

Aids and Adaptations Policy for Council Tenants

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Consultees

Internal	External
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Corby Tenant Voice	

Distribution List

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Links to other documents

Document	Link
Keyways Allocation Scheme	
Tenancy Policy	
Mutual Exchange Policy	

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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of the Aids and Adaptations Policy is to outline how the Council will support council tenants and their immediate household members to remain independent in their current home. Where this is not possible or practical the policy sets out how the Council will assist tenants in finding suitable alternative accommodation.

2.0 Scope

This policy specifically refers to disabled adaptations to properties managed by the council in its capacity as landlord. This policy does not extend to home owners, leaseholders or tenants applying for aids and adaptations to private sector or other social rented properties; such assistance is available through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG).

The policy recognises the impact aids and adaptations in and around the home can have in helping someone with a disability to maximise their independence. The policy also recognises that alternatives to the provision of new adaptations will be explored with the tenant and their household and in some cases it will be more practical for tenants to move to more suitable accommodation.

This policy confirms the council's commitment to meeting the needs of tenants, which may change over time, as well as effectively using the council's existing housing stock and ensuring a fair distribution of aids and adaptations within finite resources.

The council acknowledges that the timely provision of minor adaptations can often sustain the independence of tenants and postpone the need for substantial major adaptations. The provision of minor adaptations is therefore seen as an important and timely preventative service.

This policy covers two areas

- Part 1 - Adapting existing homes
- Part 2 - Allocation of and best use of existing stock currently part or fully adapted to meet housing demand

3.0 Policy Outcomes

The purpose of the Aids and Adaptations Policy is to outline how the Council will support council tenants and their immediate household members to remain independent in their current home. Where this is not possible or practical the policy sets out how the Council will assist tenants in finding suitable alternative accommodation.

This policy:

- States clearly how new aids and adaptations requests will be accessed, considered, prioritised, approved or rejected.
- Prioritises making the best use of existing adapted council properties through their allocation to the most suitable applicants based on their assessed needs.
- Specifies threshold indicators and limits relating to types of adaptations
- Indicates what support can be offered to assist tenants to find more suitable housing
- States clearly which adaptations will not be funded
- States clearly how tenants will be made aware of their responsibility to contribute towards costs, where adaptations will cost more than the maximum limit the council will fund.

North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) as a landlord meets the cost to supply and fit aids and adaptations to council homes. These costs are met through the Councils Housing Revenue account. We will do all we can to ensure there is sufficient funding to meet the needs of tenants, however this may not always be possible.

4.0 Local Context

As at 1st April 2021, the council owned and managed 8,224 homes and relets on average 600 each year. Accommodation comprises of a variety of houses, flats, bungalows and maisonettes suitable for all applicants and 965 homes in sheltered schemes. As of this date approximately 35% of active applicants registered on Keyways, are waiting for a property which is adapted to meet their needs.

Around 2000 homes are currently adapted with at least one major adaptation within the council's stock.

There are a very limited number of purpose built or fully adapted properties; these properties have widened doorways, a level access shower and are fully accessible to wheelchair users.

There has been sustained investment into the provision of aids and adaptations enabling people to remain safely within their own homes and maximising their independence.

With an ageing population and people living longer with managed medical conditions as a result of better health care it is expected that demand for adaptations will continue to rise.

5.0 Legal and Regulatory Framework

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

The act includes a duty for public bodies when carrying out their functions to have due regard to promoting equality. Discrimination on grounds of disability can be justified in law if the council has appropriately balanced the needs of the person with a disability and those of others in need of accommodation. Making better overall use of the limited housing stock we have with meeting all applicant needs, including those with disabilities, is a legitimate aim.

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

The legislation which sets out the duty and rules for providing mandatory Disabled Facility Grants (DFG).

6.0 Aids and Adaptations Policy Part 1- Adapting Existing Homes

1. Eligibility

Aids and Adaptations will only be considered for NNC tenants, their partner or a member of the immediate family who is permanently resident in the household.

Qualifying applicants will have an impairment which has a significant long term effect on their ability to

- Carry out normal day-day activities in and around their home
- Access essential facilities within their home

Adaptations for children of tenants will only be completed at the property which is the principal home.

Major Adaptations will not be approved for individuals who are waiting for medical procedures which will improve mobility until their expected recovery is complete. Adaptations will be considered when a tenant is waiting to be discharged from hospital and require their current homes to be adapted, however it may not be possible for them to be completed prior to discharge.

Adaptations will not be carried out for lodgers or temporary visitors

Generally, adaptations will be carried out where a secure tenancy is held, although consideration will be given if tenants are introductory tenants. If the tenancy is in its introductory period and is less than 12 months old adaptations may not be carried out if the tenant failed to declare that they or a member of their household had a pre-existing disability where it would have been reasonable for them to do so.

Requests for major adaptations will not be approved where a Right-to-Buy application has been received. Tenants in these cases will be signposted to the assistance available through the council's DFG programme once they have completed the purchase of their home.

Tenants seeking to Transfer or Mutual Exchange will be considered on their individual merit and whether they are leaving or going to a suitably adapted property will form part of this consideration.

The council will not progress with an adaptation where possession proceedings have commenced or a possession order is already in place.

We will only consider carrying out major adaptations that have been recommended by the Community Occupational Therapy Service, or independent Occupational Therapist commissioned by the Council.

2. Accessing the Service

To access the service tenants can contact their Housing Team directly, or get in touch with their Doctor or another health professional in order for a referral to be made. Tenants can also self-refer by completing an application for assessment available on the Council's website.

Tenants can also telephone the Occupational Therapy Service on 01604 361913.

Once a referral is received and reviewed by the Community Occupational Therapy Service they will contact the tenant from which is usually by telephone to undertake an initial screening. An appointment to visit (if required) will be made with the tenant to identify any adaptations that are necessary, appropriate and qualifying. If a need for adaptations is identified the Community Occupational Therapy Service will in turn send a written recommendation to the Council for consideration.

3. Equipment and Aids

Provided a tenant meets the Fair Access to Care (FACS) criteria, Health or the Community Occupational Therapy Service will provide a range of freestanding portable or medical aids suitable for the functional requirements for including:

- Portable hoists, hospital beds, toilet frames and specialist seats
- bed levers, wheelchairs, shower chairs, chair risers
- Walking frames, reaching devices, door entry systems

4. Minor Adaptations

Works which cost £2,000 or less.

The provision of these adaptations may be based on the recommendation of an Occupational Therapist whilst assessing for major adaptations or be requested by a tenant direct to NNC.

Where the minor adaptation is more technical in nature, NNC may still request that an Occupational Therapist is involved in order to make sure it is fit for purpose.

Examples of minor adaptations include:

- Grab rails, hand rails, lever taps, stair rails, bath lifts
- Lowering/repositioning of light switches and sockets (wheelchair users only)
- Steps, half steps, small ramps or removable ramps
- Flashing or amplified doorbells, door and wall protectors

5. Major Adaptations

Major adaptations are works that cost over £2,000 and usually involve structural alterations, improvements to, or additions to the fabric of the property.

An assessment of needs, by an Occupational Therapist must be undertaken for all major adaptations identifying any necessary and appropriate adaptations required to meet the needs of the disabled person.

Following the assessment, the Occupational Therapist will provide a written recommendation to the council. The council is not bound by law to undertake all or any of the recommendation(s). The recommendation is used as a tool to trigger and consider a tenant's need.

The council must be satisfied that the recommended works are:

- Reasonable, feasible and practicable with regard to the type, age and condition of the dwelling
- Necessary and appropriate to meet the needs and prognosis of the disabled occupant, having regard for end of life care protocols

For example, the council would not normally provide a level access shower to a first floor flat unless there was lift access to the first floor.

The council will also consider the wider impact of the requested adaptation in relation to issues such as others in the family tenancy, regular visitors to the property and under-occupancy levels. It should be noted that some of the council's properties are unsuitable by design for adaptation.

Major adaptations are provided in line with the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 for disabled facilities grants (DFG) and in summary help to facilitate:

- Access to and from the home.
- Making the dwelling or building safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with him/her.
- Access to a room used or usable as the principal family room.
- Access to or providing for the disabled occupant, a room for sleeping.
- Access to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room(s) in which there is a lavatory, a shower and or bath, a wash hand basin, or facilitating the use of such facilities as required by the disabled occupant.
- The preparation and cooking of food by the disabled occupant.
- Improving/providing a heating system in the dwelling to meet the needs of the disabled occupant.

- The use by the disabled occupant of a source of power, light or heat by altering the position of one or more means of access to or control of that source or by providing additional means of control.
- Access and movement by the disabled occupant around the dwelling in order to enable him/her to care for a person who is normally resident in the dwelling and is in need of such care.
- Facilitating access to and from a garden by a disabled occupant

Examples of major adaptations include:

- Level access showers,
- Large permanent ramps,
- Door widening,
- Stair lifts
- Kitchen refurbishment with low level units (appliances excluded)
- Through floor lifts
- Tracked hoists (works associated with strengthening the structure and additional electric points only – hoists are a medical aid)
- Swing doors or doors operated electrically
- Extensions – ground floor level only

5. Threshold Indicators and Options Appraisal Process for Major Adaptations

Once an Occupational Therapist report has been received the council will consider in more detail a number of factors to establish if it is willing to proceed.

Factors include

- Establishing if the aids and adaptations are feasible, reasonable and practicable for the property and person
- Gathering further information, undertaking home visits, site visits and/or case conferences with key professionals
- Identifying if any threshold indicators have been reached, and if they have, recommending an options appraisal be undertaken

An options appraisal process will automatically apply to cases that hit one or more of the following triggers but may also be adopted if other threshold indicators (Appendix A) are in question:

- a) Where the property is currently under or over-occupied or will become under or over-occupied if the adaptations are undertaken
- b) Where a possession order has been obtained or is in the process of being obtained
- c) Where the estimated cost of adapting a property is £2,000 or above
- d) Where the property cannot be adapted because of design constraints

The options appraisal will be undertaken by the Housing Team. A short report with officer recommendations on the options available will be presented to a Senior Manager.

Where ever possible the council will seek to carry out the most cost effective adaptation to the property which adequately meets the applicant and households needs, this usually means that an adaptation is carried out within the existing footprint and structure.

Only one main family room is necessary to meet a households' needs and the council may consider the use of one of any additional reception rooms in a property to provide adaptations.

The options appraisal process will make a decision as to whether the adaptations will be undertaken or an alternative option recommended.

6. Funding and Prioritisation of Adaptations

The annual funding budget for aids and adaptations is a fixed amount, with demand often exceeding the financial resources available. Therefore, the council will prioritise the demand in a way that best meets the greatest needs. All major adaptations are subject to budget availability.

The council will normally only fund major adaptations up to a maximum limit of £30,000, this is set in line with the DFG limits. Where an adaptation is over this amount, the council will discuss with the tenant the options of self-funding, alternative funding and/or re-housing.

Prioritisation of adaptations will be based upon the Occupational Therapist’s assessment of how critical and urgent the adaptation is. In general terms, this means dealing with the highest priority cases first whilst taking into account the length of time a person has been waiting.

Where budget is unavailable the council will inform tenants and give an indication as to how long they are likely to wait. Where appropriate, the council will work with the tenant to explore alternative options such as re-housing or other sources of funding.

7. Approval of Works

If adaptations qualify and are considered the most appropriate solution, the council will:

- Instruct the production of any schemes, costs and drawings as necessary.
- Ensure relevant permissions are obtained.
- Approve the undertaking of such work with relevant contractors.
- Agree and implement where applicable the need to reclassify the property in terms of adaptations undertaken and any reduction in bedrooms due to the adaptations.
- Work with relevant partners, to facilitate the adaptations to properties.
- Add the recommendation to the waiting list
- Inform the tenant of the outcome.

8. Approval Limits

Neighbourhood Manager / Housing Officer / Maintenance Team	£1,000
Housing or Maintenance Team Manager	£2,000
Senior Manager	£2,000+

All refusal recommendation will be reviewed by a Senior Manager.

All approvals will also adhere to financial rules on authorisation limits as set out through the Finance Directorate.

9. Timescales

The council will look to facilitate a tenants discharge from hospital by fast tracking approved recommendations in order to minimise any delay to ensure they are able to return home as quickly as possible and prevent bed blocking. It is important to note that adequate notice, communication and information are all critical to enabling this to happen.

Under normal circumstances and with the financial resources being available the council will aim to commence adaptations within the following timescales.

Major Adaptations Critical	3 months
Major Adaptations Urgent	9 months
Major Adaptations Standard	18 months

Minor Adaptations	3 months
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10. Exclusions

The following are examples of aids and adaptations that will not be funded:

- Adaptations for the use of or storage of mobility scooters
- Vehicular access, hard standings and driveways
- Certain pieces of non-specialist fixtures or equipment and appliances. (For example, ovens and hobs and other appliances forming part of an adapted kitchen)
- Safe play areas inside or outside (including fencing)
- Extensions and loft conversions would only be considered if a suitably sized property did not exist in the council's housing stock
- The proposed adaptation results in the disabled person still being unable to access a significant proportion of the home
- The request is to address specialist medical needs of an individual other than basic needs (For example, self-washing facilities, hospital beds or hoists)
- Stair lifts on communal staircases

11. Tenants Contribution towards Major Adaptations

Tenants will be subject to "test of resources" this is to ensure this policy is more reflective of the test of resources calculation applied to DFG applicants.

Where a tenant has a contribution to make towards works over the maximum limit or in relation to preferred choice, this will be discussed with them. Any costs not funded by the Council must be paid for prior to works commencing.

In the majority of cases tenants will make no contribution to the cost of an adaptation.

12. Undertaking Major Adaptation Work

Where the Council is funding adaptation works, partially or in full, the council will contract these works through its Maintenance team and their relevant specialist contractors.

13. Adaptations to Common Parts / Communal Access

Common parts relate to those areas outside of an individual dwelling but within the structure of the building. Such as, entrance hallways or communal staircases to blocks of flats.

Communal access relates to shared access to a group of properties. Such as, shared paths and steps.

Aids and adaptations to common parts and communal areas including handrails or ramps to a shared path. These requests will be assessed on a case by case basis. The council will take into account the health, safety and needs of all affected occupants.

14. Installing Own Aids and Adaptations – Permissions

In some circumstances tenants may wish to install their own aids and adaptations, such as over bath showers or stair lifts. Permission must be provided in writing prior to the commencement of any works.

Following our permission, where any planning costs, building regulation fees or similar are required, these costs will need to be met by the tenant.

In the case of tenant installed aids and adaptations, at the end of the tenancy the tenant will be required to remove them and make good any damage to the property. Alternatively, the Council may agree to take responsibility for the aid or adaptation. The tenant will be required to sign over ownership free of charge and cannot lay claim later. Agreement to accept any aid or adaptation will be dependent on its age, condition and demand.

15. Maintenance and servicing

On re-let of any adapted property there will be routine inspection and maintenance undertaken of the aids and adaptations in place. Certain aids and adaptations will be subject to agreed servicing and maintenance programmes. This generally applies to large pieces of equipment including stair lifts, through floor lifts, step lifts, showers and fixed tracked hoists.

Tenants will be expected to allow reasonable access to enable servicing and maintenance of aids and adaptations. Should this not be permitted, tenants may be liable for the cost of any deterioration or fault which is attributed to the inability to perform necessary servicing and maintenance.

Tenants may also be liable for charges in the case of inappropriate call outs or aborted pre-arranged visits.

After 12 months, maintenance/repair of new major adaptations to the structure of a property will be undertaken as responsive repairs.

16. Removal of Aids and Adaptations

An aid or adaptation to a property that has been funded by the council is owned by the council and must not be removed by the tenant either during, or at the end of, their tenancy. If a tenant removes an adaptation without approval they will be recharged the full cost of replacing it.

In some circumstances where an aid or adaptation is no longer required, the council may consider removing it if it could be used in another home. Otherwise, it will be left in place.

If an aid or adaptation is no longer working and beyond reasonable repair, then approval may be given for it to be removed following a reassessment of need. The council will not normally remove structural adaptations to a property, for example ramping, widened doors or level access showers and wet rooms.

NNC reserve the right to remove adaptations in empty properties, where leaving in situ would compromise the Council's best use of resources to meet local housing need.

7.0 Aids and Adaptations Policy Part 2 – Allocation of Adapted Council Housing

1. Allocation Management

In order to effectively manage our homes and make best use of the adapted properties that we have, this policy -

- Identifies the appropriate matching of applicants needs on the housing register to adapted and empty properties via the keyways allocation scheme.
- Requires acceptance of the property with the current suitable adaptations. The Council cannot be held responsible for any future required adaptations. Where any such requests are as a result of a change in physical ability as formally reported through an Occupational Therapist, they will be viewed within the Council's process for new adaptations.
- Ensures the adapted property list will be kept up to date.
- Considers if current adapted properties make best use of available stock
- Provides financial help to existing tenants where a move to more suitable accommodation is the most appropriate option.
- Allows the direct matching of adapted properties to current Council tenants, where they have a need for such adaptations and their current property has been deemed as unsuitable for those required adaptations.

2. Re-lets, Matching Need and Re-housing

2.1 Adapted Properties List

The Housing Maintenance Team will provide details of adaptations undertaken once complete. The Housing Team keep an updated list of adapted properties. Keyways adverts will clearly describe adaptations.

Allocation of properties will be based on the criteria set out in the Council's current Keyways Allocations Policy, except when a direct match is required to meet the needs of a current tenant.

Where there is no exact match to the property, the property maybe re-advertise for wider consideration, following that applicants that best match the adaptations will be considered.

2.2 Accessible Housing List

The Housing Options Team will keep a list of applicants requiring an adapted property detailing what is required, this will be shared with the Housing Team.

The Housing Team will share details of any approved Direct Match tenant for whom the decision has been made not to adapt their current property.

3. Direct Matching

The council will hold a list of all the applicants who require extensive or specific adaptations.

If a property becomes vacant and has extensive or specific adaptations, a decision to direct let the property may be made. A match will be made to a Council tenant or applicant most in need, in accordance with the Keyways Allocations Scheme.

The council reserves the right to withdraw adapted properties from the lettings list as appropriate to meet urgent unmet demand.

4. Letting Adapted Properties

Where an applicant who requires assessed adaptations joins the housing register, they will be granted priority banding for any suitable adapted properties in line with the Keyways Allocations Scheme.

Where appropriate bids are not received the Council reserves the right to let to an applicant that does not require the adaptation, so long as the property meets their needs. Each relevant property will be considered on a case by case basis with input and advice from relevant officers.

NNC reserve the right to remove adaptations in empty properties, where leaving in situ would compromise the Council's best use of resources to meet local housing need.

5. Re-housing current tenants

Where the Council receives a request for a major adaptation, officers will discuss with the tenant the option of a transfer to alternative accommodation that meets the needs of the disabled person more appropriately.

Examples of why this may be considered:

- A vacant property which is already suitably adapted to meet the essential needs of the tenant can be identified
- A vacant property which is more suitable to be adapted to meet the essential needs of the tenant can be identified
- An extension can be avoided by a move to a larger property
- The current property is not suitable for a particular adaptation
- Adaptations to a property may reduce its potential to be let in the future
- There is under occupation by at least one bedroom or more

Where it is considered that a move to more suitable accommodation would be possible and/or the best solution, a priority banding or a direct match may be given to the tenant to enable them to move more quickly.

If suitable accommodation is available, the tenant would be expected to accept the alternative property. Once an offer has been accepted on an alternative property, the customer will be expected to take up the tenancy and move in to this property as soon as is practical.

If a tenant refuses two reasonable offers of alternative accommodation, the council will inform the tenant that they will be excluded from any further considerations.

Where re-housing is being considered, part of a case review will be to check the availability of accommodation. If it is not possible to find suitable alternative accommodation within a reasonable time of 18 months, adaptations to the existing property or another property will be considered.

If any additional aids and adaptations are required to the new property these will not be authorised until confirmation of the tenant's intention to move has been received.

6. Financial assistance towards moving

Where an offer is accepted to transfer/re-house under the Aids and Adaptations Policy, the council may help with the cost of moving to the other home.

Tenants who take up the option to be re-housed may receive financial assistance to cover relocation expenses. Assistance will vary according to circumstances but may include:

- Removal costs
- Disconnection and reconnection of cooker, and essential appliances
- Refitting of carpets
- Redecoration allowance or where appropriate redecorating of rooms in a new home

7. Adapting Vacant Properties

There may be occasion where a property would be suitable for a tenant or applicant requiring adaptations if additional adaptations were installed. From time to time and where no suitable empty properties have become available the council may consider offering Keyways applicants or a current tenant a vacant un-adapted or partially adapted property which may require further adaptations to address all needs.

Where critical adaptations are required these will be completed whilst the property is empty. Other work will take place whilst the tenant is in situ where safe and appropriate.

8. Future occupation and successive applications

Once major or extensive adaptations have been completed at a property that meets the applicant or tenant's needs they will be considered suitably housed.

They would only gain a new housing need to move where their housing situation has changed due to a worsening medical condition and further required adaptations are not possible or practical.

Tenants requesting consideration to undertake a mutual exchange to a property without adaptations when it is clear they have been provided for them in their current property will be refused consent.

Where significant work has taken place at a property and the person(s) requiring the adaptation(s) dies or is unable to remain at the property and permanently resides elsewhere, the remaining tenant or family members will be supported and encouraged to move to more suitable accommodation in order to allow the adapted property to be let to a disabled tenant or applicant.

9. Appeals and Complaints

If applicants are dissatisfied with any decision made about their application, they have the right to request a review. Reviews will be carried out by a senior manager from the Council.

If applicants are not satisfied with the review decision they may register a complaint through the Council's formal Complaints Procedure.

Appendix A

Major Adaptations Options Appraisal Indicators

The Building/ Property

- The age and structural condition of the property
- Existing adaptations at the property
- Cost of adaptations necessary to make the property suitable
- Length of time the adaptation will take and incumbent void rent loss
- Property constraints in terms of its adaptability
- If the adaptation is for a level access shower in a first floor flat the means of accessing the flat
- Where works would require planning permission or building regulation approval which has not been, or would not be, granted
- Whether adaptations make the best use of the council's housing stock and future let ability of a property
- Whether adaptations affect the amenity of the area for other residents
- Whether there is a 2nd reception room which could be utilised as a bedroom /bathroom when a stair lift and wet room to the 1st floor is being recommended

The Demand

- Property type and demand.
- Availability of suitable alternative adapted or part adapted accommodation
- Whether a suitable, alternative adapted property is offered and refused
- Whether the property is a ground floor home in a block of flats
- Whether the property is a bungalow

The Person/ The tenancy

- Availability of the disabled person's existing support network and carers
- Affordability (rent increase and under occupation for instance)
- The tenant's intentions regarding the long term use of the property
- If the council is taking possession proceedings against the tenant for example, for rent arrears (in line with general needs transfer requests) and/or anti-social behaviour
- Any competing needs of different members of the family
- Whether the property and proposed adaptations will meet the long-term needs of the disabled person
- Current occupancy of a property, for example is it under-occupied or will it be over occupied on completion
- The request is to address specialist medical needs of an individual other than basic needs (Example of specialist needs: self-washing facilities, hospital beds or hoists)

Appendix B

Service Charge Increases

Any properties which have been adapted historically with no service charge increase, will have an uplift implemented prior to being relet, where the adaptation is fit for purpose and is to remain.

Service Charge Elements

Adaptation	Rent Increase per week
Stair lift	£1.33
Through Floor Lifts	£2.70
Tracked Hoists	£1.53

Service charge increases will be subject to review.