



# **West Suffolk Housing Assistance Policy and Application Guidance**

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## **1. Introduction**

The West Suffolk Strategic Plan includes a priority for ***Homes for our communities***. Included in the priority is a commitment to improve the condition of private sector housing (where alternative funding, including Government funding, is not available), help to bring empty homes back into use and increasing the number of decent homes for vulnerable people. Through this financial assistance policy, we are demonstrating how we support this commitment which will in turn contribute to our overarching strategic priority.

The West Suffolk Housing Strategy 2015-18 describes how Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough councils (working together as West Suffolk) will support the delivery of homes through an integrated approach to housing policy, and it contains an action to review the existing Housing Assistance Policy.

This West Suffolk Housing Assistance Policy has been developed from existing policies, linking with a number of other housing policy areas to produce an integrated approach towards housing policy. This sets out the framework for action to support and target households to improve the condition of their homes, including advice and education, enforcement and financial assistance.

Discretionary financial assistance and support (or Housing Assistance) is available to property owners, owner-occupiers and renters in the private rented sector and is explained in this policy. In particular, this support seeks to help those who are unable to meet the cost of repair themselves.

This policy does not cover the social housing sector. Under their landlord duties, Registered Providers (RPs) are responsible for ensuring their housing is decent and suitable for their tenants. Both councils transferred their housing stock to (separate) RPs, and improvement programmes should be in place to maintain housing to the Decent Home Standard.

Currently housing assistance in West Suffolk consists of the following grants:

- Home Assistance Grants
- Home Security Grants
- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Empty Homes Grants

## **2. Overview**

The quality of housing has an impact on the health of the occupants. This link between health and housing is well established and recognised in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) introduced with the Housing Act 2004 and coming into force in April 2006. In their assessment of housing conditions, local councils must consider the health impact associated with poor housing rather than concentrating on disrepair.

This policy has been informed by housing data published in the West Suffolk Housing Strategy: <http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/news/news14102201ws.cfm>

The importance of improving people's homes is recognised in the Housing and Health Charter for Suffolk, launched by the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board in July 2015. The charter's vision statement is: '...for Suffolk people to live in a suitable affordable home that is in good condition where they feel safe and supported by the local community.' The document in full is available at the following link: <http://www.eastsuffolkpartnership.org.uk/assets/Uploads/Board-September-2015/Agenda-Item-4-Appendix-1-Housing-and-Health-Charter.pdf>

Repair and maintenance remain the responsibility of the home owner, but it is sometimes appropriate for a council to take action and offer assistance to those in greatest need and without funds to improve their homes themselves. This discretionary financial assistance will only be available where:

- it can be demonstrated that other funding options have been explored and eliminated;
- the assistance means the councils are meeting their priorities of returning long-term vacant properties into use;
- we are ensuring that homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. The definition of a decent home has been issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government and can be found at the following link:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7812/138355.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7812/138355.pdf)

### **3. Aims**

By adopting and implementing this policy across West Suffolk we aim to:

- increase the number of vulnerable people that live in properties in private sector housing which meet the Decent Homes Standard;
- assist those not otherwise in the position to improve their homes;
- increase thermal comfort and energy efficiency of homes; addressing issues of fuel poverty, and ensuring good quality sustainable housing;
- provide disabled residents with essential adaptations and facilities;
- increase the number of empty homes brought back into use that meet the Decent Homes Standard;
- improve the quality of life of elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents by appropriate improvements to their homes.

### **4. Delivering our aims**

The West Suffolk councils recognise the need to improve housing in West Suffolk and will take action to support households in improving the condition of their homes, with priority given to homes owned and occupied by vulnerable people.

We will deliver our aims through the following actions.

- **Advice and education**

By providing information, advice and signposting services for all homeowners and landlords to help them maintain and improve their homes.

- **Enforcement**

By taking enforcement and regulatory action to secure compliance with housing standards in the private rented sector in accordance with West Suffolk's Enforcement Policy, which can be found at the following link:

[http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies\\_Strategies\\_and\\_Plans/enforcementpolicy.cfm](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies_Strategies_and_Plans/enforcementpolicy.cfm), mainly relating to private rented properties.

- **Financial assistance**

For details please see section 6.

## **5. Legislative background**

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gave local authorities the discretionary power to provide support and financial assistance to homeowners to deal with poor quality housing. The councils also provide mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) for adaptations to properties under the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

The councils use the HHSRS to identify and rate significant hazards. The system scores the likelihood of harm to health occurring due to particular hazards during a 12-month period and the likely severity of the outcome. This results in a banding and category type for the hazard. Some form of action is expected to remedy a Category 1 hazard and protect the household.

Guidance found in the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, published in July 2012, places a statutory responsibility on local authorities to publish a report of the energy conservation measures that they consider practicable, cost-effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in their area. The report can be found at the following link:

[https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies\\_Strategies\\_and\\_Plans/upload/West-Suffolk-2013-15-HECA-progress-report-FINAL.pdf](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies_Strategies_and_Plans/upload/West-Suffolk-2013-15-HECA-progress-report-FINAL.pdf)

Furthermore, in March 2015, in response to the Hills Review, Government published a revised fuel poverty strategy for England in March 2015, "*Cutting the cost of keeping warm*" which can be found at the following link: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/408644/cutting\\_the\\_cost\\_of\\_keeping\\_warm.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408644/cutting_the_cost_of_keeping_warm.pdf). Under supporting regulations published in December 2014, a new fuel poverty target has been set for England, "*to ensure that as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of Band C, by 2030*". Government

has however adopted two interim milestones to keep efforts on track with the target of (i) *“as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable to Band E by 2020”* and (ii) *“as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable to Band D by 2025”*.

Additional information on Energy Performance Ratings can be found at the following link:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/332236/fpeer\\_methodology.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332236/fpeer_methodology.pdf)

## **6. Financial assistance**

Financial assistance will be offered in accordance with this policy. The housing assistance schemes are set out in section 8. Funding for all the discretionary grants detailed in this policy is provided through the councils’ capital programme. We will seek to fund our capital works programme sufficiently to meet the demands for the different types of grant and assistance being offered through the policy.

Funding for Disabled Facilities Grants is provided through the Better Care Fund in accordance with the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The Better Care Fund pools funding from Social Care, Health and Housing across the county to provide more integrated services for residents.

We will make best use of the limited funding available for these grants in a number of ways, including effective and efficient partnership working, and accessing other funding that may be available.

If the demand for grants included in this policy exceeds the available budget it may be necessary to prioritise requests/applications or delay applications being processed, until sufficient funds are available.

In such circumstances, requests/applications will be prioritised by considering factors such as the:

- vulnerability of the occupant(s);
- potential harm to health;
- condition of the property;
- alternative options available (other than financial assistance);
- wider benefit and impact to the community under our strategic priorities.

In all cases, prior to grant approval, repairs and/or improvements to the property should be the most appropriate course of action.

## **7. Guidance on applications for housing assistance**

The councils operate four grant schemes:

- Home Assistance Grants
- Home Security Grants
- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Empty Home Grants

Details on how these grants can be used, who is eligible to apply, qualifying works, the level of grant available and conditions can be found in section 8.

### **7.1 General conditions**

The West Suffolk councils share housing policies and staff so delivery of the services are the same across both councils. The location of the property which is the subject of an application for funding will determine which council makes the decision about any grant award.

An application for assistance must be in a form specified by the councils and shall include:

- full particulars of the proposed works including, where relevant, plans and specifications of the works;
- particulars of any professional fees or other charges which relate to the preparation of the scheme, the supervision of the works or administration of the contract; and
- written consent of the mortgagees when a charge applies.

Potential applicants can request help with their application. Applicants may also get help from a Home Improvement Agency, surveyor or architect, although such fees will only be eligible as part of a grant if the council considering the award agrees that they are reasonable.

Applicants will not be entitled to assistance if they:

- start or complete the work before their application is determined;
- deliberately worsen their housing conditions, for example by damaging the structure or fittings;
- have commenced a project and have been unable to complete it;
- make a fraudulent application or request for payment;
- are in council tax arrears;
- are not resident in the property at the time of the application, with the exception of the Empty Homes Grant.

Applicants (or their agents) must inform the council of all relevant changes in their circumstances from the date of enquiry through to approval and payment of assistance. Applicants should contact the council in advance if they believe their circumstances may change.

Where the eligibility of a grant is dependent upon the receipt of a specified benefit the grant will only be approved where the owner of the property, or where applicable the tenant, is in receipt of the benefit. Refer to section 8 for further detailed information in respect of each grant. Where other persons, not in receipt of such a benefit, have a shared interest in the property (excluding partners and shared ownership schemes) the council may restrict or refuse a grant.

Where the Government introduces a new benefit, change, vary or otherwise alter existing benefits, the authorised officer will determine whether the benefit is a qualifying benefit for the purposes of the grant.

There will be general conditions concerning ownership and tenure as part of the application for respective grants.

## **7.2 Contractual arrangements**

The council will only approve financial assistance on the basis of what it considers to be the reasonable costs of the works. Applicants will be responsible for paying any amounts in excess of this.

The building contractor is responsible to the applicant (or their representative or agent) for ensuring that works progress to a satisfactory completion. Before works commence, it is essential that the applicant and the contractor agree the following.

- The scope and cost of the works to be carried out (this may be the approval notice schedule of works, provided by the council following inspection, but it may also include items that are not covered by the approval notice). This should also include VAT and proof of public liability insurance.
- The time it will take to complete the contract.
- All the relevant practical arrangements for working on site: for example, the hours of work, what services can be used by the contractor, the provision of dustsheets to protect furniture and possessions and other preliminaries.
- How the work is to be paid for, for example by instalments or on completion.

The applicant and contractor will be expected to resolve any contractual disputes. Any disputes which involve breach of contract by either party are civil law and may require specialist advice from a solicitor or a Citizens Advice Bureau.

## **7.3 Conditions for repayment of assistance**

Repayment conditions are attached to Home Assistance Grants once the cumulated grant value exceeds £1000. Repayment conditions are attached in respect of the total grant for Empty Home Grants and Disabled Facilities



(Relocation) Grants. Where a repayment condition is applied, it is registered as a Charge until it has been repaid. Further information is provided in section 8. Only in exceptional circumstances will the council not demand repayment. Repayment conditions are not attached to the Home Security Grant.

With regard to Disabled Facilities Grants, repayment conditions (registered as a local land charge) apply where the grant exceeds £5000, subject to a maximum of £10,000, where the applicant disposes of the premises in respect of which the grant was given within 10 years of the certified date. The date of completion of the qualifying works to the satisfaction of the council is the certified date.

If an application is approved but it subsequently appears to the council that the applicant (or applicants) was not, at the time of the application's approval, entitled to assistance, no payment will be made. The council may demand that any payments already made are repaid with interest.

Applicants will be wholly liable for meeting any costs incurred under the contract and/or will be required to repay the money upon any breach of the conditions.

The council will demand the repayment of grant from the applicant in whole where an interim payment has been made but the relevant works have not been completed.

#### **7.4 Applications that do not comply with the policy**

Where an application falls outside the specific policy, but in the opinion of the authorised officer there would be a benefit to the West Suffolk councils' strategic aims in considering the scheme, then the authorised officer may approve the application.

#### **7.5 Prior approval**

In exceptional circumstances, and at the discretion of the authorised officer, approval may be given to commence the relevant works prior to the formal approval of a grant. An application for 'prior approval' must be made in writing stating the reasons why the particular works should commence before approval of the grant. Prior approval will only be given where a grant application form has been received by the council together with estimates for the works that are intended to be carried out under the prior approval.

If, for whatever reason, formal grant approval is not granted, no payment will be made towards any 'prior approved' works completed.

#### **7.6 Payment of grant**

When the council approves an application for assistance, it is forming a contract with the applicant to pay the correct amount of money on satisfactory completion of the eligible works and on condition that the applicant complies with the terms under which assistance is given.

It is a condition of payment of every grant that the eligible works are carried out within twelve months from the date of the approval. The council may allow further time where it is satisfied that any delay in the completion of the works was beyond the control of the applicant.

Final payment of the grant will only be made on the completion of all relevant works to the satisfaction of the council and the submission of invoices and relevant certificates of compliance.

It is a condition of the payment of every grant that the eligible works are carried out by the contractor whose estimate accompanied the application, or where two or more estimates were submitted, by one of those contractors. The cost of the grant eligible works will however be calculated on the lowest quote submitted.

Interim payments may be made at the discretion of the authorised officer. In normal circumstances interim payments will only be made in the following circumstances:

- the payment is for a minimum of £1500;
- at least 50 per cent of the eligible works are completed;
- in the case of a Disabled Facilities Grant, the applicant has paid 90 per cent of their contribution (the 'notional loan') to the grant;
- the total of interim payment should not exceed 90 per cent of the grant value;
- a maximum of two interim payments can be made.

Where there is more than one contractor carrying out grant works an interim payment may be made when the above criteria does not apply, where one contractor completes the works ahead of another.

The interim payment will be repayable if for any reason the applicant fails to complete all the approved grant works to the satisfaction of the councils within the period specified.

## **7.7 Unforeseen works**

At the discretion of the authorised officer additional grant assistance (up to the maximum for that grant) may be approved towards the cost for relevant works that could not have reasonably been foreseen prior to the grant approval. Grant assistance towards unforeseen works will only be considered where the defect/deficiency has been inspected prior to its remedy. No payment for additional works and/or increased expenditure will be made unless the council is satisfied that the works are eligible for additional grant.

## **8. Housing assistance schemes**

### **8.1 Home Assistance Grant**

The **purpose** of this grant is to:

- fund the cost of energy efficiency measures in the homes of owner-occupiers on low incomes but who do not qualify for assistance under any other Government schemes;
- assist applicants to maintain their properties to prevent them from falling into serious disrepair;
- carry out repairs and improvements to homes in the private sector to ensure they meet the Government's four criteria for a Decent Home as defined in the following guidance:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7812/138355.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7812/138355.pdf)
- enable the existing occupier to remain in the property in safety through carrying out essential works;
- carry out works and repairs to equipment;
- carry out works which enable the owner to be discharged from hospital and reoccupy their home.

**Eligible** owner-occupiers are those who:

- have savings of less than £16,000;
- have a gross income of less than £20,000 for a single person, £24,500 for a couple, plus £2500 for each child up to a maximum of two children;
- subject to the discretion of an authorised officer, qualify for a Government scheme but there is an unreasonable delay in the provision, repair or replacement of a boiler and the applicant would be left without heating over the winter months
- are in receipt of specified income related or disability related benefits where minor adaptation is required for a disabled person.

The following are classed as **qualifying works**.

- Loft insulation up to 270 mm.
- Cavity wall insulation.
- Draught-proofing.
- Provision of heating to the Decent Homes standard.
- Repair or replacement of boilers.
- Repairs to the fabric of the building.
- Repair of basic amenities.
- Works to remedy Category 1 hazards (as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System).
- Provision of reasonably modern facilities and services (as described in the Decent Homes Standard).
- Minor adaptations for disabled persons.

The **level of grant** available is:

- the reasonable costs of the eligible work as determined by the council, subject to the following minimum and maximum amounts:
  - minimum cost of eligible works – £100;
  - maximum – £20,000.

The following **conditions** apply.

- Two contractors' estimates must be provided in respect of the relevant works.
- For any grant where the cumulated grant figure exceeds £1000 the grant will be registered as a Charge from the certified date.
- The council will demand the repayment by the applicant of the grant, in full, if the applicant disposes (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise) of the premises in respect of which the grant of over £1000 was given.
- Where central heating is provided or boilers are repaired or replaced it is a condition that draught-proofing, loft insulation and cavity wall insulation is installed to the West Suffolk councils' minimum recommended standard.

**Qualifying benefits:** As specified by the Government and as agreed by the authorised officer

## **8.2 Home Security Grant**

The **purpose** of this grant is to fund works which enable applicants to remain in safe and secure homes.

**Eligible** applicants are those that are in receipt of a specified income related or disability related benefit.

**Qualifying works include** revision of security devices as determined in consultation with Suffolk Police.

The **level of grant** available is 100%, up to a maximum of £500 per application.

The grant is given on condition that the applicant intends to live in the property as their main residence for a period of at least 12 months following the completion of the works.

**Qualifying benefits:** As specified by the Government and as agreed by the authorised officer.

### **8.3 Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) - Mandatory**

The **purpose** of this grant is to adapt the home of a disabled person so that they are able to gain access to and safely use all the normal facilities of their home.

**Eligible** owners/occupiers are those that are living with disabilities in West Suffolk, subject to an essential need assessment by an Occupational Therapist employed or contracted by Suffolk County Council.

The following are classed as **qualifying works**.

- All works that are mandatory as described in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, as amended, to meet the essential needs of the client and that can be completed at a reasonable cost.
- Where major internal adaptations or extensions are being proposed, it may be appropriate to refer the application through a panel, as detailed in the attached Disabled Facilities Grant Protocol, for further discussion, and to look at any other appropriate, alternative options. See appendix 1 for further details.

The maximum **level of grant** available is £30,000.

The following **conditions** apply.

- Where the applicant has a qualifying owner's interest in the premises on which the relevant works were carried out, the grant will be registered as a local land charge for a period of ten years from the certified date.
- The council awarding the grant will demand the repayment by the applicant of such part of the grant that exceeds £5000, subject to a maximum of £10,000, where the applicant disposes (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise) of the premises in respect of which the grant was given within 10 years of the certified date.
- The matters in section 3(2)(b) of the Disabled Facilities (Conditions relating to approval or payment of Grant) General Consent 2008 have been considered and it is considered reasonable in all the circumstances to require the repayment.

#### **8.4 Disabled Facilities Grant (Relocation) - Discretionary**

The **purpose** of this grant is to assist an applicant eligible for Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to move to a property that is either adapted to meet their needs or is capable of being adapted, and where their existing home cannot be adapted.

**Eligible** owners/occupiers are those that qualify for the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant.

**Qualifying works** include grant aid towards the approved cost of moving to a more suitable property.

The maximum **level of grant** available is £10,000.

The following **conditions** apply.

- The applicant must be a resident within either West Suffolk council area and the property moved to must be within the districts of the two councils.
- Where applicable, an application for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant must be made within 12 months of the payment of the Relocation Grant.

The council awarding the grant will demand the repayment by the applicant of the grant, in full, if the applicant disposes (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise) of the premises in respect of which the grant was paid.

## 8.5 Empty Home Grant

The **purpose** of this grant is to fund the return of empty residential properties back into use.

Owners are **eligible**:

- where the property is currently empty and has been vacant for more than twelve months
- Where, at the discretion of the authorised officer, renovation would provide homes to meet the strategic aims of the councils.

The following are classed as **qualifying works**, where works of repair and improvement (in the judgment of the council awarding the grant) are necessary to:

- remove Category 1 hazards (as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System);
- ensure that the property is in a reasonable state of repair;
- provide reasonably modern facilities and services (in accordance with the Decent Homes Standard);
- provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The **level of grant** available is the reasonable costs of the eligible work as determined by the council awarding the grant and up to a maximum of £20,000.

The following **conditions** apply.

- The property is let as residential accommodation; or
- the property is occupied by the owner as their only or main residence.
- Repayment of the full grant will be made:
  - on breach of the condition to let or occupy the property; or
  - on sale (assignment, transfer or otherwise) of the property; or
  - the property becoming vacant without being let or occupied for a period of more than three months.



## **9. Appeals, complaints, standards of service**

Any applicant who is dissatisfied with any decision or the standard of service relating to a grant enquiry or application should initially discuss their concern with the relevant service. If the customer is still dissatisfied, their complaint will be investigated under the West Suffolk councils' Corporate Complaints Procedure as the Grant Authority.

There is no appeal against the outcome of the statutory test of resources ('means test') in respect of applications for Disabled Facilities Grants. Applicants will be advised how their contribution to the grant was calculated. The calculation is based on Government guidance and legislation, over which the councils have no discretion.

## 10. Definitions

**Authorised Officer:** an officer authorised by the West Suffolk councils in respect of grant decisions made under this policy.

**Certified date:** the date the eligible, or qualifying works, are completed to the council's satisfaction.

**Completion to the council's satisfaction:** means when the work has been completed to an acceptable standard and in accordance with the submitted and approved plans, quotations, planning approvals, building regulations and any other relevant statutory requirements. It excludes any defects liability period.

**Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG):** Mandatory DFGs are available from local authorities for essential adaptations to give disabled people better freedom of movement into and around their homes and to give access to essential facilities within the home. The legislation governing DFGs is the *1996 Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act*.

**Eligibility:** the criteria that determines who the grant will be available to.

### **Grant period:**

- for Disabled Facilities Grant a period of 10 years from the certified date;
- for all Home Assistance Grants over £1000, up to the disposal of the property by the applicant (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise);
- for Empty Home Grants, up to the disposal of the property by the applicant (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise) or the property becomes vacant, without being let or occupied for a period of more than three months.

**Means test:** a statutory test of the applicant's resources to determine the amount of eligible grant aid.

**Notional loan contribution:** the contribution the applicant will have to make to their Disabled Facilities Grant when a full grant is not available following a means test.

**Owner-occupier:** where grant eligibility is in respect of owner-occupiers the applicant must be resident in the property at the time of the application.

**Owner's interest:** a person will be deemed to have an owner's interest if that person is on the deeds of the property as an owner, either in full or part, of the property which is subject to the grant application.

**Qualifying works:** the works that will be eligible for grant aid.

**Valid application:** means an application which includes fully completed application forms, all necessary plans, quotations for the works, Certificate of

Title (if appropriate) and copies of any planning and building regulation approvals.

**West Suffolk councils:** Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

## **11. Useful links**

The Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Department for Communities and Local Government - Guidance for landlords and property related professionals

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/9425/150940.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/9425/150940.pdf)

A decent home: Definition and guidance for implementation. Department for Communities and Local Government.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7812/138355.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7812/138355.pdf)

## **APPENDIX 1 – Disabled Facilities Grant referral protocol**

### Purpose

To ensure that, as the grant authority, we meet our statutory obligations in that all works that have been recommended are eligible, will meet the essential needs of the client and can be completed at a reasonable cost.

To ensure that we consider alternative options to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), where appropriate, and therefore discuss these alternatives with the client and their family, as well as the Occupational Therapist (OT), so as to provide real choice.

### Challenge

In some circumstances it may be appropriate to challenge the essential needs being recommended, particularly where major internal adaptations or extensions are being proposed.

### Panel

Referring an application, which is more complex, through the proposed panel will enable appropriate discussions on the proposals to consider any suitable alternative options.

### Relocation

This would include the possibility of relocation, where adaptations would not be considered reasonably practicable or the cost of an adaptation is considered excessive.

### Maximise funding

By ensuring that only grant eligible works are approved and grant schemes are both reasonable and practicable to maximise the limited funding available.

### Managing expectations

It is very important to manage the expectations of applicants and their families from an early stage so that they are fully aware that any grant offered will be for the minimum scheme of works required to meet the essential needs of the disabled person.

With the development of the new integrated Home Improvement Agency Service many of these principles will be taken forward into practice.

### Process

- It is essential that the OT referral clearly states the essential needs of the client and explains why the client needs a particular adaptation. Where it is considered that the proposed adaptation will need to include complex and extensive provision for future needs; for example, a wheelchair

accessible bathroom, or ceiling tracks for a hoist where the client's condition is likely to deteriorate in the future, these must be clearly stated and explained. This information may be submitted at the initial referral stage or following a site visit as below. There is no need for a detailed specification as part of the OT referral as this can be worked up at a later stage if adaptation is appropriate.

- A site visit with the OT will help to establish if the adaptation is considered to be reasonably practicable, having taken account of the construction and layout of the property concerned. This will also provide an opportunity to discuss alternative ways of achieving the required outcomes if appropriate.
- Consideration must also be given to the overall suitability of the property to accommodate the occupiers and existing overcrowding issues will need to be taken into account.
- Where it is considered that the property cannot be reasonably adapted for the essential needs of the client, the possibility of a relocation grant to a property which can be adapted should be discussed. It may be appropriate for the housing options officer to visit and discuss alternatives with the applicant(s). If adaptation is not appropriate then a letter should be sent to the applicant(s) advising of this decision and giving the reasons.
- Where extensive internal adaptations or extensions are being considered, it is recommended that the officer draws up a rough plan of the property, with appropriate dimensions, positions of windows and doors etc. The proposal and any possible alternative options can then be discussed with team members /DFG panel and the OT where considered appropriate, to determine and agree any works which should be funded through a DFG, prior to confirmation of the eligible works with the client. This will enable all parties to be clear of the adaptations required to meet the essential needs of the client prior to plans being drawn up for planning or building regulation approval, if required.