

Information sheet C17 – 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 major 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. An OT will visit you within a week of a request if you need adaptations urgently to meet critical needs, and within two months otherwise. If you need help while you wait for an adaptation, your OT 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 that would solve your problems better than adaptations to your home (see Information Sheet C16). If your home is very ill-suited to your needs, the OT may suggest that the best solution is to move, and can offer advice about housing options. 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. VAT Notice 701/7 gives details – you can find this by searching on the web, or you can ask your OT to get you a copy.

■ Small adaptations

Many different health and social care professionals can arrange small adaptations such as fixing a grab rail or adapting steps at your property. There is no charge for this service, but we will fund small adaptations only when a professional recommends them to avoid, reduce or delay a need for care and support, and we normally apply a cost limit of £1000. We aim to complete work within three weeks of a professional recommendation. Small adaptations are usually completed by our Home Improvement Service Handypersons.

■ Council and housing association tenants

If you are a tenant your landlord 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 however some larger adaptations may have to be funded via a Disabled Facilities Grant (see over the page for further information).

■ Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

Whether you rent or own your house, you may be entitled to Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) from the County Council. Depending on your financial circumstances, you may be eligible for DFG for any adaptations which are necessary to meet any of the following needs:

- Getting in and out of your home and accessing your garden
- Ensuring your home is safe for you and the people you live with
- Accessing a bedroom and the main living room
- Accessing a toilet, a bath or shower and a washbasin
- Being able to cook and prepare food
- Being able to control your heating, lighting and electricity
- Being able to care for others living with you (e.g. children or another disabled person)

An occupational therapist will assess what adaptations are necessary. We will discuss with you how you would prefer your home to be adapted, but the level of grant will be based on the lowest-cost solution which meets your needs and does not have an unacceptable negative impact on you or other people who live with you. If you prefer a more expensive solution, you will need to find the extra cost yourself.

DFG is means-tested. Whether you are eligible for it depends on the income and savings of both yourself and your partner, if you have one. You may have to pay part of the cost yourself. However DFG will pay the full cost of necessary adaptations if you are less than 19 years old and getting child benefit, or if you are getting one of the national means-tested social security benefits. If someone other than you or your partner is the owner or tenant of the property, the application for DFG will have to come from them, but their finances will not be taken into account in the means test. The maximum grant that can be paid is £30,000.

If you would have serious difficulties meeting the difference between the grant amount and the cost of adaptations which we agree are necessary, we will discuss with you other possible sources of funding. However usually people are expected to make their own arrangements, for instance through a second mortgage or a high street loan.

Before we can approve DFG, we will need to see evidence about the tenure of your home, details of any other residents and confirmation that you intend to remain at the property for at least the next five years. If your circumstances later change and you have to move, you may be asked to return any removable adaptations that have a continuing value. In some circumstances you may also have to agree to refund part of the grant if the property is sold within 10 years.

Financial assessments for DFG are carried out by caseworkers from our Home Improvement Service (HIS). The HIS can also manage the actual works on your behalf, including arranging detailed designs, and getting quotes from contractors. You don't have to use the HIS for this if you don't want to – you can make your own arrangements, though we can only pay DFG if we are satisfied that your contractors have carried out the work to the right standards. There is a charge if the HIS arranges the works; in many cases this is paid from the grant, so makes no financial difference for you, but we will tell you if it does make a difference, so that you have full information when you make your choice. You should not begin the work until the grant has been approved, because grant will not be paid for work already carried out.