

# Powys County Council Housing Services

## Council Housing Adaptations Policy

May 2017

Cymunedau cryf yng nghalon werdd Cymru  
Strong communities in the green heart of Wales



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## Policy background and coverage

- a. The Council's Housing Service (the Council) aims to help long-term sick, frail and disabled tenants to remain in their homes and carry out essential daily activities.
- b. The Council will assess the need for installing adaptations in Council homes for tenants and their household.
- c. Where it is not possible or practical to carry out adaptation works, the Council will assist tenants in finding suitable alternative accommodation.
- d. The Council will ensure that it manages the adaptations process in accordance with best practice and relevant policy, legislation and Council Housing service standards.
- e. The Council will ensure that, where it has discretion, this is exercised in a reasonable, fair and equitable manner.

# **1 Allocating homes**

## **1.1 Objective**

The Council ensures adequate processes are in place to allocate and improve Council homes to meet the needs of residents, with regards to their specific needs.

## **1.2 Housing allocation**

- a. The Council keeps a register of Council accommodation designated for older or disabled people.
- b. The Council maintains a Common Housing Register jointly with participating housing associations. Households that need or would like to move are accepted on the register.
- c. Household applicants that state they have specific housing needs, as a result of a medical condition or impairment, are professionally assessed by a Housing Management & Options Officer and where necessary by an Occupational Therapist.
- d. The Council ensures that designated accommodation is allocated to households that meet the qualifying criteria in accordance with the joint allocations policy.

## **1.3 New build or acquiring property**

Where necessary the Council will consider utilising the Social Housing Grant programme or any other funding available to meet need through new build or by acquiring a suitable existing property.

## **2 Adapting and improving accommodation**

### **2.1 Objective**

The Council aims to make its housing stock more accessible and usable to current and future tenants, both through adaptations to meet individual needs and improving all properties.

### **2.2 Adaptations to meet individual needs**

- a. The Council will professionally assess the needs of tenants and their household to understand clearly what the need is and how the Council can assist meeting that need.
- b. The Council will consult with tenants or any carer working on their behalf, throughout the process from assessment to completion.
- c. The assessment will include a home visit by a Trusted Assessor or Occupational Therapist where appropriate.
- d. Any recommended adaptations must be necessary, appropriate, reasonable and practicable to meet the household's needs and must be cost effective for the Council.
- e. The assessment will take into account:
  - I. existing adaptations in the home
  - II. the type of accommodation occupied
  - III. the adaptability of the home
  - IV. the availability of the tenant's existing support network and carers
  - V. cost effectiveness of adaptations
  - VI. availability of alternative more suitable accommodation
- f. Adaptations, other than minor adaptations, will not be undertaken where the person requiring adaptations is on the Common Housing Register or intending to move from the property.

### **2.3 Welsh Housing Quality Standard**

- a. The Council aims to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2018 to ensure that dwellings are of good quality and suitable for the needs of existing and future residents.
- b. The dwelling should have the necessary physical adaptations to suit the professionally assessed requirements of the tenants.
- c. The Council considers the particular requirements of individuals and/or groups. Where the existing dwelling falls short of their needs, the Council will look at possible remedies.

- d. Accessibility issues should be addressed when considering dwellings to be occupied by those with a mobility impairment. This applies mainly to bungalows and blocks of flats designated for older people.

### **3 Eligibility**

#### **3.1 Objective**

- a. The Council will ensure that an agreed process will be followed to assess needs and carry out adaptations to meet the assessed needs, where reasonable.
- b. Any request for an adaptation needs to be submitted in writing by the tenant, Occupational Therapist or Trusted Assessor, unless otherwise agreed with the Council.
- c. The Council will inform the tenant in writing of any decision taken.

#### **3.2 Requests for tenants and their household**

The Council will consider requests for adaptations from all Council tenants for themselves, as well as for permanent members of their household that occupy the home as their only or principal home at the time of the request.

#### **3.3 Requests for lodgers, sub-tenants and other non-permanent household members**

- a. Adaptations for people other than the tenant and their permanent household, will only be considered in exceptional cases. These people are not considered part of the tenant's household and only have limited rights to remain resident at that property. Any adaptations may be of limited or short-term benefit.
- b. It needs to be demonstrated that the lodger, sub-tenant or other person not a permanent member of the household, is a long term resident of the property for at least three years.
- c. It also needs to be demonstrated that there is significant hardship, for example not being able to access or egress the accommodation.
- d. Approval of standard and major adaptations can only be granted by the Service Manager Housing Solutions in conjunction with the relevant Cabinet Member.
- e. Where people move in and are added to the tenancy agreement they are regarded as permanent members of the household.

#### **3.4 Requests before signing a tenancy**

- a. The Council will ask applicants for the Common Housing Register if they have any specific needs.

- b. Where tenants indicate they have specific needs, the Council will professionally assess those needs.
- c. The Council will where possible ensure the applicant is matched with a suitable Council home.
- d. Where necessary and circumstances allow, the Council will adapt a property before the tenant moves in, to minimise disruption for the tenant.

### **3.5 Right to Buy**

- a. Requests for adaptations will not normally be approved where terms for the sale and purchase of a council property has been agreed under the Right to Buy and completion of the sale is imminent.
- b. If a major adaptation is required during the course of a Right to Buy application it is important that any work undertaken is included in the valuation under Right to Buy wherever possible.
- c. Where a valuation has already been agreed and adaptations are subsequently required the Council will decide on a case by case basis how to proceed and where necessary take legal advice.
- d. The Council will decide whether the adaptation should proceed, and if so followed by a new valuation or whether the existing valuation should be honoured.



## **4 Assessment**

### **4.1 Objective**

The Council ensures there is a transparent process in place to assess the need from tenants to carry out adaptation works. Housing staff and occupational therapists undertaking assessments will take current legislation and guidance into account.

### **4.2 Levels of adaptations**

The Council differentiates between three levels of adaptations:

- I. minor adaptations
- II. standard adaptations
- III. major adaptations

### **4.3 Minor adaptations**

- a. Minor adaptations are adaptations with an estimated value up to £500 in any of the Council's homes.
- b. Examples of minor adaptations that are available:
  - I. grab rails
  - II. lever taps
  - III. additional stair rails
  - IV. smoke alarms for people with a hearing impairment
  - V. replacing recessed or knob style handles to kitchen units doors and drawers
  - VI. relocating sockets and/or switches
  - VII. additional sockets for appliances required for functional/medical equipment needs
  - VIII. half steps to improve the accessibility of steep or high steps and thresholds
- c. A tenant should contact their Housing Management & Options Officer or Housing Surveyor to discuss a request for minor adaptations.
- d. Any member of the Housing Service that is qualified as a Trusted Assessor can decide on carrying out minor adaptations or ask an Occupational Therapist to assess the tenant's needs if necessary.
- e. The Council will agree with the tenant, and where necessary Occupational Therapist on the installation of minor adaptations.

### **4.4 Standard adaptations**

- a. Standard adaptations are certain adaptations with an estimated value over £500 in homes designated for older people or disabled people.

- b. Standard alterations available are:
  - I. replacing baths with level access showers
  - II. ramps
  - III. widening doors
  - IV. door intercom
  - V. removing older storage, solid-fuel and oil heating systems
- c. A tenant should contact their Housing Management & Options Officer to discuss a request for standard adaptations.
- d. Any member of Housing staff that is qualified as a Trusted Assessor can decide on carrying out standard adaptations or ask an Occupational Therapist to assess the tenant's needs if necessary.
- e. The Council will agree with the tenant, and where necessary Occupational Therapist the installation of standard adaptations.

#### **4.5 Major adaptations**

- a. Major adaptations are adaptations with an estimated value over £500 not being a standard adaptation.
- b. Examples of major adaptations are:
  - I. stair and through floor lifts
  - II. ceiling tracks
  - III. mobility standard kitchens
  - IV. additional WC and wash facilities
  - V. door entry systems
  - VI. level access showers for general needs
  - VII. ramps for general needs
  - VIII. heating for general needs
  - IX. widening doors for general needs
- a. An assessment and recommendation by an Occupational Therapist is needed before the Council takes a decision on major adaptations.
- b. Tenants can arrange an assessment by a Social Services' Occupational Therapist by:
  - I. contacting Powys Council Social Services;
  - II. contacting a Housing Management & Options Officer who will make necessary arrangements;
  - III. referrals from Social Services Staff or medical practitioners.
- c. The Occupational Therapist will visit the home and agree a plan of action with the tenant. This plan might include recommending adaptations to the home or considering alternative, more suitable accommodation. Individual support needs from tenants should be taken into account when taking a decision.

- d. The Council will let the tenant know in writing which adaptations can be carried out or if the Council recommends moving to alternative accommodation.

#### **4.6 Refusing adaptations**

- a. Where the Council refuses to carry out adaptations the Council will inform the tenant in writing, including the reasons for refusal.
- b. Where agreement between the Council and the tenant can't be reached, the Council will inform the tenant in writing of its proposal to meet the tenant's need.
- c. Examples of reasons to refuse adaptations are:
  - I. Adaptations cannot be carried out safely or they affect the structural stability of the home.
  - II. There are concerns about the age and condition of the property.
  - III. The property will not meet the tenant's long-term needs. This is a period not less than five years after the adaptation. The Council will consider each case on its merits.
  - IV. The architectural and structural characteristics of the dwelling, or any planning, conservation or listed building restrictions, may render certain types of adaptation inappropriate.
  - V. The practicalities of carrying out adaptations to properties with narrow doors, stairways and passages which might make wheelchair use in and around the dwelling difficult, or properties with limited access, e.g. steep flights of steps making access for wheelchair users impossible and therefore making continued occupation of the dwelling open to question.
  - VI. There are competing needs of different members of the tenant's family which cannot be met in that particular home.
  - VII. Access ramps would adversely affect the amenity of the area for other residents.
  - VIII. The Council has obtained a warrant for eviction due to a breach of tenancy conditions, for example due to rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.
- d. Where the Council does not consider it reasonable and practicable to adapt the property, the tenant will be given priority for the next available suitable property which meets their needs.

## **5 Adaptation process**

### **5.1 Objective**

The Council will ensure there is a process to carry out adaptations in Council Homes after agreement with the tenant and where necessary Occupational Therapist.

### **5.2 Minor adaptations**

- a. The Council will ensure that minor adaptations are completed in a timely manner, but no later than 40 days after the request is received.
- b. Minor adaptations are carried out by staff from the Responsive Maintenance Team or Care & Repair in Powys.

### **5.3 Standard and major adaptations**

- a. The Council will agree a timescale with the tenant for carrying out the adaptation and any actions that need to be undertaken, for example the process before appointing a contractor or obtaining planning permission.
- b. The Council will inform the tenant when the adaptation leads to an increase of rent or service charge.
- c. The Council will inform the tenant which contractor(s) will carry out the adaptation(s) and provide contact details of the contractor.
- d. The Council keeps the tenant informed of any changes in the timescale or change of contractor(s), and agree a new timescale if necessary.
- e. The Council will advise the tenant that once the order is raised it is valid for 90 days.

### **5.4 Budgets and restrictions**

- a. The Council aims to deliver adaptations cost effectively.
- b. Where possible the Council will incorporate standard or major adaptations within existing planned maintenance and improvement programmes.
- c. Where this is not possible, for example due to the urgency of the tenant's need, specific adaptations or there not being a planned programme, the adaptation works will be ordered separately.
- d. The Council's Housing Service will fund agreed adaptations in Council homes up to a maximum limit of £36,000.

- e. Where the estimated costs are over £36,000, the Housing Service Senior Management Team can authorise the adaptation. The Council will take into account the overall level of need of the tenant and household and assess the effectiveness of the adaptations over the longer term. The Council will also take into account what other options there are available, like moving to a more suitable property.
- f. The Council will allocate a fixed capital and revenue budget each year.
- g. Should demand for adaptations exceed the finance available, the Council will prioritise adaptation works. The Council will consult with Occupational Therapists, before deciding on the highest priority cases and delaying lower priority cases.
- h. The Council will write to all tenants who are awaiting an adaptation to explain the position and give an indication as to how long they are likely to have to wait.

## 6 Alternative suitable accommodation

### 6.1 Objective

Where major adaptations are necessary to make the home suitable for the needs of the tenant and the household, the Council will always consider if a move to suitable alternative accommodation is a more viable alternative.

### 6.2 Recommendation

- a. A move to suitable alternative accommodation is likely to be recommended in the following circumstances:
  - I. The property does not lend itself to adaptation;
  - II. The household is significantly under-occupying a large property that is unsuitable for their needs;
  - III. The property, even with adaptations will not be suitable for the tenant and household;
  - IV. The cost of adaptations is prohibitively high and a move to adapted or more suitable accommodation is more cost effective;
  - V. The tenant is requesting a move for their own reasons.
- b. The option of a move to suitable alternative accommodation will only be recommended where the Council knows that genuinely suitable accommodation is available.
- c. In identifying suitable alternative accommodation the Council will take due regard of the tenant's preference in terms of location and type and size of accommodation. This is subject to the "*Common housing register allocations policy*".
- d. The Council will discuss with the tenant, the likely waiting time for alternative accommodation and agree jointly, in consultation with the Occupational Therapist, whether this waiting period is acceptable.
- e. Major adaptations can be subject to delay and a move to suitable alternative accommodation could be made more quickly than the time taken to complete the adaptation. This lag time in completing the adaptation will form part of the assessment as to whether a move to alternative suitable accommodation is the recommended option.
- f. If the initial expected waiting time for a move is exceeded or if the tenant's circumstances change, the case will be reviewed. A decision will be made regarding whether a move is still the most appropriate course of action or whether the adaptations to the existing home are now required. All decisions of this type will be made in consultation with the tenant.
- g. In seeking alternative accommodation the Council will work with housing associations. This means Council tenants may be offered accommodation provided by a Registered Social Landlord.

- h. When a tenant moves as the result of a recommendation by an Occupational Therapist, the Council will work with the tenant to support them in the process of moving home. This can be in the form of advice, practical assistance, such as arranging removers, and, where appropriate, financial assistance. Any financial assistance would generally be confined to reimbursing any reasonable out of pocket expenses incurred in the move.

## **7 After adapting the home**

### **7.1 Objective**

The Council aims to keep adaptations available for future use in the case the need for them ceases to exist.

### **7.2 Moving after major adaptations**

- a. Where the Council carries out major adaptations, it is normally expected that the tenant remains in the adapted home for at least five years.
- b. Where a tenant needs to move, the Council will reassess the tenant's changed need. Examples of changed situations are:
  - I. a significant change in medical circumstances;
  - II. a major change in household size and composition;
  - III. accepting employment elsewhere.
- c. Where the tenant moves to a Council home that requires any adaptations to meet the tenant's specific needs, the Council will assess and adapt the property in accordance with the terms of this policy.

### **7.3 Mutual exchange**

The Council may refuse a mutual exchange where:

- I. the home is designed or adapted to suit a physically disabled person; and
- II. the home would be occupied by someone that is not physically disabled.

### **7.4 Adaptation no longer required**

- a. In cases where adaptations are no longer required, the adaptations are left in place.
- b. The removal of adaptations will be considered for items which may be used in another home, for example a stair-lift.
- c. If the person for whom the adaptation was provided no longer lives in the property, any remaining tenant(s) may be asked to move to another suitable home, to make the adapted home available for someone that needs the adaptations. Reasonable moving expenses will be paid. Where tenants refuse to move or do not accept a reasonable suitable alternative, the Council may decide to pursue legal action to take possession of the property.



## **8 Adaptations by tenants and freestanding equipment**

### **8.1 Objective**

Where tenants wish to carry out adaptations themselves, the Council will give permission where reasonable.

### **8.2 Alterations**

- a. The Council will ensure there is a procedure in place dealing with alterations carried out by tenants.
- b. All tenants need to obtain written permission from the Council, before carrying out adaptation works in the property.
- c. The Council will not unreasonably withhold permission.
- d. Permission or refusal will always be in writing.
- e. Any alterations need to comply with building regulations and other legal requirements. The Council will attach other conditions to any permission.
- f. The Council will not normally maintain or service any installation made by the tenant. The tenant will be responsible for this.
- g. At the end of the tenancy the tenant may be required to remove any adaptations they have installed and make good any damage to the property. If this is the case the Council will include this as a condition to the permission. The Council can agree to take responsibility for the adaptations in certain cases. Where the Council accepts responsibility this will also be confirmed in writing.

### **8.3 Freestanding equipment**

- a. Occupational Therapists will assess the needs for freestanding aids.
- b. Examples of freestanding equipment are:
  - I. hoists;
  - II. toilet frames;
  - III. bed levers;
  - IV. shower chairs.

## **9 Equalities**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The Council is committed to giving an equal service to all.

### **9.2 Procedures and practices**

- a. The Council's staff and contractors will operate in such a way to ensure that their procedures and practices are sensitive to the needs of individual residents. They will ensure that they do not discriminate in any way.
- b. Enforcement and application of this policy will from time to time need to be tailored to meet the needs of individuals. All cases will be considered on an individual basis.

### **9.3 Information**

- a. The Council will in all reasonable circumstances make information available in a variety of information formats, including for example:
  - I. Braille
  - II. large print
  - III. audio tape
- b. Where specialist services are required to ensure that information is accessible to the tenant or member of their family, the Council will provide these specialist services where reasonable.

## **10 Reviewing decisions, complaints and compliments**

### **10.1 Introduction**

The Council is committed to improve service delivery and put right any mistakes.

### **10.2 Review**

Anyone that is affected by a decision of the Council's Housing Service is entitled to ask an independent review from a manager or team leader that was not involved in making the decision.

### **10.3 Complaints and compliments**

- a. The Council welcomes all feedback from customers, because it helps to improve services.
- b. When the Council receives a complaint, the Corporate Complaints Procedure will be followed.
- c. The Council will aim to clarify any issues about which someone is not sure.
- d. Where possible, the Council will put right any mistakes it may have made.
- e. Where the Council gets something wrong, it will apologise and where appropriate try to put things right.
- f. The Council will aim to learn from good practice and mistakes and use the information gained to improve services.

## **11 Review of this policy**

- a. This policy will be reviewed by the Council every three years unless there are circumstances that require a review, for example a change in legislation or regulation.
- b. Where there has been a change in legislation which has an impact on the policy, the policy will be reviewed within 3 months of the legislation or regulation coming into effect.