

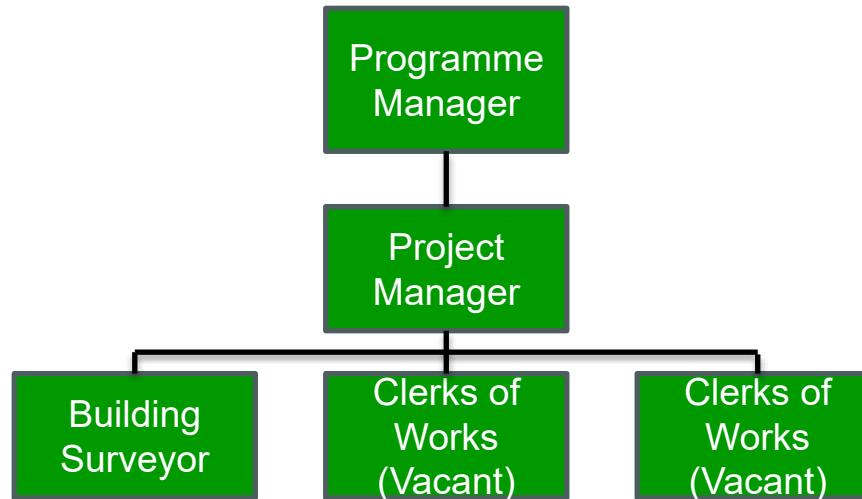
Aids and Adaptations Policy

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A & A Team



- The A & A Team is part of Housing Asset Management and is overseen by Denise Lewis, Assistant Director for Building Safety and Housing Property Services.
- Recruitment will commence in 2025/26 to make permanent appointments to new and agency filled roles¹
- The A & A are supported by the Housing Asset Management Business Unit team.

¹ We are changing the technical team from just two surveyors to one Surveyor and two Clerk of Works

A & A Current Policy

- **Scope of Aids and Adaptations:** Covers types of aids and adaptations, council responsibilities, and service expectations.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Based on conditions such as sight, hearing, speech impairment, mental or physical disabilities. Adaptations must be necessary, appropriate, reasonable, and practical to be approved by the council (as per Equality Act 2010 and Housing, Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996).
- **Adaptation Types:** Minor adaptations (e.g., ramps, handrails) and major adaptations (e.g., stair lifts, kitchen/bathroom changes).
- **Refusal Reasons:** Situations where the council cannot assist with adaptations.
- **Policy Review:** The current policy was approved in 2020 with provisions for review in response to legislative, strategic, or policy changes.

A&A Proposed Policy Changes

- **Review and Update:** The Aids and Adaptations Policy was reviewed from June 2024 and no significant changes are proposed, the outcome of the review will be presented at Cabinet in March 2025.
- **New "Purposes" for "Eligible Works":** One of the main changes that is being proposed is clearer guidelines on what is considered when reviewing requests for adaptations to council properties, improving transparency on decision-making for tenants.
- **Legal Framework:** The policy includes detailed measures on how the council will meet legal requirements.

A&A Consultation



- **Consultation Overview:** A four-week consultation was held with residents and health professionals to gather feedback on the proposed updated policy, which was extended until 13th January 2025 due to responses continuing to be received.
- **Response Rate:** 131 responses were received, representing a 22% return rate.
- **Resident Support:** Overwhelmingly, residents were supportive of SBC's policy.
- **Focus Group Interest:** 38 tenants expressed interest in joining a focus group to help further shape the Aids and Adaptations service.
- **Consultation Details:** Full details of the consultation will be published separately on the Councils website.

Budget and Spend

Annual Referrals: The estimated cost of referrals average approximately £1.4M per annum¹, with actual costs typically being 60% of that value².

2024/25 Projection³: This year, referrals equate to £1.3M, but the projected value for 2024/25 is £810K (62%) due to applying the policy and evolving needs.

Early Assessment: Moving forward, referrals will be reviewed earlier using assessments and surveys to better gauge demand and provide more accurate reporting. This early review aims to ensure that adaptations, particularly costly ones like converting bathrooms to wet rooms, are the most effective and sustainable solutions.

Cost Reduction: By working closely with teams like Empty Homes, Lettings, Resident Downsizing, and Specialist Accommodation, a notable reduction in spending is anticipated going forward.

¹ based on projected costs for specified work

² due to actual costs being less than estimated and/or works not being completed

³ based on 10 months data

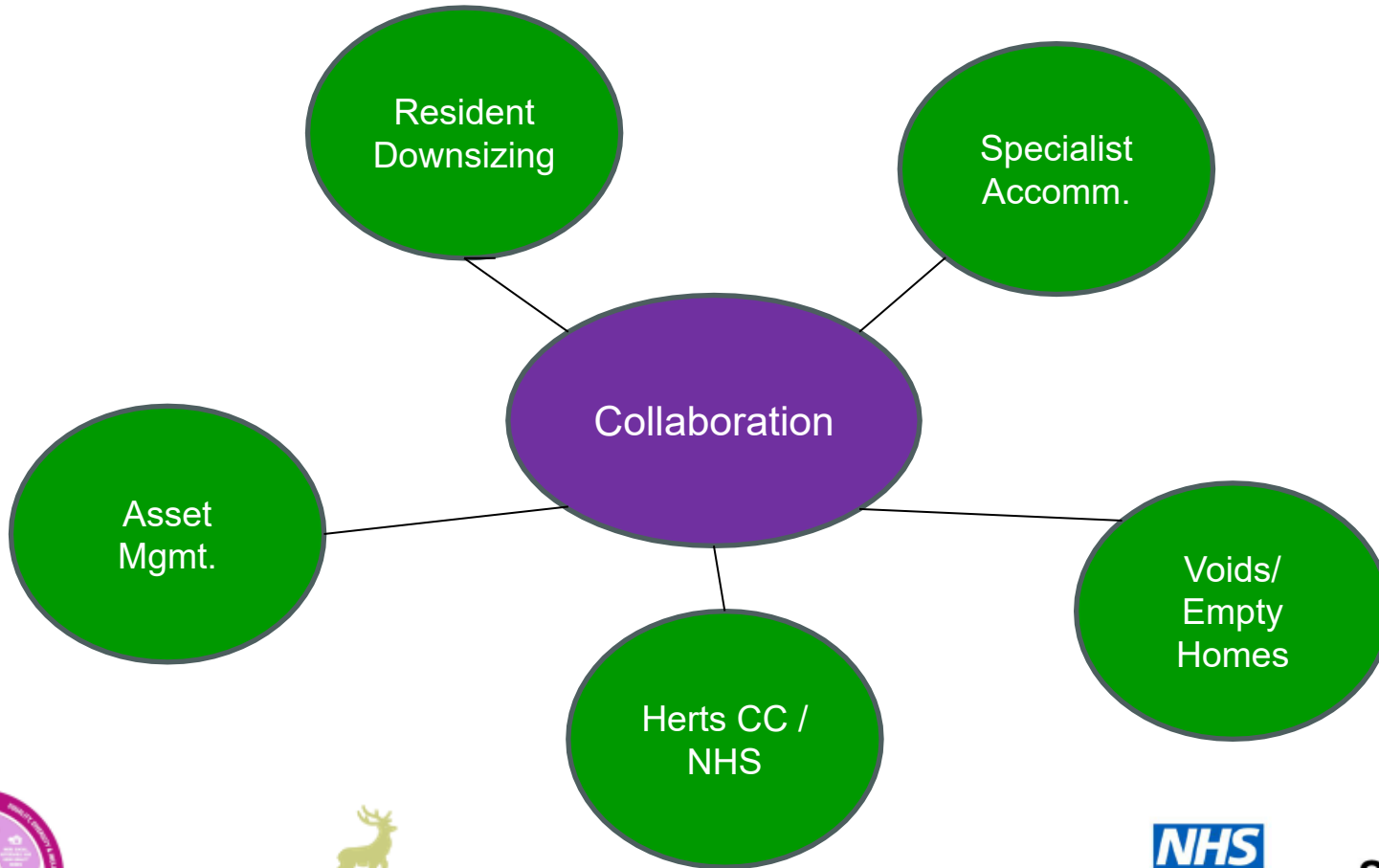
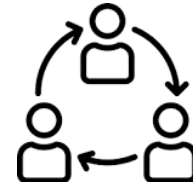


Budget and Spend

2025/26 Budget: A proposed reduction in budget provision from 2025/26 onwards has been approved as part of the budget setting process, as this is a discretionary area of spend. The focus will be on meeting the demand for low-level adaptations, while exploring alternative housing options that may better suit tenant needs and avoid high costs associated with major adaptations, especially those that can't be future-proofed. While tenants won't be forced to move, downsizing incentives will be offered, and efforts will be made to maximize the use of existing adapted stock.



Collaboration



Contracts

Stevenage First Policy: Committed to the policy, with success in using internal SBC engineers for groundworks.

Insourcing Limitations: Insourcing A&A work is limited by the need for specialist skillsets and equipment. However, there will be a further review to explore the possibility of insourcing minor work.

Contracts: A contract for bathroom, kitchen, and external adaptations, will commence in April 2025 to address the backlog by outsourcing design, resident liaison, and programming. A contract for stairlift installations, servicing, and maintenance will be procured in 2025/26.

Faster Process: This new approach aims to speed up the process for residents, as the current batch-based approach significantly impacts our ability to meet performance timescales.



Complex Work - Case Study

While the bulk of adaptations are simple, we get a few complex cases each year. For example:

Complex Case: A family of 5 in a 3-bedroom property, with all three children having mobility issues, and the youngest requiring a wheelchair. The case is more complex than typical adaptations due to the specific needs of the children and the property's limitations in accommodating their mobility needs within the existing footprint.

The decision has been made to extend the property to meet the family's needs and work is due to commence shortly.



Example Case Study Decisions

Examples of where work is accepted/refused, in line with the policy:

Bathroom Conversion Refusal: The council will not carry out conversions of standard bathrooms to wet rooms in first-floor or above properties where the tenant is unable to navigate a bath, as they may struggle with navigating stairs long-term. Further adaptations, like stairlifts in communal areas, may pose risks by restricting access and compromising fire escape routes, which is not considered practical or safe.

Adaptation Approval: For a family of 4 in a three-bedroom property with existing minor adaptations and external ramping, a referral for a stairlift and wet room is received. The property is the correct size for the family, and as a no more suitable property is available to match their needs the adaptation recommendation is accepted, and the necessary work will be arranged.



A & A Challenges

- Backlog of cases and high volume of new cases are creating pressure on the service
- Budgetary pressures
- Resource implications of procuring work
- Permanent recruitment to vacant posts
- The need to review and improve NEC processes and configuration to streamline operations
- Enhancing processes with HCC OT's and Health Care professionals to improve service delivery
- Availability of suitable accommodation/Downsizing incentives
- Ensuring the right types of new development properties are in the pipeline to meet future needs.
- An improvement plan is being developed to address these challenges, alongside the policy updates to drive better outcomes



A & A Improvements

- Data cleansing has identified the backlog cases
- Volumes are driven by age and health factors in the Stevenage populus
- Moving some elements to frameworks will reduce procurement demands
- A review of NEC processes will enhance data capture and reduce admin
- A task and finish group between SBC and HCC is working to improve information sharing and case throughput
- The A & A team is collaborating with Empty Homes, Lettings, Downsizing, Residents and Estates and Specialist Accommodation to match tenants with suitable properties more effectively
- New development will help with adaptations, but there is a need for more bungalows and larger properties built to lifetime homes standards to meet customer needs



Question and Answers