

REPORT TO BUCHAN AREA COMMITTEE, 22 FEBRUARY 2022

Aberdeenshire Council Care and Repair Update 2020/21

1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 To provide a performance report for Aberdeenshire Council's Care & Repair Service and to inform members of future service development.

1.2 The Committee is recommended to:

1.2.1 Note the contents of the performance report at appendix 1 and provide any comments, feedback or recommendations.

2 Decision Making Route

2.1 The purpose of this report is to raise awareness of the Care & Repair Service amongst Elected Members and to give a general overview of service provision, performance and future service development.

2.2 It was recommended at Communities Committee on 9 December 2021 to share this report and performance information with all 6 Area Committees and the Integration Joint Board.

3 Discussion

3.1 The Scottish Government legislated to integrate health and social care and as a result Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (AHSCP) was established in April 2016. The housing adaptation's function was delegated from the partnership to the Housing Service and this function is delivered through Aberdeenshire Council's Care and Repair service

3.2 Care & Repair offers owner-occupiers and tenants of private landlords who live within Aberdeenshire, advice and assistance with repairs, improvements and adaptations. The current criteria for accessing the service is clients must be over 60 and/or have a disability.

3.3 The Care and Repair service link into the national Care and Repair Scotland Group, a charitable organisation supported by the Scottish Government to help promote continued independent living within people's communities.

3.4 The Scottish Government recognise that equipment and adaptations make an important contribution to supporting older people and disabled people to live safely, comfortably and independently in their own home. They have committed to a consultation and a review of the current guidance on good practice.

- 3.5 Through our Adaptations Working Group, we will endeavour to review our practices in line with the new Scottish Government Guidance to ensure that they are streamlined, standardised, tenure neutral and in line with best practice
- 3.6 Appendix 1 provides key performance information for Aberdeenshire’s Care and Repair Service over the last 3 years and informs on future challenges and service development.

4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 Delivering adaptations, small repairs, advice and assistance through the Council’s Scheme of Assistance helps deliver the Strategic Priorities “Health and Wellbeing” within Pillar of “Our People”, having the right people in the right place, at the right time as well as the Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023.
- 4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is (are) agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		X	
Staffing		X	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland	[IIA attached as Appendix xx]	X	
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing	[IIA attached as Appendix xx]	X	
Climate Change and Sustainability	[IIA attached as Appendix xx]	X	
Health and Wellbeing	[IIA attached as Appendix xx]	X	
Town Centre First	[IIA attached as Appendix xx]	X	

- 4.3 There are no staffing implications as a result of this report.
- 4.4 The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment process has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be undertaken. The report is principally designed to provide an update on the Care and Repair service for 2020/21. There will be no differential impact, because of the report, on people with protected characteristics.
- 4.5 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:
- ACORP001 – Budget Pressures. Disabled adaptation grant is funded from the General Fund Capital Plan. The current Private Sector Housing Grant spend averages at around £800,000 per year and has generally met demand. It is anticipated that demand for the service will remain high due

to the increase in our ageing population together with the increasing costs for building materials and labour is likely to create a risk of the current allocation not meeting demand

- ACORP005 – Working with other organisations (e.g. supply chains, outsourcing and partnership working). These will be monitored as appropriate. [Corporate Risk Register](#)

4.6 The following risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- ISSR002, ISSR003 – Housing Provision [Directorate Risk Register](#)

5 Scheme of Governance

5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

5.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section B.1.2 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to the Committee's powers to consider, comment and make recommendations to Services and any other appropriate Committee on any matter or policy which impacts its Area.

Alan Wood **Director of Infrastructure Services**

Report prepared by Nicola Murray, Private Sector Housing Team Leader and Billy Wishart, Senior Private Sector Housing Officer. November 2021

List of Appendices:
Appendix 1 – Performance Report

Appendix 1**Aberdeenshire Council Care and Repair Update December 2021****1. Introduction – Service Provision**

1.1 Aberdeenshire Care and Repair currently provides the following services to homeowners and private tenants who are over the age of 60 and/or have a disability:

- Disabled Adaptations and Grants
- Providing Small Repairs Grants
- Providing Information, advice practical and in some circumstances financial assistance on how to repair and maintain your home through the council's [Scheme of Assistance](#)
- Signposting and referring clients for assistance with income maximisation, fuel poverty and financial health checks

2. Disabled Adaptations

2.1 Local Authorities have a duty under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 to provide financial assistance in the form of a grant to homeowners who have a disability and require their home to be adapted to meet their needs and enable independent living.

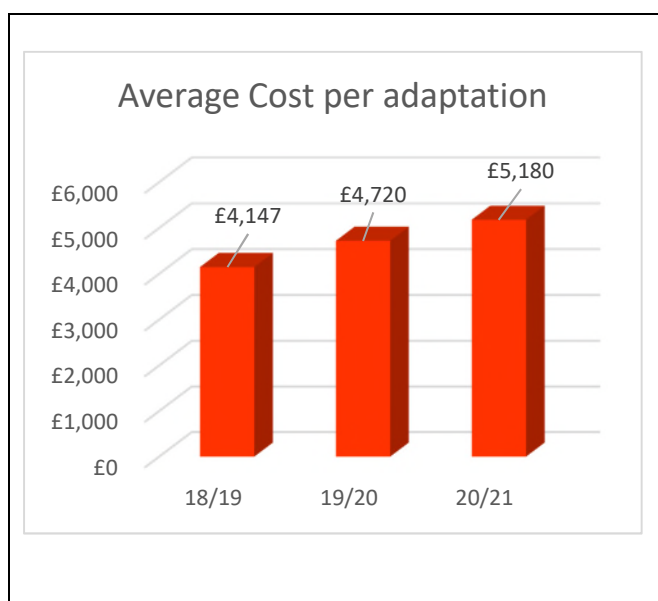
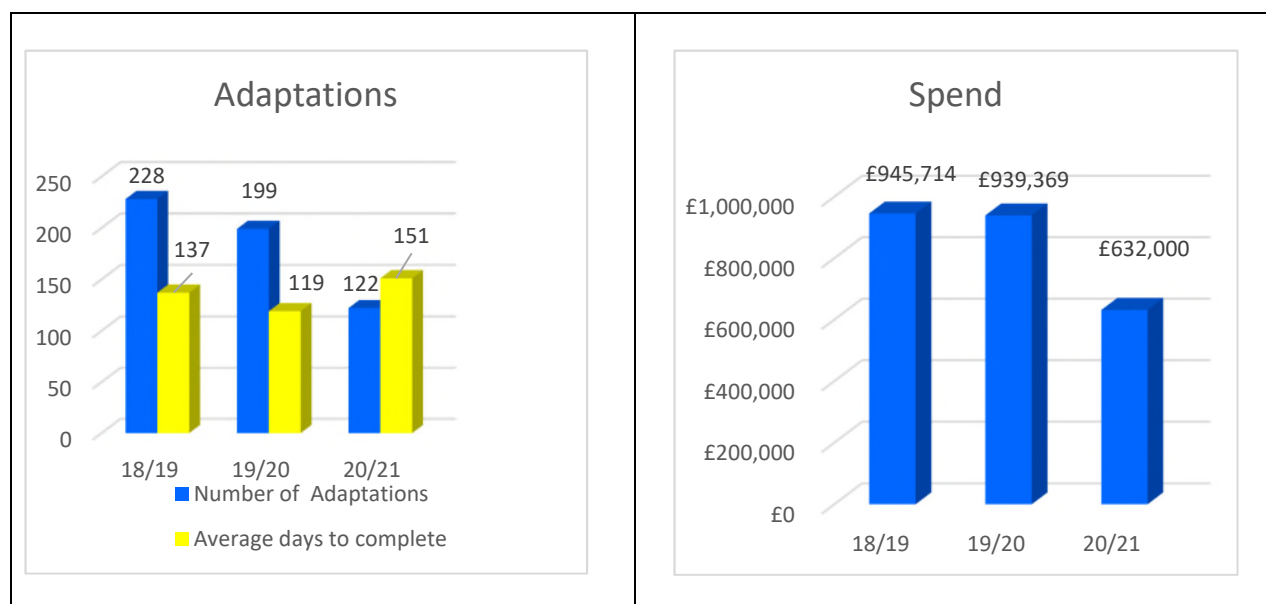
2.1.2 All local authorities must provide a minimum grant of 80% of any structural adaptations. Grant funding of up to 100% can be awarded, depending on a client's financial circumstances and whether they are in receipt of qualifying benefits. It should be noted that grant funding is not provided to extend the original structure of a house to create additional living accommodation, but the original structure may be extended to provide a standard amenity (e.g., Fixed bath or shower, wash hand basin or toilet).

2.1.3 Examples of work that can be funded through a grant are:

- Level access shower
- Ramp
- Stair-lift
- Through floor lift
- Widening doors to allow wheelchair access.

2.1.4 The role of the Private Sector Housing Officer (PSHO) is to help facilitate adaptations and ensure that the work is completed professionally and at the required standard. Officers work extremely flexibly and can offer as much or as little support as the clients need. They encourage clients to choose their own contractors to deliver the work, the majority of which are usually local so there are benefits to both the local economy and the local community as well as promoting good relationships between local contractors and clients within our communities.

2.1.5 In terms of performance, the tables below highlight some key performance information over the last 3 years.



2.1.6 The tables highlight the demand in the service. In a typical year the team deal with around 300 referrals and facilitate over 200 adaptations. The team started to fully utilise the UNIFORM database in 2018, they streamlined processes and introduced a Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (T&CG) where partner meet on a regular basis to improve communication and problem solve which resulted in a year-on-year reduction in the number of days taken to complete an adaptation (11% reduction in 19/20).

2.1.7 The numbers and spend naturally fell at the tail end of 19/20 and throughout 20/21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We had to content with the difficulties of clients and staff shielding, contractors furloughing staff, Occupational Therapists

(OT's) seconded into alternative roles, shortages of materials etc. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the average cost of adaptations continues to rise.

2.1.8 As we come out of the pandemic and return to normality, demand for the service is as high as ever. The OT services are currently working through a backlog of referrals, and we continue to work closely and in partnership with them to ensure that we streamline our processes wherever we can and prioritise the cases that are in most need.

2.2 Disabled Adaptations – Future Challenges and Service Development

2.2.1 The consequences of the pandemic caused an underspend in 2020/21 which resulted in a reduction in the 21/22 budget from £1 million to £679,000. However, we anticipate that our spend will be over £1million this year. This is expected because we have received a greater number of referrals than usual as the OT service work their way through a backlog and, since restrictions eased, the team and local contractors have worked hard to reduce the backlog of previously approved adaptations. To put this into some context, this year the team have completed 113 adaptations at a cost of £691,439 meaning that we are on track to complete the usual 200+ adaptations over the course of the year.

2.2.2 Further budget implications arise from the increase in costs of building materials, these have risen by approx. 15–20%. Feedback from the construction industry is that although costs are likely to stabilise, it is unlikely that they will come down anytime soon.

2.2.3 Throughout the pandemic we have adapted our working practices to suit, we have moved most our processes to electronic and reduced the number of visits and joint visits. OT's now include photographs or videos of room layout along with referrals and we can use video calls where appropriate. Although some of our more vulnerable clients still have difficulty communicating with us electronically, we have had a great deal of success with most clients.

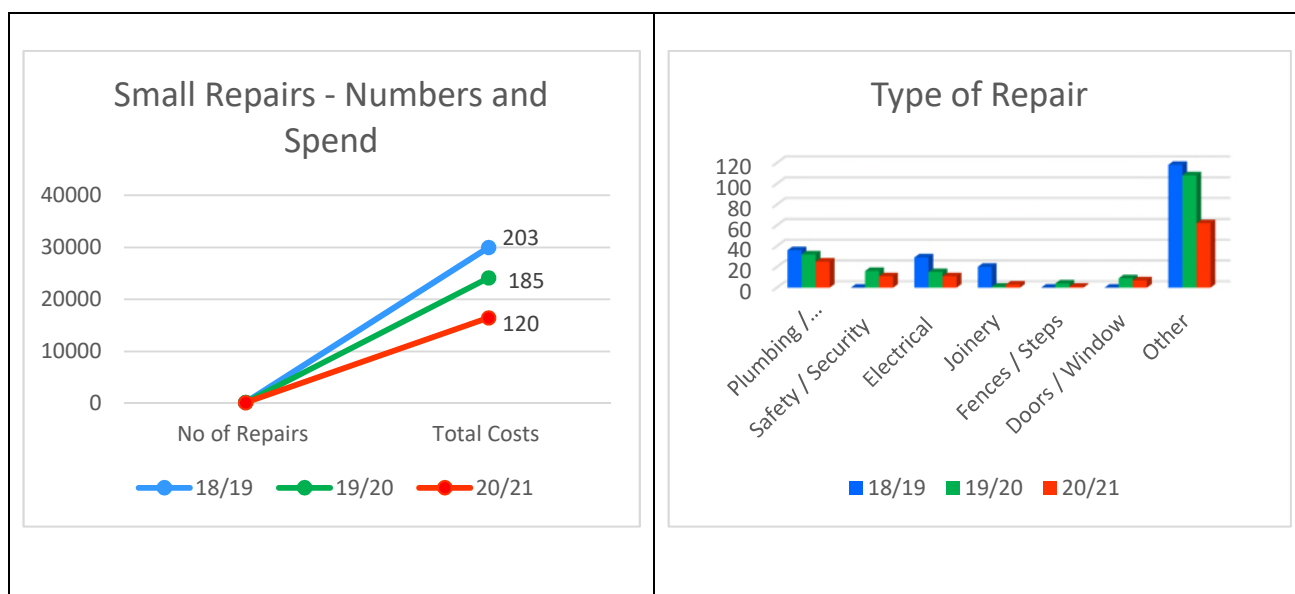
2.2.4 We have worked with the OT Service to develop a fast-track referral process for straight forward level access shower adaptations, reducing the time frame for installation and officer visits.

2.2.5 We are currently undertaking a review of our process for ramps. Traditionally, wherever possible, permanent ramping has been favoured because it has a longer life span and is aesthetically better looking. However, permanent ramping is more expensive, takes much longer to install and in some cases is only required for a limited period time. Going forward the intention is to provide modular ramping as a default, except in exceptional circumstances. This will result in quicker outcomes for the client, a reduction in officer time and a reduction in costs.

2.2.5 We continue to work with colleagues in Health and Social Care through the Adaptations Working Group to look for ways to streamline processes and review delivery of adaptations. We intend to focus on high-cost equipment (e.g., specialist baths, rise and fall kitchen units etc.) next.

3. Small Repair Grants Service

- 3.1 Small repair grants are available to Care & Repair clients, i.e., those over 60 or who have a disability. They cover small internal and external repairs. The main aim of this grant is to assist with small repairs to keep the house wind and watertight, secure, free from any safety hazards and ultimately to prevent further disrepair.
- 3.2 The current service entitles all clients over 60 or who have a disability to two small repair grants up to a value of £150 each. £50,000 is set aside each year to provide this assistance. Over the last few years, we have seen an underspend in this budget, mainly because we identified a pattern emerging of regular clients contacting each year to have general maintenance (e.g., gutter clearing) and because we wanted to review the criteria with the aim of widening the reach to ensure that those most in need could have access to this valuable service.
- 3.3 The tables below outline the demand on the service over the last 3 years. As outlined before, covid has had an impact of demand, however, in a typical year we would usually carry out over 200 small repairs and, we anticipate that demand for the service will increase again as we move out of the pandemic.



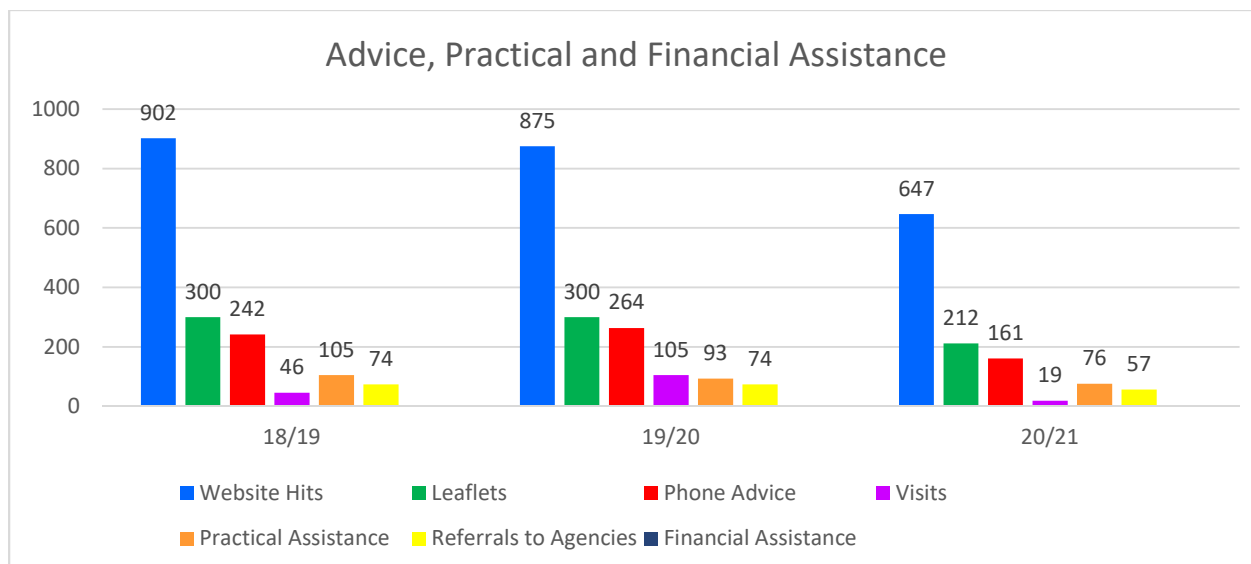
3.4 Small Repairs – Future Challenges and Service Development

- 3.4.1 We are in the process of reviewing this service with the intention of widening the reach so that we can target the service to those most in need. We want to encourage a referral process and provide further help to clients referred to us from partner services such as H&SC and build on current help already being provided to clients who are being supported by other services.

- 3.4.2 As well as reviewing service delivery, we will have to review criteria to ensure that the service reaches those most in need. Currently, this service is only open to C & R Clients. Our thinking is that we want to change these criteria to enable us to provide assistance to those most in need, regardless of age. This may include, for example, low-income families etc. We will work with our partners in H&SC to develop future criteria and a referral process.
- 3.4.3 From February 2022 private homes should all have been upgraded in accordance with the new smoke and fire alarm regulations. The Scottish Government provided funding of £500,000 for distribution to Care & Repair Organisations or Local Authorities to assist our most vulnerable clients to meet the new regulations. Aberdeenshire Council was successful in its bid for funding and have been awarded £15,000. We are working in partnership with the Joint Equipment Store who will assist us in installing smoke and heat detection into around 70 homes across Aberdeenshire.
- 3.4.4 The qualifying criteria for this is that each client must be of pension age, in receipt of guaranteed element of pension credit or have a disability and be in a support group and in receipt of employment support allowance. Our allocation of £15,000 should enable us to help 70 - 80 clients with this work.

4. Information, Advice and Financial Assistance through Scheme of Assistance

- 4.1 The Scheme of Assistance is open to All citizens of Aberdeenshire. We assist independent living by providing information, advice, practical and in some cases financial assistance for repairs and maintenance to their homes. The table below outlines the team's information and advice activity.
- 4.2 It should be noted that the number of visits required can vary enormously depending on the type of assistance the client requires. Visits dropped dramatically in 2020/21 due to covid restrictions.
- 4.3 Practical assistance involves sourcing independent trades and quotes for clients and ensuring that the prices quoted are fair and reasonable.
- 4.4 The housing policy statement was broadened in 2018 to allow provision of financial support to homeowners in the private sector, who are most in need and have no means of alternative funding, to repair and maintain their homes. We provided financial assistance to 4 clients over the period 19/20 and 20/21. All 4 clients required critical roof repairs to prevent further deterioration and disrepair, two have fully repaid and with the remaining two maintaining regular payments.



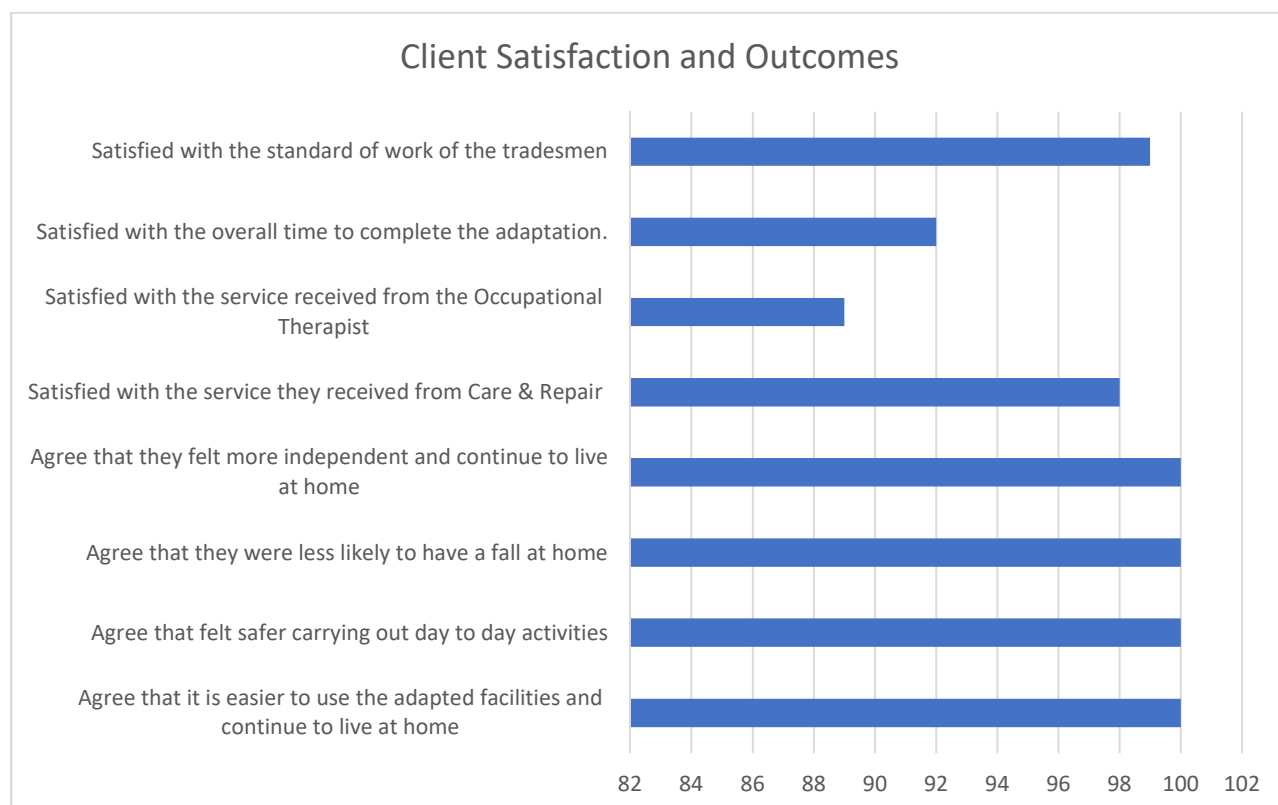
5. Partnership Working and Promotion of Service

- 5.1 We have set up a Tasking and Co-ordinating Group (T&CG) where appropriate housing staff meet with colleagues in the Occupational Therapy Service to improve communication, share experience and knowledge and trouble shoot. The forum focusses on complex cases or cases that have been delayed for various reasons. It has been a very useful and resourceful tool where we have been able to discuss, and problem solve issues that have arisen more quickly and effectively.
- 5.2 We also continue to work with partners through the Council's Financial Inclusion group where we continue to discuss the financial pressures our clients are experiencing and helping these clients through signposting and referring to partners for income maximisation and financial health checks. We also ensure that the signposting and referral process is in place whereby clients who could benefit from Care and Repair services are passed to us to follow up with directly.
- 5.3 The Scottish Government have recently committed to a consultation and review of the aids and adaptations guidance. The aim of the review is to standardise service provision across Local Authorities and ensure Health and Social Care Partnerships are making full use of Joint Equipment Stores and to promote good practice. We are feeding into this via our participation in policy development groups such as Care and Repair Scotland Meetings and the Scottish Housing Network.
- 5.4 The Independent Living Strategic Officer has recently re-launched the Adaptations Working Group, we actively participate in this group together with colleagues in Local Authority Housing, H&SC Occupational Therapy Service and the H&SC Joint Equipment Store and Registered Social Landlords. The group will endeavour to review our practices in line with the new Scottish Government Guidance ensuring they are streamlined, standardised, tenure neutral and in line with best practice.

- 5.5 Through the Adaptation Working Group we are working with the Occupational Therapy Service and the Joint Equipment Store to look at high value high value items of equipment with the main aim of this work is to ensure that the JES is recycling as many of the larger cost items as possible in order for the Council to retain ownership and make best use of recycling savings.
- 5.6 This includes looking at the provision of stairlifts, modular ramps, specialist baths and kitchen motorised units. From discussions at the policy working groups the thoughts are that the new standard best practice working document may well lead to additional elements having to be funded by councils which again may impact on budgets.

6. Client Satisfaction & Outcomes

- 6.1 Listed in the table below is some of the key outcomes from our questionnaires issued in 20/21.



- 6.2 To gauge client satisfaction and outcomes we provide two separate questionnaires to our clients. One which focuses on service delivery and the other focusing on individual outcomes for the client.
- 6.3 In terms of service satisfaction, we consistently report a high level of satisfaction year on year but more notably, the outcomes questionnaire undoubtedly reveals that our clients feel more independent, they feel safer, and most importantly they able to remain living independently within their own homes.

- 6.4 Prior to the pandemic we were achieving a year-on-year reduction in the number of days taken to complete an adaptation (11% reduction in 19/20). Our aim is to continue work in partnership other Council Services and Contractors and set ambitious targets for further reductions in delivery timescales in the coming years.