

# **RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Disabled Adaption Policy- Council Housing Stock**

Review date: June 2025

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This policy sets out how Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) will respond to requests for property adaptations to the homes of Council tenants.

1.2 The Council is committed to supporting tenants to live independently within their own home where possible. The increase in demand for social housing requires a greater focus on supporting tenants to consider how their housing needs may be met in the longer term and this policy clarifies that, as their needs change, tenants may be required to move to a more suitable property.

1.3 This policy is aligned with the Council's approved Housing Allocation Scheme and the objectives of making best use of stock, ensuring Best Value and responding to the housing needs in the area.

## **2. Aims**

2.1 The aims of this policy are to;

- Enable RBC to provide housing which best meets the assessed needs of residents.
- Support best use of financial resources, to ensure budgets are spent effectively.
- To make best use of the Council's property assets so that the long-term benefit derived from the housing stock is preserved for future use.
- Guide Occupational Therapists (OT) and other professionals to understand the circumstances in which RBC will not be able to assist with adaptations.
- Ensure residents have a full understanding of the parameters within which decisions are made.
- Operate a service that offers suitable, practical, and cost-effective solutions that meet tenants' assessed needs.
- Meet the long-term needs of tenants and their families, ensuring their safety, well-being and quality of life.
- Ensure no tenant waits longer than 12 months for an approved adaptation to be progressed.

Secondary aims are to ensure budgets are spent effectively and that the long-term benefit derived from the housing stock is preserved for future use.

## **3. Scope, Definitions and Legislation**

3.1 This policy takes into account the following legislation;

- The Care Act 2014
- The Runnymede Housing Allocations Scheme made under the Housing Act 1996
- The Equality Act
- Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010

3.2 Long-term adverse effect refers to disabilities that have lasted for at least 12 months, the effects of which will last for at least 12 months and which are likely to last for the remainder of a person's life.

## **4. Policy Details**

4.1 Adaptation work will only be undertaken after careful consideration of various factors such as:

- current and future needs of the tenant(s) and their household
- individual tenant's level of disability
- professional assessment/recommendations of healthcare professionals
- characteristics of the dwelling, its construction and internal arrangement
- planning and building regulation requirements and legislation
- budget provision and long-term property asset implications
- most cost-effective temporary of achieving the required outcome
- alternative solutions to address assessed needs.

In order for property adaption work to be considered tenants must request a referral to an OT approved by Surrey County Council, usually Adult Social Care or Children's Services.

4.2 The OT will assess the resident and confirm their recommendations to the Council. In some cases, the OT will request a joint visit with RBC.

4.3 The OT assessments will be considered by the Council who decides what is reasonable in relation to its need to make housing available to a wide range of people in housing need, over the long term.

4.4 An OT or other professional must confirm that "the effects of which will last for at least 12months" and "which are likely to last for the remainder of a person's life" apply to each assessment submitted to RBC.

The long-term diagnosis of a tenant's condition and the future use and occupation of the property will be key considerations when deciding about the most appropriate solution.

Adaptations may be declined in favour of rehousing where:

- it is not appropriate to meet the assessed need in the current home because of financial costs
- the property is under occupied under the bedroom allocations in the prevailing Allocation Scheme.
- there will be an adverse impact upon the future use of the property
- it is impractical to adapt the property
- there are available alternative solutions to meet the tenant's assessed needs
- adaptations will not be completed where the household's needs can reasonably be met through rehousing within a 24-month period from the date at which RBC is made aware of the tenant's assessed needs.
- A tenant's mobility needs are better met by a move to a property on the ground floor.

4.5 The on-going maintenance and servicing of adaptations is funded by annual repair and maintenance revenue budgets if approved by RBC. Subject to means testing, servicing of some specialised equipment may be the responsibility of the tenant after installation.

The renewal/ replacement of previously installed adaptations will be treated as a repair/ renewal funded from core budgets and will require a current assessment of the households' accommodation needs.

4.6 Provision of appliances and portable specialist equipment will not be funded as these are either the tenant's responsibility or that of social services.

4.7 Minor adaptations such as handrails up to a combined total value of £1000 may be carried out to enable a resident to remain independently living in their home regardless of whether they are under occupying the property.

4.8 Major adaptations costing more than £1000 are means tested using the same criteria as that used for Disabled Facility Grant applications.

Requests for major adaptations could be rejected in the following circumstances;

- Under occupying by one or more bedrooms
- Overcrowding or waiting for a transfer to another property.
- Possibility of the tenancy ending, for example a notice has been served
- Adaptation is unreasonable, for example requiring structural alterations.
- Installing a level access shower above ground floor which cannot be accessed by an existing lift.
- Needs can be met with alternative use of the property, for example, using a ground floor second reception room as a bedroom
- Other suitable alternative adapted, or part adapted accommodation is available
- It is likely that a suitable property will become available within 24 months of the request.
- Adaptation would adversely affect the Council's ability to make best use of the stock and relet the property in the future.
- The household's circumstances are such that further adaptations will be required in the future and therefore more suitable accommodation may be more appropriate.
- Adaptation would place others at risk e.g. a communal stairlift with no alternative access for other residents
- Other than in exceptional circumstances, where a person has left a property with suitable adaptations already present and there was no identified housing need to move.
- Property is unsuitable for adaptation due to its construction
- Council does not own the property
- Property is used for temporary housing including a temporary decant.

The Council will not install a through floor lift unless this can be accommodated within the existing property without utilising a bedroom.

The Council will not install stairlifts in under occupied properties. For other requests the Council will consider the practicalities and cost involved in adapting an under-occupied property against the potential benefits to the tenant(s) or to the Council of moving them to a more suitable smaller home. If a tenant is under-occupying and has requested adaptations, RBC will assess the suitability of their property for their needs. Our primary aim is to ensure tenants are housed in the most appropriate home to meet their needs.

Where RBC consider that a tenant's needs are best met by moving them to a smaller and more suitable home, the focus will be to understand the wider impact of a potential move on the tenant's well-being and continuity of care. Support will be provided with a move in collaboration with Surrey County Council Adult Social Care, Housing Services staff or the Social Prescribing Service if required.

Adaptation work that RBC could carry out to an individual flat or house which otherwise meets the current household needs includes:

- Installation of grab rails in various locations throughout a property
- Installation of access steps/ramps to front and rear entrances
- Additional internal banister rails
- Additional external handrails

- Installation of lever taps
- Installation of over-bath shower facilities.

4.9 RBC will not usually replace adaptations in a property where they have been removed by the current resident. If they are required, it will be at the Council's discretion where to reinstall, and the cost may be recharged to the resident.

Where RBC declines adaptations in favour of the tenant moving to suitable alternative accommodation, financial assistance may be provided for the move at the Council's discretion subject to a means test.

4.10 Where a home has been adapted for a specific resident who no longer lives there, RBC will try to identify a suitable tenant for the property. In the event that this is not possible the property may be let with adaptations in place, and these will not usually be removed at the request of the new resident. The property will be advertised and let as such unless there is prior agreement in writing from the Council to carry out works.

4.11 In some cases, extensions and/or conversions will be considered where the property is capable of being adapted to meet a resident's needs at reasonable cost, the adaptation is likely to have an on-going future demand, and/or there is no other reasonable viable alternative including re-housing. This is entirely at the discretion of the Council.

Any work such as these that is approved will be progressed as quickly as possible but may take up to 36 months to complete.

4.12 Where a resident living in an adapted property is being moved because of redevelopment or refurbishment of their home, essential adaptations will be carried out in the new home being offered. This is most likely to apply to residents of previously converted housing, older properties and Independent Retirement Living schemes which require refurbishment.

4.13 RBC will ensure that where possible adaptation works are financed through the Capital Programme.

During planned works, RBC will maintain any existing adaptation or fixed equipment if it is still needed for the household.

RBC may remove semi-portable equipment or minor adaptations such as a handrail, stair lift or specialist shower if no longer needed due to a permanent change in the household requirements.

Fixed adaptations such as structural alterations or concrete ramps will be retained and maintained.

4.14 RBC will consider the practicalities and cost involved in adapting an under-occupied property against the potential benefits to the resident(s) or to the Council of moving to a more suitable smaller home. If a tenant is under-occupying and has requested adaptations, RBC will assess the suitability of their property for their needs.

4.15 RBC will not carry out adaptations to properties that are subject to a Right-to-Buy application. The applicant will be referred to the Council's Home Improvement Agency.

4.16 Pavement crossovers and hard standings are for wheelchair users and residents with severe disabilities. Where a need for parking is identified RBC may identify an alternative

suitable property. If the Council does agree, these requests are subject to approval by the Planning Department and Surrey County Council Highways.

4.17 There is no statutory duty to grant works to communal areas. Where works are both necessary and reasonably practical, the Council will consider essential access requirements. Such proposals may require the consent of other residents and must not compromise other residents' safety and will therefore be risk assessed on a case-by-case basis.

4.18 RBC will consider cost and practicality of making provision for residents' mobility scooters and whether it is appropriate to offer alternative accommodation. Adaptations to make provision for a mobility scooter will not be approved where the tenant is under occupying if alternative accommodation is available. Requests for provision of a mobility scooter store without any other adaptations will be considered by a Trusted Assessor at RBC regarding than a SCC OT.

4.19 Where a tenant requests a mutual exchange or transfer from their adapted property, to one that is not adapted RBC are likely to decline the request unless there is evidence that the adaptations are no longer required. RBC may not carry out further major adaptations to the subsequent property unless there are extenuating circumstances. When tenants request a mutual exchange, the incoming tenant will be expected to have an OT recommendation for any installed adaptations.

4.20 Suitable access will be considered for the main front door and/or existing rear door(s) to a ground floor property, where reasonable and practical. If this is not viable the most economical provision will be explored, which may include other adaptations such as changing windows to doors. This will be at the discretion of RBC in conjunction with the Surrey CC, OT service and an offer of alternative accommodation will be considered.

A recommendation for additional space, for example an extra bedroom, will be referred to Housing Solutions to support an application for a more suitable property to meet that need.

4.21 Where additional space is being requested due to a child who has challenging behaviour due to their disability the Household will be assisted through the Council's Housing Allocation Policy.

4.22 Tenants wishing to carry out their own adaptations, including making provision for a mobility scooter, need permission from RBC before any work is carried out. The resident must;

- Ensure proposed work is carried out by a fully competent qualified contractor
- Conform to the appropriate regulations and legislation
- Be responsible for putting right any damage relating to the works being carried out
- Contact RBC's Housing Service upon completion of any work so an inspection is carried out
- Provide RBC with any relevant certificates of the work upon completion
- Maintain and repair any equipment or fittings they have installed.

RBC reserves the right to request that the tenant signs a legal agreement confirming they are responsible for ensuring the property is put back to its original condition upon termination of the tenancy. The cost of this must be met by the resident.

A reasonable charge may be made to cover the cost of RBC staff engaged in monitoring this work.

## **5. Communication and Consultation**

5.1 RBC will provide clear and comprehensive advice and information to tenants, with an aim for a single point of contact.

5.2 Where adaptations are refused in favour of a move to alternative accommodation the Council will provide support through the transfer application process.

5.3 Where works are approved the Council will consult with residents, explaining the scope of the works and how long it will take to complete.

5.4 RBC will actively promote this policy and the adaptations service through a range of media including (but not limited to) leaflets, posters, newsletters and the RBC website.

5.5 If a tenant is not satisfied with any aspect of a decision taken on their application, they have a right to request a review. If dissatisfied with the outcome of the review, they may make a complaint under RBC's complaint procedure.

## **6. Monitoring and Performance Management**

6.1 We aim to review this policy at least every three years to ensure that a comprehensive service is being offered that meets residents' requirements and in accordance with any legislative changes.

RBC is committed to:

- Monitoring completed adaptations through the use of customer satisfaction surveys; to ensure we maintain performance and help inform future service improvements
- Publishing information in relation to RBC performance against the aims and standards set out in this policy
- Training RBC staff to recognise the need for adaptations and to enable them to give guidance to resident who may require an OT referral.

## **7. Equality and Diversity**

7.1. The policy seeks to promote fairness and equality throughout the activities of RBC, regardless of where the tenant lives, their background or circumstances. In deciding whether to carry out adaptations, RBC will have regard to the housing need in the area and the duty to achieve best use of stock this will include not facilitating.

7.2 Where there is a barrier in accessing information, extra effort will be made by RBC staff and its representatives. This may involve asking a relative or third party for help (with the consent of the service user) or employing translation or interpretation services if necessary.

7.3. An Equality Impact Assessment screening has been carried out on this policy and is available on request. It notes that, in applying the policy staff will be sensitive to the needs of tenants who have lived in their homes for a long time, to ensure that any solution supports their long-term needs, well-being and continuity of care. If the Council declines adaptations in favour of a move to more suitable property, support will be available to navigate this process to achieve a positive outcome and to ensure that suitable adaptations are either already available in the selected new home or these are installed to the OT's specification.

## 8. Version Control

Version Number	Date Amended	Comments	Date Approved	Author	Approved By
V1	October 21	Approved by committee	June 2021	Maggie Ward	Committee
V2	November 21	Amended format of original document and added version control	November 21	Luisa Cantore-Norris	HMT