

Meeting of:	Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 11 October 2023
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Independent Living Policy
Purpose of Report:	To present the proposal for the implementation of an Independent Living Policy in the Vale of Glamorgan.
Report Owner:	M. Goldsworthy, Director of Place
Responsible Officer:	P. Chappell, Operational Manager Regeneration
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Cabinet will be considering the Policy and any comments from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 19 th October
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet

Executive Summary:

The draft Independent Living Policy at Appendix A outlines the Vale of Glamorgan Council's strategy to facilitate home adaptations 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 across Council departments to achieve independent living for eligible citizens.

Preserve and enhance home independence through promoting the use of community support, equipment, grants, and home adaptations.

Provide clear guidance on expected services for applicants.

Incorporate relevant advice and guidance from the Welsh Government by introducing a new Discretionary Adaptations Grant.

The Independent Living Policy enables individuals to thrive at home by ensuring transparency, collaboration, and support by providing additional options. 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.

Recommendations

1. That Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee refers the draft Independent Living Policy for Consideration by Cabinet.
2. That any comments received from Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny are referred to Cabinet for their consideration before the policy is approved.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To allow Cabinet to approve the Independent Living Policy.
2. To consider any comments from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee in order to approve the Independent Living Policy.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Disabled Facilities Grant helps toward the cost of adapting homes to meet the needs of people living with disabilities. Home adaptations mean that people can maintain their independence and safety allowing them to live at home with dignity, reducing pressures on health and social care services in the longer term.
- 1.2 The administration of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) follows the guidelines outlined in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, amended by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.
- 1.3 The current Housing Renewal Policy has been in place since 2014. Since then, legislation has been introduced in Wales such as Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, which provides a duty on Local Authorities to promote people's wellbeing in a way that enhances individuals control over their lives and ensures that their voice is heard.
- 1.4 A 2021 internal Audit report recommended that the current policy be reviewed and that a decision be taken on where the Disability Facilities Grants Team should sit within the Council. The team is currently based within the Regeneration department.
- 1.5 Homeowner occupiers, landlords and private tenants can apply for a Disability Facilities Grant to adapt a property, providing there is a disabled person living in the property as their main residence. The Council has a statutory duty to consider and approve applications for Disabled Facilities Grants where there is an identified need, and the property could be reasonably adapted. A qualified professional, such as an occupational therapist, assess what home adaptations are required to promote the person's independence and wellbeing. A specialist building surveyor then assesses that the works are reasonable and practical.

- 1.6** Improvements can include better heating and lighting systems, bathroom and kitchen adaptations, stair lifts, through floor lifts and widening of doorways are also provided as part of some adaptations.
- 1.7** The DFG (Disabled Facilities Grant) is subject to a financial means test for adult applicants of home adaptations (means testing does not apply to parents of dependent disabled children or young people under 19). This assessment considers all income, savings, and outgoings, meaning some private homeowners are means tested to contribute significant sums towards the adaptation.
- 1.8** The statutory limit for grant aid for the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants is £36,000. Where the cost of adaptations exceeds the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant limit, and it is not reasonable for the disabled applicant to use the relocation grant to move to a more suitable property, the Council will fund a Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant. This discretionary Grant is offered on the same terms and conditions as the mandatory DFG, including the means test and grant conditions and will fund the same adaptation works and fees as the Mandatory Disability Facilities Grant.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** In 2021, Welsh Government outlined an expectation that Local Authorities remove means testing on small and medium sized adaptations. To facilitate this, the Council established a working to develop the new Independent Living Policy.
- 2.2** The Council has a statutory duty to provide DFGs to eligible disabled people. Local Authorities can make use of powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 to award grants without applying a means test. The new Independent Living Policy proposes:
 - 2.3** Small Adaptations: Small adaptations, including portable ramps, grab rails, and minor works, will not be subject to a means test and will be addressed within approximately two to four weeks (subject to demand and capacity at the time of enquiry).
 - 2.4** Medium or Large Adaptations: If the Occupational Therapist (OT) assessment determines a medium or large adaptation, including large scale kitchen or bathroom adaptations, lifts, extensions and structural changes to the property, the case will be transferred to the Disabled Facilities Grants Team. They will collaborate with the OT to determine the scale of work and assist in the grant application process.
 - 2.5** For medium or large adaptations, the applicant will be presented with three options:
 - (1) Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) with a Means Test and resultant financial contribution and a 10-year charge on their property.
 - (2) Discretionary Adaptations Grant (DAG) without a Means Test, but with a lifetime charge on their property.
 - (3) Relocation grant if the proposed adaptation is not feasible or practical.

- 2.6 For tenanted properties individual discussions, are held that include what adaptations will be considered by the landlord or the potential for a move to a different property.
- 2.7 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.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1 An independent living policy aligns with the five ways of working outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act in Wales by considering the long-term impact on future generations, preventing challenges, integrating referral processes, fostering collaboration between departments, and involving citizens and stakeholders.
- 3.2 Long-term focus: An independent living policy considers the long-term well-being of children and adults with disabilities who require support for independent living. This involves planning for their needs and ensuring that policies are sustainable over time to provide continued support.
- 3.3 Prevention: The policy focuses on removing potential barriers to independent living by offering citizens a new route to home adaptations through the introduction of the Discretionary Adaptations Grant. This investment in accessible infrastructure, backed up by promoting inclusive education, and providing training and resources to caregivers to help individuals maintain their independence at home. Welsh Government estimate that for every £1 spent on Disability Facilities adaptations, £7.50 is saved on social care costs in the longer term. This figure is backed up by a report from the Isle of White Council that puts the savings for every £1 spent at £7.
- 3.4 Integration: The policy encourages an integrated approach to care and support at home by involving healthcare, housing, and social services to provide a comprehensive and effective support system.
- 3.5 Collaboration: Collaboration primarily focuses on working closely with disabled individuals, older adults, and their families. Collaboration will also take place with advocacy groups, healthcare providers and Welsh Government when it comes time to review the policy.
- 3.6 Involvement: People who require support for independent living should be actively involved in shaping the policy. Their insights and experiences can guide the development of policies that are truly responsive to their needs. Public consultations, focus groups, and surveys can help gather input from the affected individuals and communities.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** The Independent Living Policy will have implications for both climate change and nature. Here are some ways in which such a policy can impact these areas:
- 4.2** Energy Consumption: Independent living often involves modifications to living spaces to enhance accessibility and comfort. Depending on the choices made, these modifications can lead to increased energy consumption if not implemented with energy efficiency in mind. Policies that promote energy-efficient and sustainable housing modifications can help mitigate this impact.
- 4.3** Assistive Technology: The policy will enable adaptations that involve the use of assistive technologies that consume electricity or resources. While these technologies are essential for enhancing independence, efforts should be made to ensure that they are energy-efficient and designed with sustainability in mind. The use of such technology might also reduce the need for visits to a home by care staff.
- 4.4** Construction Materials: The use of sustainable and eco-friendly building materials is encouraged. Options such as pod extensions are available.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

Revenue

- 5.1** Lifetime charges are placed on properties for adult adaptations which will see the cost of the adaptation repaid to the Council at the point that the property is sold. It is proposed that this sum should be ringfenced to fund future adaptations required as part of the policy.
- 5.2** The proposed revenue cost for the team will be funded from existing revenue budgets, there is £20k saving that could be allocated to private housing that may be realised as a result of this alternative delivery model.

Capital

- 5.3** The total capital expenditure on adaptations in 2022/2023 was £668,636 funded from general capital funding, with the average medium to large adaptation costing £8,777.
- 5.4** The demand for adaptations as a result of the new policy is unknown, it is proposed that a capital bid is submitted to increase years 2024/25 – 2026/27 to £3m in each year as set out in the table below. The capital bid will be evaluated as part of the 2024/25 Capital budget setting process and an indicative Capital Programme will be brought to Cabinet in January 2024. It should be noted that in the context of Welsh Government indicative General Capital Funding allocations and inflationary pressures within the wider programme it is unlikely this additional cost will be funded in full. The allocations for adaptations in year will be limited to the funding in the approved in the Capital Programme and

additional applications received after this sum has been allocated would need to be deferred until the following financial year.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Approved	1,531	1,306	1,305	1,305	1,305	1,150
Capital Bid	0	1,694	1,695	1,695	0	0
Total	1,531	3,000	3,000	3,000	1,305	1,150
Funding of Approved Budget						
General	1,150	1,150	1,150	1,150	1,150	1,150
Capital Funding						
Capital Receipts	350	156	155	155	155	0
Total	1,531	1,306	1,305	1,305	1,305	1,150

Employment

5.5 The policy has no employment implications

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.6 The Housing Renewal Policy has been in place since 2014. Since then, legislation has been introduced in Wales such as Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The Vale of Glamorgan Council legal team have reviewed the legal implications of this as part of a review of DFG Grants and Policies.

5.7 DFGs are made under Part 1 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the duties and powers under that Act are expanded upon by regulations principally the Housing Renewal Grant Regulations 1996 and there is also various non-statutory guidance. Section 23 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act sets out the purpose for which a grant must be approved.

5.8 Revised agreements will be required between Council and the recipient of the grants to align the terms of the funding with the new policy.

6. Background Papers

None.

Vale of Glamorgan - Independent Living Policy



DRAFT

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Previous versions

Version	Status	Description	Sign off
1a	Current	Draft	

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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
Date Approved:	05 October 2023
Review Frequency:	Annually
Date Policy to Be Reviewed:	05 October 2024
Responsible Officer(s):	Phil Chappell, OM Regeneration, Andrew Cole, OM Locality Services