

Act to Adapt: Freedom of Information activity and findings

What is a Freedom of Information request?

A Freedom of Information (FOI) request is a way of getting information that is held by a public authority. In this case, we wanted to find out information directly from local councils about the support they provide for home adaptations through the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). We wanted to use this information to assess whether they are likely to be meeting the needs of people living with MND.

What we did

In May 2021, we sent out an FOI request to all local councils in England and asked them questions relating to their home adaptations policies, including whether they have a fast-track system in place and whether there were situations in which they do not carry out a financial assessment.

Why we looked at this issue

Accessible housing is vital to people living with MND. **Everyone has the right to live in a safe and accessible home.** For people living with MND, this means an accessible home that enables them to maintain their independence, dignity and quality of life as the disease progresses. Being trapped in inaccessible housing is linked to a range of negative impacts on physical and mental health.

Our 2019 report, *Act to Adapt*, found that disabled people face many barriers when trying to adapt their home. 96% of people living with MND who responded to our survey stated that the cost of home adaptations was a barrier to accessible housing. People also identified the length of time taken to deliver funding and carry out works, and a lack of communication and support to help people understand what support they can access and how.

Local authorities in England and Wales are responsible for delivering support for home adaptations, including through the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). We used FOI requests to better understand how different local authorities across the country provide support for home adaptations.

Findings

We collected the answers from the councils that responded to our FOI request and the results show there is a high degree of variation across the country in how local councils provide support for home adaptations and accessible housing:

- 213 local councils told us they had a fast-track grant application process of some kind for Disabled Facilities Grants, while 83 said they did not. This compares to 184 councils when we asked in 2018.
- 185 local councils told us they provide some funding without a financial assessment for home adaptations, while 111 do not.
- The proportion of the local DFG budget spent by each council ranges from 100% and over to as low as 5%.

As this data shows, there is significant local variation in how local authorities use the powers available to them to deliver support for home adaptations. **Many councils across England are failing to provide the support that people with MND need and deserve.**

What we're calling for

Our Act to Adapt campaign calls on councils to use their discretionary powers to ensure that they are meeting the needs of people living with MND in relation to accessible housing.

We recommend that councils learn from existing good practice and make improvements to the support they provide by:

- Fast-tracking support for people with MND.
- Removing financial assessments for high impact adaptations under £5,000 such as stairlifts.
- Maintaining a register of accessible homes for people to move into.
- Enabling automatic grant eligibility for people diagnosed with a terminal illness.
- Increasing the cap on the maximum DFG grant level to reflect local costs.

Take action

[Take a look at our interactive Act to Adapt Housing map](#), where you can find a summary of the information we received from your local council. Use this information to contact your local councillors who are responsible for housing in your area, and ask them to take action.

If you'd rather contact your councillors directly via email, feel free to use the below wording as a guide. Please personalise your email where possible as your councillors may be more likely to respond.

Dear [First Name],

As your constituent, I'm writing to ask you to make access to home adaptations fairer and faster for people with motor neurone disease (MND).

MND is a fatal, often rapidly progressing disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. It has no cure. It kills a third of people within a year and more than half within two years of diagnosis.

Most people with MND will need home adaptations due to the rapid deterioration the condition causes. The MND Association's Act to Adapt campaign found that people with MND are becoming trapped in inaccessible homes because essential adaptations are too expensive and take too long to complete. Many have died waiting for crucial adaptations.

[Insert your council's unique data found in the Housing Map]

As my councillor, please will you:

1. Attend the MND Association's Act to Adapt online seminar at 6-7:30pm on Tuesday 16 November. At the event, you will hear from people with, and affected by, MND about why timely adaptations are vital and what you and your council can do to help. To register, please fill out your details here: <https://www.mndassociation.org/get-involved/campaigning/take-action/act-to-adapt/register-for-the-act-to-adapt-councillor-event/>

2. View the interactive map to see how your council is performing: <https://ecampaigns.mndassociation.org/page/88773/action/1>

The MND Association recently asked councils across England to share information about the support they provide. The map highlights there is a high degree of variation across the country in how local authorities provide support for home adaptations. Please take action by sharing it with colleagues in your council.

For more information about MND and the MND Association's Act to Adapt campaign, visit their website: <https://www.mndassociation.org/get-involved/campaigning/take-action/act-to-adapt/>

Please act now to ensure people with MND can live safely, independently, and with dignity in the time that remains to them.

Yours sincerely,

X

What if my council hasn't responded to the FOI request?

We are still waiting for a response from some councils. If your council hasn't responded, please get in touch with your councillors using our Act to Adapt Housing Map in the first instance or via email as above.

You can also submit a new Freedom of Information request yourself by visiting What Do They Know, an easy and free to use website that allows you to make requests to

public authorities here: <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/>. **Please share any response you receive from your council so that we can update our records.**

We would suggest asking questions that relate to the year 2019/20 before the COVID-19 pandemic began as this may give a more accurate representation of how the council supports people in normal circumstances. Try to ask less than 10 questions as this may increase the likelihood that you'll receive a response.

Here are some suggested questions to ask:

1. What was your Disabled Facilities Grant budget for the period from 1st April 2019 to 31 March 2020?
2. What proportion of the budget mentioned above was spent on DFGs during the period from 1st April 2019 to 31 March 2020?
3. What proportion of DFG applications received during the period from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 received a decision within the statutory time limit of 6 months?
4. What proportion of approved DFG applications received during the period from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 received funding within the statutory time limit of 1 year?
5. Do you currently have a fast-track application process in place to provide DFG funding more rapidly to applicants with urgent needs? If yes, what are the eligibility criteria to access this process?
6. How many applications were made under the fast-track process (if applicable) during the period from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, and how many of these were approved?
7. Are there any circumstances in which the DFG mandatory financial assessment is waived and if so, what are those circumstances? (e.g. for adaptations under a certain cost or of a certain type)
8. Do you currently have an accessible housing register for your local authority area that is publicly available?