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Disability Living Policy



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Disability Living Policy

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1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 FCHO aims both to assist customers to live independently longer, and at the same time to make best use of its existing adapted stock.
- 1.2 This policy exists to show how FCHO balances the needs of customers, asset management and provides value for money at a time of reduced funding.
- 1.3 FCHO out-performed its transfer promises in relation to the provision of Aids and Adaptations. Future funding for such works needs to be targeted to ensure it contributes to an Active Asset Management approach that ensures the needs of all service users can be addressed.
- 1.4 FCHO has continued to provide a fast track aids and adaptation service for works which meet customer needs and cost below £1,000.
- 1.5 Whilst small aids and adaptations (under an estimated cost of £1,000) are still funded and controlled directly by FCHO, more costly works are now subject to the Disability Facility Grant (DFG).
- 1.6 An application for rehousing is always the first option offered to customers requiring works which are estimated to cost over £1,000.
- 1.7 FCHO makes best use of existing adapted properties and supports customers with a disability to move to alternative accommodation which better meets their needs.
- 1.8 The supply and demand for adapted properties, especially heavily adapted and wheelchair accessible, is mainly concentrated in specific geographical areas making it difficult to meet this housing need in the short/medium, and sometimes in the longer term. Customers are encouraged to have a realistic view of how FCHO can provide the support needed and to be flexible on their area of choice.
- 1.9 FCHO along with other Registered Housing Providers accesses the means tested, DFG operated by the local authority to maximise available funds, and the number of adaptations it is therefore able to undertake. All FCHO approved applications for aids and adaptation works with a cost in excess of £1,000 require FCHO customers to make an application to Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC) for DFG.
- 1.10 Customers requiring aids and adaptations have the legal right to be assessed by an Occupational Therapist. Assessments result in recommendations which address the customer needs. Requests based on the OT recommendations, are considered by the FCHO Adaptations Panel. All requests are subject to FCHO policy, and require FCHO landlord permission to progress.
- 1.11 When developing new properties FCHO considers the inclusion of wheelchair accessible properties in all suitable new build schemes

2. What is the purpose of this Policy?

- 2.1 FCHO recognises that at times balancing customer needs and managing assets well, may present conflict particularly where customer aspirations are to remain in their current home and seek to have this adapted to meet their individual needs. This policy sets out how FCHO will balance the needs of customers with the need to manage its assets well.

2.2 The objective of this policy is to provide clear and transparent information to customers, FCHO colleagues and third parties about the type of adaptation FCHO will undertake on differing property types, and those adaptations which will not be considered.

3. Policy Details

3.1 Disability Living Service (DLS)

3.1.1 All requests for Aids and Adaptations to FCHO homes must be directed to the FCHO Disability Living Service (DLS) whose role is to assist customers to live independently for longer. DLS will advise customers and provide information on: -

- The availability of aids and equipment to meet identified needs under the cost of £1,000.
- Rehousing options available and the incentives to move home to address identified needs where estimated costs are above £1,000.
- The requirement to submit an application to OMBC for the Disability Facilities Grant (DFG)
- FCHO policy regarding large scale adaptations which will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and subject to negotiations with OMBC.

3.1.2 Rehousing will always be the first option discussed where works are likely to be in excess of £1,000.

3.2 Adaptations Panel (AP)

3.2.1 The Adaptations Panel, chaired by FCHO's Asset Manager meets on a weekly basis to consider requests for adaptations received via the DLS. Decisions by the AP are taken in line with FCHO Aids and Adaptations Policy.

3.3 Community Occupational Therapist Team (COTT)

3.3.1 The Oldham Community Occupational Therapy Team (COTT) is used by FCHO to assess the needs of customers whose request for adaptation work has gained the in principle approval of the FCHO Adaptation Panel. The COTT make recommendations for works to meet the customer's needs.

3.3.2 Once the adaptation is approved principle, timing of assessments is at the discretion of the COTT.

3.3.3 Where there is a significant difference between the customer's request and the COTT recommendations the case will be referred back to the Adaptations Panel for consideration and the customer informed of the decision.

3.3.4 FCHO customers have the right to be assessed by COTT however without FCHO providing landlord permission no works can be authorised.

3.4 Aids and Adaptations

3.4.1 Minor Works

- Minor Works are those which cost up to £1,000 and include such items aids as grab rails which can be quickly installed.
- FCHO commits an annual budget provision and fully funds Minor Works.
- Requests for minor works will normally be assessed and installed by FCHO Trusted Assessors who are able to both advise customers and provide the minor aids required.

3.4.2 Major Works

- Major works are those with a cost between £1,000 and £8,000 and include works to provide ramped access to customer homes.
- When a request for major works is made the FCHO Disability Living Service will discuss the request with the customer and advise on rehousing options.
- Rehousing to a property which meets the customers need will always be the first FCHO response to a request for major aids works.
- Where a suitable housing option which meets the customer needs is unlikely to be available within a 12 month period, the request for major works is considered by the FCHO Adaptation Panel.
- The Adaptation Panel will consider each request in line with the following criteria, and where approved in principle will follow the DFG process at 3.6 below.
- An application for the means tested DFG must be made by customers where FCHO approves major works.

3.4.3 Criteria for the installation of Aids and Adaptations

- Rehousing to a more suitable property will always be explored first when Major Works are requested.
- Major Works will not usually be considered or approved in properties that are under occupied by one or more bedrooms.
- Major Works will not usually be considered or approved in properties that are statutorily overcrowded or overcrowded under the Council's allocations policy.
- New adaptations will not usually be installed in a property where a customer has recently (within the past three years), moved into or transferred from one FCHO property to another, unless the customer's circumstances have significantly changed since the move.
- It is expected that adaptations will meet the needs of the customer for at least five years from the date of installation.
- Bathing Facilities
 - Level access showers (LAS) will not be fitted in flats above the ground floor or in maisonettes unless served by a suitable lift.
 - LAS will not be fitted in houses, maisonettes or properties with poor external access.
 - LAS may be fitted in properties where there is level external access or where one could easily be provided by the installation of a simple ramp.
 - In some exceptional cases low level showers may be fitted in properties with poor external access to meet the immediate needs of the customer.
 - Where a shower has been provided to meet customer needs, a bath will not usually be reinstated back into an adapted property when re-letting.
- Lifting equipment:
 - Replacement of obsolete stair lifts and step lifts in existing properties will usually be replaced when still required.
 - Curved stair lifts will not usually be fitted.
 - Straight stair lifts will not be provided in flats or maisonettes above ground floor.
 - Stair lifts will not be fitted in communal areas or in shared accommodation.
 - Vertical lifts will not be fitted in properties with less than three bedrooms.
 - Seated vertical lifts will not usually be fitted.
 - External stair lifts are not usually provided.

- External access
 - Only one external level access ramp will be provided to a property.
 - Handrails can be provided to external steps.
 - Handrails will not be provided along paths.
- Miscellaneous requests for adaptations outside of those specifically mentioned in the criteria will be considered according to; the reasonableness of the request, the prospects of alternative rehousing, value for money the adaptations offer, the long term asset management plans and the needs of the property concerned.
- Where FCHO refuse an adaptations request the customer may seek funding for the adaptation from OMBC or other sources. In all such circumstances the customer and funder will require the permission of FCHO as the landlord. FCHO will withhold landlord permission where the adaptation is not in line with FCHO Aids and Adaptations Policy, the wider Asset Management Strategy and/or related policies.

3.4.4 Large Scale Aids and Adaptations

- Work to FCHO homes where the estimated cost exceeds £8,000 will only be considered in exceptional circumstances following negotiations with OMBC. FCHO aims to meet customer needs without resorting to high cost works. This includes such works as extensions or major structural works.
- Rehousing to a property which meets the customer need will always be the first FCHO response to a request for extensions and major structural works.
- Where a request is made for any request for Large Scale Works DLS will discuss rehousing options with the customer.
- Where a suitable housing option which meets the customer needs is unlikely to be available within a 12 month period the request for large scale considered by the FCHO Adaptation Panel which meets on a weekly basis.
- The Adaptation Panel will consider the request in line with the Criteria for the Installation of Aids and Adaptations above.
- Where the request is supported by the Adaptation Panel it is referred to the FCHO Customer First Director who will consider whether the request should be progressed.
- Should the Customer First Director agree to progress the request, the DFG process will be used.
- Where the Customer First Director considers the request should be denied, DLS will again discuss rehousing with the customer.

3.5 Support to Move Scheme

- 3.5.1 Where customers choose to move to properties which meet their identified needs FCHO can provide assistance under the Support to Move Scheme. The support offered by the scheme can be: -
- Financial (a value for money alternative to expensive adaptations).
 - Practical – This can include help with packing, removals and access to a handy person to do small jobs around the new home.
- 3.5.2 A support package (Appendix A) may also be offered to a customer releasing an adapted property where the adaptations are no longer needed and where the property can be re-let to a household that needs the adaptations.

3.6 Disability Facilities Grant (DFG)

- 3.6.1 Disability Facilities Grant (DFG) is a mandatory, means tested grant administered in Oldham by OMBC. The grant is provided to fund necessary works to enable disabled applicants to remain in their homes for longer.
- 3.6.2 DFG is a borough-wide, grant facility operated by OMBC on a date and priority basis. Applications for DFG are assessed in competition with other applicants.
- 3.6.3 FCHO joined other Registered Housing Providers in Oldham in their use of DFG to supplement the cost of Aids and Adaptations costing in excess of £1,000.
- 3.6.4 Where FCHO approve a request for Aids and Adaptations estimated to cost over £1,000, the customer, or their representative, must submit a DFG application to OMBC.
- 3.6.5 FCHO has no control or influence in the approving, prioritising and timing of grants.
- 3.6.6 Once notified by OMBC, that an application has reached the top of their waiting list, FCHO is responsible for the specification, costing, and where approved by OMBC, the procurement and supervision of required works.
- 3.6.7 Prior to any works taking place customers are required to pay OMBC any contribution required by the means testing. There are exemptions to the means testing which include those in receipt of Housing Benefits, Tax Credits and Pension Credit and where the disabled customer is under 18 years of age.

3.7 Appeal Procedure

- 3.7.1 In the event of a refusal to a request for an adaptation, the customer will be informed in writing within 5 working days of the Adaptation Panel meeting.
- 3.7.2 The customer will be advised of the reason(s) for the refusal and advised of the Appeal Procedure.
- 3.7.3 An appeal must be in writing and received within 15 days of the date of the advisory letter.
- 3.7.4 On receipt of a written appeal a member of the Leadership Team will consider the basis of the same and may request that the Adaptations Panel review their decision before the appeal is heard by the Appeals Panel.
- 3.7.5 The Appeals panel will consist of 2 Senior Managers and/or Customer Congress Members.
- 3.7.6 Appeals against the means testing of the Disability Facilities Grant cannot be considered as the testing forms part of current legislation.
- 3.7.7 The Appeals Panel will be convened within 15 working days of the customer appeal being received. The customer will be given as much notice as possible of the date and time of the Appeals Panel hearing and advised that they may attend and bring representative(s) to present their case. The Panel may in certain circumstances consider it appropriate to arrange a meeting at the home of the customer.
- 3.7.8 Following the conclusion of the review the Appeals Panel will write to the customer within 5 working days informing them of the outcome of the review and the reasons for the decision.

4 Monitoring and implementation

- 4.1 This policy will be circulated and implemented on approval.
- 4.2 The Disability Living Service will be responsible for the collation of information which will include the number and type of requests made, approved or rejected.
- 4.3 Data gathered will be reported to the Adaptation Panel on a monthly basis and used to project demand for Aids and Adaptations.
- 4.4 The Asset Manager and Investment Accountant meet on a monthly basis to monitor spend against the annual budget.

5 Legislative or other Guidelines

- 5.1 FCHO is committed to delivering the best possible value for money and utilising resources to achieve that aim. FCHO's commitments reflect the expectations of the Homes and Communities Agency.
- 5.2 The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 details how the Disability Facilities Grant operates.

6 Links to other FCHO Policies

- 6.1 Asset Management Policy
- 6.2 OMBC Allocations Policy

7 Links to FCHO Strategic Plan

- 7.1 This Policy is linked to the FCHO Disability Living Strategy.

APPROVAL AND REVIEW	
Lead Officer / Author	Michael Gibney Asset Manager
Consultation	DLS, Neighbourhood and Asset Management Teams.
Equality Analysis	The EIA was undertaken and concluded that there were no conflicts
Approved by	Joe Waters and Bill Taylor 6 th December 2016
Policy Review	This policy is due for review in November 2019 or in line with changes to legislation and regulations.
Approved by	Leadership Meeting
Electronic File Location	S Drive/Hsg General/Policy and Strategy
Copy available from	Joanne Goodall, Governance and Corporate Support Manager

VERSION TRACKING	
Version / Date	No 1 April 2017
Version Notes	This policy contains key changes to the funding route for Major Works and eligibility period

Appendix A

FCHO SUPPORT TO MOVE SCHEME

The Support to Move Scheme is exclusive to First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO).

The scheme could help you move if you are an FCHO customer and: -

- You or a member of your household has a physical disability and is in need of a property that has been adapted* to meet your households needs

AND

- Your present home does not meet the guidelines for when FCHO will consider providing disabled adaptations

OR:

- You live in a heavily adapted** property that is not required by you as neither you nor any member of your household has a physical disability.

* By adapted, we mean a property that has one or more of the following adaptations:

- A step-lift to enable a disabled occupant to access the entrance to the property from the street
- A stair-lift or a through floor (or vertical) lift to enable a disabled occupant to access the upstairs rooms in the property
- A level access shower to enable a disabled occupant to shower unaided
- A ground floor extension intended for use by a disabled person

** By heavily adapted, we mean a property that has two or more of the adaptations listed above. These must be in good condition and the property must be deemed suitable for re-letting to a disabled applicant by FCHO.

Acceptance onto the scheme will be at the discretion of FCHO and is subject to a home visit to discuss your circumstances and to inspect any adaptation(s) that are installed in your current home. Once accepted onto the scheme, you will be placed in the High Band to give you priority on the housing waiting list.

You will be eligible for consideration for properties that meet your established bedroom need and in accordance with the allocations policy.

FCHO will always try to re-house you in an area of your choice in Oldham.

Where you identify a suitable property, owned by FCHO, to move to you may opt to receive a cash payment or access a package of support, or a combination of both to an agreed value.

Support could include: -

- Help with moving (e.g. a removals service, a packing and unpacking service, the disconnection and reconnection of major domestic appliances, telephone connection and mail redirection)
- Access to a handyperson scheme to carry out small jobs in your new home not already provided by FCHO as part of their Voids and Repairs Service (e.g. fixing curtain rails or reassembling furniture).

This list is not exhaustive. As the purpose of the scheme is to pay for any practical support you may need to move to your new home. We are happy to discuss your individual circumstances and needs.

- Where you identify a property, owned by another housing association in Oldham you can opt to receive financial support to cover the cost of removals.

Where you are in need of an adapted property the suitability of the property must also be agreed with the Oldham Community Occupational Therapy Team.

Who is it for?

- FCHO's customers with a disability or members of customer's household with a disability, who requires an adapted property and who do not currently live in such a property.
- A customer living in a heavily adapted property who no longer requires such a property for her/himself or a member of their household

You will **not** be able to apply if you: -

- Are not a First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) customer
- Have a significant level of current or former tenant rent arrears, and you have not made any arrangements to repay the debt
- Currently have a suspended possession order against your name
- Have not maintained your tenancy in a satisfactory manner
- Have not maintained your home in a reasonable condition
- Are carrying out a mutual exchange

How to Apply

Contact First Choice Homes Oldham: disabilitylivingservice@fcho.co.uk 0161 393 7117

Payments

You will receive a cheque payable into your chosen bank account, usually within two weeks of you moving into your new home.

If you think this may prevent you from moving contact the designated officer, who may be able to assist you to make alternative arrangements.

If you have any debt or rent arrears with FCHO then these will be deducted from your cash incentive.

Removals

FCHO will make all the removal arrangements for you with a local removal firm and will be invoiced for the work.

The cost of removals will be deducted from your cash payment.