



**WELWYN  
HATFIELD**

## **Aids and Adaptations Policy**

Effective Date:  
01 April 2025

Classification: Unrestricted



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## Introduction

- 1.1 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (the council) is committed to providing a high-quality aids and adaptations service that enables disabled council tenants to improve their quality of life, and to live safely and more independently within our homes.
- 1.2 The council will take all reasonable measures to provide a fair and accessible aids and adaptations service that makes best use of existing adapted properties and works closely with other external agencies.
- 1.3 The councils' decision making will consider the legislative requirements of providing works that are 'necessary and appropriate' to meet the physical needs of the applicants and are 'reasonable and practicable' in their nature. Where works are considered to be beyond reasonable and practicable, the council reserves the right to refuse to undertake these works or to offer alternative solutions including re-housing.
- 1.4 The Aids and Adaptations Policy applies to disabled council tenants and/or their immediate family members living in properties owned by the council and where this is their principal home.
- 1.5 WHBC is solely responsible for managing the aids and adaptations to the property itself and is not responsible for undertaking any medical assessments. All medical assessments are to be carried out by Hertfordshire County Councils (HCC) Occupational Therapist (OT) services. We will consider referrals from a private OT however we reserve the right to request a social services assessment before agreeing to any works.

## 2. Key Objectives

- 2.1 The key objectives of this Aids and Adaptations Policy are:
  - To set out the scope of the service in providing aids and adaptations and the criteria by which the council will assess requests for aids and adaptation work.
  - To support the needs of disabled tenants in providing adaptations where reasonably practical to do so and subject to the provision of available funding.
  - To have regard to the council's duty to manage its housing stock effectively and to make best use of its stock, through the council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Housing Allocations Policy, Asset Management Strategy and Housing Delivery Strategy 2019-2025.



- To optimise the use of resources for aids and adaptations, always having regard for value for money.
- To comply with legal and statutory requirements such as the Equalities Act 2010, and the Housing Act 2004 in relation to the provision of disabled adaptations. WHBC will cooperate with HCC in order to assist them with meeting the provisions of the Care Act where possible however these provisions remain the responsibility of HCC.
- To deliver a high-quality aids and adaptations service where there are clear channels of communication and established joint working practices with partners.

### 3. Policy Statement

- 3.1 The council is committed to providing an impartial, efficient and accessible aids and adaptations service to support the needs of disabled council tenants within the constraints of the resources available.
- 3.2 All referrals for aids and adaptations will be considered individually having regard to the criteria set out in this policy and the circumstances of the individual requiring the adaptations.
- 3.3 As part of the assessment process, other options may be considered, including the offer of a move to a more suitable property within our stock, where this is appropriate.
- 3.4 For major and complex aids and adaptations to family homes we will encourage and assist in a move to more suitable accommodation if this is appropriate.
- 3.5 When a property with major adaptations becomes vacant, we will seek to find a housing applicant or existing tenant who needs the adaptations we have carried out to the property.
- 3.6 We will make use of our aids and adaptations resources to provide proactive and planned generic adaptations to properties deemed suitable for such works.
- 3.7 The Policy should be read in conjunction with:
  - WHBC Repairs and Maintenance Policy
  - WHBC Complaints Policy
  - WHBC Equality and Diversity Policy
  - WHBC Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
  - WHBC Data Protection Policy



## 4. Definitions

- 4.1 An adaptation is an alteration to an aspect of a dwelling to assist the disabled person to live as independently as possible in their home.
- 4.2 A disabled person is someone who is defined as having a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities (Equality Act 2010).

## 5.0 Eligibility (medical needs only)

- 5.1 A person must be a Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council tenant, their partner or a member of their immediate family who is permanently resident in the household and has a physical impairment that is likely to last for at least 12 months, that substantially affects their ability to carry out normal day to day activities or access facilities in or around their home.
- 5.2 If a person does not live in a property owned by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and is not a council tenant, their initial enquiry should be directed to the Council's Private Sector Housing Team who deal with adaptation referrals for owner occupiers, housing association and private landlord tenants.

## 6. Minor Adaptations

- 6.1 The council will in most cases follow the guidance in/of '*Adaptations without delay – A practical guide and technical specifications for housing associations*' 2019 produced by the College of Occupational Therapists.
- 6.2 Tenants can request (self-refer) minor adaptations by contacting the council's Housing Maintenance Team on 01707 357 000. Any resident unsure of the extent of the required adaptation will be asked to contact Hertfordshire County Councils Occupational Therapist Services on 0300 123 4042. If a tenant requires additional support with accessing HCC Occupational Therapist services, we will assist where possible.
- 6.3 Minor adaptations (typically under £500) are easily installed and do not affect the future use of the property e.g. shower seats, lever taps, grab rails, half step and mop stick handrails.
- 6.4 Minor adaptation will be raised as a routine repair job (i.e. up to 25 working days) as long as they do not exceed £500 per property.
- 6.5 The likely timeframe for completing minor adaptations may be less depending on critical need or if there are immediate risks to the health and safety of the occupants of the property.



- 6.6 All minor adaptations requests that cost between £500 and £1,000 will be assessed by the council's Adaptations Team, within 10 working days, to assess whether a major adaptation would be more suitable.
- 6.7 The council reserves the right to seek an Occupational Therapist's report on aids and adaptations requests below £1,000 in value on a discretionary basis, to ensure the proposed works meet the customer's individual needs in the most effective way.
- 6.8 If an assessment is required, once agreed, the council aims to ensure all minor adaptations are completed within 25 working days from the date the works are agreed and the order raised.
- 6.9 Minor adaptations do not include non-fixed equipment to assist with a disability or mobility problem that are normally supplied by Hertfordshire County Council Equipment Services.
- 6.10 During an assessment carried out by WHBC the surveyor is able to offer additional advice/guidance around other matters. This includes offering advice on insulation, energy efficiency, improvement and disrepair issues. They are also able to direct the resident to departments within the council who offer support on benefits and other housing-related issues. If the resident requires support accessing these departments, the surveyor can help with this.

## **7. Major Adaptations**

- 7.1 Major adaptations (typically over £1,000) are adaptations that meet needs identified through an Occupational Therapist referral e.g. stair lift, over bath shower, level access shower, electric opening doors, ramps and hoists.
- 7.2 Approvals for major adaptations will only be made on receipt of an Occupational Therapist's assessment and clear recommendation that the work is necessary to sustain independent living, addressing basic medical needs only (with critical needs assessments receiving the greatest priority).
- 7.3 When assessing a request for an adaptation, the council will consider individual, technical and other relevant factors to ensure a balanced decision that makes best use of the available financial resources.
- 7.4 Wherever possible and suitable for a customer's circumstances, the council will endeavour to speed up approved requests for major adaptations through allocations or management moves agreed via Exceptional Circumstances Panel to an alternative suitable property that meet the required needs. This will include consideration of the suitability of the property, such as floor level and under occupation. For example, if a single-person requires an adaptation,



but is occupying a larger family home, a transfer to a more suitable property is likely to be more appropriate.

- 7.5 The council will only consider approving major adaptations in non-adapted properties when moving or allocating to an alternative property is not appropriate or unlikely to meet medical needs (as identified by Occupational Therapist reports) within reasonable timescales. For example, the council has been unsuccessful finding a suitable property or a void property with the adaptations already in place, or a property that can be more easily adapted than their current home.
- 7.6 The council will consider the following criteria when prioritising permissions and providing funding for major adaptations works:
- There is a completed independent Occupational Therapist referral with all relevant information to make a full assessment.
  - The work requested is to assist in meeting a long-term medical condition that is likely to continue for the near future.
  - The Occupational Therapists eligibility criteria to decide if they have priority needs (with 'critical needs' receiving priority over those with 'substantial needs').
  - Where there is more than one applicant with the same Occupational Therapist recommendation, priority will be given on date order (i.e. those that have been waiting longest).
  - Additional priority may be given where the requirement for adaptation is causing a current health and safety or fire risk.
- 7.7 The council reserves the right to refuse the request for a major adaptation on the following grounds:
- Where the adaptation is requested in a property that is due for demolition or major refurbishment within two years.
  - The property is unsuitable for the resident e.g. too large or too small for their household. In the case of under occupation, the council may on a discretionary basis waive this condition where no other suitable housing is available.
  - The property is unsuitable for adaptation.
  - Where the request is for the communal parts of buildings.
  - The adaptation is considered unreasonable and unsuitable for the tenants needs, for example installing a level access shower to a flat above ground level where there is no lift to access the flat.
  - The request is to address specialist needs other than basic needs (Example of specialist needs: self-washing or changing facilities).
  - The request affects other areas of health and safety i.e. fire safety.
  - The adaptation requested is unlikely to meet the needs of a progressive condition or on-going health needs.





- A suitable, alternative or already adapted property is offered and refused (depending on individual circumstances and subject to review by the Exceptional Circumstances Panel as outlined in 8.5, below).
  - Tenants are in persistent rent arrears, are subject to a current anti-social behaviour order or injunction action against them. The council may on a discretionary basis waive this condition in cases of critical need or where there are immediate risks to health and safety to the occupants of the property.
  - If the tenant has submitted an application under the right-to-buy (RTB) scheme. Tenant will be signposted to the Disabled Facilities Grant. The Referral will be reassessed if the RTB is withdrawn.
  - Under Schedule 5 of the Housing Act 1985 a RTB application can be refused if special facilities are provided wholly or partly for the purpose of assisting those persons with disabilities.
  - Where a tenant has transferred from another property within the last 12 months, which previously had the adaptations that are now being requested again; unless that property was confirmed to be no longer suitable for their needs by a health professional or council officer or if the tenant is downsizing to a smaller property.
  - Where the building structure is considered integrally unsuitable for technical and practical reasons, for example widening doorways in prefab buildings, wet floor showers in beam and block floors etc.
  - A suitable alternative adaptation is offered and refused by the tenant.
  - Where the tenant's needs may be met by a more reasonable solution. Particularly where the Occupational Therapist has recommended an extension or major works the tenants needs will be assessed and consideration given to applying alternative solutions, for example utilising a ground floor dining room as a bedroom, instead of building an extension, a smaller extension or rehousing.
  - Where the works would result in under occupancy.
- 7.8 Where a major adaptation is accepted, the council aims to ensure all major adaptations are completed within 6 months from the date they are requested. Adaptations where a move to a more suitable property has been identified are deemed 'complex'.
- 7.9 Where adaptation works include a new kitchen or bathroom/wetroom, the council will follow the councils approved kitchen and bathroom specifications including offering tenants a range of choice on colours etc where applicable.
- 7.10 The council may consider non-permanent adaptations if it is expected to take over 6 months to find a suitable alternative property.
- 7.11 The council will inspect all major adaptations on completion to ensure the work has been undertaken professionally and to check that the resident is satisfied with the work.



## 8. Complex Adaptations

- 8.1 Complex adaptations require work that is more extensive e.g. major remodelling, widening of doors, off road parking and extensions, and are often designed for the specific need of the individual. These works are of high cost and affect the future use of the property.
- 8.2 These adaptations are to be carried out within the original footprint of the property. Only in exceptional circumstances and where alternative suitable properties are not available will any works outside of the footprint including extensions will be considered.
- 8.2 Upon receipt of the Occupational Therapists report, where required a feasibility assessment will be carried out in consultation with the Occupational Therapist, along with a member of the council's Adaptations Team, Neighbourhood and Enforcement Team and Housing Allocations Team to assess whether the recommendations are reasonable and practicable 'in their nature. For new referrals this will include a visit to the property. Where the referral is similar in nature to previous referrals and the property layout is well known or a visit has taken place within the last 12 months then a desktop assessment will suffice. Where works are considered to beyond reasonable and practicable, the council reserves the right refuse to undertake these works or to offer alternative solutions including re-housing.
- 8.3 The feasibility assessment will seek to establish:
- If the works can be carried out within the footprint of the property.
  - If the recommendations are reasonable and practicable or are there more suitable alternatives that can be offered.
  - If there is a possibility for the tenant to be moved to more suitable accommodation.
  - Any implications of having the works done in relation to under occupancy and council tax rates.
  - The implications of the adaptation work when the property becomes available to re-let, in particular the impact on future allocations and under occupancy issues. The feasibility report will highlight these issues once confirmed.
  - If the adaptation works are suitable for the disabled tenant. Occupational Therapist confirmation that the proposal meets the needs of the tenant.
  - The feasibility of the adaptation in relation to the layout and structure of the property.



- The proposed works meet all planning, estate management and building regulation requirements. (This will not always be fully known until an application is put in).
  - Whether the estimated cost of the adaptation work is reasonable or likely to exceed the council's maximum budget provision.
- 8.4 Where it has been identified that a move to a more suitable property is both reasonable and practicable, the council reserves the right to refuse approval for the adaptations requested for the original home.
- 8.5 The council further reserves the right to refuse the request for a complex adaptation on the same grounds mentioned above in relation to Major Adaptations (point 7.7 above).
- 8.6 In situations where a suitable alternative or already adapted property is offered and refused, approval of the complex adaptation will be subject to review by the Exceptional Circumstances Panel attended by senior council representatives. Alternatively, if the person is on the Housing Needs Register, it might be appropriate to refer the case to the Exceptional Circumstances Panel for consideration of a review of their priority banding on the housing needs register or for consideration of a direct let to a suitable property if available.
- 8.7 The council may seek advice from an independent Occupational Therapist to assist with requests for complex (and sometimes major) adaptations. This individual will be registered with a professional body e.g. the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), or similar alternative.
- 8.8 We aim to ensure all complex adaptations are approved within 12 months from the date they are requested. However, due to the complexity of these adaptations, particularly involving extensive works such as extensions (requiring planning permission etc) then this timescale will be considerably longer. Due to the detailed nature of these requests, timescales to complete complex adaptations will be discussed and agreed at the time they are made. Works of this nature will not be agreed until they have also been financially approved.

## **9. Moving to a More Suitable Property**

- 9.1 For those disabled tenants downsizing, we may be able to offer help to people who need financial assistance / help and/or support with the moving process. Each case will be looked at individually and the assistance/support will be tailored to individual needs.
- 9.2 Where circumstances allow, we may also offer:



- Staff time to help tenants through the process with issues such as arranging removals, reconnection of gas and electric and other practical issues.
- Extra support via our tenancy support service for some tenants who may need it.

## 10. Legal Compliance

- 10.1 The Council will make a positive difference to our communities and to the people we employ, provide services to and do business with and aims to provide services which meet the needs of customers, employees and other people and groups, including people with protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- 10.2 The council will comply with the relevant legislation in regard to the provision of aids and adaptations services. The main provisions of the legislation are set out below:
- Providing auxiliary aids and services.
  - Changing provisions, criteria or practices (e.g. allowing a disabled person who uses an assistance dog to take a property that might otherwise have stipulated 'no dogs').
- 10.3 Despite having no legal requirement under the Equalities Act 2010 to alter any physical features of our properties, the council is committed to promoting choice for independent living for its existing residents and applicants who have a disability or require an aid or adaptation.
- 10.4 The council will ensure that no person nor group of persons will be treated less favourably than another person or group of persons and will carry out our duty with positive regard for the following core strands of equality.
- 10.5 The council will also ensure that all services and actions are delivered within the context of current Human Rights legislation. Staff and others with whom we work, will adhere to the central principles of the Human Rights Act (1998).

## 11. Financial Considerations

- 11.1 The council will set an annual budget identified within the annual Business Plan, which will be used as efficiently as possible to provide a fair and accessible service to all existing tenants, whilst demonstrating value for money.
- 11.2 In the event that the demand for assistance exceeds the annual budget allocation, a waiting list will be operated subject to priority need which can be rolled forward into the next financial year.



- 11.4 The council may request that multiple adaptation requests to a single property are separated into highest need to manage funding by allocating priority to certain adaptations.
- 11.5 For all adaptations, the council's Contract Procedure Rules must be followed to ensure that stewardship and probity are maintained within the Council and that Approved Officers obtain Best Value services and Value for Money from purchasing arrangements.
- 11.6 Occupational Therapists requesting adaptations for private tenants should be directed to the Council's Private Sector Housing Team who facilitate all adaptation referrals for owner occupiers, housing association and private landlord tenants.
- 11.7 The council will recoup costs for any adaptations works over £5,000 should the tenant move from their adapted home or complete a RTB application within five years of receiving the adaptation. This amount will reduce by 20% per annum over the five-year period.
- 11.8 Under very exceptional circumstances or where the council instigates a move, the council may consider waiving some or all of this charge.

## **12. Use of Adapted Property**

- 12.1 It is expected that once major adaptations have been completed the tenant continues to live in the property unless circumstances do not allow for this (such as a worsening medical condition).
- 12.2 Where substantial works have been carried out to the property and the person requiring the adaptations dies or is unable to remain at the property and moves elsewhere, the remaining members of the household may be asked to move to alternative accommodation in line with the allocations policy.
- 12.3 If a customer applies for re-housing or a mutual exchange, unless their circumstances have changed, they will normally be classed as adequately housed and therefore will not qualify to join the housing needs register.

## **13. Letting Adapted Properties**

- 13.1 Where a property with major adaptations becomes vacant, we will generally advertise the property through the choice based letting scheme with a view to finding an applicant who needs the adaptations.
- 13.2 If a property has specific or extensive adaptations, we will advertise the property with priority for those with an identified need for the adaptations. There may be occasions where a decision may be made not to advertise the



property but to make a direct offer to an applicant or existing tenant who has a need for the adaptations. This would be agreed via Exceptional Circumstances Panel.

## **14. Prioritising and timescales for adaptations**

- 14.1 Occupational Therapist reports are normally processed in chronological order. However, we recognise that on occasions we will receive a request to fast track the adaptations for exceptional reasons. Where possible and appropriate we will fast track the works requested.
- 14.2 Minor adaptations have a target deadline of 25 working days (unless part of a major adaptations request, where they may be completed at the same time).
- 14.3 Major adaptations have a target deadline of 6 months from receipt of the Occupational Therapist Report, although we aim to complete 80% of major adaptations within 3 months.
- 14.4 Complex adaptations where work that is more extensive e.g. major remodelling, widening of doors, off road parking and extensions, we aim to have these works approved within 12 months from the date they are requested. However, due to the complexity of these adaptations, particularly involving extensive works such as extensions (requiring planning permission etc) then this timescale will be considerably longer. Due the detailed nature of these requests, timescales to complete complex adaptations will be discussed and agreed at the time they are made. Works of this nature will not be agreed until they have also been financially approved.

## **15. Implementation**

- 15.1 Staff have a responsibility to be aware of the Aids and Adaptations Policy and to signpost any customer queries that may arise.
- 15.2 Decisions related to extensive alteration (on the recommendations of Occupational Therapists reports and subject to budget / resource availability) must be approved by the Asset Manager and where necessary, a member of the operational housing team.

## **16. Performance**

- 16.1 Service standards and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are monitored at monthly contract monitoring meetings, held between the Building Surveyor responsible for day-to-day operations, the contractor responsible for the works and other members of the Asset Management Team.



16.2 The Assistant Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods has overall operational responsibility for the aids and adaptations service.

16.3 Every tenant that receives an adaptation will be asked to complete a customer satisfaction survey. The results of the survey will be used to measure the satisfaction of the tenant in relation to the way the works were managed, and these are also used as part of monitoring the contractors performance.

## **17. Appeals and Complaints**

17.1 Any person who is not satisfied with the way the council or its contractor(s) has dealt with the service they have received regarding the aids and adaptations service, has the right to have their case investigated via the council's complaint procedure.

17.2 Any person who has had their request for aids and adaptations refused may request that the decision be reviewed by using the council's complaints procedure.

17.3 The Housing Ombudsman Service can assist with complaints where a resident may be able to engage with the Ombudsman's dispute support advisors. The Housing Ombudsman Service can be contacted by phone on 0300 111 3000, email [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk) or online at [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk).

## **18. Responsibility**

18.1 The Assistant Director for Homes and Neighbourhood is responsible for this policy. This includes its implementation and review, ensuring that all related procedural and guidance notes are timely and accurate. Each Assistant Director/Director will be responsible for ensuring that teams adhere to this policy, our customer service standards and for driving performance improvement where that is required.

## **19. Impact Assessment**

19.1 An impact assessment on our Adaptations Policy has been conducted during the consultation process.

## **20. Review**

20.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years, with interim revisions to be made on an exceptional basis considering any legislative or regulatory changes, or in line with best practice.





## 21. Getting in touch with us

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council  
Council Offices  
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Our opening hours are: 8.45am to 5.15pm Monday to Thursday, 8.45am to 4.45pm Friday



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