



Bristol City Council – Local authority in-house home improvement agency

Good practice themes

- 1. Innovative Regulatory Reform Order to broaden range of support for home adaptation provision**
- 2. Procurement review to fast track and streamline process**

Context

Bristol City Council is a large unitary authority. It has a long track record of developing and implementing a range of support services that enable older people to retain their independence for as long as possible.

These have most notably included

- establishing a singularly managed co-located housing and adult care occupational therapy service (entitled Accessible Homes)
- operating as much as possible in a tenure neutral way across all housing tenures
- positive collaborative working arrangements with the local independent agency service (West of England Care and Repair)
- utilising the local independent agency's Home Independence Centre for the majority of routine OT assessments. This considerably speeds up that part of the assessment process for the service user and also provides an opportunity for them to view other adaptations, equipment and access services
- establishing a service user reference group that meets every six months providing feedback on existing services and input on proposed service developments

1. Innovative changes introduced through revised Regulatory Reform Order

The increase in DFG funding through the Better Care Fund to the city has enabled a broadening of support to disabled people by way of a combination of innovative grant and/or loan assistance.

There has been a recognition that the improvements in health and wellbeing experienced by service users as a result of property modifications can be optimised by the delivery of other forms of support in the home environment. The revised policy document for 2018/19 extended funding options for home modifications over and above mandatory DFG. It has also brought in a number of Added Value services, some delivered directly by the in-house agency with others provided by partner organisations.

The detail of eligibility, cost thresholds and relevant conditions can be found via [Financial Assistance Schedule April 2018](#). In summary these comprise:

Discretionary Funding Options

In respect of assistance relating directly to disability over and above mandatory DFG the current policy includes the following:

- **Discretionary Adaptations Assistance (DAA)** – top up for mandatory works
- **Discretionary Adaptation Assistance (DAA)** – for discretionary works in exceptional circumstances determined by a panel.
- **Disabled Facilities Loan** – 0% interest to top up owner occupiers DFG, DAA applications or means tested contribution on mandatory works
- **Disabled Facilities (DFG Safeguard)** – one off grant where the applicant cannot meet an assessed contribution and also fails to meet Disabled Facilities loan criteria
- **Hospital Discharge Grant (urgent adaptations)** – rapid discharge from hospital/ prevention of readmission and for terminally ill people.
- **Feasibility Assistance** – to assist consideration of options in complex adaptations prior to DFG approval.
- **Stairlift Removal** – to meet “making good” costs associated with lifts less than five years old if no longer required. Items are then potentially used for recycling to other suitable properties
- **Repairs to Disabled Adaptations** –for adaptations outside of the warranty period

Added Value services

Include the following:

- **Hospital Discharge Grant** (urgent repairs, cleaning and clearance) – to enable people to be discharged quickly from hospital/ prevent re-admission provided by West of England Care and Repair.

- **Assistance to meet Decent Homes Standard** – a mixture of maintenance loans, loan leverage in cases of hardship and safety net grants to remove category 1 hazards available through the vehicle of Wessex Home Improvement Loans who are a not for-profit financial organisation offering low cost loans.
- **Making Space** – Providing assistance to the Home Improvement Agency with the help of volunteers, to assist hoarders reduce the amount of clutter in their homes.
- **Energy loans** – for owner occupiers who are either fuel poor or able to pay. Maximum loan is up to £15,000 at 0% interest rate if fuel poor or 4% if able to pay.

The decision to have a local service offer linked to disability that includes a mixture of grants and loans, rather than just grants, has been enabled by increased Better Care Fund allocations and the aim of making the approach more financially sustainable (and hence assist as many households as possible). Consequently a proportion of the available Better Care Funding has been transferred to the local Loan Fund administered by Wessex Home Improvement Loans and dedicated to supporting disabled people (the majority of whom are older owner occupiers).

2. Procurement review to fast track and streamline processes

In common with many local authorities the austerity programme has resulted in pressures on staffing levels. Within the in-house agency the number of surveyors has reduced when capital budgets have significantly increased. In a conscious attempt to continue providing adaptations on a rapid right first time basis the relationship between Accessible Homes and contractors has been redefined at key stages of the process.

Fast track adaptations

An abbreviated pathway has been introduced for bathroom adaptations, ramps and other straightforward items. A similar abbreviated pathway exists for simple stair lifts. Consequently the value of a scheme involving several types of work eligible for fast track could be up to £10k.

In summary this involves:

- **Pre-approval** – Referrals relevant for fast track are identified by the Occupational Therapist. The Accessible Homes surveyor confirms the suitability of using this approach (approximately 90% of such cases). A caseworker contacts the owner and establishes whether the owner wants to organise the work themselves or appoints an agent. If they choose the in-house agency, the work is issued directly to a contractor to arrange a property survey, produces a design and drawing (using a specified product) and the Framework contractor calculates a cost derived from agreed Schedule of Rates, including an agency fee. The Accessible Homes surveyor checks the information and, if everything is satisfactory, issues a grant approval to the service user with a simultaneous instruction to proceed sent to the main contractor.
- **Post-approval** – the contractor liaises with the service user for a convenient start date and works can then commence. The contractor undertakes their own quality control

process independent of site operatives with the contract conditions placing pressure on them not to invoice for payment if snagging works are apparent.

- **Protecting the Service User** – At completion of works the service always rings the service user to ensure they are satisfied plus they undertake a small percentage of unannounced post completion compliance checks before payments are authorised. Any concerns or complaints expressed by the householder linked to provision of works are initially the responsibility of the contractor but a failure to resolve them satisfactorily results in an investigation by the Accessible Homes surveyor. Findings are monitored against a set of contract BVPI's

Outcomes of Revised Fast Track Working Relationships:

- whilst some initial difficulties were experienced by the introduction of these arrangements they have been largely addressed by a revised set of detailed and time scaled metrics designed by Accessible Homes that improve contract management
- contractors having an increased direct level of responsibility for securing a positive service user outcome has freed up the in-house surveyors to concentrate on more complex cases
- the approach could be extended to other types of adaptations
- high service user satisfaction levels have been maintained

Contact

Sarah Hooper, Accessible Homes Manager sarah.hooper@bristol.gov.uk

[Read the full report](#)