

Aids & Adaptations Policy

Aster Group is the overarching brand name of Aster Group Ltd and all of its subsidiaries.

1 Scope

1.1 Aids and adaptations can make it easier and safer for our customers to access and use their homes. Aids and adaptations are recognised as an effective way to enable independent living for individuals and their families, whilst also improving wellbeing, physical and mental health, improved social inclusion, privacy, confidence, and dignity. Our focus is to offer a person-centred solution to make sure a customer can use their home more easily, rather than focussing on the physical adaptation itself.

1.2 This policy is applicable to all Aster customers who hold a tenancy for properties owned and managed by Aster Group, except Shared Ownership customers, those in temporary accommodation, market rent accommodation, short term lets, or homeless accommodation. The policy covers both the primary tenants and any minors, dependants, or individuals recognised on the tenancy agreement.

1.3 Definitions:

Aid - An aid is equipment which is not permanently fixed to the home and is usually supplied to help those with mobility difficulties or other disabilities.

Adaptations - An adaptation is specialist equipment or alterations which are fitted to homes to help customers overcome difficulties with tasks such as bathing, getting upstairs or getting in or out of their home safely.

2 Policy Statement

2.1 We consider accessibility and adaptability of homes from the start of the customer journey with us where we ensure that any specific customer requirements are matched to a suitable property.

2.2 If a customer or someone they live with or care for has a disability and is recognised on the tenancy agreement, we may be able to help by adapting the home or installing aids. These can be requested by a customer, family member, support agency, housing, neighbourhood, or independent living team.

Simple aids: We can provide aids to the home upon request, but we may require an occupational therapist report from the Local Authority to make sure we provide aids suitable to the customer's needs. These include aids such as handrails, grab rails and lever taps.

Minor adaptations: We can complete non-structural minor adaptations for customers with identified disabilities to help them live more comfortably in their home. We require an occupational therapist report from the Local Authority to make sure we fit equipment suitable to the customer's needs. A minor adaptation may include over the bath shower and ramps.

Major adaptations: Before customers are considered for a major adaptation, a report will need to be provided from the relevant local authority via an Occupational Therapist (OT). We will refer all major works above the threshold of £4,500, subject to an increase in line

with inflation, to the Local Authority for consideration of a Disabled Facility Grant (DFG). For customers in care settings, we will work with the Adult Social Care Team. Where overall costs exceed the limit set by the local authority, and the local authority or their agencies request funding to top up the grant, we may consider contributing towards the cost of the works on a case-by-case basis. Major adaptations include level access showers and stairlifts.

- 2.3 In some circumstances a transfer to more suitable accommodation or a mutual exchange may be a better solution for the customer, as well as ensuring the best use of our homes. Examples could be if there is a sole tenant in a family home who is able to downsize, or where a stairlift was required but a bungalow was available. When all suitable alternative housing options have been explored, we can install adaptations to ensure the current occupiers are able to live safely in their home. Where more appropriate, we will recommend customers to transfer to suitable alternative accommodation.
- 2.4 We may not install major adaptations to properties where customers are registered on a transfer or exchange list as they are assumed to be actively looking to move to a more suitable property. However, these works may be considered in exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.5 Where it is advised to move a customer to suitable alternative accommodation, we will work closely with the local authorities as required, and a proportion of reasonable moving expenses may be paid for from the appropriate budget. This would not exceed £3,800 (including any minor aids or adaptations already installed at the property) and would be decided on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.6 We will not install major adaptations for customers who are in temporary or private sector leased properties, or for customers who have an active application to buy their property.
- 2.7 We carefully consider the needs of customers in our planned investment programme, such as the replacement of baths with showers in some of our housing for older people schemes.
- 2.8 We will require customers to seek permission for any aids and adaptations they wish to install themselves or with their own contractor before any works can commence under the terms of their tenancy. We will not withhold permission unreasonably, as with any other alteration. An inspection may be required before permission can be granted.
- 2.9 We wouldn't normally accept aids or adaptations where a customer organises an installation privately and advises us a third party will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and servicing of the installation, sometimes known as 'managed by others'. However, at the time the servicing/inspection is due, we may accept documentary evidence that the equipment is being properly maintained. This would be under exceptional circumstances and viewed on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.10 If a customer has not sought permission and we become aware of any adaptations that have been installed, we will either:

- grant retrospective permission if the adaptation has been installed to an acceptable standard
- or refuse permission and expect the customer to reinstate the property to its former condition as we would with any other alteration.

If the customer does not do this, we reserve the right to reinstate the property at cost to the customer, in line with our Recharge Policy.

- 2.11 We reserve the right to refuse permission for any adaptation which is a health and safety or fire risk, or conflicts with any of our policies/procedures.
- 2.12 We will reasonably adjust a customer's home, to allow them to live independently and safely in their home for as long as possible.
- 2.13 If a customer has rent arrears on their account, we will support them in having a payment plan in place as part of the application for an aid or adaptation to their home.
- 2.14 We will take on servicing and inspection responsibilities of most equipment that we have granted permission for and/or been involved in the installation of. In instances where equipment has been installed privately or owned by a local authority or charity, we require evidence of completion of the servicing and inspection regime. All lifting equipment and automatic doors require a servicing and inspection regime in line with the Lifts & Lifting equipment policy and Communal Mechanical & Electrical Equipment Policy.
- 2.15 We reserve the right to apply a service charge for any adaptation that has an ongoing repairs or maintenance liability. Any warranty period would not be affected or charged for.
- 2.16 We will take customers' views about works into account throughout the process, and keep them (and, if required, their nominated person with permission to share) informed on the progress of any works due.
- 2.17 Where properties with adaptations become empty, we will generally advertise these with adaptations, but we may remove the adaptation if this is viewed as best use of our resources, or to meet housing need.
- 2.18 If a customer moves into a property with adaptations and wants to remove them, this would be treated as an alteration request. If permission is granted, we may require the customer to reinstate the adaptation at the end of their tenancy.
- 2.19 When an adaptation comes to the end of its life and is due for renewal or replacement, such as a stairlift or other mechanical equipment, we will not automatically renew the equipment. We would require the relevant permission request and supporting evidence as if the aid or adaptation was a new installation.
- 2.20 Where we manage blocks which have communal spaces and grounds, we will consider the use of alternative budgets alongside the aids and adaptations budget to ensure that all spaces within a block are accessible to customer's needs.

- 2.21 We will liaise with the developers of new build Aster properties to accommodate adaptations into the build stage as well as promoting designs that meet high accessibility standards.
- 2.22 We have Connected and Independent Living services which are key to delivering our holistic approach to inclusivity and accessibility. We also ensure that all our policies are updated alongside an Equality Impact Assessment.
- 2.23 The implementation of this policy involves colleagues from different teams working together across the customer service departments. Specific roles are set out in our Aids & Adaptations Procedure.

3 Monitoring and Review

- 3.1 Policy overview sessions will be delivered to relevant teams following implementation of this policy to ensure the content and responsibilities are understood.
- 3.2 The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored with a range of performance indicators and management information.
- 3.3 Policy overview sessions will be delivered to relevant teams following implementation of this policy to ensure the content and responsibilities are understood.
- 3.4 If an application has been handed to the local authority for a Disability Facilities Grant the responsibility of timescales and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) transfers to the Local Authority. We will not consider and request for an adaptation that has previously been declined by the Local Authority
- 3.5 The effectiveness of this policy will be scrutinised after 12 months by the *Customer Experience Panel*.
- 3.6 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years as standard, unless a change in legislation, regulation or business need prompts an earlier review.
- 3.7 We will monitor customer complaints and any lessons learnt regarding this policy.

4 Related Policies and Procedures

- 4.1 Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- 4.2 Health and Safety Policy
- 4.3 Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- 4.4 Lettings Policy
- 4.5 Tenancy Policy
- 4.6 Service Charge Policy
- 4.7 Income Management Policy
- 4.8 Empty Homes Policy
- 4.9 Recharge Policy
- 4.10 Aids & Adaptations Procedure
- 4.11 Home Improvements & Alterations Procedure
- 4.12 Lifts & Lifting Equipment Policy and Procedure
- 4.13 Communal Mechanical & Electrical Equipment Policy

5 Governance

Effective From:	11/01/2024	Expires:	11/01/2027
Policy Owner:	Regional Operations Director		
Policy Author:	Policy and Assurance Officer		
Approved by:	<i>Customer Overview Group</i>		
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