health and social care and reflects the increasing national focus on the integration of housing with health and social care services.
- 3.3 The improved Better Care Fund (iBCF) is passed to local authorities with social care responsibilities as a Section 31 grant, with conditions. The grant determination requires the money to be used only for the purposes of:
1. Meeting adult social care needs
 2. Reducing pressures on the NHS, including seasonal winter pressures
 3. Supporting more people to be discharged from hospital when they are ready
 4. Ensuring that the social care provider market is supported.
- 3.4 Conditions were placed that a recipient local authority must:
- Pool the grant funding into the local BCF, unless the authority has written ministerial exemption
 - Work with the relevant CCG and providers to meet National condition 4. (Managing transfers of care) in the Integration and BCF policy framework.
 - Provide quarterly reports as required by the Secretary of State.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 The four main aims of the Policy are as follows:-
1. Enable and support people to live independently in their current and future homes,
 2. Promote, encourage and ensure fair access for disabled people to all appropriate adaptation services,
 3. Work in partnership to deliver a seamless service to disabled people, providing services and equipment that are cost effective and value for money,
 4. Make best use of Registered Providers' existing housing stock.
- 3.7 Assistance provided through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) are consistently effective. They produce significant health gains and prevent accidents and admission to formal care settings.

- 3.8 In 2008-09 the scope of a DFG was widened to support any local authority expenditure incurred under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO). This enables authorities to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes.
- 3.9 Creating greater flexibility will allow the DFG to be used for associated purposes, such as moving home, house clearances and de-clutters and where this is a more appropriate solution to moving home. Funding could be pooled to purchase alternative solutions to major adaptations.

4. Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002

- 4.1 This Policy also sets out how the Council will consider options for disabled people in addition to mandatory DFGs as prescribed by legislation and reflect the wider intentions of the RRO.
- 4.2 The DFG (RRO) can 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
 - Improved quality of life
 - Support for carers
 - Reduction in child poverty

5. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)

- 5.1 Hartlepool Borough Council administers Mandatory DFGs to all owner-occupiers, social and private housing tenants 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. In England the maximum entitlement of grant under the DFG is currently set at £30,000 per applicant, and authorities are not required to provide additional costs over this maximum but can top up grants, as agreed locally and set out in their local Housing Assistance Policy. For more complex home adaptations, including those involving applications for bespoke extensions to existing dwellings, these can substantially exceed the upper limit in some cases.
- 5.2 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 Therapy service 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 Care Act 2014 (incorporating Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act).
- 5.3 Recommendations are passed to the Council's Special Needs Housing Team who process requests in waiting list order.
- 5.4 Further information regarding DFG's can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants>

6. Use of DFG funding to Registered Providers (RPs) Properties

- 6.1 The Council works closely with its RP partners to deliver assistance to their tenants, and is aware that the majority of RP's will complete adaptation works to specific dwelling types, however there is still a large proportion of works that are not covered and are processed via DFG's. Through this policy all applicants will be treated equally regardless of tenure.

7. Rehousing as an Option

- 7.1 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 adaptations to be completed. Assistance for relocation costs will be considered by the Special Needs Housing Team. Should this scenario arise a discretionary grant maybe processed to support any payments deemed necessary.
- 7.2 Adapted social rented housing is advertised through the Tees Valley Homes Finder scheme which covers the Tees Valley. Such properties are re-let to applicants who match the requirements of the property on a needs first basis.

8. Discretionary Grants

- 8.1 Discretionary Grant payments will be explored should an application for works cost more than the maximum grant available (£30,000). In cases were major adaptations (e.g. Extensions) are being completed and the applicant has been classed as eligible for grant assistance, should the works cost more than £30,000 (grant limit) HBC may look to apply for a discretionary payment to make up the shortfall. The decision if this additional grant will be awarded will need ratified by the Assistant Director and Head of Service.
- 8.2 For Adults where the grant exceeds £30,000, HBC will consider the options and make decision through its existing panel process.
- 8.3 For Children the process and threshold is undetermined in the national guidance, HBC will consider a parental means test and a decision will be considered at the existing risk panel.

9. Prevention

- 9.1 Following an assessment of need, minor adaptations (under £1000) 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. This work is either completed by the Council or RP's.

10. Working in Partnership

- 10.1 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 respective Clinical Commissioning Groups (ICS partners from April 2022) the local health infrastructure including Registered Providers of social housing.

11. Recycling Equipment

- 11.1 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. These adaptations are processed via a separate policy which is The Equipment / Loan Policy 2021 as the equipment fitted remains the property of HBC.

12. Procurement

- 12.1 Where major adaptations are approved the Special Needs Housing Team follow Hartlepool Borough Councils procurement guidelines in organising / procuring works to be completed.
- 12.1 These guidelines are as follows and are subject to change (correct as of 01/04/2022)
- Works costing between £1000 & £5000 – Two quotes are requested via the quick quote system
 - Works costing between £5000 & £25,000 – Three quotes are requested via the quick quote system
 - Works costing above £25,000 – All required information is passed to HBC procurement team and three / four quotes are requested.
- 12.2 Should quotes come in and are at the same costing it would be determined by either the Special Needs Housing Manager or Technical Officer as to which contractor will be awarded the contract. Normally this will be decided by establishing which contractor can complete the works in the quickest time.
- 12.3 Stairlifts are procured as part of a sub-regional contract which offers cost savings and value for money.

13 Client Contributions

- 13.1 The Department for Leveling Up, Housing and Communities and The Department of Health and Social Care issued joint guidance for local housing authorities (28 March 2022) . The revised guidance reflects changes to means testing. Means testing applies to applications made by owner- occupiers, tenants. Different rules apply where the application is made by a landlord.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england#contents>

- 13.2 The revised DFG Guidance makes reference for the need to consider the fast tracking of applications or 'no means test' for works up to £5,000 when people have a rapidly progressing or highly debilitating condition or for people who may still want to work and we know they would benefit from the property being adapted prior to them declining.
- 13.3 Where these circumstances present a decision will be made on a case by case basis

considering both the unique circumstances of the applicant and the application of the grant conditions.

- 13.4 There may also be a need in other circumstances for HBC to make available a payment plan for those applicants who will struggle to make their contribution in one lump sum. These payment plans will be agreed by the Team Manager (Occupational Therapy & Special Needs Housing) and would have to be repaid before the end of the financial year that they were authorised.

14. Land Charges

- 14.1 When a dwelling has been substantially adapted (e.g. extension) the Council will seek to place a local land charge against the property. For DFG's that cost more than £15,000 Local Land Charges may be placed (to the desecration of HBC) on the property (up to a maximum of £10,000) should the property be sold within 10 years.
- 14.2 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.
- 14.3 The amount of funding to be reclaimed including the top up (where costs exceed £30,000) HBC will pursue a charge against the property.

15. Agency Service

- 15.1 The Special Needs Housing Team offers an Agency Service to all Clients at no extra costs to them. The Special Needs Housing Team is in part funded by the grant and covers a proportion of staffing costs, miscellaneous costs incurred during the year (such as bespoke staff training / and necessary IT upgrades for example) and abortive costs (i.e. costs incurred on DFG applicants which are subsequently cancelled or in instances where a client dies).
- 15.2 This agency service is optional and Clients can still choose to make their own application and are informed of this throughout the grant enquiry process so they can at any time make their own valid application for grant assistance.

16. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 16.1 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.
- 16.2 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.

17. POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW

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

