

Adapting your home to meet your needs

Factsheet



This factsheet is a general guide to the kinds of adaptations available that can improve your independence and help you remain in your own home.

If you think you need care and support your first step should be to visit our Locate website www.durhamlocate.org.uk. Locate hosts a range of information and advice, including organisations to help you live as independently as you can. If you find using the internet difficult, ask a friend or relative who you are happy to share your information with, to help you. You can use computers for free at your local library (booking advisable).

If you don't have anyone who can help or can't access a computer, please contact Social Care Direct who can assist you with your care and support needs over the telephone.

You may be entitled to a Care and Support Assessment and a Financial Assessment to see if you are eligible for care and support. If you are not eligible, we will signpost you to organisations that may be able to help you. You may find the following services useful.

Equipment Advice Service

The Equipment Advice Service is available to anyone who lives in County Durham and has difficulty managing everyday activities. The service provides information to help people live independently, offering advice over the telephone or by email. You can make an appointment to visit their Independent Living House, a demonstration centre to try out a range of equipment including a stairlift, bathlifts, walking aids and kitchen equipment. Specialist sensory support products are also available to try along with Telecare equipment.

You can contact the Equipment Advice Service by telephoning 03000 265 667 between 10.00am and 3.00pm Monday to Thursday.

Community Equipment Loans Service

The Community Equipment Loans Service is a county-wide service which loans equipment to children and adults of all ages with illness and/or disabilities to help with their nursing, social and rehabilitation care. The equipment helps people to maintain their independence and remain in their own home. To qualify for the service you must first be assessed by either therapy staff or a district nurse.

Adaptations to help you

An adaptation is an alteration to your property that involves a tradesman or craftsman fitting, removing or making structural changes to things such as walls, floor or doors to make your home more suitable for you. Depending upon your needs, you may need minor or major adaptations to your home.

Minor adaptations

Some examples of these are grabrails, handrails, stair handrails or alterations to steps. If you are assessed as having eligible needs the adaptations are funded by Durham County Council or your housing provider. You may be referred to a handy van service or your local housing provider who will arrange to carry out the minor adaptation.

County Durham Handyperson and Minor Adaptations Service

This service can offer direct assistance with small repairs and minor adaptations that will reduce the risk of falls. Grabrails can be purchased from the service. To find out if you are eligible for the service telephone 0300 456 2220.

Local housing provider

In some cases your housing provider or landlord may carry out minor adaptations contact them directly to discuss your needs.

Major adaptations

Major adaptations to your home such as the installation of access ramps, stairlift or bathroom alterations can be provided if you are assessed as having eligible needs, and the adaptations are necessary and appropriate to meet those needs.

Your housing provider may carry out and pay for the work or may refer you for a Disabled Facilities Grant. If you own your own home or rent from a registered provider or private landlord then you may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant. Disabled Facilities Grants are means tested and are governed by housing legislation.

Durham and Darlington Home Improvement Agency manage the Disabled Facilities Grant programme and will therefore arrange and manage any work on your behalf and will be your main contact should you be eligible for a grant.

All works for a Disabled Facilities Grant must be deemed reasonable and practicable by the housing service.

How long will it take for major adaptations to be made?

The length of time to carry out the necessary adaptations will depend on the work required. For example a stairlift or shower installation could be made within three or four months of referral, however, an extension could take over nine months due to technical design and planning arrangements.

Who pays for major adaptations?

Some housing providers pay for the works to their own properties, whilst others expect you to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant. Your Occupational Therapist will know where to send any recommendation for adaptations.

If you apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant a 'means test' will be carried out. This will determine if you are entitled to a full grant or if you have to pay a contribution towards the cost of the works. If you are required to pay a contribution and cannot afford to pay it, there may be charitable or benevolent funding available to assist you.

The Home Improvement Agency will help you with this. Major adaptations for children are not means tested.

Housing legislation and the Disabled Facilities Grant

Housing legislation means that if you are eligible for adaptations to your home this will also include adaptations to remove, or help you to overcome any obstacles, which prevent you from moving freely into and around your home.

This means that if you apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant, the proposed adaptations must ensure that you have reasonable access into your home, to the main habitable rooms within your home – such as the living room and bedroom, and to a bathroom or shower room in which there are suitable facilities for washing and/or showering.

Works that are eligible for Disabled Facilities Grant are those that are essential to meet your needs and not necessarily those requested by you or your family.

The following are some of the types of work that fall within the eligibility criteria:

1. Access to, from and around your home

The council will normally ensure a disabled person has safe and suitable access to either the front or rear of their property. This will be with the provision of a ramp. In certain circumstances an external step lift may be necessary. Doorways may need to be widened to facilitate access through the external door and into the main habitable rooms e.g. the main living room, bathroom and bedroom.

Ramps will be considered if:

- A wheelchair is used all the time
- Mobility is very restricted or unsafe
- The existing steps cannot be adapted with minor adaptations to ensure safety

Please note: The council are unable to provide ramping or storage for privately purchased scooters.

In some circumstances access to a garden may be provided, however this does not include access to patio or grassed areas.

Dropped kerbs

If you would like to request kerbs be dropped near your home please telephone the Highways Action Line on 03000 26 1000. They will log your request, which the council will then consider.

2. Getting up and down stairs

A stairlift or through floor (vertical) lift can be provided to ensure safe access to essential facilities i.e. bedroom, bathroom and toilet.

Essential means there is no other solution. If, for example, a ground floor room can be used as a bedroom and there are toilet and bathing facilities on the ground floor, provision of a stairlift or through floor lift would not be considered.

Lifts will be considered when:

- The disabled person cannot use the stairs safely and independently and is assessed as being able to use a lift safely now and in the future
- The layout and construction of the house allows it

Any medical condition would be taken into account when the council decide if a stair or vertical lift is a suitable solution. If your medical condition would make using a stair or vertical lift unsafe alternative solutions would be suggested.

3. Bathroom adaptations

Access to and provision of bathroom adaptations are generally the most needed adaptations by disabled people. Adaptations of this nature generally involve the following:

- Rearranging bathroom facilities to allow a better space for movement around the bathroom
- A shower over the bath
- Removal of the bath and installation of a level access shower

We will consider a bathroom adaptation where the provision of equipment does not meet the individual's need and:

- A person is permanently disabled
- He or she is unable to keep themselves clean due to a physical disability
- The disabled person who is a carer for others and is at risk of injury (Disabled Facilities Grant does not provide for carers needs)
- An over bath shower may be installed where the disabled person is able to get in and out of the bath safely for the foreseeable future and bathing equipment is considered inappropriate due to the user's degree of functional loss or medical condition
- A level access shower maybe considered where bathing equipment or other adaptations are not appropriate and there is risk to independence

Downstairs toilet

In certain circumstances a downstairs toilet may be installed. This would be instances when:

- The user cannot get to the existing toilet at all
- Mobility is so restricted that they cannot always get to the toilet in time
- A commode or chemical toilet is not an appropriate long-term solution
- No other form of adaptation would be suitable, e.g. a stairlift

Upstairs toilet

An upstairs toilet would only be funded in extremely exceptional circumstances through a Disabled Facilities Grant. Assistance will be considered if:

- The medical condition means that they need to use the toilet frequently
- A commode is not an appropriate solution.

4. Kitchen adaptations

Where somebody other than the disabled person does and will continue to do the cooking and preparation of meals, only certain adaptations will be carried out to the kitchen for the disabled person. This is to allow the person to prepare light meals or snacks.

These adaptations may be lowering a worktop with power points for a microwave and kettle.

Where the disabled person lives alone or has to prepare meals for someone they care for, more extensive kitchen alterations may be carried out. This could involve adjusting the height of the sink, ensuring relevant cupboards and work surfaces are at an appropriate height, positioning the cooker at an appropriate height and location to suit the disabled person and providing accessible space for a refrigerator. Sockets and switches can be repositioned as necessary.

5. Making a dwelling safe

Adaptations can be provided to minimise the risk of harm caused by a disabled person to either themselves or people living with them. They can be designed to minimise the risk of danger where a person's disability causes them to act in a boisterous or violent manner, damaging the house, themselves and perhaps other people.

Adaptations of this nature could be in the form of specialist lighting, toughened or shatterproof glazing to windows in the parts of the dwelling the disabled person has normal access to and the installation of guards around such things as fires or radiators to prevent harm.

Provision of specially made safety gates may be considered if stairs are hazardous because of the disability, and commercially available gates are not suitable. In some circumstances reinforcement of walls and floors may be needed to prevent self-injury.

6. Alternative means of heating

Where there is inadequate or no heating system, or where the existing heating arrangements are unsuitable to meet the disabled person's needs, a heating system may be provided.

Adaptation or installation of heating systems will only be provided in rooms which the disabled person normally uses i.e. a living room, a bedroom and a bathroom.

The installation of central heating to the dwelling will only be considered where the wellbeing and mobility of the disabled person would otherwise be adversely affected. This would include people with specific medical conditions, which severely affect body temperature, and there is evidence that a lack of heating would lead to a serious deterioration of the condition.

Assistance may be given where:

- The user demonstrates a physical inability to manage the existing heating system (e.g. solid fuel)
- The user has no family or carer able to maintain the existing heating system, and it is not possible to provide fire-lighting or home support services

In cases of severe breathing difficulties, medical evidence may be requested to confirm the severity of the symptoms in relation to the heating system.

The maintenance of your heating system is the responsibility of the property owner or housing provider. For further information about replacing your solid fuel heating system contact Durham and Darlington Home Improvement Agency on 03000 268 000 or by email on ddhia@durham.gov.uk

For information on cavity wall and loft insulation schemes contact Durham County Council on 03000 260 000.

7. Heating, lighting and power controls

Adaptations may take place to ensure a disabled person has full use of heating, lighting and power controls in their home. This may include the relocation of power points to make the power points more accessible, the provision of suitably adapted controls and the installation of additional controls.

8. Extensions

In some circumstances ground floor extensions can be constructed to provide the disabled person with essential sleeping and bathing facilities, where access by the disabled person to the existing facilities is not safe.

Works of this nature will only be considered if the internal space cannot be utilised to accommodate the needs of the disabled person. For instance a dining room may be suitable to use as a bedroom and a utility room easily converted into a shower room, or a garage may be more reasonably converted to provide the necessary facilities rather than building an extension.

These decisions will be made in conjunction with your occupational therapist and Durham and Darlington Home Improvement Agency.

Some typical examples of extensions are:

- Providing a ground floor bedroom extension for a wheelchair dependent person
- Providing a bedroom with specialised en-suite toilet and washing facilities

However, this type of help can only be considered where:

- The work is essential to meet the identified needs of the disabled person
- The house, as it stands, does not offer the facilities required; no simple and practical alternative exists (for example, providing a stairlift to give access to existing upper floor facilities)
- It is technically possible to do the work, and the work is reasonable and practicable

Should your property be unsuitable for adaptation, and you qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant, the funding can be used to help you move to a more suitable property, or to adapt a property you move to. In these circumstances, your occupational therapist and local Home Improvement Agency will work with you to identify a suitable property.

Should you wish to move to a council house this can be discussed and the Home Improvement Agency help you identify a suitable property.



Need help finding the right care and support?

locate
Care and support in County Durham

This free online resource provides a wealth of information and services making it easier for you to make plans now and in the future.

www.durhamlocate.org.uk

Please ask us if you would like this document summarised in another language or format.

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