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Introduction

If you feel that alterations to your property could make it easier for you to live at home, you may be able to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant from your local council to help with the cost. If you have a disabled child you may also be eligible for a grant.

Applying for the grant is not as complex as you might think and this leaflet aims to tell you all you need to know. The first step is to contact us so that we can understand your situation and the difficulties you are experiencing, we will refer you for an Occupational Therapy Assessment.

Grants are available if you experience any of the following difficulties, with:

- Access to or within your home, e.g. your bedroom, a family room or the bathroom.
- Preparing food and drink and other such activities within the home.



What is an Occupational Therapy Assessment?

We will arrange an appointment for an Occupational Therapist to visit you at home to assess your needs. You may like to have a relative, friend, carer or someone else to support you when we visit. The Assessment is an opportunity to discuss the difficulties you are having and to understand what your needs are. Although we will take account of what you would like to have done to your home, we can only recommend alterations we think would be essential to meeting your needs. If your home needs substantial alterations, such as a stair lift or a shower, you may wish to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant from your local council.

Can I get support in applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant?

We have included contact details at the back of this leaflet for local Home Improvement Agencies who can help you with the whole process. Home Improvement Agencies provide specialist help. For example, filling in forms, giving advice on benefits, claims and other financial options, as well as advice on domestic repairs. They also liaise with the local council and Occupational Therapy staff and act as a central point of contact. They can provide in-house surveyors, technical support and arrange for estimates. Home Improvement Agencies can make sure you are satisfied once the work is finished and that the adaptation meets the requirements of everyone involved in the process. Alternatively, you may be able to get support from other sources, for example, disability organisations such as Independent Living Advocacy Essex or DIAL (serving the disability advice network) charitable organisations or Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Applying for the grant

Your Occupational Therapist will recommend to your local council which alterations are necessary and appropriate for you. The council then has to decide whether these recommendations are reasonable and practical and they have the final say in approving work. Your local council will not begin your formal grant application until all the necessary paperwork is complete. You will need to complete an application form and provide a certificate showing that you intend to live at your home for at least

five years. If you own your home you may need to provide evidence of this. The deeds to your home, usually held by your bank or building society or a Land Registration Certificate can provide proof of ownership. If you rent the property you will need to get the owner's permission to carry out the work. For large adaptations, where plans are required, you must get professional drawings - for more information **see page 5**. You must also have planning permission and building regulation approval.

Most local councils will send you the relevant forms, including a financial assessment form, to apply for the grant. Once you have filled in and returned the paperwork and the council accepts it as a formal application, the council must inform you within six months if it will offer you a grant.

Do I have to pay anything?

If you are applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant your local council will require you to complete a financial assessment form. The form, which the council will send to you, asks you to provide information about your income and savings.

This assessment will determine how much the council considers you can contribute towards the cost of your alterations. The assessed amount will be based on your income and savings. If you have a partner the assessment will also take their income and savings into account.

Most local councils will carry out your financial assessment informally when you first ask about applying for a grant. This lets you know how much you may be expected to contribute before you go to the trouble of finding architects and obtaining estimates. The council must also check details again when you make your formal application.

Your local council is not legally required to give you a grant over £25,000. They may choose to top this up with another grant, but this depends on the funds they have available. Essex County Council can consider a contribution to any additional costs via a housing adaptation loan. Applications for funding assistance from Essex County Council need to be made through your Occupational Therapist and be considered by our Housing Options Panel.

Finding architects and builders

If you need help in finding an architect, builder or manufacturer you can contact your local Home Improvement Agency. You can also find lists of architects, builders and manufacturers in the Yellow Pages. Your local council or your Occupational Therapist may be able to advise you as well. Your friends or relatives may also be able to recommend builders or manufacturers that have carried out work to a good standard.

If you are using an architect they will often identify suitable builders to approach for estimates. Normally the council requires two or three estimates. You should note that not all works require an architect. In many cases a builder or specialist manufacturer can provide you with an estimate based on the schedule of work you receive from the grants officer at your local council.

Preliminary costs

If you need to appoint an architect or Home Improvement Agency, these costs will be included in any grant awarded. However, you should note that any such costs will only be paid if the grant goes ahead, but you must be clear about this with the grants officer. For example, if you decide not to go ahead with adapting your home after your financial assessment, you may still have to pay the fees of the Home Improvement Agency or architect. In some cases it is possible for you to come to an agreement with the person concerned, so that they will only charge you if the grant is approved.

It should be possible to negotiate with your local council whether the builder sends invoices to you or to the council direct for the work they do. In some situations, a builder may request a part (interim) payment for work done and this may be arranged with your local council.

The grants department will only pay for the cost of 'making good' any work done. This does not mean decorating a room to match existing décor, but will include plastering and paintwork.

Estimates

Your local council will expect you to get a minimum of two (in some cases three) estimates. It is your responsibility to make sure that suitable estimates are obtained from builders unless someone else is acting on your behalf, for example, a Home Improvement Agency.

Your local council will expect the estimates to be priced as reasonably as possible. Sometimes, this may mean that they propose using materials you may not like. In such circumstances you can negotiate to pay the additional cost of your preferred materials yourself.

It is important that you check schemes, estimates and plans to make sure they cover all the recommended work.

Schedule of works

The schedule specification of works is a document prepared by the grants officer from the council. It shows in detail every aspect of the work the builder must work to. Although this may be quite a technical document, we recommend that you or your representative read it to make sure it is accurate.

Getting the work done

It is your responsibility to get estimates and place the order for building work. However, you should make sure that you have got grant approval before you place any order. Your local council and Essex County Council will not pay for any work that may have started before you have received approval. Once you have received a formal offer of a grant you have a maximum of 12 months for the building or installation work to be completed.

Maintenance, service and repair

You will be responsible for the maintenance, service and repair of any mechanical fittings, for example stairlifts, showers, closomats, provided as part of the grant works. You may wish to discuss this issue with your Occupational Therapist.

Making sure you are satisfied

During the works, your agent or architect should visit to check progress or at least be available to address any queries.

When your building work is completed, the grants officer and Occupational Therapist will visit to inspect the work. You will then be asked to sign to say that you are satisfied with the quality of work. However, you should allow a short time living with the adaptation before declaring you are satisfied. This is in case you need the builder or manufacturer to make minor adjustments.

Help shape our services

We are committed to working with you to continuously improve our services. The Essex Participation Network Forum (PNF) represents people who use our services and their carers and helps us make sure our services are easy to access, co-ordinated, timely and effective.

Why not get involved?

The Essex Participation Network Forum (PNF) is always interested to hear from people who feel they could play a positive part in the work of Essex County Council. This might involve monitoring or reviewing services. It could also involve planning and developing new services. To find out more please contact our user carer advocacy policy advisor by calling Ann Nutt on **07790 222769** or write to:

User Carer Advocacy Policy Advisor

Essex County Council
PO Box 297
County Hall
Chelmsford CM1 1YS

