

Financial Assistance (Non HIA Pathway)

Disabled Facilities Grants

The provision of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) is a statutory obligation on local authorities. St Helens Council delivers this obligation through its capital programme. There is a clear framework established that determines which applicants have a legal entitlement to mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (detailed guidance can be found on the government website – www.gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants). In St Helens detailed assessment of client's needs is undertaken by the Occupational Therapy Team situated within the Housing Services Section of the Council. Applicants for assistance through the DFG process can be from any tenure background and as such St Helens Council works in partnership with the main social housing providers in delivering this support.

In May 2008 the Government introduced the following changes to the delivery of DFGs:

- Raising the maximum grant limit to £30,000
- Amending the Means Test, including the 'passporting' of certain benefits
- Relaxing the ring-fence around DFG funding
- Levying property charge against owner occupied properties (maximum levy of £10,000 and only where works exceed £5,000)

In practical terms, the relaxation of the ringfence for DFG funding allows local authorities the discretion to develop a more flexible grant package to assist disabled clients whilst still benefiting from specific DFG Government funding. The Council has utilised powers available under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) to provide a range of discretionary grant assistance to meet the needs of disabled clients.

St Helens, like all other areas, is experiencing an increase in both the demand for assistance through the DFG process and also in the complexity of applications. This is evidenced by the increase in the number of referrals through to the Occupational Therapy Service. This is due to a number of factors including the promotion of independent living, demographic changes such as an ageing population and an increase in children's cases which are no longer means tested. This increase in demand has also led to pressures on the funding allocations to provide this service.

St Helens delivers a comprehensive service through a 'one stop shop' approach with the Occupational Therapy Team and the Home Improvement Agency and Technical service working under the same Manager to ensure liaison and co-ordination of activity (a model that is now cited as good practice). It is important the strengths of this service are built upon and enhanced to ensure that the service delivery remains consistently high.

HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY (Reviewed 2017)

Disabled Facilities Grant		
Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<p>Needs Assessment and referral by Council Occupational Therapist confirming that work is necessary and appropriate</p> <p>Adaptation is the most satisfactory course of action subject to a 'reasonable and practicable' assessment</p> <p>Available across all tenures</p> <p>Eligible works are as set out in S 23 Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996</p> <p>Works commenced prior to grant approval will not be eligible (S29 HGCR Act 1996)</p>	<p>As set out in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 Part 1. All applications to provide certificate of intended occupation</p> <p>Repayment of grant (up to maximum of £10,000) if applicant owner occupier moves within 10 years of completion date where grant provided for Extension to property.</p>	<p>Maximum of £30,000</p> <p>Subject to means test (excluding children's cases)</p>

Disabled Facilities 'Top Up' Grant

Provision of funding above the statutory Disabled Facilities Grant maximum limit (currently £30,000) is at the discretion of the Manager, Private Sector Housing Services. Financial Assistance limited to £10,000 will only be made available in exceptional cases to meet work costs exceeding the statutory maximum. An example of this is where necessary variations to work on site would increase costs above £30,000 and completion of DFG works would be compromised through client financial hardship.

Disabled Facilities 'Top Up' Grant		
Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<p>Client eligible for Mandatory DFG as above.</p> <p>Cost of works verified by the Council's Technical Officer to be in excess of £30K</p> <p>Restricted to Owner occupiers</p>	<p>Repayment of 'top up' amount if applicant owner occupier moves within 10 years of grant completion date.</p>	<p>Maximum of £10,000</p>

HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY (Reviewed 2017)

Disabled Facilities 'Other' Assistance

Where clients are reporting hardship with regard to payment of their means tested DFG contribution and there is a risk of adaptations not proceeding, enquiries will be made with the Council's Social Care & Health Section regarding the Council's duties under the Care Act fairer charging assessment and continuing health care. This includes where a disabled person cannot raise their assessed contribution, and also those cases where the help needed goes beyond what is available through DFG, or where DFG is not available for any reason. The Council has the discretion to offer either zero rated loan or grant assistance dependent on individual case circumstances and cost of works required. In cases where grant is offered, this will be subject to repayment of the total grant amount if grant conditions regarding ownership and occupation are not met. As this type of assistance is case specific, individual decisions will be subject to prior consideration by the Director of People's Services in consultation with the Manager, Private Sector Housing Services

Disabled Facilities Grant – Shared Custody

The Housing Grant, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 stipulates that Mandatory DFG is only available at the address which is the main residence of the disabled occupant. However, strict adherence to this approach without consideration of alternative provision would risk undermining joint custody arrangements and may deny the child the option to live with one of the parents. Discretionary funding can therefore be considered to enable adaptations at a child's secondary residence, up to a maximum work cost of £15,000, subject to eligibility criteria and available resources. Advice regarding rehousing options will be provided in cases where adaptations are estimated to be above £15,000. Specific consideration will be given where there is a risk of breakdown in care for the child. Only one secondary residence will be adapted for the child.

Disabled Facilities Grant – Shared Custody		
Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
Child under 19yrs old. Shared custody agreement in place. Needs Assessment and referral by Council Occupational Therapist confirming that work at the secondary residence is necessary and appropriate Adaptation is the most satisfactory course of action subject to a 'reasonable and practicable' assessment Available across all tenures Eligible works are as set out in S 23 Housing Grants, Construction and	Property occupied by the applicant carer as their main residence until expiry of grant condition period (10 years) Repayment of total grant if applicant owner / occupier moves within 10 years of grant	Maximum of £15,000 Non means tested Funding available to adapt one secondary residence only.

HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY (Reviewed 2017)

Regeneration Act 1996	completion date.	
-----------------------	------------------	--

Fast Track Disabled Facilities Grants

In October 2008 and in accordance with RRO, the Council introduced a 'fast track' DFG application process for all cases not exceeding £2,000. Under the fast track system applicants are not means tested. The Council can also use its discretion to process applications with a lesser burden of proof than would be required with the mandatory DFG regime. Small value grants are therefore processed across all tenures in a more timely manner, allowing improved staff management of cases.

Following the successful introduction of the small value fast track DFGs, and in consultation with the larger Registered Social Housing Providers (RPs) operating within the Borough, on 1 April 2009 the Council introduced Fast Track DFGs for the tenants of all partnership Housing Associations, irrespective of grant value. This has eliminated the need for intrusive means testing procedures in a situation where the landlord would effectively fund any tenant contribution. This process has resulted in effective partnerships with the major social landlords of the Borough to the advantage of their tenants, leading to significant reduction in timescales for grant approval whilst maximising available funding for adaptations through agreed RP financial contributions.

Fast Track DFG		
Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
Client eligible for Mandatory DFG, as assessed by Council Occupational Therapist Estimated cost of works £2,000 or less. Property owned by partnership Housing Association and agreement in place to fund 50% grant cost.	Application assessed using Council's Agency Service	Maximum £30,000 if owned by partnership Housing Association. Estimated cost of works £2,000 or less if owner occupied or private rented.

Disabled Facilities Relocation/Support Assistance

The relaxing of the DFG funding ring fence also allows for greater flexibility of provision in meeting customer needs. It enables the Council to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes which may be more appropriate to meet individual needs than conventional DFG arrangements, i.e. to support purchase of alternative accommodation or associated relocation costs. It is therefore proposed that where it is considered that adaptation through mandatory DFG is not possible and / or does not provide a value for money solution and/or is not reasonably practical, as an

HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY (Reviewed 2017)

alternative a financial package can be developed to deal with the specific needs of clients on a case by case basis, up to a maximum of £10,000 and subject to approval by the Director of People's Services, in consultation with the Manager, Private Sector Housing Services.

In cases where the client requires additional space or more conveniently located facilities, a suitably adapted property may already exist. Prior to the DFG process, a client's re-housing options are to be explored fully with key Registered Providers in the Borough to make best use of previously adapted or more readily adaptable properties.

DFG Relocation / Support Assistance		
Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<p>Client eligible for Mandatory DFG, as assessed by Council Occupational Therapist</p> <p>EITHER property cannot be adapted (fails reasonable and practical assessment) OR the cost of adaptation is judged on assessment to be in excess of the cost of relocation grant plus estimated adaptation cost of the replacement property</p>	<p>Application assessed using Council's Agency Service</p> <p>Repayment of grant if applicant moves / sells replacement property within 10 years of acquisition date</p>	<p>Maximum £10,000. Grant amount dependent on individual circumstances of each case.</p> <p>Subject to financial assessment.</p>

Emergency Adaptations – Non Grant Provision

Subject to available budget / specific funding streams, the Council has discretion to offer small scale adaptations without recourse to the Disabled Facilities Grant application process. These cases will be identified by the Council's Occupational Therapy service on a case by case basis and will support hospital discharge and / or end of life care. Whilst provision will be direct from the Council without grant assistance, the type of adaptation supplied will, in the main, be recyclable lifts, hoists and / or ramps

Emergency Adaptations – Non Grant Provision		
Eligibility Criteria	Conditions	Amount
<p>Client eligible for Mandatory DFG, as assessed by Council Occupational Therapist.</p> <p>Client circumstances and adaptation needs meet criteria for hospital discharge /</p>	<p>Eligibility assessed by OT and Manager / Assistant Manager Private Housing.</p> <p>No grant condition.</p>	<p>No prescribed maximum, however, provision is focused on recyclable adaptations such as lifts, hoists and removable ramps.</p>

HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY (Reviewed 2017)

<p>end of life assistance.</p> <p>Not applicable to tenants in cases where landlord permission for works is required.</p>	<p>Client required to sign recycling / maintenance agreement as necessary.</p>	
---	--	--