

Report To:	CABINET
Date:	17TH FEBRUARY 2025
Heading:	AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS POLICY (PART A)
Executive Lead Member:	CLLR TOM HOLLIS, EXECUTIVE LEAD FOR STRATEGIC HOUSING AND CLIMATE CHANGE
Ward/s:	ALL
Key Decision:	YES
Subject to Call-In:	YES

Purpose of Report

To advise Members about the increasing difficulty in delivering large scale property adaptations to private properties within the current spending limit and to seek flexibility to exceed that limit to meet the needs of local residents.

Recommendation(s)

To approve a change of wording to section 5.1 of the Council's Aids and Adaptions Policy (Part A). The revised wording is as set out below;

Current wording

Sec 5.1 - Although the maximum amount of grant available for a mandatory DFG is currently £30,000, the Authority has agreed through this policy to potentially provide up to an additional £20,000 as a discretionary top-up...

Proposed wording

Sec 5.1 - Although the maximum amount of grant available for a mandatory DFG is currently £30,000, the Authority has agreed through this policy to potentially provide up to an additional £20,000 as a discretionary top-up. The expectation is that the combined mandatory grant and discretionary top up, totalling a maximum of £50,000, will be sufficient to meet the needs of most residents. In exceptional circumstances, the Executive Director can approve works above this figure. In doing so there must be clear evidence that the works are essential to the needs of the residents, that all attempts have been made to reduce costs and that all other options have been considered...

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Under the terms of the Council's existing Aids and Adaptations Policy (Part A) private residents are eligible for a grant, termed a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), of up to £50,000 to adapt their home to make it suitable for their needs. This figure includes a £30,000 mandatory grant and a £20,000 discretionary top up.

Most adaptations come in well below the upper limit and will continue to do so. However, build cost inflation mean that the most complex and extensive major adaptations, such as large ground floor extensions, are reaching the £50,000 limit. This figure has not increased since 2020.

A small number of cases have reached the £50,000 limit, to date officers have worked with Social Care colleagues to look at what savings and adjustments can be made to reduce costs and bring it within the limit. We now have the first case that cannot be delivered for this figure.

Under the terms of the Aids and Adaptations Policy there is no flexibility to exceed the upper limit, even in exceptional circumstances. There is no facility for Councillors or Senior Officers to approve an out of policy decision. To enable the Council to help those families with exceptional needs, flexibility is necessary to exceed the upper limit of £50,000 for adaptations to private homes, hence the need to revise the wording in the Aids and Adaptations Policy (Part A)

Alternative Options Considered

Option 1 - To leave the wording within the Aids and Adaptations Policy (Part A) unchanged. This will mean the upper limit for any DFG remaining at £50,000 and there is no ability to exceed the figure even in exceptional circumstances. This option was rejected because build costs are increasing, and the most complex large-scale adaptations are now exceeding this figure.

Option 2 – To agree to increase the discretionary top up of the DFG from £20,000 to an alternative specific figure. This was rejected because if the figure was increased by a further £5,000 or £10,000 there is a risk that an exceptional case could exceed that figure in which case we are unable to proceed.

Detailed Information

The Council is keen to ensure all residents can remain independent in their home for as long as possible. The Aids and Adaptations Policy sets out the Council's approach to adapting private and council homes, to ensure their long-term suitability for the occupant.

Part A of the Policy sets out the Council's approach to private residents, Part B relates to Council tenants. The difference is in part due to the funding arrangements. Part A, private residents, are funded through the Better Care Fund, a grant of circa £1m per annum the Council receives from Government. Part B is funded through the rent paid by tenants. Part A and Part B are broadly similar in content as the Council is keen to ensure a consistency of service across tenure.

The DFG Team is involved in delivering minor, large scale and major adaptations to private homes. The Team receives and actions referrals from the Occupational Therapy Service (Notts CC), whose role it is to assess resident's needs and recommend work required. The DFG Team will design, tender and implement works in accordance with the assessed needs.

Major adaptations can include property extensions, in some cases including a ground floor bedroom and bathroom, typically for a family member who is a wheelchair user. The DFG Team goes through a competitive process to identify a value for money contractor.

Inflation within the building sector is well documented. To illustrate, in the 12 months up to January 2024 the cost of pipes and fittings rose by 21.1%, metal doors and windows by 18.9% and ready mix concrete by 11.7% (figures from gov.uk). The inevitable outcome of this is that major adaptations that in the past came in close to £50,000 are now exceeding that figure.

The relevant wording within the Aids and Adaptations Policy (Part A) and the proposed change is as stated within the Recommendations section at the start of this report.

The proposed wording makes clear that funding above £50,000 would only be approved in very exceptional cases, when there has been a thorough assessment and continuing with works is the most suitable course of action.

Adaptations to private homes are funded entirely through the Better Care Fund (BCF) grant the Council receives. The General fund contributes to elements of staffing costs. The BCF grant is a set figure and so increasing the amount spent on some major adaptations could reduce the total number of works that can be delivered, albeit only marginally.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

A Corporate objective is to ensure there are sufficient safe and suitable homes for Ashfield residents. Adapting homes to make them suitable for residents, enabling them to remain independent is a fundamental part of this.

Legal:

The recommended change to policy will enable flexibility in exceptional circumstances to authorise costs over £50k whereas the existing policy does not provide any room for discretion where needed. The suggested change requires evidence of the exceptional circumstances which will ensure the policy is applied consistently and fairly. [RLD 22/01/2025]

Finance:

The recommended change will provide greater flexibility in the way the available funding can be allocated to specific cases. This affects the way the funding is distributed, rather than the amount of funding allocated to the programme as a whole. Accordingly, there are no budgetary implications, provided the total cost of adaptations continues to be managed within the available budget. [PH 28/01/2025]

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	N/A

General Fund – Capital Programme	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	N/A

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Spending more on some major adaptations means fewer residents can be assisted with the Better Care Fund budget.	All major adaptations that exceed the £50,000 limit will be scrutinised and cost savings identified wherever possible. We only anticipate that a small number of cases will exceed the £50,000 upper limit and they will be kept as close to the limit as possible to minimise the budgetary impact.

Human Resources:

N/A

Environmental/Sustainability:

No direct impact.

Equalities:

Major adaptations are there to help meet the needs of disabled residents, children and older residents in particular. From an equalities perspective, the proposed policy change will have a beneficial impact on this group in particular. An Equalities Impact Screening Assessment has been completed for this purpose.

Other Implications:

None

Reason(s) for Urgency

N/A

Reason(s) for Exemption

N/A

Background Papers

None

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