

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

29 April 2025

Subject:	Major Aids and Adaptations
Director:	Executive Director of Place, Alan Lunt
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 To consider and comment upon the aids and adaptations service.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 There has been a restructure within housing to improve the way the service is delivered to provide an improved customer experience.
- 2.2 We know from feedback from customers, along with the number of complaints and MP enquiries received, that the time taken to complete adaptations is a concern for our tenants.
- 2.3 The aids and adaptation service is part of the commitment to deliver the commitment of the capital budget of £3m for the financial year 2025/26.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Living in Sandwell	Engaging with a diverse set of tenants and listening and acting on their feedback will build communities that know the power of their voice. This will hold us to account and allow us to deliver improvements that tenants are passionate about.
Healthy in Sandwell	By providing a high-quality adaptation service it supports tenants to remain in their homes for longer. The outcomes of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey will demonstrate what our tenants think about the services we provide and indicate which areas require improvement. This will enable us to deliver a service which meets the needs of our tenants and ensures they are receiving value for money.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The purpose of the aids and adaptations service is to enable individuals, especially those with disabilities, mobility challenges, or age-related conditions, to live more safely, comfortably, and independently in their homes. These modifications help improve their quality of life, allowing them to stay in familiar surroundings, maintain autonomy, and delay or avoid the need for institutional care, like moving to a nursing home or care facility.
- 4.2 Aids and adaptations can range from small, simple adjustments (such as grab rails, ramps, or shower chairs) to more complex modifications (like stairlifts, wider doorways, or ground-floor living arrangements). They are crucial in promoting independence, dignity, and well-being for individuals with physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments.
- 4.3 By investing in these adaptations, councils and housing authorities can provide long-term housing solutions that better meet the evolving needs of their residents, contributing to improved health outcomes and reducing the burden on health and social care services.
- 4.4 A variety of departments within the Council support overall service delivery across all tenures by playing key roles in ensuring that the

needs of tenants, homeowners, and other residents are met, particularly when it comes to accessibility and the suitability of housing. The breakdown of the specific roles of each department is as follows:

4.4.1 Adult Social Care - Occupational Therapists

Role: Occupational Therapists (OTs) in Adult Social Care assess the needs of individuals, particularly those with disabilities, elderly residents, or those with medical conditions that impact their daily life. They recommend and prescribe aids and adaptations to help these individuals live more independently and safely in their homes.

Key Functions:

- Assessments for mobility aids, like walkers, wheelchairs, or hoists.
- Recommendations for modifications such as grab rails, lifts, or bathroom adjustments to improve accessibility.

4.4.2 Housing Management – Local Offices, Rent Officers, Housing Officers

Role: This department is responsible for overseeing the overall management and administration of council housing, including tenancy support, rent management, and addressing tenants' concerns.

Key Functions:

- Local Offices provide tenants with in-person support, including advice on tenancy agreements, rent issues, and general housing services.
- Rent Officers: Ensure that rent is set fairly and manage rent-related queries for tenants.
- Housing Officers: Support tenants with issues such as property suitability and affordability, helping to assess whether a particular property meets the needs of the tenant and ensuring that they are provided with suitable housing options.

4.4.3 Housing Management – Disability Funding Grants (Supporting Homeowners)

Role: This part of Housing Management focuses on supporting homeowners with disabilities by providing access to grants and funding for adaptations to their homes. These grants are designed to

help make homes more accessible for people with mobility issues or other disabilities.

Key Functions:

- Assessing eligibility for funding to assist homeowners with making adaptations to their properties.
- Providing financial assistance for necessary adaptations, such as ramps, stairlifts, or other modifications that improve accessibility.

4.4.4 Asset Management and Improvement – Repairs and Maintenance Service (Supporting Minor Adaptations)

Role: This department handles the day-to-day repairs and maintenance of council properties. It also oversees the installation of minor adaptations that are necessary for improving accessibility and safety for tenants.

Key Functions:

- Supporting minor adaptations like the installation of grab rails, handrails, or small adjustments that improve safety in the home.
- Ensuring that minor repairs or changes to properties are carried out promptly to meet the needs of tenants, especially those with disabilities

4.4.5 Asset Management and Improvements – Capital Investment (Supporting Major Adaptations)

Role: This department focuses on contract management of the larger-scale adaptations and capital improvements to council properties. These adaptations often involve significant structural changes to make a home more suitable for people with specific needs. The works are contracting out to two contractors: Vinci for the South of the Borough and Gillespie for the North. These contracts are due to expires in February 2027. We recently recruited to the vacant post of Customer Liaison Co-Ordinator, who is a pivotal role to support the resident journey and support coordination with the contractor.

Key Functions:

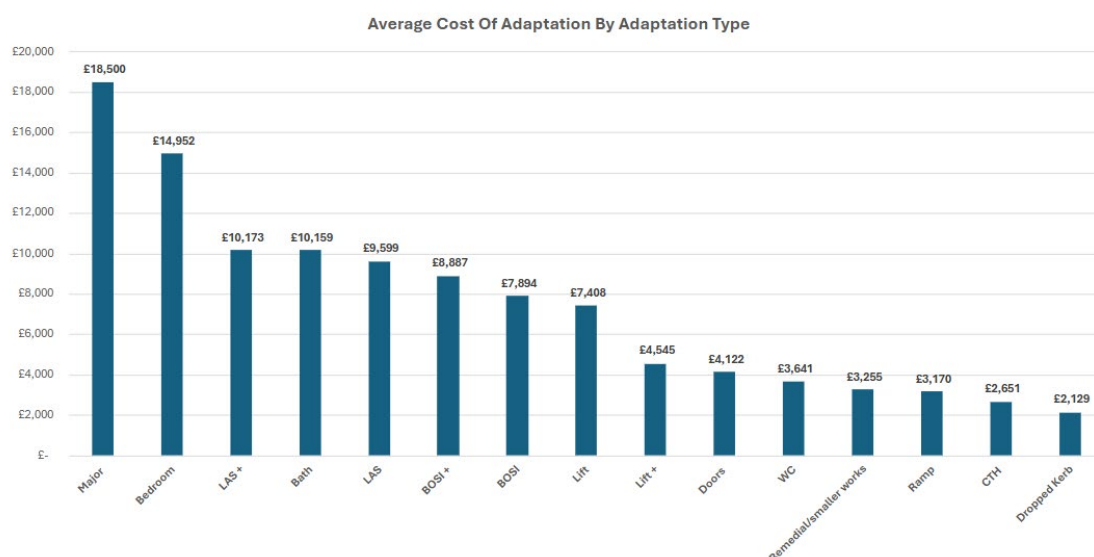
- Overseeing and funding major adaptations, such as the installation of level-access showers, bathroom modifications, or even extensions to properties to create ground-floor living arrangements.

- Ensuring that major adaptations comply with relevant building regulations and that properties are properly modified to meet the specific needs of tenants requiring more complex or extensive changes.

4.4.6 Together, these departments work collaboratively to ensure that all tenants and homeowners, particularly those with disabilities or age-related conditions, have safe, accessible, and suitable living environments. They provide tailored support through various adaptations, from minor adjustments to major capital investments, and help people stay in their homes longer and with greater comfort. Each department has a specialised role in both assessing needs and providing the appropriate solutions to support individuals across different tenures.

4.5 Cabinet approved the procurement of Major Adaptations and Improvement Works 2023-2027 in May 2022. Cabinet report 2025/2026 reaffirmed the spend of £3m per annum for the delivery of the service for council tenants through the current contract provision.

4.6 The table below shows the average cost of adaptation by type of works.



4.7 The table below shows the budgetary spend in 2024/25 of the major adaptation budget delivering adaptations to 267 council homes.

	Completed	Spend	Average Spend
North (all)	181	£1,770,897	£9,369
South (all)	189	£1,704,543	£9,417
Total (all)	370	£3,475,440	£9,393
North (Council)	146	£1,226,545	£8,401
South (Council)	121	£1,170,425	£9,673
Total (Council)	267	£2,396,970	£8,977

4.8 Next Steps

- 4.8.1 Aids and Adaptations forms part of the Capital Investment workstream of the Housing Improvement and Transformation Programme. A comprehensive review of the way the Capital Investment Team deliver the major adaptations service has been completed and the required actions are embedded within the plan.
- 4.8.2 Asset Management commissioned an Internal Audit into the aids and adaptation process to provide external validation on ways for improvement. The recommendations of this report have been built into the improvement plan.
- 4.8.3 The Capital Investment Team within the Asset Management and Improvement section is hosting a workshop with all the interdependent parties within SMBC to ensure collaborative working is maintained and improved.
- 4.8.4 A review of the Aids and Adaptations overarching policy is being completed to ensure that it meets with not only the legislative requirements but the best practice that has been highlighted by recent Housing Ombudsman decisions.

4.9 Future Assurance

- 4.9.1 A complete review of the Capital HRA budget has been undertaken by Asset Management and Finance which will help support financial investment in future years.

4.9.2 Stock condition data will help inform an investment plan for the coming years and will provide assurance on the levels of investment required.

4.9.3 A change in approach to investment approvals is being developed to give Cabinet an oversight into the breakdown of capital investment in upcoming years. This will be developed using data and intelligence from the stock, in line with the Asset Management Strategy.

5 Implications

Resources:	The £3m budget for aids and adaptations had been agreed at Cabinet as an annual budget until 2027. The prices were agreed when contracts were let in 2023. New contracts and renegotiated prices will be reviewed for 2027 onwards.
Legal and Governance:	The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 strengthened the role of the Regulator of Social Housing. Contract spend is reviewed monthly and a dashboard showing the performance of the contractor is being developed to monitor progress.
Risk:	By not being able to deliver the standards expected and consistently not achieve targets, there is a reputational risk to SMBC. There is also the impact of the information being published by the RSH through the Tenant Satisfaction Measures. Therefore, the opportunity to review the aids and adaptation service will support SMBC to meet the expectations of the customers.
Equality:	The Aids and Adaptation Policies aim to provide consistency for all customers, however, will be implemented alongside the Housing's Reasonable Adjustment Policy to ensure we treat all customers equally and fairly.
Health and Wellbeing:	If we do not install aids and adaptations in a timely manner, the customers health and wellbeing can be significantly impacted, not providing a suitable environment to live.

Social Value:	There are no specific social value implications arising from this report.
Climate Change:	There are no specific climate change implications arising from this report.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no specific Corporate Parenting implications arising from this report.

6 Appendices

None

7 Background Papers

7.1 None