

Information sheet 13 – adaptations to your home

If you have a disability or illness which makes daily life more difficult, you may benefit from having your home adapted to help you carry on with your life independently. Examples of adaptations include:

- Installing a stair-lift so that you can continue to use upstairs rooms
- Constructing a shower area which you can get into without a step
- Making a wheelchair ramp at the main entrance to your home
- Fixing grab rails, hand rails or stair rails to help you to move around safely.

■ Getting expert advice

You should get advice about possible adaptations from an **occupational therapist (OT)**, who will know all the problems that can arise, and understand how your health condition may develop. You **must** do this if you want help with the costs but an OT can offer advice even if you will be paying yourself. Your care manager can arrange for an OT to visit you. We aim for this to be within a week if you need adaptations urgently to meet critical needs, and within two months otherwise. If you need help to cope while you wait for an adaptation, your care manager will discuss this with you – for instance you might need support from a home care agency until work has been carried out on your home.

When the OT visits, they will discuss with you all the possible solutions to your problems. For instance there may be equipment which would solve your problems better than adaptations to your home (see Information Sheet 12). If your home is very ill-suited to your needs, the OT may suggest that your best solution is to move. If adaptations are the best solution, the OT will discuss with you in detail how these can be arranged. This information sheet provides a summary of the ways you may be able to get financial help. If you decide to pay for adaptations yourself, you may still be able to get VAT relief. Customs and Excise Notice 701/7 gives details – there is a link to this on our website, or you can ask your OT to get you a copy.

■ Small adaptations

The Care Trust can arrange directly small adaptations such as fixing a grab rail. There is no charge for this service, but we will supply equipment only to avoid, reduce or delay a need for care and support. We do not normally fund adaptations that cost more than £1000. We aim to complete work within three weeks of an OT recommendation.

■ Council and housing association tenants

If you are a tenant of Homes for Northumberland, they may arrange for adaptations to be carried out on the recommendation of an OT. You will not have to pay for work that they do as a landlord. Housing associations may be willing to arrange adaptations on the same basis.

■ Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

Whether you rent or own your house, you may have a right to receive a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) from the County Council (please see 'Needs which qualify for DFG' below).

If the person who is disabled receives one of a specified list of means-tested benefits (e.g. income support), the grant will cover the full cost of approved works, up to a maximum of £30,000. Where the application is for a disabled child or young person under the age of nineteen there is no means test. Otherwise, you may not be eligible, or may get a grant to cover only part of the cost and so have to make a contribution. In very exceptional circumstances, the County Council may agree to additional help for people who are not eligible for full grant funding and cannot afford the work – but usually people are expected to make their own arrangements, for instance through a second mortgage. In addition, in certain circumstances, the Council may be able to provide additional assistance to pay for works which are eligible for a DFG, but where their cost exceeds the maximum limit of £30,000 and the applicant is unable to afford their contribution.

To estimate how much grant you might get, you should ask your OT to request that Care & Repair Northumberland (an independent organisation which provides the service on behalf of the Council), carry out an **informal test of resources**. They will contact you and ask you to supply details of your finances. The officer will then carry out the informal test and advise you of the estimated contribution you may have to make, if any. Once you have estimated figures, you can make an informed decision about whether to proceed.

If you decide to go ahead, Care & Repair Northumberland or the OT will help you to get quotes for the adaptations you need, and you will then have to fill in a **full application**. This will include the quotes and evidence about who the property belongs to and the basis on which you live there. You must confirm in writing that you intend to stay there for at least five years. If your circumstances later change and you have to move, you may be asked to return any equipment which has a continuing value and should the property be sold within 10 years of the date the adaptations are completed, the Council may demand repayment of such part of the grant paid in excess of £5,000 up to a maximum of £10,000.

Once you have given them a correctly completed application, the County Council must make a decision about the grant within six months. If you start the work before hearing the Council's decision about your application, you will **not** normally be paid any grant. You can only get a grant for the basic cost of the works needed, but you can top this up from your own money if you wish, for instance if you want a special finish or if you prefer to choose a more expensive builder or supplier than the cheapest quote.

■ Needs which qualify for Disabled Facilities Grant

Whether you are eligible for grant depends on your needs. There are special rules about this, which are not the same as for other services arranged by a care manager. A grant will only be approved if your needs have been confirmed by an OT and if they believe that adaptations to your home are necessary, appropriate, reasonable and practicable. If these conditions are met, and you qualify under the means test, you may be offered a grant. You have a **right** to one if you need adaptations for one of the following purposes:

- Getting in and out of your home
- Ensuring that you are safe
- Getting access to your living room, and to a bedroom, kitchen, toilet, washbasin and bath or shower
- Getting a suitable heating system, or making heating controls and light switches easier to use
- Enabling you to care for someone else (for instance a child or a spouse or partner)
- Access to your garden.