

Scottish Government submission of 6 September 2022

PE1956/A: Increase the provision of wheelchair accessible homes

The Scottish Government is committed to delivering homes that are fit for purpose now and for the future to meet the needs of older people, disabled people, wheelchair users and people with other specific needs. We are already undertaking a range of action, which I am happy to outline in this letter. As some of the longer term commitments are still under development, including the new Scottish Accessible Homes Standard, the petitioner may wish to contribute to public consultations which will take place as part of this work.

Housing to 2040, the Scottish Government's long term housing strategy, makes clear that we will take action so that our homes support those with long-term conditions and disabilities and everyone, who can and wants to, is enabled to live independently in a home of their own.

Local Housing Strategies and Strategic Housing Investment Plans

The Scottish Government has committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which 70% will be for social rent, and funding is available through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme to deliver more wheelchair accessible homes where local authorities have included these in their Strategic Housing Investment Plans.

It is the statutory responsibility of local authorities through their Local Housing Strategy (LHS) to determine the appropriate housing required in their area, informed by a Housing Need and Demand Assessment. This includes identifying what specialist provision housing need there is locally, current supply and required delivery. Where LHSs identify a strategic requirement for a particular type of home, including wheelchair accessible housing, projects to support delivery of these homes are expected to be included in Local Authority Strategic Housing Investment Plans for delivery through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.

In March 2019, the Scottish Government published guidance for local authorities on the setting of Local Housing Strategy (LHS) targets to support the delivery of more wheelchair accessible housing across all tenures.

The guidance was developed collaboratively with stakeholders including the Accessible Housing group, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Association for Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (ALACHO as well as disability organisations including Inclusion Scotland, Housing Options Scotland, and MND Scotland. The guidance has been well received by stakeholders and by local authorities who are responsible for setting targets and local authorities have developed targets in line with the guidance or are in the process of doing so. Therefore, we do not intend to any review although local authorities will continue to monitor progress of delivery of their targets.

There has been good progress by local authorities in setting wheelchair accessible housing targets. From information gathered from the 2022/23 Strategic Housing Investment Plans which local authorities are required to submit, 29 of the 32 local authorities have in place wheelchair housing targets for the delivery of affordable housing. We realise there is more to do, and we are working with all local authorities through Scotland's Housing Network to have targets in place for all tenure wheelchair accessible housing. Of note, on 23 August 2022, Midlothian Council where the petitioner resides, approved its wheelchair accessible housing target to build 20 homes per annum, 10 of which will be social housing and 10 will be in the private sector.

Draft National Planning Framework

Draft National Planning Framework 4, published in November 2021, further underpins Scottish Government's commitment to providing for accessible housing and proposes support for the delivery of high quality homes, particularly those that improve affordability and choice, including accessible, adaptable and wheelchair accessible homes.

Responses to the public consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny on Draft National Planning Framework (NPF4) are being carefully considered and we intend to lay a final NPF4 in the Parliament in the Autumn.

Housing for Varying Needs and Scottish Accessible Housing Standard

Our existing Housing for Varying Needs design guide offers good practice in the design of homes – including those designed specifically for wheelchair users – in order to help them achieve a degree of flexibility, suit people of varying needs, be convenient to use, and be fit for purpose. Where possible, all new affordable homes delivered

through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme are built to Housing for Varying Needs standards. In 2020-21, where information was returned, 95% of new build homes delivered by housing associations and councils met those standards.

As set out within the Housing to 2040 route map, we are reviewing the Housing for Varying Needs design guide. We want the guide to help better meet the needs of an ageing population, help people to live in their home for longer, consider a wider range of needs, and learn lessons from the pandemic by recognising the importance of outdoor space, and space for home working or study.

We plan to consult on proposed changes to the guide over the coming months and will wish to engage with disability groups and those with experience of living in homes delivered to Housing for Varying Needs standards, as well as those involved in the delivery of new homes.

Once complete, the review of Housing for Varying Needs will inform the introduction of building standards in 2025-26 to underpin a new Scottish Accessible Homes Standard, which all new homes will need to achieve by law, regardless of tenure.

Adaptations

Since the integration of health and social care, Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) are responsible for the planning and delivery of adaptations using budget created by delegation. IJBs are also responsible for reviewing and developing services to improve outcomes for people who require adaptations. Scottish Government is providing £11 million funding in 2022-23 to registered social landlords to provide adaptations for their tenants.

However, we know that there are issues with the way in which adaptations are being accessed and delivered locally. We are therefore taking forward a review of the current housing adaptations system to consider how the process can be streamlined and made easier for people who need adaptations. Health officials are undertaking a review of aids and adaptations guidance which will contribute to the housing adaptations review. Housing to 2040 also includes a commitment to establish an inclusive programme of retrofitting social homes. This will ensure all planned refurbishment addresses accessibility requirements.

We have also identified the need to drive improvements in digital connectivity in all homes. Telehealth and telecare have the potential to transform the way people engage and manage their own health and wellbeing. We will also look to address the practical barriers faced by older and disabled home owners who want to move to a home that better meets their needs.

Affordable Home Ownership Options

The Scottish Government provides priority access to support disabled people to buy a home through its Open Market Shared Equity Scheme. In August 2022, to reflect current market conditions and the recent sharp increase in house prices, it carried out an interim review of the threshold prices for the scheme increasing the majority of these by 9%. In addition to this, applicants to the scheme are now permitted to make 'offers over' formal valuation levels providing they are able to meet the cost from their own funds. It is hoped that these changes will increase access to the scheme and allow priority groups to search for a home best suited to their needs.

I hope that the information above assures you that we are taking positive action to increase the number of wheelchair accessible homes across Scotland.