

Report To:	CABINET	Date:	20th SEPTEMBER 2021
Heading:	REVISED AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS POLICY		
Portfolio Holder:	COUNCILLOR JOHN WILMOTT, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LICENSING, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND REGULATORY SERVICES & COUNCILLOR TOM HOLLIS, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COUNCIL AND SOCIAL HOUSING		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	YES		
Subject to Call-In:	YES		

Purpose of Report

To advise Members of the Council's approach to assisting residents who require an aid or adaptation to their home to help them retain their independence and to seek approval of the revised Aids and Adaptations Policy.

The policy is revised to encompass changes to the county wide Disabled Facilities Grant Policy and to mirror those changes in Ashfield District Council's Aids and Adaptations Policy which it applies to socially rented properties.

Recommendation(s)

To approve the revised Aids and Adaptations Policy, as attached at Appendix A

To approve applying the new maximum grant level of £50,000 to new and existing cases where work is yet to start on site.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

The Council is keen to ensure that residents are given the assistance they need to remain independent in their home for as long as practically possible.

The Council understands that not only does this protect the wellbeing and dignity of residents, it also reduces demand on other public sector services, such as hospitals, nursing and residential care.

Underlying this commitment is a need for a clear and transparent policy. Residents, health professionals, officers and Members all need to be aware of who we can assist and in what ways we can assist.

The original Aids and Adaptations Policy has been reviewed, the catalyst for the review being a commitment from the Nottinghamshire Districts to establish a common policy for private residents, referred to as Disabled Facilities Grant or DFG applications.

The majority of the changes in the revised Policy, both the DFG and Council side are minor; typically, procedural changes or rewording to improve clarity and consistency. The one major change is to increase the upper limit on grants for major adaptations. For both private residents and Council tenants the proposal is to increase the maximum grant from £40,000 to £50,000. The increase reflects the increasing complexity of referrals and higher contractor and material costs. A growing number of major adaptations are priced above the current £40,000 limit, thus bringing in to question our ability to meet the needs of households with urgent needs. Whilst the intention is to increase the maximum grant the adaptations budgets for both private residents and Council tenants will remain the same.

Alternative Options Considered

None. As part of the Council's commitment to partnership working establishing a common, countywide approach to adapting private properties was required, thus triggering a review of the Council's Aids and Adaptations Policy.

Detailed Information

The Council's Aids and Adaptations Policy was first approved by Cabinet in September 2018. The Policy is an overarching policy and is split into 2 parts.

- Part A - Adapting private homes, referred to as Disabled Facilities Grants or DFG
- Part B – Adapting Council homes.

DFG's are Government funded through the Better Care Fund. There is national guidance relating to who is eligible for assistance and how DFGs should be administered. By contrast, adaptations to Council homes are funded through the rent paid by tenants and the rules can be determined locally. An aim of the Aids and Adaptations Policy was to establish a level of consistency across tenures, ensuring that wherever possible the service offered to Council tenants mirrored that offered to private residents.

Representatives from Nottinghamshire District and Borough Councils' DFG Teams and the County Council's Occupational Therapist Service meet on a regular basis to discuss the DFG process. Each District/Borough has their own DFG Policy, based upon national guidance. As the Occupational Therapy (OT) service works across the County, it was agreed that having a single DFG Policy would help them and local residents and would ensure a consistent level of service provision. Part 1 of the revised Aids and Adaptations Policy reflects the new countywide DFG Policy.

In respect of changes to the DFG Policy, as outlined above, the main change is to increase the upper grant limit from £40,000 to £50,000. The DFG consists of 2 elements, a mandatory grant and a discretionary element. The mandatory grant level is set nationally, currently at £30,000, this has not changed. The increase relates to the discretionary element, taking that from a maximum of £10,000 to £20,000.

Other notable changes to the DFG Policy include the following;

- Discretionary grant funding, up to the maximum of £20,000, will be placed as a legal charge on the property for 10 years. Currently only the first £10,000 of a mandatory DFG is placed as a legal charge. This means that in exceptional circumstances the total legal charge could reach £30,000.
- The maximum grant payable where there are dual residency arrangements for a child will increase from £10,000 to £30,000. The funding will be placed as a legal charge on the property for 10 years. Previously the £10,000 legal charge was for an indefinite repayment period.
- The previous limit of £10,000 to assist a resident being discharged from hospital to relocate to suitable accommodation has been removed and replaced by the term 'reasonable cost' thereby giving the Council flexibility with the level of help it can provide.

In keeping with the aim of ensuring consistency across tenures, the review of the DFG Policy triggered a review of the Policy relating to adapting Council homes. In respect of this the intention is to adopt the new upper limit for major adaptations, taking the maximum grant payable to adapt Council homes from £40,000 to £50,000.

The only other change of note to the Policy is to reduce the threshold at which a test of resources is applied. Under the existing Policy a means test was only applied to adaptations over the value of £2,000. Under the revised Policy the figure has been reduced to £1,000, bringing it in line with the threshold in the DFG Policy. The test of resources only applies to adults, if the adaptation request relates to a child there is no means test.

As part of the review process the revised Aids and Adaptations Policy has been shared with the Occupational Therapy service.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

This policy supports the Council's housing vision to: "ensure the population of Ashfield are living in or can access homes that are affordable, warm and within a safe community that promotes the health and wellbeing of residents"

Legal: [RLD 02/09/2021]

The provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) is mandatory under the provisions of Section 23 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	N/A
General Fund – Capital Programme	Section 1 costs are met through DFG's in the Council's Capital Programme.

Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	Section 2 costs are met via the HRA Capital Programme.

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
No risks identified	

Human Resources:

No HR implications

Environmental/Sustainability

This policy helps ensures we are making the best use of existing resources and sustaining residents in their own home.

Equalities:

This policy has a positive impact for older and/or disabled residents as it provides them with assistance to live independently in their home.

Other Implications:

None

Reason(s) for Urgency

Not applicable

Reason(s) for Exemption

Not applicable

Background Papers

Not applicable

Report Author and Contact Officer

Phil Warrington

SERVICE MANAGER – STRATEGIC HOUSING & LETTINGS

p.warrington@ashfield.gov.uk

01623 608893