

Adapting Your Own Home

A Step by Step Guide for People with Disabilities



A Guide for Major Adaptations in
Private Sector Housing

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Disability Action NI

Disabled Persons Housing Service (Edinburgh)

Family Information Group

'Staying Put', Fold Housing Trust

Foyle Disability Resource Centre

Eastern Health and Social Services Council
Northern Health and Social Services Council
Southern Health and Social Services Council
Western Health and Social Services Council

Multiple Sclerosis Society

Rate Collection Agency

Royal National Institute for the Blind

Gable

Adapting Your Home to Meet Your Needs

If you, or someone living with you in your property has a disability, you may qualify for grant aid (following a financial means test) towards the cost of adaptations to your main residence to help you to continue to live at home. A new means test will not be applied where the person with a disability is a dependent, up until their 19th birthday.

This guide takes you through the process of adapting your own property. The process is complicated so we have tried to simplify it into four main steps and give approximate time-scales for each step.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Health and Social Services Trusts work in partnership to help you adapt your home.

As the speed of this process partly depends on how quickly you can obtain and pass on information and documentation to relevant bodies, a checklist is provided to give you more control over the adaptation process.

Some avoidable pitfalls are identified by a caution symbol



while tips on keeping the cost of the adaptations down are identified by a money saving tips symbol

Who is Involved?

A number of people may be involved (contact details can be found at the back of this booklet) including:

Occupational Therapists (OTs)

Occupational Therapists (OTs) advise on what is "necessary and appropriate" to meet needs. They will assist you in choosing an adaptation design that will help you to be independent or help others to care for you.

Housing Executive Grants Officers

The Housing Executive commences its involvement in the process following receipt of the OTs recommendation. Housing Executive Grants Officers decide what work is "reasonable and practicable" for grant purposes and will help you through the grant system.

Technical Advisors

You may also need specialist technical advice on the work to be done. This advice may come from architects, building surveyors or on occasion representatives specialising in products for people with disabilities.

Home Improvement Agencies (Care and Repair Agencies)

The Housing Executive Grants Offices have arrangements with Home Improvement Agencies to act as an agent for you throughout the grant application, relieving you of some of the responsibilities involved in completing the grants process. However they cannot speed up the grant.

It is your choice whether you avail of this free service.

The Builder

Warranted builders are required for work over £5,000.



How Long Does It Take?

Step 1

Occupational Therapy Assessment of your needs

The Community Charter states that this service aims to initiate your assessment within three months. Your local Health and Social Services Trust will strive to meet this standard but in practice it can take longer, due to local service demand, the relative priority of your situation and staffing levels. Once made, the Occupational Therapist will forward the recommendations to the local Grants Office.

Step 2

Designing the adaptations

Once the OT recommendation has been received, the local Grants Office will arrange a site inspection within 10 working days. A schedule of works will be issued after a further 20 days, subject to receipt of information or reports required.

Step 3

Getting your grant approved

Up to six months.

Step 4

Building work

Three to four months.

Some of the time scales may overlap in practice.

The target times aim to restrict the Housing Executives total processing time to 70 days (14 weeks). However it may take some time for the applicant to gather together all the necessary documentation. Fold and Gable can assist the applicant in this process.

In the meantime the Occupational Therapist may provide equipment or minor adaptations such as rails to promote quality of life in the home or Social Services may review your home care if necessary.



Getting Started

You can either apply through you GP, Social Worker or to your local Occupational Therapy service.

Up to date medical information from your GP or hospital consultant helps the Occupational Therapy service identify your needs more rapidly.

If you require other works of repair or improvement, the Housing Executive Grants Office can give you information on the range of grants available to improve your home.



Step 1

The Occupational Therapy Assessment Process

When a referral is received and accepted by the HSS Trust, your Occupational Therapist will carry out an assessment, which looks at both your needs and, where appropriate your carers needs, to decide whether they can be met through a range of services. The Occupational Therapist will then discuss options with you. These may include rehabilitation, referral to other Health and Social Services professionals, provision of daily living equipment, moving home or adapting your home.

In many instances where needs are less complex it will be possible to make a recommendation for an adaptation early on. On some occasions where needs are complex, more information may be needed from other Health and Social Services personnel to identify both short and long term needs. This may involve contact with people such as your hospital consultant regarding your condition. The Occupational Therapy service aims to obtain this information within six months as stated in the Community Charter.

If adapting your home is an option, the Occupational Therapist will assess the layout of your property in order to help you with your daily living requirements or to enable you to care for the person with a disability. The Occupational Therapist will also work with special equipment suppliers where this is a necessary part of the adaptation.

The Estate Services Departments of Health and Social Services Trusts may provide certain minor works e.g. stair or grab rails following an Occupational Therapy recommendation. They may also provide lifts where they are recommended by the Occupational Therapist.



When certain types of adaptations such as bedrooms, showers or ground floor toilets are recommended by the Occupational Therapist they will notify the Housing Executive grants department so that eligibility for grant aid can be considered.

Step 1 Checklist: Occupational Therapy Assessment

You will need to have:

1. Agreement with your Occupational Therapist about your needs, and where appropriate your carers needs following assessment.

2. An assessment of your home environment and ideas about options for adaptation.

3. An Occupational Therapy recommendation and brief for the adaptation

Step 2:

Designing the Adaptation

The Housing Executive Grants Office administers the process following receipt of the OT recommendation. You can also receive assistance from your local Home Improvement Agency if you wish (see contact details at the end of the booklet).

The Grants Officer will visit your home, possibly together with the Occupational Therapist to look at the condition of your property and to make sure the recommended adaptation is feasible.

The Grants Officer will explain the type and level of grant aid available. The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is commonly used to fund major housing adaptations. As a means test is involved, some people will be required to make a contribution to the cost of the adaptation work. A means test will not be applied where the disabled person is a dependent, up until their 19th birthday.



If you are in any way unsure of the contribution you may have to make to the adaptation, it is advisable to request a preliminary test of resources (means test) early on to help with financial planning.

Having looked at options, it may also be suggested that you get further technical advice from an architect, building surveyor or specialist equipment suppliers.

The Design Process

The Occupational Therapist will produce a brief, which outlines the nature of the essential adaptations needed.

The Grants Officer will produce the necessary schedule of grant-aided works for the adaptation. You may also receive a separate schedule of works to address unfitness or disrepair in your home.

Where work is more complex you will need to employ a "technical advisor" to produce drawings/ specifications and obtain the necessary statutory approvals.

Taking time to get the plans right by talking to the Occupational Therapist, Grants Officer and Architect can save time and money later on.



A contribution towards the fees involved for this can be paid as part of the Disabled Facilities Grant, once it is approved. Remember that if you withdraw from the grants system before work is complete you will still have to pay the architect or designer for plans and other fees.



Step 2 Checklist: Designing the Adaptation

You will need to have:

1. Permission from the owners of your home for adaptations (if you are not the owner) or proof that you own your own home. . .
2. Completed a preliminary enquiry form . .
3. An agreement with your Occupational Therapist, Housing Executive Grants Officer and "technical advisors" on one adaptation design to meet your needs . .
4. Drawings (if necessary) to illustrate the proposed adaptation
5. A schedule of work produced by the Grants Office
6. Details of what funding you may be entitled to and/or what your contribution may be - Preliminary test of resources . .
7. Considered the need for temporary alternative accommodation during building work

Step 3: Getting Your Grant Approved

Either you or your architect must send the schedule to builders to get a quote for the work required. If needed, the Housing Executive Grants Office can supply you with a list of contractors in your area. The builder will need to visit your home to give you an accurate quotation and you may need to shop about for prices.

You may be entitled to exemption from VAT for all or part of your essential adaptation work. Check with the VAT office or phone the help-line on the back page.

Planning permission and Building Control approval may also need to be obtained. There may be exemptions on fees for some or all of the adaptation work. Check this with your local Building Control service.

Your Architect or Technical Advisor will do most of this preliminary work for you.

If you are not receiving the assistance of your local Home Improvement Agency the Housing Executive Grants staff can give assistance with the completion of forms. If you have any problems contact the Grants Office.

If you are not eligible for a grant we may need to discuss alternatives.



Step 3 Checklist: Getting Your Grant Approved

You will need to have:

1. Completed the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Application form and also formal test of resources form and provided proof of income
2. An account or estimate for professional fees e.g. architects fees.
3. Planning and building control permission (where necessary)
4. Proof that you own your own home or evidence of permission for the adaptation from the homeowner (certificate of owner occupation/tenant's certificate/Certificate of title)
5. Certificate of future occupation/intended letting (where appropriate).
6. An estimate from a builder (warranted, if work costs over £5,000)

- 7. Approval of plans by the Grants department and the OT department . . .
- 8. Mortgagee's consent
- 9. Authorisation certificate(s) (completed by people other than the applicant who hold title to the grant property)
- 10. Rate Demand.

If you feel your situation has changed considerably since the assessment by the Occupational Therapist, notify your therapist if they are not already aware of your situation, before proceeding with building work.



Remember – you must not start any building work until the grant has been approved.



Step 4:

Building Work and Grant Payment

The Grants Officer will issue a formal approval to you if you are successful in your application for a Disabled Facilities Grant. At this stage you can commence building.



Work should commence within eight weeks and finish within a further twelve months of this approval.

Either you or your technical advisor should speak to the chosen builders to set a date for the work to begin. While the Grants Office wishes to see the work progressing rapidly they have no direct control over the builder.

Practical arrangements may need to be made with the builder and on occasion it may be necessary for you to move out temporarily while the work is going on.

There may be exceptional circumstances where interim payments can be made. Check this with your local Housing Executive Grants Office.



You should contact the Housing Executive when the work is completely finished. The final grant cannot be paid until your builder has completed all the work outlined on the schedule.

The Grants Officer will try to visit within 2 weeks of receiving notification from you that the work is completed. Following this the Occupational Therapist will inspect the adaptations. If everyone is satisfied with the work the relevant payments will be made. When required, the Occupational Therapist will provide equipment such as a shower chair to help you use your new facilities.

The ongoing maintenance of the adapted property is the homeowners' responsibility.

The Rate Collection Agency can advise you on whether a rate rebate (Disabled Persons Allowance) will apply to your housing adaptation. (See contact number for advice)



Step 4 Checklist: Building Work and Grant Payment

You will need to have:

1. Formal approval to commence work

2. A date for the builder to start and complete the work

3. Approval of the completed adaptations by the relevant professionals

Your Contact With Us

Occupational Therapists, Housing Executive Grants Officers and other staff are often out on visits to other people during the day. If you need to talk to someone about the progress of your adaptation please contact your local Housing Executive Grants Office or Home Improvement Agency if they are helping you. They will be able to answer most queries or will contact the person you need to speak to.

Your Local Contacts

Occupational Therapy Service

Contact:

Tel:

Housing Executive Grants Office

Contact:

Tel:

Web site address: www.nihe.gov.uk

Home Improvement Agencies

Gable (North West Area)

Tel: 028 7188 2147, Freephone 08000 286686

Fax: 028 7138 3947

Fold (Rest of Northern Ireland)

Tel: 028 9042 8314

Fax: 028 9042 8167

Your Architect

Contact:

Tel:

Planning Department

Contact:

Tel:

Building Control

Contact:

Tel:

Your Builder

Contact:

Tel:

VAT Office

VAT advice relating to housing adaptations for people with disabilities.

Tel: Helpline 0845 010 9000 or 0845 000 0200
(people with hearing disabilities)

Web site address www.hmce.gov.uk

Rates

Telephone your local Rate Collection Agency office or contact

Housing Benefit Central Unit,
Londonderry House,
21-27 Chichester Street
Belfast
BT1 4JJ

Tel: 028 9054 2913

Web site address www.ratecollectionagency.ni.gov.uk

Glossary of Terms

Test of Resources (means test)

An assessment of your income, which is used to calculate whether you will be expected to pay for some of the adaptation work.

Preliminary Enquiry Form

A form you use to enquire about grant aid.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

A means tested Housing Executive grant for housing adaptations.

Home Improvement Agency

There are two organisations in Northern Ireland who can provide free help to process the grant application. Shelter covers the North West and Fold cover the rest of Northern Ireland.

Schedule of Works

A schedule is a list of work to be carried out which has been agreed by the Occupational Therapist and the Grants Office and which will be grant aided.

While this booklet outlines many of the steps involved in a major housing adaptation, it does not attempt to describe the total process.

Local service providers will offer specific advice depending on your individual circumstances.

Calls are welcomed via BT Text Direct for text or minicom users. Insert 18001 in front of the number you wish to dial.

This information can also be made available in alternative formats. Contact:

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Translation services are available via a telephone service called Language Line in each Housing Executive office.

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