

Vale of Glamorgan - Independent Living Policy



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Previous versions

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1a	Current	Draft	

1. Introduction and aims

This policy outlines the Vale of Glamorgan Council's strategy to facilitate adaptation provisions that preserve individuals' independence in their homes, particularly those in need of assistance. It establishes guidelines, informs enquirers about available provisions, and addresses individual needs effectively.

Objectives:

- Foster interdisciplinary collaboration to achieve independent living for eligible citizens.
- Preserve and enhance home independence through equipment, grants, and referrals to promote the use of other potential services.
- Provide clear guidance on expected services for applicants.
- Incorporate relevant advice and guidance from the Welsh Government.

The Independent Living Policy encourages individuals to thrive at home by ensuring transparency, collaboration, and support of them and their needs. By implementing this policy, the Vale of Glamorgan Council aims to enhance citizens' independence and well-being, enabling them to maintain their autonomy and quality of life.

2. Legislative Context

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 acts aims to promote a healthier Wales, where people's physical and mental well-being is maximised. This policy and associated procedures are written as a response to the act, policy guidance, and the following documents:

- Age friendly Wales: our strategy for an ageing society – Welsh Government, 2021.
- Welsh Government Consultation: Action on Disability: The Right to Independent Living – Welsh Government, September 2019.
- Disabled Facilities Grant Factsheet – Welsh Ombudsman, March 2015.
- The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – National Assembly for Wales.
- Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 – National Assembly for Wales.
- Review of Housing Adaptations including Disabled Facilities Grants – Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, March 2005.
- Disabled Facilities Grants: Changing the means test – Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2021.
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
- The Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
- Housing Act 1985.

- Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 which now supersedes most of the 1985 Act.

3. Context and Scope

This policy outlines how the Council supports citizens in maintaining independence in their own homes through property adaptation.

Owner occupiers, property owners, and private tenants can apply for assistance to adapt their property if there is a person requiring assistance at home.

Vale Council tenants should contact the Council Housing department for help, while other housing association tenants will be assessed by a suitably qualified professional in consultation with the relevant housing association.

Adaptations may include improvements in heating, lighting, bathing facilities, cooking assistance, mobility, and safe access to the property.

Referrals are made through the Wellbeing Matters Service via Contact One Vale. Citizens may be referred to other organizations for additional support.

Disabled Facilities Grant enquires are open to owner occupiers, property owners, and private tenants who need adaptations to live independently and accept a means test. Enquires are made for grants via Contact One Vale.

Discretionary Adaptations Grant enquiries are open to all that have been identified with an adaptations needs and citizens that accept a lifetime charge on their property.

The Council may direct applicants to other organisations that can provide timely and efficient assistance, such as benefit advice or energy efficiency measures.

Essential information for enquiries, and applications includes:

- Name of enquirer.
- If someone is making an enquiry on behalf of someone else their details will also be needed.
- Any information about your/their health that informs the enquiry.
- What the home is like.
- An understanding of any challenges the enquirer has and how they affect them and what they would like to achieve from the enquiry and how it will improve their life.

Providing this information and objectives is vitally important in how we respond, and the timescales associated their enquiry. The more information we gather the better. Response times do differ for different applications, ranging from 1-2 weeks for certain services to longer periods for comprehensive assessments and property changes.

More details on the process of the process of assistance are given in the document that accompanies the policy - Vale of Glamorgan Independent Living Assistance Policy Guide.

4. Principles

The following principles guide our approach:

- Enquiries are promptly managed, directing them to the appropriate next step in the process. This could involve referring for assessment, providing guidance to other council departments or external organizations capable of addressing the enquiry.
- Enquiries requiring assessment are addressed within our specified timeframes, or enquirers are informed about the assessment date based on the council's current capacity.
- Enquirers are informed about the council's available services during the assessment, highlighting that the offered services may not align with their expectations.
- Swift action is taken for small adaptations, ideally completing them within four weeks of the initial enquiry.
- Medium and large adaptations are evaluated in accordance with Section 6 of this policy, following the definitions set by the Welsh Government.
- Upon completion of assessments, enquirers are provided with clear explanations of the Discretionary Adaptations Grant or Disabled Facilities Grant process, including the purpose and implications of each grant.
- In cases where the council determines that an adaptation is not reasonable or feasible, the enquirer is notified of the reasons. The council also explains the relocation offer and the appeal process should the enquirer wish to proceed with either of those actions.
- Random checks are conducted to ensure the suitability of minor adaptations, verifying that they meet the enquirer's stated needs.
- Medium and large adaptations undergo a quality assurance procedure to assess if they effectively meet the applicant's requirements. Additionally, proper registration of items with warranties or guarantees is ensured.

5. Key Duties and Requirements

The policy outlines the following key duties:

1. Upon receiving an enquiry or referral, we will initiate the processing. There are two approaches we follow:
 - a. We will promptly address aspects within our capabilities, such as quick adaptations, equipment provision, and installation of Telecare. These cater to less complex needs and may or may not require an assessment.
 - b. For more complex enquiries, an assessment will be necessary, which may involve a waiting period.
2. Assessments: The Occupational Therapy team will arrange contact applicants requiring assessment and will attend the home if needed. While a single visit may suffice, additional visits may be necessary depending on complexity and involvement of other departments.
3. Small Adaptations: Small adaptations, including portable ramps, grab rails, telecare, and minor works, will be addressed within approximately two weeks (subject to demand and capacity at the time of enquiry).
4. Medium or Large Adaptations: If the enquiry necessitates a medium or large adaptation, the case will be transferred to the Disabled Facilities Grants Team. They will collaborate with the enquirer to determine the scale of work and assist in the grant application process.
5. For medium or large adaptations, the applicant will be presented with three options:
 - a. Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) with a Means Test, and a 10-year charge on their property.
 - b. Discretionary Adaptations Grant (DAG) without a Means Test, and a lifetime charge on their property.
 - c. Relocation grant if the proposed adaptation is not feasible or practical.

For tenanted properties individual discussions, are held that include what adaptations will be considered or the potential for a move to a different property.

For children's adaptations, there will be no means test. It is proposed that for all adaptations a 10-year recovery charge is placed on the property, if it is determined that there are benefits to the adaptations and they are practicable and reasonable. A case conference is required for all adaptations above £36,000.

6. In the event of an enquirer wishing to appeal an offer or decision, joint meetings will be arranged involving the citizen, Assessor, and the Grant Officer/Agent. These meetings aim to discuss and reach agreement regarding work or eligibility within the scope of this policy.

6. Standards

Adaptation Size

The small, medium, and large adaptations referred to in this policy are defined as follows:

Category	Nature of Work Required	Example of Work
Small Adaptions are inexpensive items, which can be provided very quickly. They would fit into the description of 'immediate falls prevention' or 'urgent for hospital discharge' and can be assessed and installed within days or the same day if urgent. They can be identified by several health/social services/other appropriately trained staff e.g., RSL staff, Care and Repair staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor home modification required • Not a specialised solution • No building/planning approval required • Adjustable/flexible • Simple and intuitive • Minimal maintenance and/or servicing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grab rails • Stair rails • Small ramps • Accessible taps • Key safes • Mop stick handrails • Outdoor rails • External/staircase se lights • Additional electrical sockets
Medium Adaptations are anything which is not classed as small or large.	Major home modification may be required, but building/planning approval not required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk in shower • Stair lifts • Large ramps • A combination of adaptations installed as one job
Large Adaptations these are works which will require specialist assessments, statutory approvals, and major adaptations to a property such as extensions and through floor lifts. An Occupational Therapist's assessment will be required, and planning permission may be needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major home modification/structural change required • Specialised/innovative solutions required • Building/planning approval required • Fixed/permanent/long term • Complex/unfamiliar/ requires training and supervision • Solution requires expertise for installation and maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building an extension to provide a downstairs bedroom and/or bathroom • Through floor lift • Significant internal structural modifications e.g., relocate bathroom or kitchen

Financial Limits

The following financial limits apply to DFG and DAG grants, and Relocation expenses:

- The maximum grant limit for DFG and DAG grants is £36,000.
- The first £5,000 of any application is discounted from any charges that may be levied.
- Grants exceeding this amount will undergo case conferences to assess their reasonableness, practicality feasibility.
- Relocation grants are calculated as:
 - 3% of any property valued to £225,000.
 - An additional 2% for any value above this.
 - Provisions to cover reasonable fees.

Prioritisation

This system only applies to the Occupational Therapy Service and the way in which they identify the enquiry/referral or application to the Independent Living Service. Any person aggrieved by a decision in relation to Priority Status has the right of appeal to the Director of Social Services, Vale of Glamorgan Council, Docks Office, Subway Road, Barry CF63 4RT.

Fast Track or High Referrals

1. Exceptional circumstances where major works of adaptation are essential for safe discharge and do not fall within the remit of:
 - Health
 - Rapid Response Adaptations Project grants or
 - Social Services Minor Works options.
2. Urgently needed stair lifts/through floor lifts where privacy of treatment cannot be achieved for care AND where there is a high health risk to the client or safety risk to the carer. (*e.g., Severe heart disease, terminal illness where there is an essential need to conserve energy, rapidly progressive neurological conditions such as motor neurone disease and some types of multiple sclerosis.*)
3. Exceptional multifaceted situations where the alternative would be admission to care.

Standard Referrals

Category one

1. Life limiting illness not triggering a fast-track category but where an early solution is indicated. (*e.g., Kidney disease, advance heart lung and neurological conditions.*)
2. Conditions requiring medical treatment applied in the home situation and where the condition would worsen through lack of provisions. (*e.g., Rheumatoid arthritis where joint presentation is a primary focus, severe eczema/psoriasis or other skin or tissue disease/breakdown requiring daily showering or bathing to apply the treatment.*)
3. The management of bowel incontinence.
4. The management of long standing open/infected wounds (unless contraindicated).

5. Safety provisions due to behavioural, autistic spectrum or EMI need.
6. Ramping, where the client is totally wheelchair dependent (powered or outsized wheelchairs).
7. Urgently needed hard standings essential for safe transfers and where the client is totally wheelchair dependent.

Category two

1. Early to mid-stage degenerative conditions of all types requiring a planned solution to functional difficulty.
2. Post-surgical/traumatic condition where temporary or interim solutions/procedures can be safely sustained in the medium term. (e.g., *temporary ground floor living*)
3. Ramping where a temporary provision will meet need safely in the medium term and can be provided cost effectively.

Category three

1. Adaptations to manage personal hygiene requiring a planned solution to functional difficulty and not associated with a medical need to bath.
2. Ramping for use with transit wheelchairs where the person retains some walking and step/stair climbing capacity.
3. Heating conversions not met by other funding sources.
4. Non urgent additional lighting.

Disabled Facilities Grants Prioritisation

The Disabled Facilities Grants Service commits to providing a priority service to those referrals identified as being 'Fast Track' or 'Category 1'. Assuming that the application is deemed both necessary and appropriate, and reasonable and practicable, the time taken to complete adaptations will always depend on:

- The nature and complexity of the proposed adaptation.
- The value of the proposed adaptation.
- The condition and adaptability of the property.

7. What Disabled Facilities grants cannot be used for...

The DFG and DAG's can be used for many things, but the following are not possible through the conditions of the grants:

- The grants have no responsibility to provide facilities to promote an applicant's development.
- They cannot be used to overcome social or economic problems. This includes overcrowding.
- Based on 20/02 WAG guidance, additional quiet space inside or outside the existing dwelling will not be provided.
- They cannot be considered for the provision of an extension if it is reasonable to use the existing property's footprint. If it is reasonable and practicable to use the existing footprint to meet the client's need but the applicant does not agree to the designs, the grant application will be cancelled.

- If an applicant approaches the Council with plans for an extension to the property that are approved by Planning and Building Control and will be funded by the applicant and not grant aid, the Council will consider this layout in the adaptation of the property. In this situation grants will only fund fixtures, fittings, and equipment. They cannot fund structural work relating to the new extension.

8. Risk Management

The council's Assistance Service can be accessed with the council's agreement and provision of services. Each service offered by the council will have its own risk management plan, which becomes effective as soon as an enquiry is made.

9. Further Guiding Criteria

Further guidance can be found in the following documents:

- Vale of Glamorgan Council Independent Living Assistance Policy Guide.
- Vale of Glamorgan Council Social Services: Guidance for the adaptations of homes of people with independent living needs

10. Policy Approval and Review

Policy Approved By:	Cabinet
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Responsible Officer(s):	Phil Chappell, OM Regeneration, Andrew Cole, OM Locality Services