

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Housing and Housing Development
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AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS POLICY

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KEY DECISION

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek approval of an updated version of the Aids and Adaptations Policy following a review and consultation with tenants.
- 1.2 The key objective of the policy is to support tenants, while providing assurance that the Council is fulfilling its legal and regulatory obligations.
- 1.3 This policy supports Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan 2024-2029 key priority of maintaining good quality homes.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the outcomes from the consultation with tenants on the Aids and Adaptations Policy and how these have been reflected in the final version attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 That Cabinet note that the Policy will become effective from 1 April 2025 and will be publicised on the Council's website. This policy will replace the previous version from 2020.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approves the updated Aids and Adaptations Policy.

3 BACKGROUND

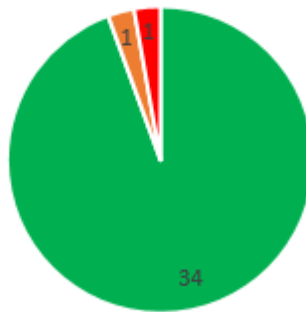
- 3.1 The Council is obligated to meet a variety of regulatory and legislative responsibilities, including those under the Equalities legislation, and The Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) Consumer Standards. To effectively fulfil these duties, it is essential to maintain a high level of oversight, awareness, and understanding of key issues related to aids and adaptations.
- 3.2 The Council has a legal duty to provide reasonable adaptations to support residents to live independently within their homes. This service is highly valued and plays a crucial role in enhancing tenants' quality of life. Over the years, demand for this service has steadily increased. Coupled with the challenges posed by the pandemic and staff shortages, this surge in demand has resulted in a backlog of cases.
- 3.3 To address the backlog work is underway to strengthen working relationships with other internal teams to facilitate the implementation of the updated policy. In line with the Allocations Policy 2023 this will help match adapted properties to prospective tenants and in line with the Downsizing Policy encourage moves to more suitably sized properties and/or independent living schemes, where appropriate support can be provided.
- 3.4 A contract is being procured by the Aids and Adaptations teams to carry out bathroom, kitchen, and some external works, with the goal of addressing the historic backlog of cases during 2025/26. This initiative is expected to significantly reduce waiting times for tenants, while also freeing up valuable time for surveyors to focus on more complex cases and help deliver this policy successfully.
- 3.5 Despite challenges with recruitment, the service has continued to deliver essential works for tenants. The council completed 505 works order in 2023/24 and reported the following KPI's:
 - 70% (351) of 505 works orders were completed on time.
- 3.6 Permanent recruitment into the Project Manager post was successfully completed in December 2024. Since then, significant progress has been made in streamlining project workflows and improving overall service delivery. The new Project Manager has played a key role in addressing the backlog, enhancing coordination across internal teams, and ensuring that projects are completed in a timely and efficient manner. This appointment has also contributed to strengthening communication with tenants, ensuring their needs are met more effectively, and facilitating quicker response times for necessary adaptations.
- 3.7 As part of the review of the Policy, the results of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) surveys for 2023-2024 were analysed for references to the Aids and Adaptations service. Within the TSM's, Aids and Adaptations was cited by 12 tenants out of the 1,000 approached as a reason for their overall satisfaction. Of these, 50% provided positive feedback. However, among those who mentioned Aids and Adaptations in the free-text responses and expressed dissatisfaction with the overall service provided by Stevenage Borough Council as a landlord, the primary concerns were delays and communication issues. This policy aims to address these challenges by

implementing clear guidelines on timescales, which should help improve service delivery and potentially lead to greater satisfaction.

3.8 Ongoing satisfaction is measured through satisfaction surveys conducted with tenants following the completion of adaptation work. Survey responses and results for the last year are illustrated below:

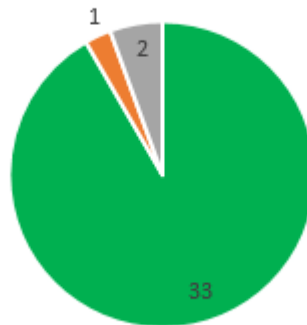
Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Total
10	4	1	1	2	-	-	-	7	3	2	1	5	36

Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service you have received?



■ Very Satisfied ■ Fairly Satisfied ■ Very dissatisfied

Over all how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of work carried out?



■ Very satisfied ■ Fairly Satisfied ■ Neither

3.9 A further service user consultation was conducted from December 2024 to January 2025. This consultation targeted tenants and users of the Aids and Adaptations service including those who were waiting for aids and adaptations and those who had works completed in last 12 months. The consultation was also expanded to include health professionals involved in the service, ensuring a broad range of perspectives were considered.

- 3.10 In response to those who expressed an interest in participating in a focus group, the Resident Liaison team is assisting in structuring a new focus group for the service.
- 3.11 In response to the RSH feedback from the inspection carried out in September 2024 around the Council ensuring that it understands who resides in its properties and how this information is used, steps were taken to engage directly with tenants affected by the proposed changes within the policy. This consultation process has ensured that tenants are well-informed about the aspects of the policy that matter most to them, helping to tailor the Council's approach to better meet their needs and expectations.
- 3.12 The Aids and Adaptations team has developed an Improvement Plan, and the related projects will be planned and delivered in collaboration with colleagues from Housing IT and Transformation to streamline the service and enhance data management.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The final version of the updated Aids and Adaptations Policy is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2 The updated policy has been reviewed having considered the feedback from service users and relevant legislation.
- 4.3 There are no significant changes proposed to the policy, however the main revisions include:
 - a. Detailed measures on how the council will meet legal requirements.
 - b. Clearer guidelines on what is considered when reviewing requests for adaptations to council properties, improving transparency on decision-making process for tenants.
 - c. Implementation of clear guidelines on timescales tenants should expect in relation to types of work recommended.
- 4.4 This policy aligns with the Allocations Policy 2023, which aims to match customers with suitable accommodation.
- 4.5 Where a property is underoccupied, tenants will be encouraged to downsize in accordance with our Downsizing Policy. This policy also provides support to facilitate the move, including financial compensation for each room surrendered and assistance with moving costs.
- 4.6 Similarly, where a tenant requires additional support that can be more effectively provided through a move to one of our Independent Living Schemes, they will be encouraged and assisted in taking up this opportunity.
- 4.7 The Executive Housing Working Group (EHWG) considered the draft policy on the 26 June 2024 and endorsed the proposed approach to consultation.
- 4.8 The draft updated policy was shared for further consultation to gather the views of tenants and service users, which took place between December 2024 and January 2025. A variety of consultation methods, including an

online form, paper form, and QR code, were used to ensure residents could engage with the Council in a way that best suited them.

- 4.9 From the consultation with 594 users, 131 responses (22%) were received. An overwhelming majority of residents expressed support for the Council's policy. Out of the 106 tenants who completed the survey, 38 indicated their willingness to participate in a focus group to provide further input on shaping our Aids and Adaptations service.

Additional details on the consultation results can be found in **Background Document (BD1)** or on the council's website under the Resident Voice page: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/resident-voice>

- 4.10 Based on the consultation feedback received no alterations were required to be made to the policy.
- 4.11 Communication regarding waiting times, delays, or the decision-making process related to adaptations will be improved ensuring transparency and clear guidelines which will help mitigate dissatisfaction.
- 4.12 The Aids and Adaptations Policy was included as a policy development item on the Community Select Committee's work programme in February 2025. At the meeting held on 5 February the following comments were made on the Policy:
- Members requested a definitive list of reasons for refusal; however, officers clarified that decisions were made on a case-by-case basis, allowing for individual assessments based on the tenant's needs and the suitability of the property.
 - Officers will always aim to find the most practical solutions within the policy, such as providing a bidet instead of a full wet room where appropriate.
 - Members acknowledged that OTs assessments may not always be logistically feasible (e.g. if a driveway isn't achievable in a given location) and to work with surveyors for the best solution.
 - Members suggested that officers explore ways to reuse equipment, whether through private or council initiatives.
 - Officers will ensure that tenants are matched with suitable properties in appropriate locations.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 The staffing resources required to support the implementation of the Aids and Adaptations Policy have been included within the 2025/26 HRA budget as approved by Full Council in January 2025. A budget of £567k has been included in the approved 2025/26 budget to fund aids and adaptations related works. The reduction in budget provision compared to previous years recognises the discretionary nature of the budget and the wider pressures on the HRA. The financial resources allocated to fund Aids and Adaptations, however, will be kept under review.

- 5.2 The implementation of the updated policy alongside any legislative changes, and service-related pressures will inform the planned review of the HRA Business Plan and future budget-setting processes.
- 5.3 The policy aims to mitigate unnecessary adaptations to properties where adapted properties are already available to meet individual needs.

Legal Implications

- 5.4 The policy has been updated in line with the legal and regulatory requirements as set out in the Policy.

Risk Implications

- 5.5 The adoption of the updated policy will help mitigate delays in processing referrals for delivery of adaptations and avoid failure to complete necessary adaptations in a timely manner which could pose safety risks to tenants, especially those with mobility impairments or other specific needs.
- 5.6 There is a risk of non-compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, including the duty to provide reasonable adaptations to tenants under the Equality Act 2010. Failure to meet these obligations could result in reputational damage, or financial penalties.
- 5.7 The effectiveness of the policy relies on the capacity and training of staff responsible for assessing, delivering, and managing adaptations. Insufficient capacity or capability of staff could result in delays in service delivery. It is crucial to ensure the policy is effectively integrated into working practices. For successful implementation, the policy must be supported by appropriate procedures and training for staff.
- 5.8 Risks are mitigated by tracking performance against key performance indicators and ensuring compliance with legislation and regulatory requirements.

Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.9 Equality and Diversity implications are monitored and evaluated within the delivery of the service. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken alongside the review process for this policy.
- 5.10 The EqIA identified positive impacts on some of the groups with protected characteristics, principally those related to age and disability, with no negative impacts identified.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- BD1 Consultation Data Analysis
- BD2 Aids and Adaptations EqIA

APPENDICES

- 1 Aids and Adaptations Policy