



Aids & Adaptations Policy

Ref: 206

1.0 Policy Aim

The Policy is to set out how The Pioneer Group (TPG) will support its social housing tenants to meet their needs through the provision of adaptations at their tenancy.

2.0 Scope

2.1 TPG will consider providing support for adaptations to tenants and their family members who live at the same address (hereafter referred to as customers). Support will not be made available for short term tenancies or lodgers of our customers.

2.2 This policy does not apply to customers in short hold tenancies, such as those in market rent tenancies, rent to buy properties. It will not apply to shared ownership.

3.0 Related documentation (numbers refer to TPG policy reference number)

308	Mutual Exchange Policy
401	Arrears Prevention and Recovery Policy
405	Rechargeable Repairs and Recovery Procedure
501	Allocation Policy and Procedure
1702	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

4.0 Compliance

4.1 The main legislation that sets out responsibilities to provide and fund adaptations is:

- **Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970:** places a responsibility on Social Services Authorities (in the case of Castle Vale – Birmingham City Council) for providing minor adaptations costing up to £1000.
- **Housing and Local Government Grant 1989 & Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996:** places a statutory duty on Housing Authorities (in the case of Castle Vale – Birmingham City Council) to provide grant aid to disabled people for a range of adaptations.
- **Equality Act 2010 (Disability) Regulations 2010:** places a statutory obligation on the 'controller of premises' (TPG) to provide auxiliary aids only for disabled customers, includes taps and handles, doorbell or door entry system, changes to colour of surfaces.
- **Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER):** places a duty on the owner of the lifting equipment to ensure that all equipment is properly serviced and maintained by competent personnel. LOLER requires all equipment to be suitable for the task, suitably marked and is subject to a statutory thorough inspection and records kept.

4.2 **Discretionary Service:** TPG does not have a statutory duty to remove or alter the physical features of its buildings to prevent a disabled customer from suffering a disadvantage. TPG

has decided to support disabled customers by providing an adaptations service for them and this service is provided on a discretionary basis.

5.0 Background and context

- 5.1 **Overview:** TPG wants to ensure that its customers are able to enjoy their tenancy, be comfortable in their home and to live independently. The provision of adaptations to customers' homes is an important service in helping achieve these objectives. TPG aims to provide a high quality adaptation service for its customers.

TPG will provide, directly or working with others, such as Birmingham City Council (BCC), an Adaptation Service that as far as is reasonable and practical meets the individual adaptation needs of TPG customers. We will achieve this through consultation with the individual customer and in conjunction with their family members, supporters, advocates or other relevant organisations where this is appropriate.

- 5.2 **Accessing TPG's Adaptation Service:** Customers may access the service through:

- A referral being made to TPG from Birmingham City Council (BCC) requesting we fund adaptation works to the customer's home for Level 2 assessments, or
- By the customer contacting TPG directly, in the first instance BCC will be requested to undertake an assessment of the customer's needs
- Housing Colleagues requesting support from the Asset Management Team
- Employees of TPG during their day to day activities whilst visiting our customers.

- 5.3 **Policy Principles:** In delivering the TPG's Adaptation Service we will:

- **Promote and develop a communication strategy:** TPG will positively promote the service within the Group to ensure all officers understand what the Asset Management Team will deliver and agree SLA's to support customers in a timely manner.
- **Working in partnership:** We will work in partnership with Birmingham City Council (BCC) with the aim of maximising access to Disabled Facilities Grants for our customers. We will also work with other organisations (including charities) and stakeholders in order to maximise alternative sources of funding for adaptations for our customers.
- **Support for those in need:** BCC provides a responsive minor adaptation service; we will not unreasonably withhold our consent to enable BCC to undertake minor adaptation works to our customers' homes. Where BCC refers cases assessed as low or medium levels of need to TPG, we will consider undertaking and funding the adaptation works. It is TPG's expectation that BCC will fund and organise adaptation works for TPG customers assessed as having a high level of need (Level 3).

- **Reasonable and practical:** When TPG considers undertaking and funding adaptation works, we will consider whether the works are reasonable and practical; having regard to the customers' needs, and the viability and extent of the adaptation works. Where scheme cost exceeds £5,000 we will consider the option of re-housing the customer in a property that already meets their needs or is more suitable for adaptation.
- **Making best use of TPG housing stock:** We aim to maximise the use of previously adapted properties where practical. Where customers that require adaptations are under occupying their homes and have an excess of two bedrooms, we will explore the practicality of moving them to a smaller property. We will adopt a flexible approach to those customers living in overcrowded homes. These cases will be referred to the Neighbourhood team who support the customer to comply with the requirements to not allow their homes to become overcrowded and either look to rehouse them, or investigate other solutions to remedy the situation.
- **Transfers and mutual exchanges:** Where an existing customer is seeking a transfer or exchange and their existing home meets their needs, we will only agree to the transfer or exchange if the new property only requires minor adaptations or there are other compelling grounds. Whilst we have no ability to prevent a mutual exchange in such circumstances, we will inform the customer that we would be unlikely to fund adaptations in their new home if their existing property meets their needs.
- **Timely and responsive:** The provision of adaptations for TPG's disabled customers can make a significant difference to their quality of their life. TPG aims to provide a quality and responsive service so that TPG customers can benefit from the adaptations without unnecessary delay.
- **Review the effectiveness of adaptations:** TPG is committed to ensuring that its customers benefit from any installed equipment and adaptation and will undertake the appropriate post work customer survey where not provided by BCC.
- **Ensure its assets and equipment are regularly maintained and serviced where necessary e.g. domestic lifts** – A contract will be set up and maintained for the procured company to provide a bi-annual service, LOLER inspection and Load Test where necessary to known domestic stair-lift installations.

6.0 Policy detail

6.1 **Major and minor adaptations:** Adaptations to customer's homes may be 'minor' or 'major'.

Minor adaptations include:

- Grab rails
- Visual smoke alarms
- Intercom systems
- Visual door bells

- Small ramps and 'half steps'

Major adaptations include:

- Stair lifts & lifting equipment
- Through floor lifts
- Adapted kitchens
- Ramps
- Widened doorways
- Level access showers

6.2 **Accessing the service:** The local authority, Birmingham City Council (BCC), has the main responsibility for meeting the disability and adaptation needs of TPG customers. Any customer approaching TPG for support with major or minor adaptations will be directed towards BCC's Adaptation Service. Customers will be offered support in accessing the service from BCC. TPG will track and monitor the application with BCC and act as an advocate for the customer via the Asset Management Team, Customer 1st and Community Co-Ordinators.

6.3 **Working with Birmingham City Council**

6.3.1 **Minor Adaptations:** BCC do not normally require an Occupational Therapist (OT) Assessment for minor adaptations and provide a responsive service for their provision when a disability need is identified. BCC do require TPG's consent for the works to proceed. TPG will not unreasonably withhold consent to allow the works to proceed.

In the event that BCC do not provide minor adaptations, TPG will ensure it meets its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 (Disability) Regulations i.e. to provide auxiliary aids only for disabled customers, includes taps and handles, doorbell or door entry system, changes to colour of surfaces. These will only be considered at the request of a customer, having checked with them that they believe the adaptations will meet their needs.

6.3.2 **Major Adaptations:** BCC undertake an OT Assessment to determine the applicant's level of need for adaptations (Priority Needs Assessment - PNA). BCC assesses the level of need based on four categories:

- **Level 0** – No substantial need identified. BCC service response is to send the applicant a letter explaining how the assessment was reached.
- **Level 1** – Low level need. BCC service response is not to provide adaptations, but to provide the applicant with alternative options as to how that need could be met. In the case of TPG customers, this will frequently result in BCC referring the case to TPG, requesting our assistance in providing the adaptations. In this case TPG will visit the property to assess the level of need and if appropriate agree any works with the customer.
- **Level 2** – Medium level of need. BCC stated service response is to provide the adaptations within a 6 month period. However, due to budgetary pressures, 'Level 2' cases may also be referred to TPG to consider. Where the assessment is forwarded to the Asset Management Team (AMT) to consider, AMT will arrange to meet the customer with a Community Co-Ordinator (CC) to assess the level of work required and follow the guidance and procedure in place for practicality and feasibility.

- **Level 3** – High level of need and assistance. BCC response is to provide adaptations immediately without delay.

TPG support for adaptations: TPG will consider providing support for adaptations where BCC has referred a case to TPG that is either a 'Level 1' or Level 2' assessment. TPG will not provide support for 'Level 0' or 'Level 3' cases.

6.4 **Budget and Management of Scheme Costs:**

Budget: TPG set a limited annual budget for adaptations and lift servicing works. The cost of the removal of any existing adaptations will be met from TPG Adaptations budget where available. Any works agreed following a Level 2 assessment will be undertaken based on a first come, first served basis pending budget availability. The customer will be advised of the outcome following the Asset Management Team (AMT) and Community Co-Ordinator (CC) visit.

Works costing less than £5,000: Where the cost of adaptation work is less than £5,000, TPG's Contract Manager (R&C) or Contracts Manager (API) may authorise works to proceed.

Works costing in excess of £5,000: The Asset Management and Development Director (or another Director of TPG in their absence) will be required to authorise works costing in excess of £5,000. In reaching a decision as to whether TPG should fund the adaptation works, regard may be had to:

- Whether the works are reasonable or practical.
- Whether the TPG customer is able to fund the works themselves in full or part.
- Whether there is a more suitable property for the customer to move to that already meets their needs or is more suitable for adaptation.

Works costing in excess of £10,000: Only in exceptional circumstances will TPG fund works costing in excess of £10,000. The approval of two TPG Directors will be required for schemes costing in excess of £10,000.

Schemes that are not reasonable or practical: Where schemes are not reasonable and/or practical, and neither TPG nor BCC is able to fund or support the adaptation works, TPG in collaboration with BCC will seek to support the customer in exploring other options to meet their disability needs.

6.5 **Alternative funding:** TPG will work with other organisations, including Charities, in order to maximise income from grants or other sources of funding. Any external income received will be used to contribute to meeting the costs of adaptations carried out to TPG's properties on behalf of its customers. For example, grants are available via Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) for equipment to properties for ex-servicemen or women.

6.6 **Transfers and mutual exchanges:** Where an existing TPG customer is seeking to transfer to another TPG tenancy or exchange with another TPG customer and their existing home meets their needs; TPG will only agree the transfer or exchange if:

- The new property meets the customer's needs or requires only minor adaptations.
- The customer is prepared to self-fund the adaptation works.
- There are other compelling grounds.

The Neighbourhood Operations Manager and Head of Asset Management will make the decision as to whether the transfer or exchange should be supported.

- 6.7 **Repairs and servicing:** TPG will be responsible for the repair, maintenance and servicing of all adaptations fitted, including domestic lifts within its properties where they have been funded by either TPG or BCC.

With regards to domestic lifts a 6-monthly service should be undertaken with a monthly LOLER inspection or Load Test as necessary depending on the equipment.

- 6.8 **Letting of properties:** TPG will require customers to declare any existing disability, or disability of other immediate family members who will be living with them on a permanent basis, prior to entering into a new tenancy agreement, as part of the allocations process. When an applicant declares that they or a family member has a need for adaptations, only properties that meet their needs or that require minor adaptations will be offered except in exceptional circumstances. The Head of Asset Management and Neighbourhood Operations Manager will assess such exceptional circumstances and make a recommendation on how to proceed to the officer with appropriate funding limits (as outlined above).

- 6.9 **Re-letting of adapted properties:** When re-letting adapted properties, TPG will always seek to match the property to the needs of the incoming customer (i.e. tenant or immediate member of their family who will be living with them), however it is recognised that adaptations are personal and we will not make judgements about what may or may not be suitable. In such circumstances a further Occupational Therapist report may be requested. Priority will be given to disabled customers whose needs match the adaptations at the property over customers who are not disabled, subject to the requirements of the allocations policy. Management move arrangements will be considered in these circumstances.

- 6.10 **Making best use of TPG housing stock:** TPG when considering adaptation schemes to meet a customer's needs, may check, and in every case where the cost of the works exceeds £5,000; whether there are other TPG properties available or likely to become available in the near future that would match the customer's needs or be more suitable for adaptation.

Where there is an alternative more suitable property available the customer may be given the opportunity to transfer to the alternative property.

Where a more suitable property is available for a disabled customer to transfer to and it is reasonable for them to move and they choose not to move, TPG may decide not to adapt their existing home.

Support for the move: When a customer is offered this type of transfer; TPG may pay:

- Reasonable removal costs (subject to the provision of 3 competitive quotes).

- Pay a 'Settling in allowance', for expenditure incurred as a result of the move, for such things as carpets and curtains up to a maximum of £750. Receipts and evidence of expenditure will be required.

6.11 **Rent arrears and recharges:**

Where a customer has either rent arrears or recharges outstanding and a transfer or exchange is sought or proposed to a home that meets their disability needs or is suitable for adaptation; the arrears and recharges should be cleared. This requirement may be relaxed where the customer can demonstrate that they have made a sustained effort to clear the debt and that they will continue to do so at the new home at the discretion of the Income Manager.

6.12 **Under occupation:**

Where a customer applies for an adaptation and they are under occupying their existing home by two or more bedrooms, based on the bedroom standard; TPG will consider offering the customer an alternative smaller property that either already meets their needs or is suitable for adaptation. Where a customer refuses a reasonable offer of re-housing to a smaller property, TPG may choose not to adapt their existing home.

In determining whether the re-housing offer is reasonable, considerations will include:

- The extent of the adaptation works at the existing home
- Availability of suitable alternative TPG properties
- The impact of a house move on the customer

6.13 **Overcrowding:**

Where a customer is overcrowding a property based on the bedroom standard, TPG will consider moving the customer to a more suitable property that meets their disability needs. If the customer makes an informed choice that they would like the adaptation works undertaken at their existing home to proceed, TPG may agree to this option provided the property is not statutorily overcrowded within the Housing Act 1985 definition.

6.14 **New build developments:**

Where TPG develops new build properties they will be designed to the current Housing Quality Indicator (HQI) standard. The system is a measurement and assessment tool to evaluate housing schemes on the basis of quality rather than cost.

6.15 **Responsive Service**

TPG aims to provide a responsive timely service. Where TPG receives a referral from BCC requesting we undertake adaptation works, we will:

- **Initial response:** Within 10 working days; confirm to BCC whether we will consider the request. Level 0 and Level 3 application will not be supported.

- **Scheme consideration:** Consider whether the scheme is reasonable and practical within 10 working days of the date of the referral from BCC and confirm to the customer and BCC that decision.
- **Undertake adaptation works:** Where the works are reasonable and practical to seek to undertake the works within three months of that decision; unless there are technical or regulatory / compliance reasons why this is not achievable; for example, Planning Permission or Building Regulation Approval.
- **Explore alternative options:** Where the works are not reasonable and practical, TPG shall within 10 working days meet with the customer and start to explore alternative options. TPG will collaborate with BCC as necessary.
- **Undertake Post Work Assessment:** TPG will undertake their own survey of the completed works with 10 working days of the completion date.

6.16 **Changing needs:**

Where a customer has had adaptation works undertaken at their home requests further adaptation works to meet their changing disability needs, they will be required to make a further referral to BCC to assess their disability needs. Any new referral from BCC will be dealt with in accordance with this policy.

7.0 **Policy Review:**

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner in the event of a significant change to policies or regulations, or in the event that demand for adaptations funded by TPG rises significantly.

8.0 **Data Protection:**

TPG manages all of the data referred to in this policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on how TPG handles information please see;

- Access to Your Information Leaflet (www.pioneergroup.org.uk)
- Data Protection Policy (www.pioneergroup.org.uk)
- General Data Protection Regulations