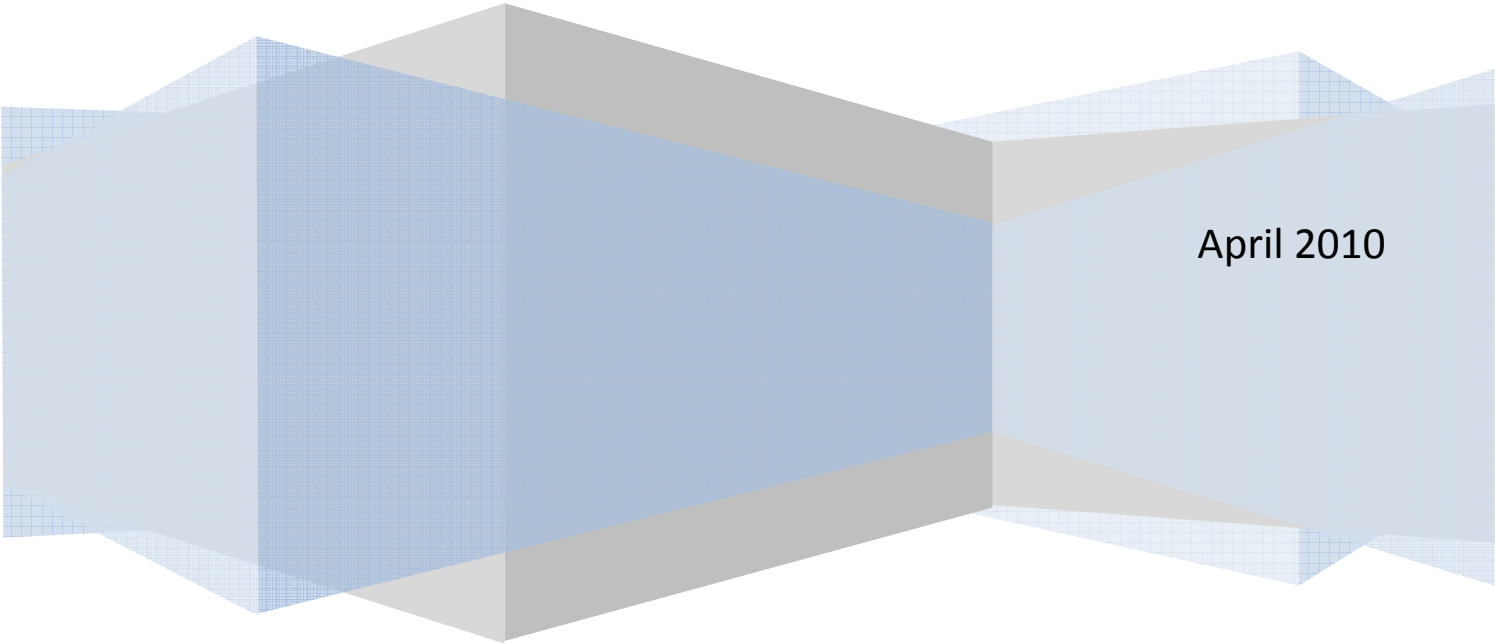


Renfrewshire Council

Adaptations Policy

Adapting Council homes to meet the needs of disabled residents



April 2010

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1. Introduction

This document sets out Renfrewshire Council's policy in relation to the adaptation of its housing stock to meet the needs of tenants (or anyone residing with a tenant as a member of their household) with a physical disability. Council policy on support for home owners and tenants of private landlords is set out in another document, known as the 'Scheme of Assistance', as required by Section 72 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006.

The provision of appropriate housing adaptations to meet the needs of disabled residents supports the Council's wider corporate aims as outlined in the current Council Plan:

- To improve the health, safety and wellbeing of our citizens and communities
- To tackle disadvantage and discrimination

This policy is also intended to meet the Scottish Housing Regulator performance standard on Adaptations (Activity Standard 2.4):

"We are responsive to the particular needs of applicants and the changing needs of existing tenants, and we adapt our properties efficiently to meet these needs. We have good records about the adapted houses we own".

Equalities

There will be no discrimination in the implementation of this policy on the grounds of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, or social or financial status.

The Council is strongly committed to equal opportunities and has made every attempt to incorporate equality measures into the policy. An equality and diversity impact assessment has been carried out, and we shall continue to review, consult on and monitor our services to ensure they are non-discriminatory.

Role of the Occupational Therapy Service

All recommendations for adaptation works will be based on the professional assessment of an Occupational Therapist (O.T.), following a visit to the property and/or an interview with the client. All decisions regarding property adaptations will be undertaken by Housing and Property Services, following consultation with the Occupational Therapy Service (part of Social Work Services).

Permanent Adaptations and Portable Aids and Equipment

This policy deals exclusively with permanent adaptations to Council properties.

Where clients require portable or temporary aids or equipment due to disability, this will be dealt with and supplied directly by Social Work Services. Examples of such aids are pieces of equipment to help the client carry out (or carer assist with) everyday activities. For example, bath lifts or shower seats.

Distinguishing between permanent adaptations and aids (portable or temporary equipment) can on occasion prove to be difficult. As a general rule, an aid would be described as something that can be removed and re-sited elsewhere once the current user has no further need for it.

In circumstances where there may be any doubt about whether an item is considered an adaptation or an aid, the Scottish Government's publication "Guidance on the provision of equipment and adaptations" will be used for clarification. (Appendix 1 gives a more detailed definition of equipment and adaptations, as set out in the Scottish Government publication).

2. Aims and Objectives

The principal aim of this policy is to enable physically disabled people to remain in their existing home, where possible, by adapting certain features within their home. However, it is recognised that this will not be possible in every instance:

- The individual's needs may be such that they are unable to sustain a mainstream tenancy, even with appropriate support.
- Their home may not be capable of adaptation to meet their needs – or the cost of adaptation works may be prohibitive. In such circumstances, we will seek to find them another property which is suitable for their needs or which can be cost-effectively adapted to meet their needs.

This policy also seeks to ensure:

- compliance with all statutory and regulatory requirements in relation to disabled adaptations;
- needs are assessed and adaptations provided in a fair, consistent and transparent manner;
- the disabled person and/or their carer(s) are involved in the decision-making process;
- all adaptation works are clearly recorded so that best use of these properties can be made as they become available for let once more; and
- best use is made of our housing stock and of the resources available for adaptation works.

3. Communication and Consultation

Information will be made available on our Adaptations Policy and how to access this service in a variety of languages and formats, and from a variety of sources – leaflets, posters, newsletters, Renfrewshire Community Website, etc.

The Council will also ensure that, before any decision is taken on any proposed adaptation works – or alternative proposal - the tenant(s), the disabled person (if he/she is not the tenant) and any identified carer(s) are consulted, and their views taken into account. In most cases, these discussions will be between the Occupational Therapist and their client. However, Housing and Property Services will also:

- notify the tenant of the decision of the Adaptations Panel (see section 6), which will have been made taking into account the Occupational Therapists recommendation.
- advise the tenant as to the extent of the work to be undertaken through use of sketches, diagrams and/or photographs of similar adaptation.
- advise tenants of the timescale of the work and update them if this changes.
- notify the tenant which contractors have been instructed to do the work.
- arrange suitable appointments for the contractor to gain entry.
- ensure contractors liaise with the tenant and keep them informed of work/progress.

In order to gain an understanding of the tenant's perception of their journey through the adaptations process, we shall develop arrangements to measure the satisfaction of the client with the service they have received.

Adjustments to common parts of buildings

Where a tenant is requesting a disabled adaptation to a common area of the property (such as a hallway, stairs or a common pathway), the Council will liaise with any owner occupiers within the property to ensure their involvement in the process, and to endeavour to secure their agreement for the adaptation¹.

¹ The current Equalities Bill, when passed into law, will make it easier for disabled people who live in homes with common areas, like hallways and stairs, to be able to use these areas. The Bill (clause 37(1)) gives Scottish Ministers power to make regulations that will enable a person to make alterations or additions to the common parts of buildings where the alterations or additions are likely to avoid a substantial disadvantage in the use of the common parts for a disabled person. The powers provide, in particular, for the regulations to require that owners of the common parts do not refuse consent unreasonably, and where this happens, for the sheriff to be able to make an order authorising works.

4. Funding

All adaptations to housing owned and managed by Renfrewshire Council will be funded from the Housing Revenue Account.

An annual review of spend on adaptation works - including costs, types of adaptation and trends - will be undertaken, to ensure the adaptation policy and the associated funding remains effective and appropriate.

The funding will be agreed on an annual basis, and the funding available will be based on the following information:

- Demand in the previous year(s)
- Trends in expressed need (provided by the Occupational Therapy Service).
- Possible changes in Council policy and/or working arrangements.
- Information available from benchmarking exercises
- External influences, such as changes in government policy.
- The resources available in the Housing Revenue Account, taking into consideration all priorities.

Consideration will be given to what is 'reasonable and practical' (see section 8 of this policy) in reaching any decision on an individual adaptation.

Once the funding is agreed, it will be regularly monitored by the Adaptation Panel and the Panel will report regularly to the Senior Management Team.

Asset Management and Capital Works

Renfrewshire Council's Housing Asset Management strategy seeks to ensure effective planning for the use of current housing stock and an adequate provision of appropriate stock to meet housing need in the future. A comprehensive database detailing property components including adapted features and properties suitable for adaptation is currently being compiled and nearing completion.

During capital works programmes (including the current Scottish Quality Housing Standard investment programme), properties identified for improvement work will be checked to see if the current tenant requires an adapted solution. Where works are identified in a property we will ensure the improvement works are carried out to reflect the particular needs of the tenant.

This will be achieved through joint working between Housing & Property Services, including the Housing Investment team, the Occupational Therapy Service and the appropriate contractor. At all stages of any works, procedures will be agreed to best meet the needs of individual tenants.

All works carried out will be in line with Renfrewshire Council's Housing Asset Management Strategy.

5. Identifying and Assessing Needs

If a tenant or someone in their household is older, disabled, or less able to manage personal and domestic tasks, or if their carer's own health is at risk from assisting that person, then a property adaptation may be of benefit.

Tenants of any age can apply for an adaptation for themselves or members of their household, but there must be a proven need.

Although referrals may initially come from a variety of different sources, an assessment must be carried out by one of the Council's Occupational Therapists.

To arrange this, the tenant, or a concerned person, with the consent of the tenant, should contact the Occupational Therapy Service.

The Occupational Therapist will carry out a home visit to discuss how the disabled person manages their daily activities (such as dressing, washing, cooking, etc). The Occupational Therapist may need to visit more than once to complete the assessment process.

Where necessary, the assessment will also look at the needs of other family members living in the property, including anyone involved in providing care or assistance to a disabled person.

The Occupational Therapist will then discuss the available options, which may include:

- Providing information, training and support to help with daily activities.
- Providing training and support for carers to assist with practical tasks (such as helping the client get in and out of bed or how to use specialist equipment).
- Providing equipment to help the client carry out (or carer assist with) everyday activities. This would be dealt with by Social Work as an aid, not an adaptation.
- Recommending the fitting of property adaptations to better meet the needs of the client.
- Recommending a move to another property better suited to the needs of the client, or more suitable for adaptation to meet those needs. If this is the case, Housing and Property Services will work with the client to explore the available options.

6. Agreeing and Prioritising Adaptation Works

To facilitate joint working and co-operation between the Council services involved, an 'Adaptation Panel' will meet on a regular basis. This Panel will consist of representatives from:

- Housing Services;
- Building Services, or the appropriate contractor; and
- Social Work (Occupational Therapy Service).

At this meeting, all adaptation works (other than minor adaptations – see below) will be agreed and prioritised. These decisions will be based on:

- Urgency of need
- Date of assessment
- Funding availability

The Adaptation Panel will;

- Examine costs to ensure spend is within budget
- Prioritise and programme adaptations based on the available funding and other resources
- Identify cases where adaptations may not be the most appropriate solution
- Review any delays in works being undertaken

The Panel members will have a collective responsibility for monitoring spending and also for monitoring that the adaptation policy is being followed correctly. The Panel will be expected to review and recommend amendments to the way in which the service is delivered as is deemed necessary.

Where the Occupational Therapist's assessment indicates that high cost adaptation works are required, we may commission an option appraisal and assess what alternative housing options are available to the tenant.

Minor adaptations

A limited number of minor adaptations will be processed out with the regular Panel meetings described above. These are adaptations which cost less than a certain value and are made up of small items like handrails and lever taps. The price limit for adaptations to be considered 'minor adaptations' will be set by the Adaptations Panel, and reviewed by them on a regular basis.

Once the Occupational Therapist has assessed the need for such minor adaptations, they shall contact Building Services or the appropriate contractor directly and instructed them to proceed.

7. Making Best Use of Adapted Homes

Adaptation works represent a significant investment by the Council on behalf of disabled residents. To ensure Best Value, we will seek to ensure that, when they become available for let at some future date, properties which have received such investment are 'recycled' to individuals or families with appropriate needs, wherever possible.

All major adaptations to properties will be recorded on Housing and Property Services' stock condition database and housing management system. Whenever practical, this information will be used in selecting new tenants.

Where an empty property has been 'substantially adapted' to meet the needs of a person with certain disabilities, we will try to match this property to an applicant household with similar needs.

A property will be considered 'substantially adapted', where it has one or more of the following adaptations;

- Doorways widened to allow a wheelchair to fit through
- Internal vertical lift
- Ramp (inside or outside, or both)
- 'Wet floor' or level access shower
- Changed heights and position of kitchen units

The responsibility for the updating and accuracy of these records of adapted properties will lie with Building Services, who shall ensure the database is updated whenever such adaptations are carried out to Council housing stock.

8. Right to Buy

Disabled adaptations will not be carried out on properties that are in the process of being purchased as the fixtures and fittings installed as part of the works would stop being the property of Renfrewshire Council.

Historically, through the right to buy legislation, a number of properties which have been adapted, or are suitable for adaptation within Renfrewshire Council's housing stock have been sold.

To help to maintain the level of adapted properties available for future tenants, where a property has been 'substantially adapted', as defined in section 7 above, we will seek permission to refuse any application to purchase.

9. Alternatives to 'Adaptation'

It will not always be reasonable or practical to provide property adaptations. In some circumstances, rehousing may be a more appropriate option. This could be because of the particular needs of the individual and/or the constraints on providing adaptations in some properties.

For example, it may not be practical to carry out adaptations;

- Where the property will not meet the long-term needs of the disabled person.
- Where the architectural and/or structural characteristics of the building may render certain types of adaptation inappropriate or inordinately expensive - e.g. carrying out adaptations to properties with narrow doors and stairways and passages which make wheelchair use in and around the dwelling difficult.
- Where the costs of adapting the property would be prohibitive.
- Where there are competing needs of different members of the family which cannot be met in that particular home.
- Where access ramps that will significantly adversely affect the amenity of the area for other residents.
- Where works would require planning permission or building regulation approval which has not been or would not be granted.
- Where the Council is actively trying to recover a tenancy – e.g. for rent arrears or antisocial behaviour.
- Where the tenant is actively seeking rehousing.
- Where the client is receiving 'end of life' care (Social Work will provide aids, as appropriate in such cases).

In terms of specific adaptation works, only in very exceptional circumstances, will the following be considered:

- Any adaptation which would involve the fitting of an additional pumped waste.
- Installation of a wet floor / level access shower in an upstairs bathroom, or in any property which cannot be ramped or is unsuitable for wheelchair use.
- Fitting of a ramped access which contains more than one turning point.
- Undertaking works to partially meet the needs of a wheelchair user, where the property cannot reasonably be adapted to meet their full needs.

Where it is decided that carrying out adaptations would not be reasonable or practical, Housing and Property Services will endeavour to help the tenant explore and access alternative housing options.

10. Removal of Adaptations

Works undertaken to adapt properties to meet the needs of disabled people represent an investment by the Council – not only in meeting the needs of existing residents, but also those of others who could be allocated that property at some future date.

If a property becomes empty, and it has been ‘substantially adapted’ to meet the needs of a person with certain disabilities, we will try to match this property to an applicant household from Mobility Group 2, with similar needs. (We define what we mean by ‘substantially adapted’ in section 7 of this policy)

If we cannot find a suitable applicant for the adapted property from Mobility Group 2 within a reasonable timescale, we will follow the normal route of offering a property, as outlined in our Allocations Policy.

If this occurs, the Council would only in very exceptional circumstances, remove any adaptation simply because an incoming tenant no longer wishes that facility.

At the request of an incoming tenant, the Council – subject to budget availability - may remove modular or stand-alone items installed to meet the needs of a previous tenant, such as ramps and grab rails. These will be retained with a view to re-fitting them in other properties, as the needs arise.

Generally, the Council will not:

- lower electrical sockets which have been raised;
- replace low-level or other specialist kitchen units;
- remove wet room showers or walk-in/step-in shower cubicles and replace them with baths; or
- remove or replace any other adaptation works (other than the stand-alone or modular items referred to above).

However, the incoming tenant may apply to the Council for permission to remove or replace these items or works at their own expense with each case being considered on its own merits. Such permission will be granted only where it could be deemed ‘unreasonable’ for the Council to refuse.

11. Appeals against an O.T. assessment

Clients have the right to appeal if they are unhappy with the result of an Occupational Therapist’s assessment. All such appeals will be forwarded to Social Work, and dealt with under their appropriate appeals procedure.

If there are any other complaints in relation to the adaptations service these will be dealt with in line with the Renfrewshire Council’s Corporate Complaints procedure.

Appendix 1 - What we mean by equipment and adaptations

Equipment and adaptation services support the health, housing, social care and educational needs of a broad range of people, and can help reduce risk to, and support independence and control. They assist those with physical or learning disabilities of all ages; people with mental health problems, and individuals who require support with communication, including Alternative and Augmented Communication (AAC) users. Many older people do not see themselves as disabled but may be frail or have difficulty with everyday tasks and could also benefit from these services.

Equipment

Equipment can be defined as any item or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified or customised that is used to increase the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Community equipment can include, but is not limited to:

- Home nursing equipment such as pressure relief mattresses and commodes.
- Equipment for daily living such as shower chairs and stools, bath lifts, raised toilet seats, teapot tippers and liquid level indicators.
- Telecare products such as flood detectors, falls monitors, smoke detectors and movement sensors. These are often linked to a call centre and trigger a response when activated
- Children's equipment.
- Ancillary equipment for people with sensory impairments, such as flashing doorbells, low-vision optical aids, text-phones and assistive listening devices.
- Wheelchairs.
- Environmental control equipment
- Communication aids (including AAC) – to assist people who have difficulty with speech. Equipment includes aids to writing and reading as well as speech.
- It does not include any medical devices or anything that is invasive to the body (e.g. PEG feeding equipment).

Adaptation

The purpose of an adaptation is to modify a disabling environment in order to restore or enable independent living, privacy, confidence and dignity for individuals and their families. Adaptations can also improve confidence, skills and mobility and reduce symptoms. They can form part of a range of options available to people experiencing a disabling environment.

This could include, but is not limited to:

- Adaptations to a bathroom, e.g. replacing a bath with a walk in shower;
- Installation of a through floor lift;
- Construction of an external ramp, and widening of a door frame to allow disabled access, or
- Fitting lower work surfaces in the kitchen.