Contact us
You can contact us by phone, fax or email details below. If you wish to meet with an officer dealing with a specific case then please contact us to make an appointment.

Write to:
Private Sector Housing Services
Town Hall
Victoria Square
St.Helens
WA10 1HP
Telephone: 01744 676555
e-mail: homeimprovementagency@sthelens.gov.uk
Introduction
We have produced this booklet to provide clear information about Disabled Facilities Grants to help you through the process. Please keep this booklet for future reference. In it you will find information on the following:

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Who can apply for a grant

You may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant if you or someone living with you has a disability and you are:

a. An owner-occupier
b. A tenant of a property
c. A landlord of a disabled tenant

A Disabled Facilities Grant may assist with the cost of providing adaptations and facilities to enable the disabled person to continue to live in the property. The person with the disability does not need to be a registered disabled person to apply. Any assistance that may be offered will be subject to an assessment of the disabled person's needs by a member of the Councils Occupational Therapy Service and in some cases an assessment of your income and savings.

What is available

By offering a Disabled Facilities Grant we aim to help you to live as independently as possible. Following your assessment the types of adaptations that may be undertaken on your home are:

• Improved access to and from the home and garden. This may include works such as ramps/steps with rails
• Improved access to certain rooms in your home e.g. toilet/bathroom. This may include door widening or stair/vertical lifts. In exceptional circumstances a shower room and/or bedroom addition may be considered if internal alterations are not possible.
• Provision of facilities for preparing and cooking food. This may mean improving kitchen layout, moving electrical switches and controls to more suitable positions.
• Making your home safe for the disabled person and other people living in the house. This may be works such as fitting a shower over a bath, replacing a bath with a level access shower, resiting bathroom fixtures in a more suitable position or additional heating.

How do I make an application?

Step 1

If you have a disability and you live within the Borough of St.Helens you should contact the Councils Customer Services Officer by phoning 01744 676600. They will ask you for some basic details which will be passed on to the Councils Occupational Therapy Service and an Assessment Officer will contact you within 3 working days of receipt of your request.

The Assessment Officer will carry out an initial assessment with you over the telephone. Or if you prefer an assessment form will be posted out to you, for completion at home. The information from this assessment will help us decide how best to assist you.

Step 2

If after the first assessment it is decided that a more comprehensive assessment of need is required we will arrange for an Occupational Therapist/Assistant to contact you and arrange a home visit. There will be a short wait for this home assessment which is dependent on the complexity of the client's needs. Those most at risk will be given priority.

Any decision we make regarding the help offered will be based on your individual needs. We will take various things into account, e.g. your medical condition, the physical problems you have, the needs of your carer and family, and the suitability of your home. You will be fully involved during the assessment process. We will give you clear information and we will arrange for an interpreter if necessary.

If the Occupational Therapist/Assistant recommends major adaptations to your home, a form will be left with you called a 'Provisional Test of Resources'. You will need to complete this form and return it to your Occupational Therapist. This will help us to calculate any grant assistance you may be entitled to and how much you will need to pay towards the cost of the works. A Case Officer will contact you to inform you what your estimated contribution will be.

This estimate will be reliant on the accuracy of the information you provide.

Please note

If you are on Helena Housing Tenant requiring bathroom adaptations only, Helena may undertake the works themselves. This will be explained to you during the assessment visit to your home.
You will not need to undertake a financial test of resources if any of the following apply:
• The disabled person is in receipt of a means tested benefit
• The adaptation is for a child
The Council also has the discretion not to require a financial test of resources if:
• The works are estimated to cost under £2000
• You are a tenant of a partnering registered social landlord

Step 3
Following your assessment a report will be prepared and considered by senior officers who will decide whether or not we can support the recommended adaptations in principal. A Housing Grants Case Officer will contact you, usually by phone, to advise of the outcome. If it is decided that the council will support the recommended adaptations, then we will progress your application for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

Disabled Facilities Grants are dealt with by the Council’s Home Improvement Agency. The charge for this service is covered by the grant and will not cost you anything. (See section on Agency Services). The Grants Case Offices will arrange a visit to your home to complete the formal application forms. If you are not using the Agency Service you will need to tell the Case Officer when they make contact with you. You will be advised of the alternative procedure.

When applying for a grant the applicant will be asked to sign a certificate stating the intention that throughout the grant condition period, (currently 5 years), the disabled person will occupy the dwelling as their only or main residence. The owner of rented accommodation will also be required to sign a certificate.

Step 4
A Technical Officer may need to visit your home to obtain final details about your adaptation. As part of the Agency service they will obtain estimates for the work from the Council’s list of approved contractors on your behalf. Contractors may need to visit your home to estimate the cost of works.

If the works require planning permission you will be given a list of approved plan technicians who can provide technical drawings. The choice of plan technician is yours and you must pay for his services in advance. However, you can claim the cost back as part of the grant when the works are complete.

Your Housing Grants Case Officer will phone you with details of the estimates and any variations in your financial contribution, if you are assessed to have one, towards the cost of the works.
How will my grant be calculated

The amount you will have to pay towards the cost of the works will be based on an assessment of your financial circumstances mentioned previously and those of a spouse or partner. This takes into account your income (including certain benefits), assets e.g. second homes, holiday homes and any savings.

If the disabled person is a dependent child under the age of 19 (i.e. qualifies for child benefit) then the grant will cover the full cost of the adaptations to a maximum of £30,000 and there will not be a means test.

The amount you will have to pay will be calculated in accordance with Government regulations. The grant will be the cost of the works less your contribution (to a maximum grant £30,000).

The council will levy a charge against an owner occupied property where the cost of works exceeds £5000 and are deemed to have added value to the property e.g. extensions. The maximum that can be registered is £10000. If the property is disposed of within the grant condition period (currently 5 years) of completion, then the council may demand repayment of the registered amount.

Grant Approval

Once we have received your valid application form and supporting information we will give you a decision in writing within 6 months. However, we aim to give you a decision sooner than this. When your grant has been approved you will receive your grant approval notice. You must not allow any work to start until you receive this notification. Along with your approval notice we will send a breakdown of the grant award showing the submitted tenders, fees, estimated expense and a copy of the lowest tender.

If you are happy for the contractor who submitted the lowest tender to carry out the work, then your Housing Grants Case worker will inform your contractor that your grant has been approved. The contractor will contact you direct to arrange a start date.

You are at liberty to choose an alternative contractor, however, you would have to pay any increase in costs yourself.

How long will my adaptation take?

The nature and complexity of each individual adaptation varies immensely. It is therefore very difficult to put general time scales on stages within the process. We strive to give the best possible advice and feel this is best achieved by dealing with questions on time scales on an individual basis. Any member of staff dealing with your case will be happy to discuss the length of time you can expect to wait. Please do not hesitate to contact them.

Payment

When the adaptations are complete your contractor will submit a final invoice to the Council. When we are satisfied that the works identified as being necessary have been completed to the Councils satisfaction, we will issue payment direct to the contractor. If you are making a contribution towards the cost of the works you need to pay this direct to the contractor after the works are complete.

Lifts, Trackhoists and Wash/Dry Toilets

In general the Council recovers specialised items of equipment when they are no longer required. You will be asked to sign an agreement to transfer ownership of the equipment to the Council and in return the Council will on your behalf, order the equipment and arrange for its installation. We will also arrange and pay for servicing, repairs and insurance, which includes 24 hour call out in cases of emergency breakdown (Lifts). When the equipment is no longer necessary we will arrange for its removal, including making good of disturbed surfaces (this does not include redecoration).

If you decide to retain ownership of the equipment you are advised to arrange and pay for regular servicing (at least two service visits per year) emergency breakdown cover (Lifts) and insurance. You will be responsible for any necessary repairs and removing and making good when the equipment is no longer required.
The Agency Service
Organising a grant application, obtaining priced estimates, employing a contractor and supervising the work can be a very complex process. In order to help you through this process the Council offers an Agency Service. There is a charge for the service, however, there will be no direct cost to you as this is covered by the grant.

This service will undertake the following:
- Assist you with the completion of all forms including home visits as necessary;
- Assist you to obtain all necessary documentation;
- Carry out a survey to identify works which are eligible for grant;
- Produce an initial scale drawing of the proposed adaptation to help the Council decide if it will approve your application;
- Produce detailed schedule of works and specification relating to the proposed adaptation;
- Provide a list of Plan Technicians (where applicable) for engagement by the applicant;
- Obtain quotations in respect of the proposed adaptation by tender
- Evaluate the results of the tender process and advise you of the outcome;
- Attend on site to inspect ongoing works as necessary, or to agree any unforeseen works which may arise;
- Make a final inspection and arrange all payments.

If you would like more information about the Agency Service please phone 01744 676555

Future Maintenance of the adaptation
The Council does not have ongoing liability for any maintenance to works carried out through a Disabled Facilities Grant. As part of the agency service the Council will liaise with the contractor on your behalf to resolve defects up to twelve months after completion of the works. When any guarantee for the work has expired you will be responsible for the upkeep of the adaptation. For a lift, hoist or closomat, where you have opted for the Local Authority to retain ownership, we will pay for and arrange maintenance and servicing.

How can I appeal against a decision
If you wish to appeal against any of our decisions you must do so in writing and send to:
Manager, Private Sector Housing services, Town Hall Victoria Square, St.Helens, WA10 1HP

Customer Charter and Performance Standards
This charter sets out how we will deliver our service and the standards we aim to meet. Our teams realise the importance of providing an effective and responsive service to all our customers. We are committed to providing the most cost effective, quality service possible. We will monitor our performance against challenging standards and we will
- Be polite, respectful and deliver an effective service
- Give clear information and advice
- Treat all customers fairly and equally
- Aim to respond to all written and e mails within 10 working days
- Aim to satisfy 95% of customers with the level of service provided
- Not accept abusive or aggressive behaviour towards staff or other customers
- Carry identity cards, which will display the officer’s name and photograph

We aim to provide an efficient service, which we are always seeking to improve. If you have any comments to make about our service (positive or negative) or if we have not met these standards, then please write to Manager, Private Sector Housing Services, Town Hall Victoria Square St.Helens, WA10 1HP