



Adaptations:

Good Practice
Guidance

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In partnership with:





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About this guide

This guide is intended to help you feel informed, empowered and in control when making decisions about managing requests for home adaptations from tenants to make your property more inclusive and accessible.

We've developed this guidance to support you as the private rented sector (PRS) plays an increasingly influential role in providing homes to a wide range of tenants.

It is estimated that 80 percent of our existing housing stock will need to cater to future needs well into the 2050s¹. The 2017-18 English Housing Survey² confirmed that the PRS contains 380,000 households headed by a person aged 65 and over. This is expected to more than double by 2046³, whilst the Office for National Statistics (ONS) projects that, based on 2010 figures, there will be a 101 percent increase in the population aged 85 and over by 2030⁴. This means that existing housing stock will need to be adapted to meet changing needs as more people live in the PRS for longer.

This guide was developed with the support of charitable, private, professional and statutory organisations, whose expert insights have helped shape the content and ensured that the advice is tailored to landlords, whilst also reflecting the needs of tenants.

The information included in this guide is intended to develop your awareness of the process of providing homes that are suitable for people with impairments – this can include, but is not limited to, physical mobility, sensory (hearing and visual), dementia or mental ill-health – and the areas you need to consider. The aim of the content is to help you feel in control and informed in your decision-making process when engaging with tenants or local councils.

As the first of its kind for private sector landlords, we aimed to produce guidance that is easily understandable without compromising on the detail. To this end, we have focused on the key themes that are crucial in helping you understand how you can manage adaptation requests from existing or prospective tenants, that will enable them to sustain their tenancies for longer, and that will improve their wellbeing. These include:

- **Defining what constitutes an adaptation**
- **An overview of the funding options**
- **Options involved in carrying out the works**
- **Considerations for future tenancies.**

It is important to emphasise that this is guidance on the 'how-to' process of managing requests and under no circumstances does it supersede your legislative obligations.

What are adaptations?

The aim of home adaptations is to make it easier and safer for people to access and use their homes⁵. The nature of adaptations can usually be classified as either minor or major. This mainly relates to the amount of work and relevant cost attached to the intervention being made.

The table below provides a brief snapshot of what can be considered a minor or major adaptation, but this is not an exhaustive list:

Minor adaptations

Grab rails and stair rails (outside and inside)

Lever taps

Lighting improvements

Door entry system/intercom

Window and door opening mechanisms

Major adaptations

Level access showers and wet rooms

Stairlifts (straight or curved)

Ramps

Kitchen alterations

Automatic door openers/closers

Accessible or adaptable

The terms 'adaptation' and 'accessibility' may seem interchangeable, but it is important to understand the differences so that you can make an informed decision about what adaptations are feasible, and what levels of accessibility your property can offer.

An adaptation is a modification to a property, whereas the level of 'accessibility' generally relates to the structural features already offered by a property such as ground floor, level access (this could potentially include a property with a lift, but where there are no steps or stairs required to negotiate additional to the lift), wider doors and hallways, a toilet and/or shower on the entrance level.

Typically, when people hear the term 'adaptations', they wrongly assume that the works required are likely to mean a tenant must move out. However, this scenario is extremely uncommon as the vast majority of adaptations are completed whilst the tenant is in occupation.



Who needs adaptations?

People who require adaptations vary in age - from children to older people. They can also have a range of impairments which could be physical (e.g restricted mobility), cognitive (e.g dementia), neurodiverse (e.g autism), sensory impairments (e.g hearing, visual), a learning disability and/or mental health problems.

In terms of the need for accessible housing, this too applies across the whole population and includes people of working age looking to be closer to employment or accessible transport networks. There is therefore significant evidence for a wide range of potential need for suitable properties especially considering that the private rented sector (PRS) is the second largest tenure in England⁶.

The adaptations that you consent to will revolve around an individual's specific needs, including help for those assisting them, some of which can arise after a tenant is in-situ because of an accident or health condition. Whilst there is no 'one size fits all', when it comes to adaptations some will still be of great benefit to a wide range of other tenants.

Requests for adaptations may involve very simple measures to make the home more suitable. For example, people with dementia who may be experiencing memory loss can benefit from signage and distinctive markers to help them with navigation such as in the kitchen or to specific rooms within the home. This could help them sustain their tenancies for much longer.

A common concern and misunderstanding is that adaptations look institutional and medical, affecting how desirable the property is for renters. In fact, adaptations can be carried out in an 'inclusive', attractive, contemporary way and can be a positive feature, including increasing the potential marketability.

Providing adaptations helps tenants overcome some of the barriers created by existing inaccessible features. By removing these and/or adapting the surroundings it can enable a person, and those caring for them, to live a more independent, dignified, better quality life.



How are adaptations funded?

It is important to understand that you are not required to fund any aspect of adaptations yourself and your key responsibility lies in providing permission for the adaptation to be made. However, self-funding is an option if this is something you would like to do.

Your consent for adaptations should be accompanied by a clear allocation of responsibility for the party responsible for restoring the property to its original condition should you wish to do so. It is important that you are able to evidence such an agreement in writing for the benefit of all parties.

The good news is that once you have given your consent for a tenant to have adaptations, you can be as hands-off as you wish. However, many landlords like to be involved to some extent and even if not, would like to be informed about what is happening. More information will be provided in the 'who carries out the works' section that will follow.

The following section provides an overview of the main sources of external funding available.

Funding sources



England

Minor adaptations

When a tenant needs a small piece of equipment (for example, a raised toilet seat) or a minor adaptation (for example, a grab rail) the tenant's local council will usually pay for these. There is no charge to the tenant. This includes any equipment or adaptations up to £1,000.

The council's social care department will usually carry out an assessment to identify what the person needs and the equipment will be delivered to the property. Where minor adaptations such as a grab rail are needed the fitting of these will usually be arranged by the council with the work carried out by an agency which has been contracted to undertake this work.

Major adaptations

In some cases major adaptations may be needed to meet your tenant's needs. Where this is the case, the local council will carry out an assessment to see what work is required. This assessment is usually carried out by an occupational therapist but may also be carried out by an experienced 'trusted' assessor. An experienced assessor can be a member of staff who has been trained to carry out assessments for people and deal with less complex cases that do not require input from an occupational therapist.

The assessment will identify what work is necessary to meet the needs of the tenant. The most common types of work required are stairlifts, ramps and level access showers. In order to meet the cost of the necessary work your tenant can apply to the local council for a grant called a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

In Wales, adaptations are split into three categories, small, medium and large. ‘Small adaptations’ such as grab and stair rails are similar to ‘minor adaptations’ in England because they are funded up to £1,000 and are likely to be delivered by the council with support from social care services. They can also be delivered by the Rapid Response Adaptations Programme which focuses on work that can be completed in 15 days.

Medium adaptations cost between £1,001 and £10,000 and tend to be delivered following an assessment by an Occupational Therapist and funded through the DFG. Examples of possible modifications include walk-in showers, stairlifts or a combination of jobs installed as one.

Large adaptations are those that cost £10,000 or more, due to their complexity, will involve an Occupational Therapist assessment and rely on DFG funding. The extent of the work can vary from building an extension to provide a downstairs bedroom or bathroom to significant structural changes such as relocating a kitchen.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), which is means-tested, can meet the cost of works up to a maximum of £30,000 in England, or £36,000 in Wales, though the average grant is actually less than £10,000⁷. It’s important to note that it is the tenant who is means-tested and not the landlord, and landlords are not required to provide any details about their income.

Statement of intent

In order for your tenant to access DFG funding, they require a statement of intent from you, confirming that you intend for the property to continue to be occupied by the disabled tenant for up to five years after the grant-funded work has been completed.

The statement of intent does not override the tenancy agreement and neither does it translate to a five-year fixed term, but indicates that you are willing for the tenancy to continue for up to five years. You will also need to confirm that you are the owner of the property, and the local council will want confirmation that you have given your permission for the necessary work to be carried out.

The tenant also has to confirm that they intend to live in the property for the same five-year period, but this period may be shortened if, for example, their circumstances change and their health worsens, which requires them to move.

Once consent has been given, the grant application process is the responsibility of the tenant and your involvement is at your discretion. Where the adaptation involves the provision of items such as a stairlift it is important that there is a clear agreement with the tenant regarding responsibility for any ongoing servicing and repair costs after the end of the warranty period (usually five years).

Additionally, it is your responsibility to agree on what happens to adaptations at the end of the tenancy and have this evidenced in writing as part of the approval process. As noted below, in some areas the local council may offer a separate discretionary grant to meet the cost of reinstatement works following the ending of a tenancy. This might, for example, meet the cost of removing a stairlift and any making good that may be necessary.

Local council discretionary grants

In many areas local councils now also provide a range of discretionary grants to complement or to provide an alternative to the statutory DFG. These can include grants for essential repairs or grants to improve heating. Local councils may also choose to provide grants without a means-test which can mean that essential adaptations can be arranged much more quickly when, for example, someone is waiting to be discharged from hospital.

In some areas the local council may be able to offer discretionary grants specifically for tenants of private landlords. Given the growth in the number of people living in the private rented sector, some of whom will be disabled, local councils want to make sure that these tenants can continue to live independently in their home. Grants could for example include funding to reinstate the property to its previous condition when the particular adaptation is no longer required e.g. when a stairlift is removed.

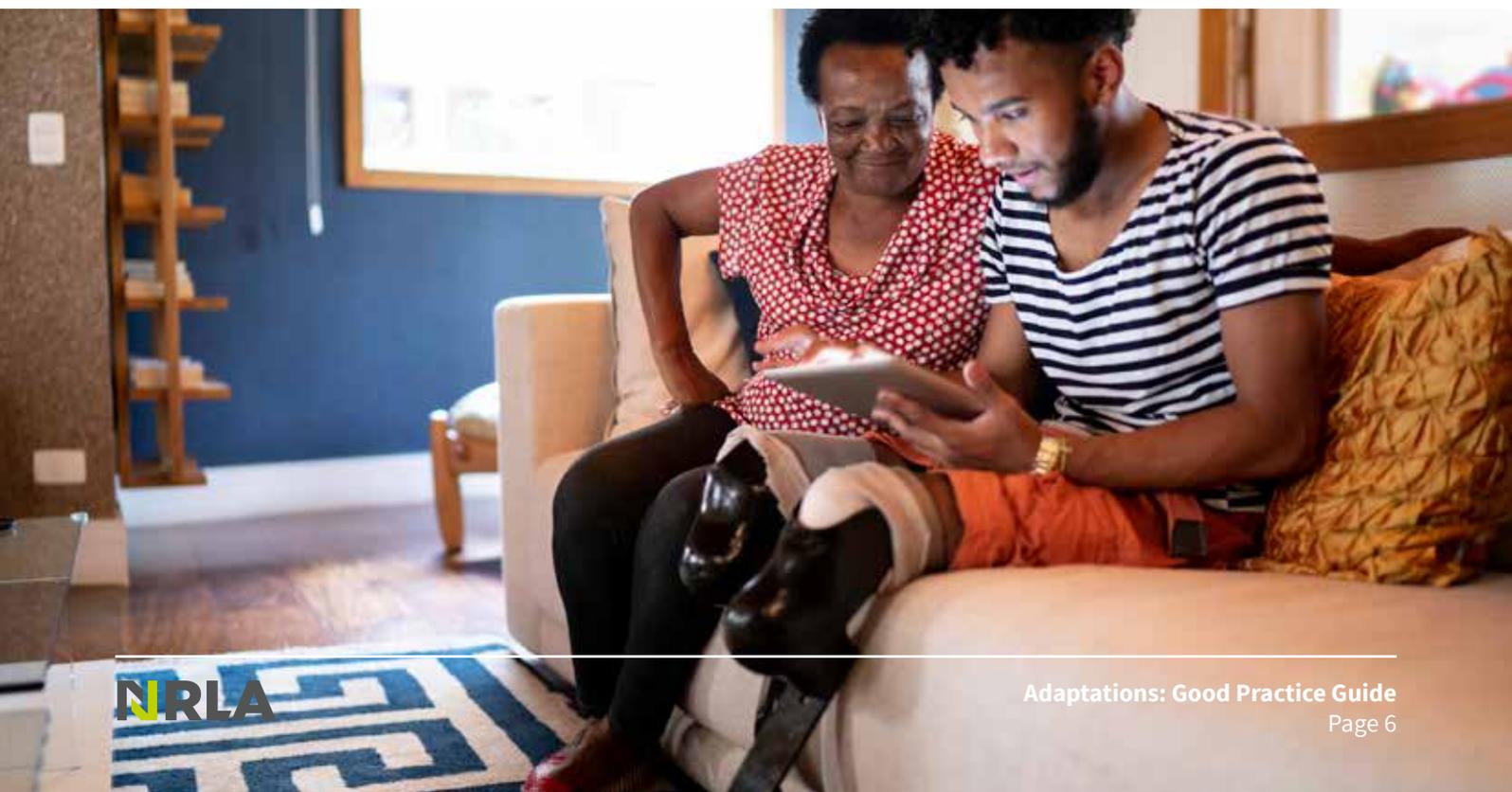
Where local councils offer additional discretionary grants they will usually be described in a Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy (or similar) and information about these should be available on the council's website or by contacting the council department responsible for private sector grants. The council can use their discretion regarding any conditions attached to such grants, so they may vary from the conditions attached to DFGs.

Home Improvement Agency (HIA)

In many areas advice and assistance with the process of applying for a grant is provided by a Home Improvement Agency (HIA). Home Improvement Agencies (sometimes also called Care & Repair agencies) are locally based and may be run by independent voluntary sector agencies, housing associations, private companies or local councils. They help older, disabled and vulnerable tenants to continue to live independently, safely and well in their own homes.

HIAs can also provide advice about any other sources of financial help and will usually also assist with arranging the work, obtaining estimates from reputable local contractors and ensuring that the work is completed to a satisfactory standard. HIAs can provide advice to landlords as well as tenants.

You can find out more about HIAs by contacting Foundations, the national body for HIAs in England - foundations.uk.com. For Wales you can contact Care & Repair Cymru - careandrepair.org.uk.





Who carries out the works?

Typically, once consent has been obtained from you and the nature of the work has been determined, most local councils (or an HIA if the work is being arranged by them) will go through a tendering process in order to select the most cost-efficient bid.

Councils tend to have an approved list of builders that they will rely on who have been used before. After a funding decision has been made, they will inform the tenant if the grant has been confirmed, and if so, when the works will be taking place. In some areas the work may be arranged by a Home Improvement Agency (HIA).

If you want to be more hands-on, it is possible to agree with the council that you can use your own contractors to undertake the work on the property. This is more likely if you are able to demonstrate the competitiveness of your chosen contractors and that the works meet the tenant's identified needs. These will have been specified by the assessor and a grants surveyor will usually have drawn up a schedule of works.

When it comes to the types of adaptations, both landlords and tenants dislike institutional-looking fixtures and fittings. You can get involved by asking to be consulted during the procurement process to help secure inconspicuous, multifunctional and visually appealing installations. If you so wish, either you, your tenant or both of you can top up the funding provided for the works to get higher specification products, but this is entirely discretionary.

Will there be disruption?

Minor adaptations tend to be the most frequent type of work and both these and other straightforward adaptations, such as the installation of a stairlift or the provision of a level-access shower, can usually be completed when your tenant is in-situ. It is only in exceptional cases that a tenant would need to be moved temporarily. Where this is necessary, the local council may be able to assist with arranging temporary accommodation, including providing funding.

Managing your tenancy during works

The relationship between you and your tenant is based on good communication, and it's important to be open and straightforward when discussing adaptations. It is vital that you develop a full understanding of your tenant's requirements before deciding on a course of action.

The key thing to bear in mind is that most adaptations are unobtrusive in nature and will result in a minimal to nil impact to the structural fabric of your property. Facilitating adaptations is possible on a sliding scale depending on your property's limitations. Therefore, communicating what is possible and why is key in ensuring that a tenant has realistic expectations. It's also crucial to remember that your openness to requests could be the difference between a long-term tenant extending their tenancy or moving out to an already adapted property, and could significantly improve their quality of life.

Even if you wish to take an arm's length approach to the choice and installation of adaptations and funding application process, it is in your interest to maintain frequent communication with your tenant so that you are kept up to date with developments.

Supporting your tenant during this period will benefit your relationship and reinforce your commitment to their wellbeing and happiness in the tenancy. This can vary from regular calls or emails to visiting the property in order to inspect the work being done. It's in your interest to proactively engage, so that any issues can be addressed early on.

End of tenancies

Once a tenancy comes to an end you can either have the property restored to its original condition or adaptations and accessibility features can be retained. If you choose to have the property restored back to its original condition, this process will be determined by the agreement you struck when you gave your consent. If a property is restored to its original condition, you can still refer to your openness to adaptations when you advertise your property.

Prospective tenants

If you have already undertaken works such as widening door frames and installing wet rooms, these can be a real selling point given how few properties have these features, so it's worth thinking about the best way to advertise your property to the prospective tenants who may need them.

Working with your council to shortlist your next tenant based on existing adaptations can be a viable option, but this is dependent on their capacity. Landlords can also reach out to specialist agents that can help source tenants for a property with adaptations. In doing so, you can receive guidance on how to highlight existing features within the property that make it suitable for a prospective tenant.

Working with your agent

It's also crucial that your agent – if you use one – is aware that you are open to adapting your property to suit a tenant's needs. We would suggest including a clause within your management agreement to ensure that any requests for adaptations are passed on to you. This simple change could have a significant impact because anecdotal evidence suggests some agents are resistant to requests for adaptations, although the landlords who are contracting them are amenable.

When marketing a property, floorplans and pictures are also helpful in showing other beneficial features such as other rooms on the ground floor, a level-access shower, level access to front door and garden if applicable. The use of pictures is useful for both parties because it makes it easier for prospective tenants to decide on whether a property suits their access needs.

There are some specialist agents who have experience of dealing with accessibility and adaptation requests, such as Branch Properties (branchproperties.co.uk), AccessiblePRS (accessibleprs.co.uk) and the Accessible Property Register (accessible-property.org). If you're interested in promoting an accessible or adapted property, make sure to ask your agent about their experience in this area.



Further information

Abode Impact	Abode Impact has conducted extensive research into integrating accessible property into PRS investment funds, and seeks to leverage this experience by working with portfolio managers as well as launching and operating the UK's first accessible housing fund.	abodeimpact.co.uk
AccessiblePRS	AccessiblePRS works with landlords, investors, developers and property professionals to unlock the potential of accessible housing as a strategic and resilient investment area. Additionally, they specialise in tenant sourcing.	accessibleprs.co.uk
Age UK	Age UK exists to help everyone make the most of later life, whatever their circumstances. This includes helping them be comfortable, safe and secure at home.	ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/care/housing-options/adapting-home
Alzheimer's Society	<p>The only UK charity that campaigns for change, funds research to find a cure and supports people living with dementia. The organisation has produced a Dementia Friendly Housing Guide that can be accessed here: https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-friendly-communities/organisations/housing-charter</p> <p>To learn more about dementia and the small actions you can take to support people affected by dementia. You can become a Dementia Friend in just ten minutes here, using the code: NRLA123</p>	alzheimers.org.uk
Branch Properties Accessibility Specialists	Branch Properties specialise in providing, finding, and promoting accessible properties. We are the leading specialists and only letting agent with a service specifically aimed at meeting the accommodation needs of disabled people. We offer a service to assist with all adaptations and expert advice whatever the scope or size of the project. Since 2015, we have been proud to be a key player in the accessible property industry	branchproperties.co.uk
Care & Repair	Care & Repair England is a small national charity whose aim is to improve the homes and living conditions of older people. It believes that all older people should be able to live in a decent home of their choosing.	careandrepair-england.org.uk
Centre for Ageing Better	<p>Centre for Ageing Better works to bring lasting changes in society that make a difference to people's experience of later life</p> <p>To read more about how simple home adaptations can improve people's quality of life, see the Centre for Ageing Better's report <i>Homes that Help</i>.</p>	ageing-better.org.uk ageing-better.org.uk/publications

Further information

Chartered Institute of Housing	CIH is the professional body for people working in housing and the home of professional standards. Our mission is to support housing professionals to create a future in which everyone has a place to call home; equipping them with the skills, knowledge and expertise they need to make a difference.	www.cih.org
Foundations	Foundations is the national body for HIAs and Handyperson services. We provide advice and support to HIAs and local authorities to support the development of good practice in the delivery of adaptations to enable people to continue to live safely and well in their own home. Information about applying for a DFG can be found on the Adapt My Home website. You can find if there is an HIA in your area by checking on the Find My HIA website which lists all HIAs in England.	foundations.uk.com adaptmyhome.org.uk findmyhia.org.uk/home
Golden Lane Housing	Golden Lane Housing is focused on creating greater access to housing for people with learning disabilities.	glh.org.uk
Habinteg	Habinteg's mission is to champion inclusion by providing and promoting accessible homes and neighbourhoods that welcome and include everyone	habinteg.org.uk
Nationwide Foundation	Nationwide Foundation's vision is to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to a decent home that they can afford	nationwidefoundation.org.uk
Royal College of Occupational Therapists – Specialist Section Housing	The Royal College of Occupational Therapists – Specialist Section in Housing promote good practice in housing, inclusive design and accessible home environments. It considers housing and the built environment as crucial to health and wellbeing.	rcot.co.uk/about-us/specialist-sections/housing-rcot-ss
	Housing LIN's <i>Adaptations without Delay</i> was commissioned by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists demonstrates how adaptations can be delivered in all four UK nations with the individual at the centre. It provides guidance on planning and delivering home adaptations differently, highlighting how occupational therapists add value to the process, as well as the rationale for when they are needed due to complexity of individual circumstances.	rcot.co.uk/adaptations-without-delay
	The Wheelchair Housing Design Guide produced by Habinteg with contributors from the Centre for Accessible Environments and the Royal College of Occupational Therapists Specialist Section – Housing provides practical advice and design considerations for delivering good quality wheelchair accessible housing and may also assist when considering adaptations.	https://cae.org.uk/product/whdg/

References

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- 3 https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/Support_materials/Other_reports_and_guidance/HAPPI-5-Rental-Housing.pdf
- 4 <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/Demographicchange/PublicServiceVol2.pdf>
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- 5 <https://www.rcot.co.uk/adaptations-without-delay>
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