



**Sandwell**  
Metropolitan Borough Council

# **Your Guide to Adaptations for People with Disabilities**

**Private Owners, Private Landlords &  
Tenants of Housing Associations**



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## Introduction

The Council provides a wide range of assistance to help people of all ages with disabilities to live as independently as possible in their homes.

In this booklet you will find information about various types of assistance which may be available to you:

- Specialist equipment
- Minor adaptations costing less than £1000
- Major adaptations costing more than £1000 (including Disabled Facilities Grants)

You will also find details of who is eligible, how to apply and the amount of assistance available to you.

It is important to remember that grant funding cannot be paid retrospectively. Do not commence any works or incur any costs which may be covered by the scope of a Disabled Facilities Grant before you make an application and before you have received written approval of the Grant.

**Do not start ANY work on your property until you have written confirmation that your grant has been approved.**

## Who Can Apply

You can enquire for assistance with adaptations if you are:-

- The disabled person
- The parent or guardian of a disabled child under the age of 19
- The owner of a property where a disabled person is resident on a permanent basis

Every disabled person who enquires about assistance will be assessed in exactly the same way, regardless of your age or who owns your property.

The assistance we can offer you can depend on your tenure (whether you live in your own home, you rent from a private landlord or Housing Association), your personal circumstances or your financial situation. You will be advised of this during the assessment process.

## How Does It Work?

There are 3 main stages to the provision of assistance:

- Stage 1 - Enquiry
- Stage 2 - Assessment
- Stage 3 - Provision

This booklet describes each of the stages in more detail and also considers the different types of assistance that may be available to you.

The Council has recently reviewed its policy which sets out exactly what assistance is available to you.

You can read the policy on the Council's website [www.sandwell.gov.uk](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk). Search for "Home Improvement Agency"



## Who is Involved?

A number of professionals and organisations work together to provide adaptations in your home.

### **Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Prevention Assessors (PAs)**

Initial enquiries are directed to Occupational Therapists and Prevention Assessors who will carry out an assessment to determine what equipment you need as well, as any adaptations you need. They will also determine what priority your request should be given, depending on your level of need.

## **Home Improvement Agency**

The Council's Home Improvement Agency will support you in applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). This team will also approve your grant funding and arrange payment.

The Agency can support you through the whole adaptation process providing the professional services you will need from application to completion of the building work.

## **Private Agents**

You can choose to use the services of a Private Agent instead of the Home Improvement Agency. The Agent will arrange for drawings, source a builder, arrange for the work to be supervised for the duration of the build, arrange to pay the contractor and provide all the relevant certification. All Agents will charge a fee for their service. The cost is normally included in any grant award from the Council.

## **Customer Managed Process**

You may choose to manage the process yourself and not use the services of an agent. If you follow this option, as the applicant, you will be responsible for preparing all the paperwork to submit a complete Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) application and for obtaining drawings, specifications and three itemised quotes for the work before managing the building work yourselves.

## **Customer Led Process**

You may choose to undertake the work yourself or ask a member of your family\*. If this is the case, you can still claim grant funding but ONLY to cover the cost of the materials involved. The Council will require an invoice, which may need to be validated by an independent third party. Grant funding cannot cover costs of labour carried out by yourself or a member of your family\*.

*(By "member of your family" we mean husband, wife, partner, parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces)*

A comprehensive information pack which details the Customer Managed Process and the Customer Led Process is available on the Council's Website

## Stage One - Enquiry

When you find you need assistance in your home, you should contact the Council's Enquiry Service by telephone or e-mail.

Tel: 0121 569 2266

Email: [Sandwell\\_Enquiry@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:Sandwell_Enquiry@sandwell.gov.uk)

They will take your details and ask for some information about your needs. They will pass this information to the Therapy Team

## Stage Two - Assessment

A Prevention Assessor or an Occupational Therapist from the Therapy Team will contact you to get more detailed information about your needs

This could be completed over the telephone, by visiting you in your home or an assessment may be completed at our facilities at the Independent Living Centre.

The Council may also contact any professionals who work with you, eg your GP. Where the disabled person is a child we may contact their GP, their school, along with any specialists who work with them.

### Eligibility Criteria

To receive specialist equipment and adaptations (major or minor) to your home, you must meet all three of the following criteria:

- You must live in Sandwell permanently, and
- You must have a permanent and substantial physical disability OR the equipment must be needed as part of a rehabilitation treatment package, and

- You are experiencing difficulty using the existing main facilities of your home because of your disability.

### Your difficulty could include:

- Not being able to get into or out of a bed without help, either on the ground floor or upstairs
- Not being able to leave or enter your home because the access is restricted
- Not being able to use stairs
- Not being able to use your bath or shower without assistance
- Being advised, by your medical professional, not to undertake any of the activities listed above without someone with you
- Having restricted mobility

### Assessment Visit

The Therapy Team will assign an Occupational Therapist (OT) or Prevention Assessor (PA) to assess your abilities and needs considering such things as:

- How safe you are in your home;
- How you are managing getting into and out of your home
- How you are managing to access the main areas of your home
- How you are managing to access and use toilet facilities
- How you are managing to bathe and clean yourself
- How you are managing with normal day to day activities

Cases are visited strictly in order of the priority given to your needs and the date we received your referral.

### Recommendations Following an Assessment Visit

Following an assessment by the Therapy Staff, one or more of the following may be recommended:

- Provision of **Specialist Equipment**
- The installation of a **minor home adaptation** (value up to £1,000)

- The provision of a **major adaptation to your home** (value more than £1,000)
- A recommendation to **move to more suitable accommodation**
- No action be taken

These are described in more detail in the next section dealing with provision of the assistance.

## **Tenants of Housing Associations and Private Landlords**

If you are a tenant of a Housing Association or a private landlord you should initially contact your landlord to determine whether they are prepared to undertake the works required. All tenants must obtain the consent of their landlord before agreeing to have works carried out. A Landlord Permission Letter will be sent to your landlord requesting this permission .

## **Stage Three - Provision**

### **Specialist Equipment**

A wide range of specialist equipment can be provided by the Council to assist people with disabilities to undertake normal day to day activities in their home. Equipment as diverse as walking aids, commodes and hoists can be supplied.

All equipment is loaned free of charge, however, you will be required to return it if you no longer need it.

### **Minor Home Adaptations**

Adaptations up to the value of £1,000 are considered to be of a minor nature and will be carried out as speedily as possible at no cost to the occupier and can be arranged by the Occupational Therapy Staff.



Minor adaptations could include such things as:

- the fitting of grab rails,
- a second stair rail,
- rails to assist with access to the house,
- a small ramp.

Maintenance of minor adaptations will be the responsibility of the applicant once any warranty periods have expired

## Major Home Adaptations

Adaptations costing more than £1,000 are considered to be of a major nature and will be carried out in line with the priority given to the case (this will be described in more detail later). Major adaptations will only be considered where the assessing officer considers that providing equipment and/or minor adaptations would be unsuitable.

Major adaptations could include such things as

- the construction of large access ramps,
- the provision of stair, vertical or step lifts,
- adaptations to existing kitchens and bathrooms (for instance the provision of a level access shower),
- extensions to an existing property where a lift is not suitable

If, following completion of the initial assessment the OT, a major adaptation to your home is recommended, a referral will be made to the Council's Home Improvement Agency. You will then be considered for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

The Home Improvement Agency will write to you to confirm that a referral has been received and provide a timeline for a Caseworker to contact you.

## Prioritisation and Waiting Lists

All referrals for major adaptations will be prioritised to ensure that the most urgent cases are dealt with as soon as possible.

Should demand for adaptations exceed the level of resources available, the Council will prioritise visits based on the above categories and the date the enquiry was made.

## **Disabled Facilities Grants**

A Caseworker from the Home Improvement Agency will contact you to complete a Financial Assessment for a Disabled Facilities Grant with you. The Caseworker can also explain the process that will follow and the timescales you might expect for the next stages.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are provided by the Council under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

DFGs are mandatory in certain circumstances, meaning the Council must approve an application if the works are necessary and appropriate for the disabled person and it is reasonable and practical to carry them out.

The circumstances in which a grant may be mandatory are:

- To make a dwelling safe for a disabled person and/or their carer
- To enable a disabled person who is also a carer to provide care for another person
- To provide a disabled person with access to their home
- To provide a disabled person with access to suitably located washing facilities
- To provide a disabled person with access to a suitably located toilet
- To provide a disabled person with access to a family room
- To provide a disabled person with access to a bedroom

DFGs are subject to a test of resources (otherwise known as a means test) meaning that, depending on your income and circumstances, you may be required to contribute towards the cost of the works.

However, you will be exempt from this if:

- The disabled person is in receipt of certain benefits,
  - Income support
  - Income based JSA
  - Pension Credit guarantee
  - Income-based ESA

- Housing Benefit
- Universal Credit
- Or, the disabled person is a dependent child (for whom Child Benefit is paid) under the age of 19.

DFGs are subject to a maximum amount (currently £30,000) and you may be asked to find the balance for the cost of any works above this amount. The Council may be able to assist you to meet these costs via a Top Up Grant This will be discussed with you once the cost of the work and your contribution, if any, have been finalised.

There are repayment conditions attached to some grant awards. You must ensure you fully understand these conditions before submitting an application for assistance.

You will find all the Grant Conditions on Page 14

## Making an Application

It is advisable to use an Agent to assist you to complete the relevant application forms, to select a reputable builder, to produce a scheme of works and to submit estimates.

Many applicants choose to use the Council's in-house Home Improvement Agency, however, you may appoint your own agent if you would prefer.

The agent must be a competent building professional such as an architect or building surveyor and must carry appropriate public liability insurance. The agent will charge a fee for their work, however, this will be included in the grant as long as the costs are reasonable and works do not exceed £30,000.

It is extremely important to note that DFG funding **CANNOT** be paid for any works which have started before the grant has been approved. If you start building your scheme prior to DFG funding being approved the Council will be unable to approve your grant.

**DFG funding will not be given retrospectively**

## **Feasibility Study**

The proposed adaptations will be subject to a study to ensure that the Occupational Therapist's recommendations are technically possible and comply with Council guidance and Building Regulations.

In most cases this will be carried out by the Council who will survey your home and, if required, produce drawings and provide costings for the scheme.

Any cases that are considered to be very costly, inappropriate or impractical to implement will be referred to an Adaptations Panel for further consideration.

## **Grant Approval**

Once the Council has received a complete application it will approve the grant if it considers the works are necessary and appropriate as well as reasonable and practicable.

You will be formally advised (in writing) when your application is approved including notification of any contribution you may have to make.

Once your grant is approved you will be required to pay any agreed contribution towards the cost of the works before those works can start.

## **Works on Site**

While the builders are on site, your agent will be responsible for monitoring all the work to ensure the adaptations are delivered and comply with Building Regulations.

## Completion of Works and Payment

Once the work is finished, your agent will obtain the relevant completion certificates, pay the contractor and arrange for any defects identified during the “defects liability period” following completion to be rectified by the builder.

## Grant Conditions

Sandwell MBC may place a charge on the property requiring repayment if the property changes ownership (there are some exceptions to this rule) within 10 years of the Certified Date (the date the final grant payment is made). The Charge only applies to grants over £5,000, subject to a maximum of £10,000. This means that if the property changes ownership within 10 years of the final grant payment, the grant may need to be repaid.

The Council may also make it a condition that you pursue any insurance or third party claims that you might be entitled to and repay the cost of the works if these are successful.

If you dispose of your property within the grant condition period (10 years) you will have to repay the grant based on the following calculation:

**Amount of Final Grant minus Any Means Tested Contribution minus £5000.**

**Maximum repayable = £10,000.**

**Example 1**      Final Grant Amount = £4,500  
                         Contribution = £0  
                         Repayment £4,500 - £0 - £5,000 = **£0**

**Example 2**      Final Grant Amount = £10,000  
                         Contribution = £2,000  
                         Repayment £10,000 - £2,000 - £5,000 = **£3,000**

The Council also makes it a condition that it can reclaim any specialist equipment provided such as lifts once they are no longer required.

## **Lift Maintenance and Repair**

Any lift that has been installed will have a warranty from the supplier/installer. When the warranty ends the Council will make arrangements for the lift will be serviced and maintained free of charge for as long as the lift is required.

## **Rehousing**

In some cases, the Council may decide it is not possible or suitable to adapt your present home and may recommend that you be rehoused into accommodation more suitable for your needs.

This might be because;

- Your present home cannot physically be adapted;
- The costs of adapting your home are prohibitive;
- You are unable to obtain planning permission for the proposed adaptations;
- The proposed adaptations would cause your home to be overcrowded, or under-occupied;
- Carrying out the proposed adaptations would cause undue upset to the disabled person.

Where this is the case the Council will try to assist you in finding suitable alternative accommodation either within the Council's own housing stock or with a Housing Association or by providing advice if you wish to buy another home.

In addition to this the Council may be able to provide you with some financial assistance in the form of a New Homes Grant and this is explained in more detail below.

## **Relocation Grant for Homeowners**

A Relocation Grant may be available to assist a disabled person and their family move from a home that is not considered suitable for adaptation to one that is more appropriate for their needs.

A grant of up to £10,000 is available to help bridge any difference between the value of your new home and the sale value of your existing home.

It may also go towards the cost of moving and setting up a new home.

### **Grant Conditions**

Conditions will be attached requiring you to occupy and remain in the new home for a period of years after the grant is paid. You may have to repay all or some of the grant if the conditions are broken.

### **Adaptations to your new home**

Payment of a Relocation Grant does not prevent you from enquiring for further assistance to make your new home suitable for your needs and in most cases the Council will arrange this and ensure that it takes place as quickly as possible.

This could be in the form of any of the types of assistance mentioned above.

## Appeals

If you wish to appeal any decisions made by officers handling your enquiry or application you may do so by writing, within 21 days of the decision, to the Home Improvement Agency Manager at  
Sandwell Council,  
PO Box 2374,  
Sandwell Council House,  
Freeth Street,  
Oldbury  
B69 3DE  
Email: [homeimprovement\\_agency@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:homeimprovement_agency@sandwell.gov.uk)

All appeals will initially be examined by the Adaptations Panel, a panel of Senior Officers from all service areas dealing with adaptations.

## Complaints and Feedback

Any complaints or feedback you may wish to make about the way your enquiry has been dealt with can be made by following the Council's Complaints Procedure.

**Online:** Contact us online via MySandwell  
**Email:** [customer\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:customer_services@sandwell.gov.uk)  
**Phone:** 0121 569 7867  
**Write in:** Customer Feedback Team  
Sandwell Council  
Roway Lane  
Oldbury  
B69 3ES

We will be happy to translate any information for you and/or provide copies in Braille, large print, audio tape. If you require this service, please telephone 0121 569 2266



# Adaptations to Private Properties

Private Owners, Tenants of Housing Associations and Private Landlords

