

TITLE OF REPORT: Gateshead Home Adaptations Policy 2020

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Purpose of the Report

1. To ask Cabinet to agree the revised Gateshead Home Adaptations Policy which covers how adaptations support for housing provided to disabled residents, in order to ensure fair, equitable and consistent treatment for all disabled people who require the Council's assistance in adapting their home.

Background

2. The Government has made a commitment to provide capital funding to help local authorities enable those who are disabled, including elderly and vulnerable people to live independently in their own home. At the national level £505M has been allocated for this purpose, Gateshead Council will receive £1,860,611 of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) in 2020/21.
3. In 2008, the government relaxed the ring-fence on use of DFG monies so that by employing the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) (2002), DFG monies could be used for purposes outside the prescribed works contained with the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The only stipulation was that in order to use the RRO, a local authority must comply with the following conditions:
 - There must be a formally adopted policy in place, which sets out how the authority intends to use its powers.
 - There must be notice to the public that a policy is in force.
 - They must ensure that a copy of the full policy is available to the public for free at the council offices.
 - There must be a summary document available on request (though a small charge to cover costs may be allowed).
4. These powers were not used extensively as most authorities had limited DFG monies and demand was usually greater than supply. Consequently, many authorities did not amend their housing policies to make use of these freedoms.
5. However, in 2015/16 the DFG was placed within the Better Care Fund (BCF) and the central government DFG funding started to rise substantially, encouraging authorities to be more innovative in their use of their DFG funds.

6. The BCF planning guidance for 2017-19, sections 30-34, explicitly encourages local authorities to make use of these powers and innovate beyond the statutory norm.
7. Local authorities are mandated to lay out their RRO policies, with regard to Private Sector Housing, in a public facing document. In Gateshead that document is the revised Gateshead Home Adaptations Policy 2020.

Changes to the Policy

8. A number of changes to the existing Council DFG policy have been included in the new policy. These are:
 - a) The removal of means tested contributions from clients for all applications relating to stair lifts.
 - b) The provision of discretionary assistance as a part of a DFG application on the terms and conditions highlighted within this report.
 - c) The provision of assistance to help with relocation costs for disabled households where their current homes are impractical to adapt.
9. A copy of the revised policy is attached at **Appendix 2**.

Proposal

10. Agreement is sought for the revised Gateshead Adaptations Policy 2020, prior to approval by Council

Recommendations

11. Cabinet is asked to endorse the proposed Gateshead Home Adaptations Policy 2020 and recommend it to Council for adoption as part of the Council's policy framework.

Cabinet is asked to approve a number of changes to the existing Council DFG policy.

- i. The removal of means tested contributions from clients for all applications relating to stair lifts.
- ii. The provision of discretionary assistance as a part of a DFG application on the terms and conditions highlighted within this report.
- iii. The provision of assistance to help relocation costs for disabled households where current homes are impractical to adapt.

For the following reasons:

- The provision of both statutory and non-statutory assistance to enable the elderly, the disabled or other vulnerable groups to live independently and to improve their living conditions is a fundamental responsibility and underpins the Thrive agenda.

- Providing support and assistance in a timely and appropriate manner is essential to ensure that individuals remain safe within their own homes and reduce potential further risk of falls and injury.

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APPENDIX 1

Policy Context

1. The Gateshead Home Adaptations Policy 2020 supports the Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives approach, and sets out how the Council, will deliver home adaptations which will support health and positive housing solutions.

Background

2. Research has shown that there is a direct link between poor quality housing and poor health. Dampness, lack of good heating, disrepair, poor ventilation and other health and safety issues can cause or contribute to poor health outcomes.
3. The Care Act 2014 embeds the concept of suitable living accommodation within the guiding principles of the entire care and support system envisaged by the Act. In addition to housing being a part of the legal definition for wellbeing, independent living is confirmed as “a core part of the wellbeing principle”. The Council therefore need to be proactive in improving the ability of vulnerable and elderly people to maintain independent living whether they are disabled or not.
4. Government acknowledges the importance housing can make in delivering preventative measures and the long-term cost savings that can result from it. The longer elderly and vulnerable people can be kept out of the health and social care system the better it is, in the long term for that individual and for other parts of the Social Care service.
5. The purpose of the revised Gateshead Home Adaptations Policy is to continue with the mandatory and discretionary types of assistance available to disabled people. It also includes, proposals which allow the Council to exercise its discretion in extending the forms of assistance provided to include the elderly and the vulnerable in the borough in such a way to enable the Council to deal with immediate health and safety issues, to prevent where possible admissions to hospital and to improve the housing stock thereby allowing those people to remain in their homes for longer and to lead more independent lives.
6. Any and all assistance provided under this Policy, except for Mandatory DFG is at the discretion of the Council and would be subject to available resources.
7. A range of changes are proposed to the Councils current DFG policy. These changes are intended to both speed up process by reducing administration relating to ‘means tests and to broaden the scope of works undertaken.

Changes to Means testing of stair lifts

8. The current legislation allows for circumstances where it is assumed that income does not exceed the applicable amount, and in these cases a test of resources is not carried out. This includes applications on behalf of a child with disabilities and where a disabled person receives one of the “passporting” benefits, these include:
 - Income Support
 - Income-based Employment and Support Allowance (not contribution based ESA)
 - Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (not contribution-based JSA)
 - Guarantee Pension Credit (not Savings Pension Credit alone)
 - Housing Benefit
 - Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit provided that the annual income for the purposes of assessing entitlement to the tax credit is less than £15,050
 - Universal Credit (this includes any amount of Universal Credit which is being introduced from 2013 onwards as a replacement for working age benefits and tax credits).
9. It is unlikely that means testing will end. A recent DFG review (November 2018) suggested that the means test assessment for the DFG become a part of the Care and Support Charging Regulations as a part of the Social Care Green Paper, or alternatively that they are updated.
10. The review does however suggest that stair lifts are removed from means testing where the authority has set up an effective stair lift refurbishment or recycling scheme, which Gateshead already has under its current contracting arrangements.
11. The evidence to support this approach lies in the fact that where there is information about fall location collected, it shows that the most serious injuries are caused by falls from stairs or steps. Looking into the return on investment of home adaptations, the Building Research Establishment (BRE) found that mitigation of hazards on stairs has the best potential payback period of all quoting an overall payback of 0.61 years. Taking into account the cost of a stair lift (rather than lower cost handrails), the payback period would still be under two years.
12. On average there are 130 approved DFG stair lift applications in Gateshead each year. The ‘means testing’ for stair lifts is undertaken by Home Improvement Officers and it takes on average 371 hours each year. The amount of funding annually recouped through means testing stair lifts is only £17,840.85 per annum
13. If means testing for stair lifts was ended, in-line with national recommendations the Home Improvement Officers time could be redirected to pick up the technical case management work that is currently with the social care Occupational Therapists (OT) and OT Assistant (OTA) team.

14. The use of the Home Improvement Officer time to support adaptations management, to chase up contractors and delivery dates is a more cost effective use of staff time and skills. OT / OTA capacity can then be focussed on their core role of assessment and holistic reablement with individuals.
15. Other local authorities have already adopted this approach. In the North East region 6 local authorities do not means test for stair lifts. They are not reporting increased demand and indications are that the recycling and reuse of stair lifts is cost effective.

Re-housing to more suitable accommodation

16. Where required adaptations involve substantial structural alterations or extensions to a property or where the cost of work needed exceeds £30,000, then existing policy allows the Council to consider re-housing to address the needs of the household.
17. A further amendment to the policy is recommended to help facilitate a move to appropriate alternative accommodation. It is recommended that the Council provides relocation assistance to cover the 'moving costs' associated with such a move.
18. Eligible 'moving costs' could include removal expenses and the connection or disconnection of appliances or the payment of a bond to a landlord. Assistance is offered to cover 100% of these costs up to a maximum payment of £5,000.
19. Historically the number of households needing to move as opposed to receiving a DFG has been very low. It is anticipated that this additional incentive cost, in these very specific circumstances, is much less than the cost of extensive adaptations to often unsuitable dwellings.

Delivery

20. The delivery of DFG adaptations is monitored nationally by Foundations, who are funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Foundations is the National Body for Home Improvement Agencies and can offer advice and support to both local authorities and home improvement agencies on the efficient delivery of DFGs, and to local authority commissioners on commissioning local home improvement services.

Engagement

21. The range of options highlighted within this report have been worked up in partnership with OT service managers, housing managers, social care leads and Foundations.
22. The draft Gateshead Home Adaptations Policy has also been published for public consultation. There have been no responses received by the Grants and Homes Adaptation Manager in the Gateshead Housing Company.
23. In amending this policy officers have also had regard to;
 - *Home Adaptations for Disabled People: A detailed guide to related legislation, guidance and good practice: DCLG/Home Adaptations Consortium: 2013.*
 - *The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Other Adaptations – External Review (2018)*

Alternative Options

24. As a Housing Authority the Council has a statutory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to eligible households.

Implications of Recommended Option

25. Resources

a) **Financial Implications –**

The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that the provision of discretionary assistance shall only be provided as long as additional levels of external grant funding shall remain available.

The value of assistance to help with relocation costs is estimated to be less than £15,000 per annum. Costs associated with this payment shall be offset via savings against the cost of expensive adaptation works within existing difficult to adapt properties.

b) **Human Resources Implications –**

Work to restructure and streamline adaptations delivery is ongoing and will be within existing staff resources. If any further technical staff skills are required funding will be identified within the DFG grant allocation.

- c) **Property Implications** – The Corporate Property Officer confirms there are no property implications arising from this report.

26. **Risk Management Implication** – The risk management implications of the policy will be assessed by Strategic Director of Housing as part of the strategic risk management process.

27. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – An integrated impact assessment is attached as **Appendix 3** to identify potential significant impact, including against the protected characteristics, as identified in the Equality Act 2010.

28. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising.

29. **Health Implications** – The Gateshead Home Adaptations policy will support activity which will contribute to improving health and wellbeing outcomes for local people within Gateshead.

30. **Sustainability Implications** - There are no sustainability implications.

31. **Human Rights Implications** – The strategy positively supports the economic and social rights and conventions outlined in the Human Rights Act 1998

32. **Area and Ward Implications** - All areas and wards within the Borough are covered by the Gateshead Home Adaptations Policy.

Background Information

- Home Adaptations for Disabled People: A detailed guide to related legislation, guidance and good practice: DCLG/Home Adaptations Consortium: 2013.
- The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Other Adaptations – External Review (2018).
- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
- Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002
- Gateshead Council’s Housing Strategy 2019-2030.
- Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives