

Home Assistance Policy



2020 - 2023

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Policy

This policy describes how Halton Borough Council will use its powers under the **Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002** to provide home adaptations for disabled people.

1.2 Strategic Context

Halton's **Sustainable Community Strategy 2011-2026** sets out a vision for Halton:

“Halton will be a thriving and vibrant Borough where people can learn and develop their skills; enjoy a good quality of life with good health; a high quality, modern urban environment; the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential; greater wealth and equality; sustained by a thriving business community; and safer, stronger and more attractive neighbourhoods.”

The Council's **Corporate Plan 2018-2020** supports this vision and contributes to achieving it through the following strategic priorities:

- A Healthy Halton
- Environment and Regeneration in Halton
- Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton
- Children & Young People in Halton
- A Safer Halton

This Home Assistance Policy contributes to the '**Healthy Halton**' priority, which is:

“To improve the health and wellbeing of Halton people so they live longer, healthier and happier lives.”

Halton's **Better Care Fund (BCF) Plan 2019/20** includes strategic narrative on Halton's approach to integration with wider services, such as Housing. It includes our commitment and approach to using the Disabled Facilities Grant to support the housing needs of people with disabilities or care needs, and highlights how this Home Assistance Policy is aligned to the schemes within the BCF.

1.3 Aims of the Policy

This policy aims to ensure that residents with disabilities are provided with support to adapt their home so that it meets their needs and they are able to continue living safely and independently at home.

1.4 Resources

The assistance offered through this policy will be funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

With the exception of statutory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), any financial assistance provided is at the discretion of the Council and is subject to financial resources being available.

1.5 Review and monitoring

This policy will be reviewed in 2023 or at any other time as deemed necessary due to changes in funding or legislation.

Performance is regularly monitored through a range of internal mechanisms.

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2.0 Types of assistance available

2.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

A mandatory grant to provide housing adaptations to enable disabled people to live independently at home. Typically for works to allow individuals to get in and out of their home more easily, to move around their home safely and to improve access to bathing and toileting facilities. The DFG scheme is statutory meaning that the rules and regulations are set out in law rather than Council policy.

The purposes for which a grant must or may be given are described in Section 23 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996¹.

Information is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants>

Eligibility criteria	Eligible need assessed by HBC Social Services. Subject to a means test (financial assessment), except in the case of children.
Amount available	For works costing over £1,000 up to a maximum of £30,000. The Council will award Disabled Facilities Grants up to the statutory maximum (currently £30,000 including all professional and planning fees, VAT and any client contribution etc.).
Charges and fees	If the property is disposed of (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise) within 10 years of works being completed, grant monies exceeding £5,000 are repayable up to a maximum of £10,000. The Council will place a land charge on the property in order to reclaim the grant when the property is disposed of. The Council may agree to waive repayment of DFG in certain cases. Please see Appendix 1 for the DFG Repayment Policy. The Council has an optional Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service, available to owner occupiers and private tenants applying for a DFG; there is a charge for this service, however, the fee can be included within the DFG award as professional fees. The Council reserves the right to charge the applicant for agency services in the event that the applicant withdraws from the scheme.
Conditions	The detailed scheme conditions are set out in Part 1 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The application will only be approved if the proposed works are considered to be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person and reasonable and practicable to achieve taking into account the nature, age, layout and condition of the property.

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/53/section/23>

	<p>The Council will agree the most suitable and cost effective scheme to meet the needs of the disabled person and will award a DFG based on the eligible costs. In the event of the applicant deciding to carry out additional works or choosing to provide the adaptations in a different way, then the Council will only pay the cost of the Council’s recommended scheme and the applicant will be required to pay for any additional costs. The Council will also only make the payment if the revised scheme is considered to meet the needs of the disabled person. In these circumstances, the Council is unable to provide the services of the Home Improvement Agency.</p> <p>Mechanical lifts, wash/dry toilets and adjustable height products will be provided with an extended warranty for a period of five years. After this period, the item becomes the responsibility of the individual in terms of ongoing maintenance and repair.</p>
<p>Application process</p>	<p>The first step in making an application is to call the Council’s Contact Centre number for Adult Social Care on 0151 907 8306 or visit one of the Halton Direct Links at Halton Lea, Runcorn or Brook Street, Widnes.</p> <p>Eligible need to be assessed by one of the Council’s Occupational Therapists (OT) or Community Care Workers (CCW) and identification of the necessary and appropriate adaptations works.</p> <p>An Initial Financial Assessment (means test) will also be carried out to establish DFG eligibility (form to be completed by the customer).</p> <p>If applicants choose to use the Council’s in-house HIA to arrange the DFG work: the OT/CCW will send a referral to the HIA who will assist the customer in arranging the work (by preparing plans/quotes/ contract administration etc.) and applying for the DFG.</p> <p>If the applicant is arranging the DFG work themselves: the OT/CCW will send a DFG referral to the Council’s Housing Grants Section. A grants inspection of the property will be carried out and DFG application forms and grant schedule will be issued to the customer for them to complete and return.</p> <p>Referrals will normally be dealt with in the order of being received, however, on occasions they may be prioritised in consultation with the Occupational Therapist or Community Care Worker according to the relative urgency of the works after taking account of the applicant’s circumstances.</p>

2.2 Discretionary Support Loan

<p>Discretionary support in the form of a loan (repayable once the property is sold or transferred) may be available as a 'top-up' in connection with DFGs or Stair Lift Grants, particularly where the works exceed the maximum grant limit.</p>	
<p>Eligibility criteria</p>	<p>Eligible need assessed by HBC Social Services.</p> <p>Only where the disabled person, or couple, has savings and capital below the upper capital limit as set out by the Care Act (currently £23,250) would this form of assistance be considered.</p> <p>Where the disabled person does not qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant i.e. their assessed borrowing power exceeds the costs of the work, they would not be considered for assistance.</p> <p>Financial assistance is discretionary and will be made available subject to the Council having adequate resources.</p> <p>This assistance will be available to owner-occupiers and private tenants but not Housing Association tenants. In the case of Housing Association tenants the expectation is that the landlord Housing Association will make up any shortfall.</p>
<p>Amount available</p>	<p>The maximum loan available will normally be £10,000.</p>
<p>Charges and fees</p>	<p>If the property is disposed of (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise) within 10 years of works being completed, the loan will be subject to repayment in full.</p> <p>The Council will place a land charge on the property in order to reclaim the loan when the property is disposed of.</p> <p>The Council may agree to waive repayment in certain cases in line with the circumstances under which repayment of a DFG would be waived. Please see Appendix 1 for the DFG Repayment Policy.</p>
<p>Conditions</p>	<p>This discretionary assistance will be considered for funding home adaptation works which are deemed as being necessary and appropriate by the Council's Major Adaptations Service in the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the means test there is a financial contribution and the disabled person reports an inability to pay their assessed contribution towards major adaptations; or • The major adaptations are in excess of £30,000 and the disabled person reports an inability to pay the additional costs. <p>In the case of applications for DFG on behalf of a disabled child where no means test has been carried out, the applicants acting on behalf of the disabled child will be required to provide information to assist with the assessment for the discretionary assistance.</p>

	Mechanical lifts, wash/dry toilets and adjustable height products will be provided with an extended warranty for a period of five years. After this period, the item becomes the responsibility of the individual in terms of ongoing maintenance and repair.
Application process	Any requirement for additional support will be identified as part of the DFG application. The applicant will be required to complete a separate Application Form so that the Council can determine whether a Discretionary Support Loan can be provided. The decision is made by a Panel of Social Care professionals.

2.3 Joint Funding Arrangement with Housing Associations

A Joint Funding Agreement is in place with the majority of local housing associations through which the Council and the housing association each pay 50% of the cost of the eligible adaptation work (subject to the availability of resources by both parties).	
Eligibility criteria	Eligible need assessed by HBC Social Services. Tenants living in properties owned by Housing Associations that have not participated in the joint funding agreement with the Council, can apply for a DFG to fund the eligible works.
Amount available	For works costing over £1,000 up to a maximum of £30,000 (£15k from Housing Association and £15k from the Council).
Charges and fees	There is no means test (financial assessment) required.
Conditions	Adaptation work to be completed with 12 months of funding being agreed.
Application process	The first step in making an application is to call the Council's Contact Centre number for Adult Social Care on 0151 907 8306 or visit one of the Halton Direct Links at Halton Lea, Runcorn or Brook Street, Widnes. Eligible need to be assessed by one of the Council's Occupational Therapists (OT) or Community Care Workers (CCW) and identification of the necessary and appropriate adaptations works. The OT/CCW will send a referral to the Housing Association, who will gather the information required (plans / quotes etc.) and submit a funding request to the council for 50% of the cost. On agreement of funding, the Housing Association will organise and deliver the adaptations and on completion they will invoice the Council for the agreed amount.

2.4 Stair Lift Grant

<p>The Council provides grants to help pay for a stair lift in order to make it easier for those with disabilities to access the first floor of their home, therefore retaining independence. It is a local means tested grant that can be used towards the cost of a stair lift. The Council will arrange installation via an approved supplier. Stair lifts are provided outside of the full DFG process, allowing a timely response.</p>	
<p>Eligibility criteria</p>	<p>Eligible need assessed by HBC Social Services.</p> <p>Subject to a means test (financial assessment), except in the case of children.</p>
<p>Amount available</p>	<p>This depends on the cost of the lift required and the financial situation of the individual; it is a means tested grant based on a financial assessment (with exceptions for children and young people).</p>
<p>Charges and fees</p>	<p>This application will involve a means test in line with that used as part of the DFG application process, which may result in the individual having to contribute (in part or full) to the cost of the stair lift and associated works.</p>
<p>Conditions</p>	<p>The Council must consider the stair lift to be necessary and appropriate and that the works are reasonable and practicable.</p> <p>When the grant is agreed (together with any assessed contribution that the individual may have to pay towards the cost of the lift), the Council will arrange installation using their approved supplier.</p> <p>Stair lifts are installed with an extended warranty for a period of five years. After this period, the lift becomes the responsibility of the individual in terms of ongoing maintenance and repair.</p>
<p>Application process</p>	<p>The first step in making an application is to call the Council's Contact Centre number for Adult Social Care on 0151 907 8306 or visit one of the Halton Direct Links at Halton Lea, Runcorn or Brook Street, Widnes.</p> <p>Eligible need will be assessed by one of the Council's Occupational Therapists (OT) or Community Care Workers (CCW).</p> <p>A financial assessment (means test) will also be carried out to establish stair lift grant eligibility (form to be completed by the customer).</p>

2.5 Ceiling Track Hoists

<p>Ceiling Track Hoists are provided by the Council to assist disabled people to retain independence and quality of life at home. They can also support caregivers in their caring role. Hoists are provided outside of the full DFG process, allowing a timely response.</p>	
Eligibility criteria	Eligible need assessed by HBC Social Services.
Amount available	Provision of a ceiling track hoist in line with assessed needs.
Charges and fees	There is no means test (financial assessment) required.
Conditions	The hoists are provided with a 10 year extended warranty, which aligns with the life cycle of the hoist. After this point, if there is continued eligible need it is anticipated that a new hoist would be supplied, again with a 10 year warranty; responsibility for ongoing repair and maintenance of ceiling hoists will not transfer to individuals.
Application process	<p>The first step in making an application is to call the Council's Contact Centre number for Adult Social Care on 0151 907 8306 or visit one of the Halton Direct Links at Halton Lea, Runcorn or Brook Street, Widnes.</p> <p>Eligible need will be assessed by one of the Council's Occupational Therapists (OT) or Community Care Workers (CCW).</p>

2.6 Minor Adaptations

<p>Minor adaptations are relatively small and inexpensive and can be defined as structural or non-structural works (see list at appendix 2) costing £1,000 or less (this may be the cost of a single item or a combination of items).</p>	
Eligibility criteria	Eligible need to be assessed by HBC Social Services.
Amount available	Up to £1,000.
Charges and fees	<p>Minor adaptations costing £1,000 or less will be provided free of charge. The Council will fund minor adaptations for owner occupiers and private tenants.</p> <p>Housing associations will fund minor adaptations for their tenants, and many of the larger housing associations accept self-referrals (further information should be obtained from individual housing associations). Cost-related criteria may vary between local housing providers meaning</p>

	that the definition of items as either minor or major adaptations may also differ.
Conditions	The majority of minor adaptations are provided within 7 days (of the request being made to the Council’s contractor), apart from external adaptations, door widening and WC alterations, which are provided within 4 weeks.
Application process	The first step in making an application is to call the Council’s Contact Centre number for Adult Social Care on 0151 907 8306 or visit one of the Halton Direct Links at Halton Lea, Runcorn or Brook Street, Widnes. Eligible need will be assessed by one of the Council’s Occupational Therapists (OT) or Community Care Workers (CCW).

2.7 Repair and maintenance

The Council will make use of DFG funds to cover the costs of repair and maintenance of mechanical lifts and hoists that are owned by the Council.

The use of DFG funds for revenue purposes is in line with the flexibility that is encouraged since the DFG allocation sits within the Better Care Fund².

However, in most cases, lifts and hoists will be provided with an extended warranty and such items will not be repaired/maintained by the Council. Extended warranties will be secured using DFG funds at the point of installation; most items are provided with a five year warranty (which covers all repair and maintenance needs).

At the end of the warranty period, the individual will be responsible for ongoing repair and maintenance; the Council will provide information and advice to assist people in this respect.

The situation is different for ceiling track hoists, which are supplied with a 10 year warranty to cover the life cycle of the lift (individuals do not become responsible for repair and maintenance of ceiling track hoists).

3.0 Discretion

Although every effort has been made to ensure that this policy clearly sets out what assistance is for, who is eligible and the conditions that apply, it is accepted there may be exceptional circumstances not covered by this policy but where there are compelling reasons to justify the provision of assistance.

Whilst this policy will be the primary consideration, applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and exceptional cases falling outside of this policy will be considered by a

² ‘Use of DFG funding for revenue purposes’, Foundations, April 2017:
<https://www-foundations-uk-com/media/5000/use-of-dfg-funding-for-revenue-purposes.pdf>

management panel and any assistance will be subject to approval by a Senior Manager/Director.

4.0 Further information, feedback and complaints

<https://www3.halton.gov.uk/Pages/councildemocracy/Contact-Us.aspx>

If you wish to contact the Council for further information or to provide general feedback, please call the Contact Centre on 0303 333 4300 (Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm) in the first instance. Alternatively, you can call into the one of the Halton Direct Links on Brook Street, Widnes or Halton Lea, Runcorn (Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm and Sat 9am-1pm).

If you wish to make a formal complaint, there is a procedure in place; for more information, please follow the web link above or request information via the Contact Centre or Halton Direct Link.

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Appendix 1: DFG Repayment Policy

- 1.1 The Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996: Disabled Facilities Grant (Conditions relating to approval or payment of Grant) General Consent 2008 allows Local Authorities to reclaim some of the DFG awarded in certain circumstances.
- 1.2 The local authority under this general consent is able to reclaim repayment of grant if the property adapted is disposed of (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise) within 10 years of completion of the relevant works but only where the cost of the grant awarded is in excess of £5,000. The maximum that can be reclaimed by the authority is £10,000. The applicant completes and signs a repayment of grant form with their application to confirm their understanding of this grant condition.
- 1.3 The government introduced the general consent to enable local authorities to maximise the potential for recycling funding for future major adaptations using DFG.
- 1.4 In order to enable the local authority to reclaim DFG funding a local land charge is registered on the property by the Council after the completion of the grant work in every case where the DFG awarded is in excess of £5,000.
- 1.5 Examples of potential reclaim are given below:

Example 1

Amount of DFG awarded was £5,679.50 for replacement of a bath with a level access shower together with cost of professional fees.

Property is sold 5 years after completion of works.

Amount of grant repayable to the local authority £679.50

Example 2

Amount of DFG awarded was £28,950.95 for provision of a ground floor bathroom extension and ramped access together with cost of professional fees.

Property is sold 2 years after completion of works.

Amount of grant repayable to the local authority £10,000

- 1.6 The policy on repayment of DFG takes into account the circumstances from the General Consent which the Council should consider before deciding whether or not it may be appropriate to consider waiving repayment of grant and these are set out in 1.8 below. The policy also adds one other relevant circumstance (in 1.9 below) where repayment of grant will not normally be requested.
- 1.7 The Council will reclaim the applicable amount in all cases where the property is disposed of within 10 years of the date of final completion of the eligible works, including where the sale arises following the death of the disabled person.

1.8 Repayment may not be required in the following circumstances:

- 1.8.1 Where the recipient of the grant would suffer financial hardship were they to be required to repay all or any part of the grant
 - 1.8.2 Where the disabled person or their partner are moving to take up employment or to change the place of employment.
 - 1.8.3 Where the disposal is made for reasons connected with the physical or mental health or physical or mental wellbeing of the recipient of the grant or of a disabled occupant of the premises.
 - 1.8.4 Where the disposal is made to enable the recipient of the grant to live with a person who is disabled or infirm and in need of care or where the recipient of the grant is disabled or infirm and is moving to receive such care from that person.
 - 1.8.5 Where an adaptation can be removed and/or recycled e.g. stair lifts, wash and dry toilets etc. the recipient would not be expected to repay that element of the grant.
- 1.10 In such circumstances as described in 1.8.1 to 1.8.4 above and where a request is made to waive repayment of the applicable DFG amount then the decision will be made by the appropriate Operational Director on having received full supporting information from the person or persons making the request.

Appendix 2: List of Minor Adaptations

Structural minor adaptations:	Non-structural minor adaptations:
<p>Hand rails – external</p> <p>Half steps</p> <p>Extra paving to widen pathways</p> <p>Re-siting of sockets</p> <p>Additional sockets</p> <p>Re-location of light switches</p> <p>Lower section of kitchen workspace</p> <p>Re-hanging of doors</p> <p>Re-location of radiators</p> <p>Widening of doorways – key access points</p> <p>Compressible threshold</p> <p>Alter position of WC</p> <p>Lowering of shower controls</p> <p>Alterations to service meter cupboard</p> <p>Trim window sill</p> <p>Trim newel post</p>	<p>Grab rails</p> <p>Stair rails – not the primary rail</p> <p>Lever taps</p> <p>Drop down rails</p> <p>Floor fixing of toilet frames</p> <p>Brackets for swivel bathers and bath boards</p> <p>Spatulate WC handles</p> <p>Lower wall cupboards/worktop</p> <p>Change door handles/kitchen door handles</p> <p>Flashing light door bells</p> <p>Smoke alarm alerts</p> <p>Door and wall protectors</p> <p>Intercom door release system</p> <p>Toilet plinth</p> <p>Microphone pick up units</p>