

AFK – Working with Disability **Mobility Services Policy**

1. Introduction

AFK's vision is of a world where disabled young people get to lead the life they choose. We facilitate this by preparing young people with learning disabilities and autism for life after school, through education and work experience programmes. We also provide mobility equipment not available on the NHS to disabled children and young people up to age 25 across the UK.

The mobility equipment we order enables young people to get out in the community and to socialise with peers, as well as to access education, employment, and volunteering opportunities.

For many of our applicants, the equipment we fund also improves muscle strength and posture and enables the younger ones to play safely and be included in activities with family and friends. In short, the specialist mobility equipment we provide is life changing for our beneficiaries, enabling them to become more confident and independent.

This policy aims to clarify:

- What our Mobility Service does.
- Our criteria for deciding what equipment we can fund, and who we can provide it to.
- Our process from application stage to ordering equipment, including information about supporting documents, and our individual fundraising and advocacy support.
- Information about how our waiting list operates.
- Our Powerchair Maintenance support.

2. What the Mobility Service does

Mobility Equipment

We accept applications for funding for mobility equipment for children and young people, from birth until their 25th birthday.

We accept applications from parents, guardians, and young people, as well as from professionals such as occupational therapists and support workers.

Individual Fundraising

We provide individual fundraising support by applying to a range of charities on the child or young person's behalf, particularly to organisations that need a third party involved. Our team raises around £50,000 to £70,000 per annum through individual fundraising, and this is in addition to the annual Mobility Service budget. We sometimes also apply to local businesses for part funding for individual items. We

also support applicants to raise funds for the equipment they need, by asking AFK's Fundraising team to set up Just Giving (or similar) pages and to direct families to AFK literature and t-shirts for events. We aim to raise the funds needed to order equipment within four months of the family applying to us.

Advocacy Support

We also provide advocacy support to individuals and their families. This can involve advising families on how they can access an NHS Personal Wheelchair Budget, to contribute to the cost of the wheelchair AFK will be part funding. Sometimes we liaise with Wheelchair Services directly, for example to challenge their decision about eligibility for a Wheelchair Service budget. As part of our advocacy work, and to ensure we get value for money, our Service also encourages applicants to consider alternative models and suppliers for the equipment they need. We also negotiate discounts with most of the suppliers we work with, to keep costs down. These approaches enable our budget to go further and ensure our co-funders, who we have developed strong relationships with, have confidence that their money is being spent appropriately. Through our advocacy work, our Mobility Service saves AFK around £10,000 a year. This represents the total money we would have spent if we had not provided the advice we gave or negotiated new discounts with suppliers.

Powerchair Maintenance Support

We pay for wear and tear maintenance support on all the powerchairs we order. This maintenance support is for the reasonable life of the powerchair (for a maximum of 10 years, or when several thousand pounds has been spent on maintenance over a few years). We strongly advise all our powerchair owners to take out insurance for accidental damage, theft, and third-party liability. More information about this can be found in Section 8 below.

3. What We Will Fund

We accept funding applications for powerchairs and manual wheelchairs, as well as for power packs and power assist for wheelchairs. We sometimes fund sports wheelchairs (but only if used by an individual rather than a team), and we also provide all terrain chairs and beach wheelchairs. We fund trikes, bikes, and specialist buggies, as well as mobile hoists and running walkers. We provide funding for specialist car seats (if the family does not have a Motability car) and car harnesses. Those with a Motability car can usually secure funding for a car seat via the Motability small grants route.

The above is not exhaustive, and our application guidance encourages potential applicants to ask us for clarity if they need equipment that is not within the above list.

4. What We Won't Fund

AFK does not provide funding for static equipment such as specialist chairs, seating, beds, hoists (except mobile hoists), standing frames, exercise bikes and treadmills. Also, we do not fund vehicles, vehicle adaptations, power assist for bikes, ramps, lifts, sheds or building works. We do not provide funding for specialist cushions and bespoke add-ons to wheelchairs, other than risers (where the riser is to be added to an NHS provided powerchair).

We do not fund communication aids, sensory rooms, laptops, or other small non-mobility related items.

We do not fund equipment for an individual that will usually be stored at school, or that is for general use in school or by a community group or sports team.

5. Application Process and Supporting Documents

Applications are made online and are received on Upshot (a database package used by Life and Work and the Mobility Service). We discourage posted and emailed applications.

We ask applicants to send in a letter from an occupational therapist or physiotherapist or another medical professional. The letter should confirm the diagnosis and describe why the applicant needs the equipment they have applied for.

We also ask for a prescription quote (usually provided after an in-person assessment). If the equipment costs over £2500 we usually ask for a second quote from a different supplier and for a different brand. AFK usually funds or part-funds the less expensive of the two pieces of equipment unless the therapist confirms that the less expensive item does not meet the applicant's needs.

The Mobility team lets applicants know as soon as possible whether their application has been approved to go on our waiting list. Where an application has been approved, we aim to place the order for the equipment within four to six months of the application, often sooner.

The application form asks only for information that is needed for AFK's mobility team, to make a decision as to whether the application can be approved to go on the AFK waiting list. Various permissions are sought in line with GDPR.

AFK's Mobility team has knowledge about specialist mobility equipment. The team can signpost families to suppliers to approach for quotes, as well as suggest possible alternative equipment for applicants to consider.

For items costing over £2500 the AFK Mobility team usually pledges around £2000, as well as working closely with the family to raise the balance. For example, if a disabled young person has applied to AFK for funding for a £15,000 powerchair, AFK might pledge £2000 or £3000 and raise the balance via individual fundraising and advocacy.

The Mobility Service operates within strict budget constraints and, at the time of writing, spends a maximum of £190,000 per annum on the purchase of equipment. The total cost of the equipment we order each year is in the region of £300,000. A large proportion of the difference between the two figures above is made up of the proceeds of the Mobility team's fundraising and advocacy efforts. In addition to the £190,000 equipment budget, we also spend up to £30,000 per year on maintenance on the powerchairs we fund.

6. AFK's Criteria

We welcome applications from disabled children and young people who:

- are aged between 0 and their 25th birthday.
- are resident in the UK.
- have a supporting letter from a medical professional saying why they need the equipment.
- have a quote (two quotes if the item costs more than £2500)
- have not already received an item of mobility equipment ordered by AFK in the last three years.
- are *not* seeking reimbursement for an item already ordered and have *not* already placed an order for the equipment.
- are *not* asking for a wheelchair or powerchair that is additional to their NHS manual or NHS powerchair chair, that the applicant intends on keeping.
- have a family annual income of less than £100,000 gross. Where the family income is over £85,000 gross and under £100,000, the Mobility team considers a range of factors before deciding whether to add an applicant to our waiting list. These factors include geographical location (In relation to house price and rental costs, the cost of the equipment and the number of children in the family with a disability).
- For those aged 18 and over, we disregard family income.

7. Waiting list and Wait Times

AFK's Mobility Service receives several applications for funding for equipment each week. They are usually incomplete and require work from the team to access supporting letters, quotes and – for items costing more than £2500 - financial details that will enable us to approach other charities who require this information. If we do not receive the documents we need within three months of the application, we contact the applicant to discuss taking them off the waiting list. We do remind them several times over the three-month period that we need the information and offer help to access it.

We aim to order equipment over £2500 that AFK is full or part-funding, within six months of receiving the application. We usually order items costing under £2500

within three to four months of the application being received and we often order them sooner.

If the waiting list becomes very long (with anticipated lead times of six to nine months from application) we will close it for a few months.

8. Powerchair Maintenance

AFK recognises the importance to many disabled young people, of having a powerchair that they can drive with confidence and in safety. We appreciate the costs of keeping a powerchair on the road.

AFK is the only UK charity we know of that routinely covers the cost of maintenance on the powerchairs we part or fully fund. We pay for annual services and repairs for the reasonable life of the chair.

Our budget for maintenance is small and we therefore need to review what we can and cannot pay for on a regular basis. We do not cover repairs caused by accidental damage and strongly advise our powerchair owners to take out accidental damage insurance.

Powerchairs need to be looked after and parts need replacing from time to time. For example, new batteries often need replacing after two years and tyres can become unsafe after three years.

In terms of process, our powerchair beneficiaries need to get a quote authorised by the Mobility team before any repair or maintenance is carried out. The invoice is then sent to our Mobility team after the work has been completed.

We fund the replacement of batteries, tyres, joysticks, motors, cushions, and footplates. This list is not exhaustive.

Once AFK has spent over several thousand pounds on repairs over a few years or - the chair is between seven and ten years old - we let the family know that we can no longer fund the repairs. We give three months' notice that future repairs are to be paid for by the beneficiary or their family.

If the beneficiary is under age 25, they can apply to AFK for another powerchair (if they meet the criteria). If the individual is over age 25, we will signpost them to other services that may be able to meet their needs.

No two powerchairs are the same in terms of their susceptibility to breakages and need for repairs. There are many variables affecting the cost of maintaining a powerchair, for example the amount of times it is being used per day or week, as well as the make and model of chair.

In terms of wear and tear maintenance we still usually fund repairs or replacements of batteries, tyres, motors, seating, and cushions. We do not usually fund additional items, such as phone holders, hand warmers and other useful but not essential items.

AFK is committed to regularly reviewing all its Policies and Procedures.

This Policy was approved by: *AFK's Board of Trustees*)
on the following date: *24th March 2023*

Next review date: *23rd March 2024*

APPENDIX I

Key Contact Information

AFK's Mobility Team comprises two part time staff:

- Julia Paylor – Mobility and Advocacy Manager
- Lesley Hulse – Mobility and Funding Officer

Both can be contacted at mobilityservices@afkcharity.org