

Sandwell's Virtual House Community Services Playbook

*A clear and simple guide to support, equipment,
and services for adults in Sandwell*



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1. What this playbook is for?

This playbook is for adults, families, carers, and professionals who want to understand what support is available from Sandwell Council.

It explains how the Virtual House works, what support Sandwell Council can provide, what it does not provide, and where people can go for further help.

The information is written in plain language and is designed to be easy to understand.

2. What is the Virtual House?

The Virtual House is Sandwell Council's new and exciting way for people to find information, guidance, and support for adult services.

The Virtual House is not a building. It is a digital front door that brings services, information, and advice together in one place.

It helps people understand their options and shows them how to contact Sandwell Council in the right way, based on their needs.



3. Why Sandwell uses the Virtual House

The Virtual House helps make sure people get the right support at the right time.

It helps by:

- Giving clear information and guidance.
- Helping people understand what support is available.
- Reducing confusion about who to contact.
- Making sure people with urgent or complex needs are supported safely.

4. How the Virtual House helps people

The Virtual House provides:

- Factsheets that explain services, support, and equipment.
- Tag descriptions that guide people to the right information.
- Clear advice on when and how to contact Sandwell Council.
- Bespoke infographics to help give a visual overview of how the equipment works and how it could support you.

Using these tools, people can understand their situation and what steps to take next.



5. Sandwell Connect offers a Trusted Triage service.

Depending on the situation, someone might need quick advice or more in-depth, specialist support. Sandwell Connect Trusted Triage service helps make sure people are routed safely.

This means:

- Listening to what matters to the person.
- Asking the right questions.
- Making sure people are not sent to the wrong service.

In some cases, people will be directed straight to specialist teams to keep them safe.

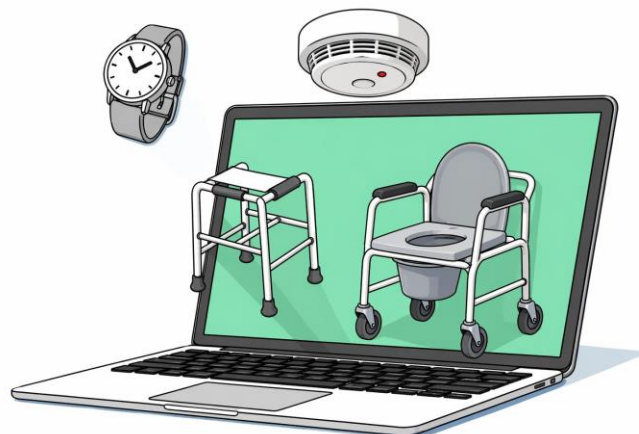
6. Equipment support – what Sandwell Council provides.

The Virtual House helps people understand what equipment Sandwell Council may support.

This can include equipment that supports safety, independence, and daily living, following assessment where needed.

Factsheets explain:

- What equipment may be provided by Sandwell Council.
- When an assessment is required.
- How to request support.



7. Equipment Sandwell Council does not provide

Not all equipment is provided by Sandwell Council.

The Virtual House is clear about what is not supported, so people have realistic expectations.

Where equipment is not provided, the Virtual House offers:

- Clear explanations.
- Suggestions for suitable alternatives.
- Guidance on how items can be safely, self-purchased.



8. Services you may be connected to

Through the Virtual House, people may be connected to one or more services, depending on their needs.

These include:

- **Occupational Therapy Services.** Including Trusted Triage and Occupational Therapy Clinics; Support to stay independent at home, including advice, equipment, and assessments.



- **Sensory Services.** Support for people with sight loss, hearing loss, or both.
- **Community Alarms Services.** Alarms that provide reassurance and access to help, day and night.

9. What happens after you use the Virtual House

After using the Virtual House:

1. You find information and guidance.
2. You are advised how to contact Sandwell Council, if needed.
3. Sandwell Connect's Trusted Triage Team help decide next steps.
4. Support is arranged where appropriate.

You should not need to tell your story more than once.

10. Your choices and rights

You have the right to:

- Be listened to.
- Receive clear information.
- Ask questions.
- Be involved in decisions about your support.

Support is about working with you, not doing things to you.

11. How to contact Sandwell Council

The Virtual House will guide you on:

- When you need to contact Sandwell Council.
- How to contact the right service.
- What information to provide.

Contact details and accessible options will be clearly shown within the Virtual House.



**How to contact
Sandwell**

12. The Trusted Triage

What is Trusted Triage?

The Trusted Triage is a service that helps people in Sandwell get the right help and equipment quickly. It uses an assessment to decide whether you need standard equipment for your home or more specialised support from the Occupational Therapy teams.

The main goal of Trusted Triage is to make sure you are 'routed safely.' This means we listen carefully to understand your needs and situation, ask the right questions, and make sure you are directed to the most appropriate service to support you.

What the Service Does

- **Listens to You:**
We talk to you about your daily life and any difficulties you are having, such as using the stairs or getting in and out of bed.
- **Gets Help Quickly:**
For many people, this service can provide basic equipment, like grab rails in the bathroom without needing a long wait for a specialist.
- **Connects You to Experts:**
If your needs are more complex, we send your information straight to our Occupational Therapy team, to keep you safe.
- **Saves Time:**
By using this system, you should not have to tell your story more than once.



How the Journey Works

1. First Contact:

You talk to an advisor, usually over the phone.

2. Simple Assessment:

The advisor asks questions about your health and how you move around your home.

3. The Result:

Based on your answers, we might send equipment to your home, give you advice on how to buy your own items, or book a visit from a specialist.




What this looks like:

Getting Equipment Support Through Trusted Triage: What Happens Next



**Standard Response:
Within 10 Days**

We aim to complete the standard support process within ten days.

-  **Step 1 – First Phone Call**
We will call you within 3 working days to check what support may help.
-  **Step 2 – Home Visit and Equipment Trial**
We visit you, assess your needs, and bring equipment for you to try.
-  **Step 3 – Equipment Set-up**
If the equipment works well for you, it is left in your home.

Service Standards & Reassurance



Getting Help Quickly
We often assess and provide equipment during the same visit for faster support.



No Diagnosis Needed
You do not need a medical diagnosis to receive support from our team.

13. Occupational Therapy Services

Occupational Therapy services in Sandwell help adults stay safe, independent, and well at home. This includes support with daily activities, movement, and making your home easier and safer to live in.

You may be supported with:

Advice and guidance

- Equipment to help with daily tasks.
- Small changes to your home (minor adaptations)
- Referrals for larger adaptations where needed.

Most people access Occupational Therapy services through Sandwell Connect and Trusted Triage, which helps make sure you are directed to the right support safely and quickly.

The Virtual House helps you understand your options before contacting the service.

What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational Therapy is part of Adult Social Care. It focuses on helping people manage everyday activities at home.

This can include support with:

- Moving around safely
- Using the toilet and Bathroom.
- Getting in and out of bed or chairs
- Managing risks in the home



Occupational Therapy aims to:

- Improve independence.
- Reduce the risk of falls or injury.
- Support carers with safe ways to help.

Support may be provided by:

- Occupational Therapists (OTs)
- Occupational Therapy Assistants (OTAs)

How you are guided to Therapy (Virtual House and Trusted Triage)

The Virtual House helps you:

- Understand what support may help.
- Decide whether you need to contact the Council.
- Avoid delays by getting the right information first.

If you do contact the Council:

1. Sandwell Connect receives your enquiry.
2. Trusted Triage carries out an early check.
3. You may:
 - a. Get advice straight away.
 - b. Be provided with simple equipment.
 - c. Be referred to Occupational Therapy for further support.

Trusted Triage helps make sure:

- You are not sent to the wrong service.
- Urgent needs are identified early.
- Simple solutions are provided quickly where possible.

Your Occupational Therapy journey

If you are referred to Occupational Therapy, the following steps usually happen:

1. Occupational Therapy review

An Occupational therapy professional reviews your situation and decides:

- What support is needed?
- How urgent your situation is.

Non-urgent cases are currently reviewed in around **4 weeks**, while urgent cases are prioritised.

2. Choosing the right type of assessment

If an assessment is needed, the most suitable option will be arranged:

Occupational Therapy (OT) Clinic (quicker option where appropriate)

- Usually takes place within **around 1 week**.
- Held at the Independent Living Centre
- Allows you to try equipment and discuss your needs.



Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) support

- Typically arranged within **around 4 weeks**
- Suitable for some types of assessment and support

Occupational Therapist home assessment

- There is currently a waiting list.
- This is **around 6–7 months** for non-urgent cases.
 - Work is underway to reduce waiting times.

You will be offered the most appropriate option based on your:

- Needs and level of risk
- What will help you most?
- Personal circumstances and preferences

3. Your assessment

Your assessment may take place:

- At a clinic, or
- In your home



During the assessment, the Occupational Therapist will:

- Talk with you about what is difficult.
- Understand what matters most to you.
- Look at safe and practical solutions.

4. Recommendations and support

You will agree next steps together. This may include:

- Advice and guidance
- Equipment (for example, rails, seating, or bathing aids)
- Minor adaptations to your home
- Referral for major adaptations

Recommendations are often agreed the same day, or within **72 hours** if further advice is needed.

5. Equipment and adaptations

If support is needed:

- **Equipment** is usually arranged within **up to 72 hours**.
- **Minor adaptations** are usually completed within **around 10 working days**.
 - Urgent cases may be completed within **24 hours**.
- **Major adaptations** are referred to another service and may take longer.

6. Follow-up and next steps

- Your support may be reviewed within **around 4 weeks**.
- If everything is working well, your case will be closed.
- If major adaptations are needed, your case will move to another service for delivery.

Important information about waiting times.

Some parts of the Occupational Therapy service have waiting times due to high demand.

- Urgent cases are always prioritised.
- Non-urgent cases may wait longer for specialist assessment.
- You will be contacted when support becomes available.

While you are waiting:

- You can contact the service if your situation changes.
- You may receive advice or interim support.

Sandwell Council is:

- Actively working to reduce waiting times.
- Improving access through options like OT Clinics.
- Keeping in contact with people while they wait, including through letters, phone calls, and advice (in line with the new **Waiting Well** guidance).

If Occupational Therapy is not the right service

If Occupational Therapy is not suitable for your needs:

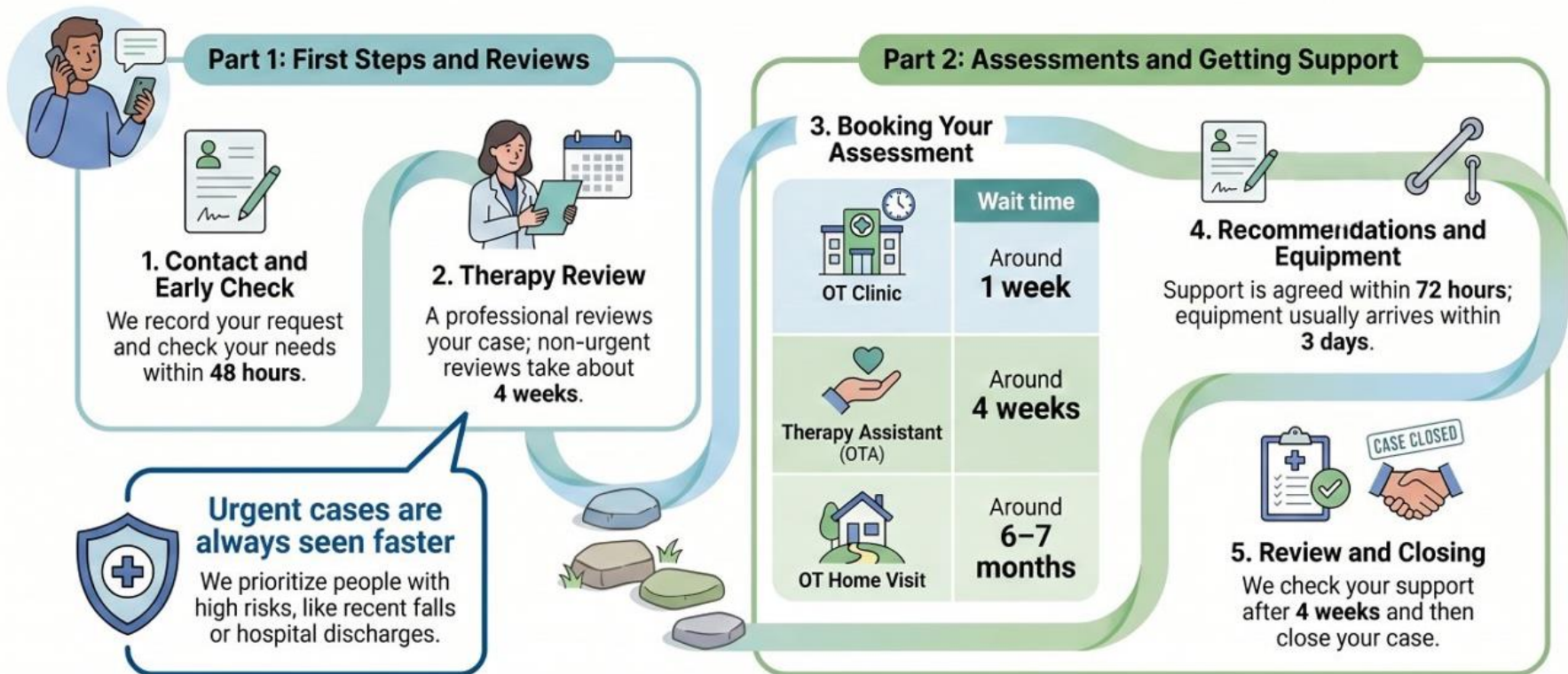
- The team will explain why.
- You will be given advice.
- You may be referred or signposted to another service.

You will not be left without guidance on what to do next.

What this looks like:

Your Journey to Occupational Therapy Support

Occupational Therapy (OT) helps adults stay safe and independent at home. This guide explains the process from the first time you contact the service until your case is closed, showing how the team decides what help you need.



14. The Sensory Service

The Sensory Service helps people in Sandwell who have sight loss, hearing loss, or both. We provide specialist equipment and training to help you stay independent, safe, and connected in your own home and community.

What is the Sensory Service?

The Sensory Service is a team of experts, including Rehabilitation Workers and Social Care Officers. We understand how difficult it can be when your sight or hearing changes. Our job is to listen to what is important to you and find the best way to help you live the life you want. You do not need a medical diagnosis from a doctor to ask for our help. If sight or hearing loss is making your daily life harder, we are here for you.

What the Service Does.

We work with you to find solutions that fit your life. This includes:

- **Teaching New Skills:**
We can help you learn how to move around safely, cook meals, and use your other senses like touch and hearing.
- **Providing Specialist Equipment:**
We can give you tools like talking watches, loud doorbells, and special canes to help you feel more confident.
- **Helping with Technology:**
We can show you how to use helpful apps on your phone or tablet to read letters, identify objects, and stay in touch with family.
- **Support and Advice:**
We can give you emotional support and connect you with other local groups that can help.

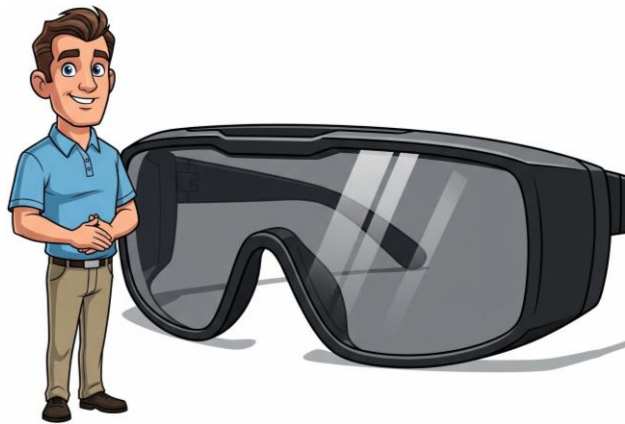
Examples of Sensory Equipment We Offer

Based on your needs, we can provide a wide range of aids, such as:

- **Kitchen Aids:**
Liquid level indicators to prevent spills when making tea, and boiling alerts that rattle when water is hot.
- **Mobility Tools:**
Different types of white canes to help you travel safely or let others know you have sight loss.
- **Communication Tools:**
Personal listening devices to help you hear the TV or conversations more clearly.
- **Home Safety:**
Loud or flashing doorbells so you never miss a visitor.

How Your Journey Works.

1. **First Contact:** When you contact us, a Duty Officer will talk to you about what help you need.
2. **Assessment:** A worker will visit you at home to understand your goals and see how we can help.
3. **Getting Support:** We will provide the equipment or training we agreed on. We often visit again after a week to make sure everything is working well for you.
4. **Ongoing Care:** If you are on our Visual Impairment Register, we will check in with you every year to see if your needs have changed.



What this looks like:

Your Journey to Sensory Support: A Step-by-Step Guide



**Within
3 Working Days**

**Within
2 Weeks**

After 1 Week

Weekly

Annually

Referral Received & Triage

Our Duty Officer reviews your referral to match you with the right specialist support.

First Contact

We will call you to discuss your needs and arrange your assessment appointment.

Home Visit Assessment

An officer visits your home to identify equipment and provide specialist demonstrations.

Week 1 Review

We visit again after one week to ensure your equipment is meeting your needs.

Ongoing Support or Closure

We provide weekly training if needed, or close the case once you feel confident.

Annual Review

Every year, we contact you to check if your needs have changed and update your registration.

15. Community Alarms Services

The Community Alarms Service provides 24-hour support, 365 days a year, to help people live safely and independently in their own homes. It uses digital technology, like wearable buttons and home sensors, to ensure help is always available at the touch of a button.

What is the Community Alarm Service?

This service acts as a safety net for anyone who might feel vulnerable at home, live alone or with someone, or have health conditions. It connects you to a 24-hour call centre staffed by trained professionals who can help you in an emergency.

The system is fully digital and does not need a traditional landline to work, as it uses roaming SIM cards to always find the best signal.

What the Service Does

The service is designed to provide rapid support and peace of mind through several key features:

- **Constant Monitoring:**
Trained staff are ready to answer your call at any time of the day or night.
- **Emergency Response:**
If you have a fall, trained responders can be sent to your home to assist with lifting or arrange help directly with the emergency services if necessary. Additionally, if you are feeling unwell, we can advise or arrange the necessary help required. They even have special lifting equipment to help if you have a non-injurious fall.
- **Professional Coordination:**
Responders can contact your GP, a district nurse, your family, or emergency services (999) if needed.
- **Automatic Checks:**
The system can tell if there is a fault or if a battery is low, so you do not have to worry about the equipment failing.

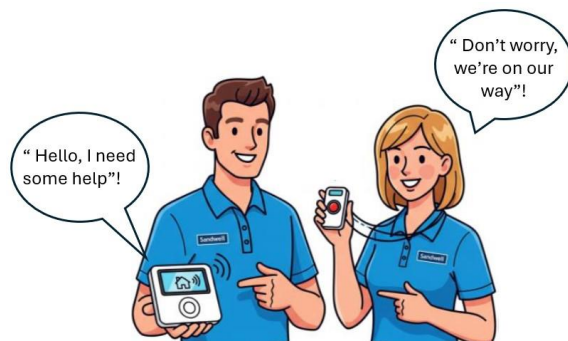
Community Alarms Equipment and Sensors

Either when the team are assessing you or at the installation appointment, the community alarms team will recommend if you require any additional sensors based on your needs. Standard and extra equipment includes:

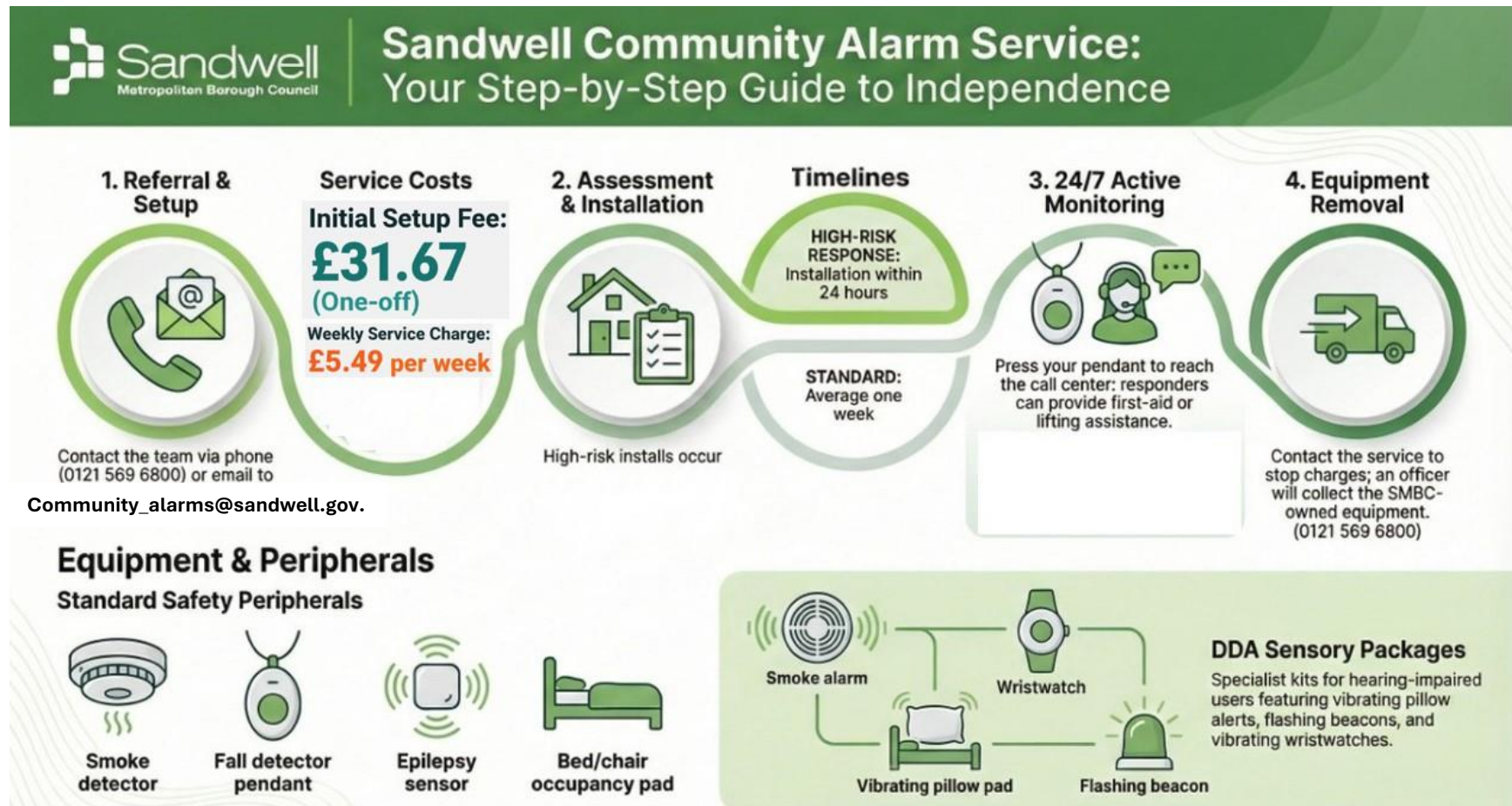
- **Wearable Buttons:**
A pendant worn around your neck or a button on your wrist.
- **Safety Sensors:**
These can detect smoke, floor-level falls, or if a door has been left open at an unusual time.
- **Bed and Chair Pads:**
Sensors that alert the team if someone has left their bed or chair and has not returned within a safe amount of time.
- **Epilepsy Sensors:**
Epilepsy sensors help detect seizures that happen during sleep

How the Journey Works

1. **First Contact:**
You can contact the team directly or be referred after exploring the Virtual House.
2. **Assessment:**
A worker will talk to you to find the right combination of sensors and alarms for your situation.
3. **Quick Installation:**
Once agreed, the team aims to set up high-risk installs within 24 hours.
4. **Using the Alarm:**
If you ever need help, you simply press your button to speak with the call centre immediately. You will be able to speak to the team hands free through the Hub (not the pendant).



What this looks like:



16. Funded Community Alarms Support

Some people can receive a funded Sandwell Community Alarms service for up to 6 weeks.

A 6-week funded Community Alarms service can be considered where:

A person is being considered for a hospital discharged or alternatively a potential hospital avoidance scenario.

The Community Alarms Team aims to support hospital discharges and avoidances as quickly as possible, and:


- Most installations are completed within 24 hours
- Response times aim to be within 45 to 60 minutes

What happens during the funded period?

- At 4 weeks, the Community Alarms Team will contact the person to let them know they have 2 weeks of funding remaining
- Most people decide about continuing the service at this point

After 6 weeks

- If the person chooses to continue, standard Community Alarms charges will apply

 **Please consider the Community Alarms service when supporting any hospital discharge planning, falls prevention, or recent falls.**

Funded 6 Weeks Community Alarms Service

**Who can get this
Funded service?**



People coming home from hospital

People worried about falling



This includes people that
have fallen in the last month

6 Weeks Funded Support



You get a full service covered
for the first 42 days

**Why Choose
Community Alarms?**



Fast setup within 24 hours



Help arrives within 45 Minutes

The Team aims to respond quickly
whenever the device is pressed



No Pressure to Stay

We check in at week 4 to see
if you want to continue.