

Mind the step:

An estimation of housing need among
wheelchair users in Scotland

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Foreword

Ten or fifteen years ago the issue of housing for wheelchair users was significantly more prominent in housing policy circles than it has been more recently. In many ways that might seem odd, as, arguably, general awareness of disability issues has risen, not least as a result of important equalities legislation.



“The shortfall identified by this report is not something that can be ignored.”

Part of the reason, though, probably lies in the notion that the housing sector made efforts some years ago to mainstream certain aspects of disability. The introduction of Housing for Varying Needs standards as a condition of grant funding for new social housing sought to ensure that all new housing met robust accessibility standards for a range of people, including many older and disabled people. And although there were separate design standards for wheelchair housing, one wonders if there was a tacit belief within the sector that disability needs were generally being met by the HVN standards for all housing (and, in the private sector, by strengthened Building Regulations).

Occasional reminders – not least from disability organisations themselves – that most disabled people were not wheelchair users, may also have inadvertently contributed to a collective taking the eye off the ball in terms of wheelchair housing provision.

The current squeeze on grant funding for new social and affordable housing only reinforces anxieties that wheelchair housing could be sidelined even further in the coming years.

The shortfall – if anything a conservative one – identified by this research report is not something that can be ignored. There are times when something won't happen unless there's a concerted approach, from a range of bodies, to making it happen. The provision of wheelchair housing is one such issue. CIH Scotland urges the Scottish Government, local authorities, housing associations, disability organisations and others to work together to put wheelchair housing back on the map so that people who use wheelchairs have a proper range of options to meet the acute housing need so many of them face.

Elaine Gibson

Chair

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Executive summary

Wheelchair users face particular design and accessibility barriers, both in and around the home and in the wider environment. This report presents a national estimate of housing need among wheelchair users in Scotland. This includes people who use their wheelchair outdoors only, as well as those using a wheelchair indoors.

Many wheelchair users who have difficulties with their housing will need or prefer to have adaptations carried out to their existing property, while others will want to move to a different property – in some cases to set up a new household. There are three solutions, which should be strategically interlinked: development of new wheelchair standard homes for owner-occupiers and tenants; support for home adaptations across tenures; and efficient allocation of accessible and adaptable homes in affordable and social rented sectors.

There are few references to wheelchair user housing in policy documents on independent living, personalisation of services, reshaping care for older people, economic inclusion, community planning and neighbourhood renewal. There have been significant moves in some areas to improve housing choice and mobility but progress is hampered by various factors, such as: lack of information on accessible homes and on the need for these; inefficient use of vacant properties; low priority given to the need for independent living; inflexible financing of adaptations and care/support services.

Analysis based on the Scottish House Condition Survey 2009/10 shows that there are around **119,800** households with a wheelchair user in Scotland (5.1% of all households). Applying the **Mind the Step** calculation for both 'indoor' and 'outdoors only' wheelchair users, the estimate of the number of wheelchair user households in Scotland with unmet housing needs is **17,042** (14.2% of all wheelchair user households).



“The number of wheelchair user households with unmet housing needs is 17,042.”

The report recommends that local authorities and their partners should set targets for the development of new homes to meet this need. This involves consideration of the needs of families with children, young adults leaving home, older people, ex-service personnel, people with additional support and health needs and people who wish to move from residential care or a supported setting. They should also look at the balance required between new homes, adaptations and better use of existing properties.

The report makes 15 specific recommendations, summarised here.

The Scottish Government should:

- ensure that at least 5% of the affordable housing programme is for new wheelchair standard homes
- ensure grant subsidy or support at levels which encourage and enable building to wheelchair user standard in all tenure types
- review Housing for Varying Needs standards for wheelchair users' housing
- update its guidance on Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (2008)
- improve the quality and availability of information on housing completions, acquisitions and adaptations for wheelchair users
- support better understanding of the key characteristics of wheelchair users and their households
- amend the SCORE (Scottish Continuous Recording of lettings in social housing) recording system to track the extent to which housing designed for wheelchair users is allocated to households who do not require this.

Local authorities and their RSL and other partners should:

- through their planning function, require the inclusion of wheelchair standard homes in all new developments that are suitably located
- set targets for the development of new wheelchair standard homes over a period of five years
- review their position or policies and decide how they intend to use adaptations and housing allocations to extend choice and meet unmet needs of wheelchair users in their area
- adopt a holistic approach to planning and provision of adaptations in all tenures, and enable the purchase and adaptation of individual properties to meet unmet needs
- address the barriers facing disabled people who are looking for a home
- invest in the Scottish Accessible Housing Register (SAHR)
- investigate the hidden needs of people who are not listed on a housing register (and whose needs are not reflected in the national estimate of unmet needs) and take these into account in local planning
- more closely integrate housing planning, investment and service responses with those of health and social care.

Estate agents and home lettings agencies should:

- follow the example of travel companies and work to 'mainstream' accessibility as a selling point in the advertising of homes for sale or rent.



Mr McGougan

Mr McGougan has been a full time wheelchair user since 1998, having suffered spinal injuries after being involved in a road accident. He has spent the last 11 years rebuilding his active life, including abseiling for a spinal injuries charity, and driving his van around the city he loves, taking photographs and observing how it is changing.

In describing the life changing experience of being mobile one day, and unable to walk the next, Mr McGougan says that he and his fellow patients found their housing issues more challenging than getting used to being in a wheelchair. He spent a year in hospital, although he was ready to be discharged after seven months. He wanted to sell his third floor flat, and buy another property, but couldn't find anything suitable in the area that was familiar to him and near his friends and family. He waited for the Council to find a property that could be adapted and eventually moved into an ordinary Council flat, with a ramp and some kitchen adaptations provided. He was happy that the property had level access and it meant he could get out of hospital. However, the flat had structural and dampness problems and was included in a clearance programme. In 2008, he was moved to a similar property, which was also going to be the subject of either demolition or refurbishment in the near future. Knowing he was going to be disturbed again in the near future, he was keen to find a more permanent solution.

“It means everything: it means I can do things myself; it means I can live an independent life.”

His landlord put his name forward to a housing association which was building a new development in the area, including housing for wheelchair users, and which was a partner in the wider regeneration programme. At the time, Mr McGougan was not aware of the other housing providers in the area, or their new building plans.

Mr McGougan is pleased that his new home is in a mixed housing development. He did not want to live in an environment consisting solely of wheelchair users, and had feared that this might be all that was open to him. An Occupational Therapist seconded to his previous landlord worked with his new landlord to ensure that the new house was fully adapted to his specific needs. Mr McGougan is pragmatic – he says that there is no such thing as a perfect house, but for people in a wheelchair some design features, such as wider doors, are simply common sense. Although he could get around his previous home, this did not offer the advantages of a purpose built home, such as light switches and sockets being at the right height, plenty of circulation space, a purpose designed bathroom and an automatic door opener to allow him to let people into his house without having to go to the door himself.

Mr McGougan feels the processes for arranging rehousing so people can move out of hospital should be faster. In 1998 his awareness of housing options was limited to one specialist provider of housing for wheelchair users, from which he tried to source housing. He relied on support staff such as his Occupational Therapist and his landlord as sources of information. He thinks that a system is needed which targets accessible housing at those who really need this and that a register would be a great idea to help identify what is available at a particular time. He says that having a suitable home in the area he comes from, where he is near friends and family “means everything: it means I can do things myself; it means I can live an independent life.”

1. Introduction

1.1 Why focus on wheelchair users?

Wheelchair users are a distinct group because they face particular design and accessibility barriers, both in and around the home and in the wider environment. These barriers are not, however, unique to wheelchair users and there are many other people, including parents with small children, frail older people, large families and people with short or long term illness, who would benefit from features such as wider doorways, level thresholds and a full accessible WC.¹

In this research, the focus is on the need for homes that are fully wheelchair accessible and, in the case of new-build properties, that meet the requirements laid out in the **Wheelchair Housing Design Guide 2nd Ed.** (Thorpe and Habinteg, 2006) and in **Housing for Varying Needs – a design guide: design for dwellings specifically for wheelchair users** (Scottish Homes, 1998). This level of accessibility is higher than the Lifetime Homes Standard, which provides for ‘visitability’ by a wheelchair user and includes features that make the home adaptable for wheelchair use at a later date. Lifetime Homes are ordinary homes incorporating 16 design criteria that can be universally applied to new homes. Each design feature adds to the comfort and convenience of the home and supports the changing needs of individuals and families at different stages of life (Goodman, 2011 and www.lifetimehomes.org.uk).

The research project starts from the principle that wheelchair user housing should, as far as possible, reflect the aims of inclusive design. Inclusive design refers to a broad-spectrum approach leading to buildings, environments and products that are usable and effective for everyone, or as wide a range of people as possible. It recognises the importance of aesthetics as well as functionality, and aims to have a general appeal.

Wheelchair user housing fits with the aspirations of inclusive design in three ways: firstly, many of the design features in such housing also make life easier for people who are not themselves wheelchair users; secondly, it can readily blend in with the neighbouring properties; and thirdly, it is a practical and effective response to individual circumstances, enabling people to participate in society and pursue other aspects of their lives. Given the very limited accessibility of existing homes and the consequent lack of choice for many disabled people, it is a necessary element in the development of sustainable communities and the regeneration of neighbourhoods to benefit all local residents.

1.2 Relevance to wider policies

In policy terms, the issue of wheelchair user homes goes beyond housing and communities. Independent living, equality and personalisation of services are themes

¹ The 2010 building regulations require dwellings to have at least one accessible WC and one accessible shower or bath.

that have great resonance in this respect, as individuals cannot realise the aims of living independently and exercising choice in their support services if they do not have a well-designed and manageable home. The promotion of self-directed support, with individual budgets as a means of personalising social care and support, is a significant development for many disabled people, including wheelchair users. In certain cases, a move to more independent housing, adapting an existing home or moving to a more adaptable home may be integral to the person exercising choice and control over other aspects of their life. This may apply, for example, to young, and older, adults living with their parents, or to people who are currently living in a residential care home or a long-term health unit who want to move to more independent accommodation.

Policy debate about the personalisation of services has so far included little or no discussion about the housing needs of people in these circumstances, or the impact on housing demand that this may provoke. In the Scottish policy debate the acknowledgement that accessible housing is itself a form of personalisation is emerging slowly. However, discussion of self-directed support has rarely extended to the implications for home adaptations: the potential for these to be included in the list of services that can (at least notionally) be purchased with an individual budget; and the potential for adaptations grant assistance to be added to an individual budget.

Accessible housing has a crucial preventative role. People who manage well in their home are less likely to want or need to move. They are likely to experience fewer falls or other accidents in the home and will be more easily able to move back home after a period in hospital. They are also in a better position to receive community health services and care at home, rather than being admitted to hospital for in-patient treatment.

The evidence related to home adaptations and equipment shows that they produce savings to health and social care budgets in four major ways:

- By reducing or removing an existing financial outlay (notably residential care and intensive home care services)
- By avoiding an outlay that would otherwise have occurred (including prevention of accidents and prevention of admission to hospital or residential care)
- By reducing wasteful expenditure (such as home care necessitated by a delay in adapting a property or an ineffective solution)
- By achieving better outcomes for the same expenditure (improved quality of life as well as more specific benefits)

(Heywood and Turner, 2008)

A social return on investment evaluation of adaptations in RSL sheltered and very sheltered housing commissioned by Bield, Hanover and Trust Housing Associations (Envoy Partnership, 2011) similarly demonstrated the fundamental role of accessible and adapted housing in reshaping care for older people, and the economic imperative for this in the context of Scotland's ageing population.

The study demonstrated that £1.4 million investment in adaptations in properties of three housing associations created Scottish Government health and social care cost savings of £5.3 million. It showed that, on average, adaptations enabled older tenants to remain at home for an extra 2.7 years when compared with tenants in the same setting who had not had adaptations to their home.

1.3 Diversity of wheelchair users

This report focuses on wheelchair users living in ordinary households, as data is not available for those living in other forms of accommodation, such as long term residents in residential care and nursing homes who may wish to move to a housing setting with personal assistance and support. It is important, however, that their housing needs are also taken into account.

Disabled children

UK research into the housing needs of disabled and older people has tended to focus on particular age groups and life stages, with few specific references to wheelchair users.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has published an information resource on housing for disabled children and their families (Cavet, 2009). This contains a summary of research evidence derived from an earlier review (Beresford and Rhodes, 2008). JRF has also published a policy and research review relating to disabled children in Scotland (Stalker, 2000). The findings from these studies, which are relevant here, include the following:

- The housing conditions of families with a disabled child were generally worse than those of families with a non-disabled child.
- They were also less likely to own their home – and those with severely disabled children were even more likely to be tenants.
- They reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with their homes than other families with children.
- Families from black and minority ethnic groups with a disabled child reported a greater number of difficulties with their housing than white families.
- Disabled children and young people who needed specially adapted accommodation were less likely to be suitably housed than older people who needed such accommodation.
- Lack of space was the most frequently reported problem for families with a disabled child. Families with a disabled child were far more likely to report this as a problem than families with a non-disabled child.
- After lack of space, deficits regarding suitability of kitchens, toilets and bathrooms were the next most frequently reported problem, followed by unsuitable location and difficulties with access (reported by a third of families with a disabled child).

- Research suggested that disabled children spent more time in their homes than other children and, for some, a lack of control over their environment could lead to feelings of helplessness and dependency.
- The minority of families receiving funding for a Disabled Facilities Grant obtained expert advice on their housing needs but this did not generally apply to other families (the majority) with a disabled child.
- Parents reported positive outcomes from improvements in their housing situation, including greater confidence and self-reliance.

Young adults

In 2001, the John Grooms organisation set up an Inquiry into the needs and welfare of young disabled people. The results of the Inquiry were published in the report **Where do you think you're going?** (Ackroyd, 2003). This was followed by a second report entitled **Young, disabled and forgotten** (Christophides, 2006), which updated the findings and continued the campaign to 'support disabled people in securing a better deal'. In 2008, Livability, the successor organisation to John Grooms, published a further campaign report on disabled young people moving towards adulthood (Christophides, 2008). In 2003, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) published a qualitative study of the housing experiences of young disabled people in Scotland (Deans, 2003).

The findings of these studies include the following:

- Lack of reliable and up-to-date statistical information was a major barrier to strategic planning in relation to the needs of disabled people.
- The lack of accessible accommodation was having a disproportionate impact on young people seeking to leave the family home (and who may have had to move back after school, college or university) but who were being regarded as adequately housed by their local authority.
- Young people's choices are restricted at an early stage by lack of information on local housing options, lack of knowledge about who can help, and not being given an opportunity to voice aspirations.
- Many disabled young people – and their families – were shocked by the lack of accommodation choices, as they had been encouraged to aspire to greater independence and assumed they would have some positive options beyond the parental home. Young people looking to leave home in a planned way had often spent many years on waiting lists, and then taken the first property offered, often settling for sub-optimal housing in order to leave the family home.
- With notable exceptions, local authorities did not have an accurate, up-to-date list of the accessible, adapted or adaptable properties in their area. A 'small but increasing' number of authorities were establishing Accessible Housing Registers to record both accessible properties and housing applicants looking for an accessible home.

Older people

The UK and Scottish research findings with particular relevance to older people include the following:

- Many older people live in poor housing, which can exacerbate existing health conditions.
- Older people tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with their housing than younger groups, which may be due, in part, to lower expectations.
- The rise in life expectancy has been accompanied by increasing years of limiting long term ill health. There is a clear link between age and disability with around half of single pensioner and 'older smaller' households containing someone with a long term limiting condition or disability.
- Older people spend more time than younger people in their homes, with over 85s spending 90% of their time there.
- With increasing age, older people are more likely to live in a flat than a house or bungalow.
- Approximately 60% of people aged over 65 live alone, with this increasing to approximately 73% of people aged over 85.
- One in four pensioners in Scotland has no income other than the state pension and associated benefits; there is a widening gap between affluent and low income older people.
- The number of older people with learning disabilities is set to increase substantially, with significant implications for housing and support.
- There is an increasing prevalence in Scotland of health conditions which impact on physical mobility, and increased need for short or long term wheelchair use. This includes neurological conditions, obesity and diabetes. Scotland has one of the highest rates of incidence of diabetes and obesity in Europe and impacts include 1250 people who have had a limb amputated in the last 10 years due to diabetes.
- Reduced physical mobility may require higher levels of heating with implications for affordability and adequacy of heating systems.

Other groups

Other wheelchair users whose housing needs require attention include:

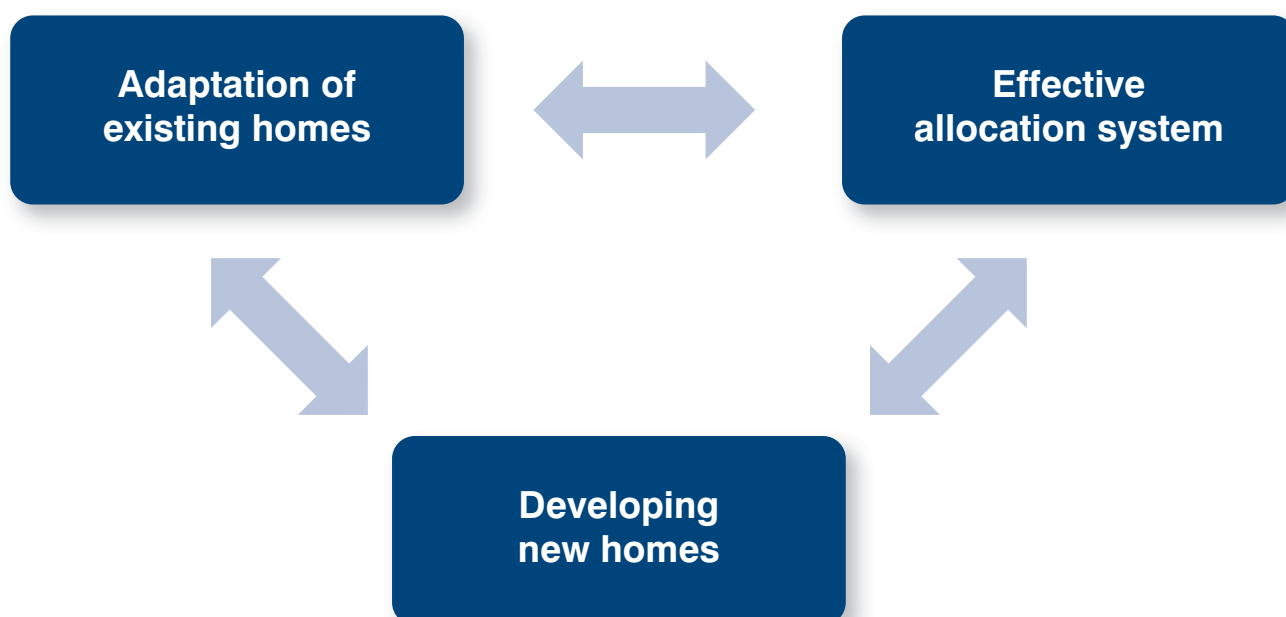
- Young and 'young middle-aged' people, some of whom have a learning disability as well as a mobility impairment, who are living with parents now in their 60s or older
- People who are living in supported housing – either shared housing or self-contained cluster accommodation – and who would like to move to more independent housing
- Disabled adults and children living in residential care or other institutional settings
- Disabled parents looking after young children or teenagers
- Adults who acquire a disability, either suddenly or over time, and use a wheelchair as a result of an accident, incident or illness.

Diversity of circumstance, diversity of solution

As this summary makes clear, people who use wheelchairs are highly diverse in respect of their life-stages, social circumstances and expectations. Many of those who have significant difficulties with their housing will need or prefer to have adaptations carried out to their existing property, while others will be looking to move to a different property – in some cases to set up a new household. The approach taken in this research is that there should be greater linkage between the three key solutions: development of new homes designed to wheelchair standard; support for home adaptations across all tenures; and efficient allocation, within social housing, of existing accessible and adaptable homes (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Three-way approach to tackling unmet need for wheelchair user housing





The Sekula Family

Gosia owns her own home and lives with her husband and 10-year-old twin daughters. A few years ago Wiktoria, one of the twins, had a prolonged epileptic seizure and suffered severe brain damage. She recovered enough to return home and is blind, unable to walk or talk, and needs support with all aspects of personal care and daily living.

The family live in a three bedroom semi-detached property and Wiktoria is being carried up and down stairs several times a day, as her parents try to manage her nutrition, continence and rest. An Occupational Therapist advised that the house is not suitable for a stair lift and the upstairs bathroom was too small to have a wet floor shower installed.

The family therefore looked at the possibility of selling and buying a more suitable home. However, they bought their home in 2007 with small deposit, and now find that they have negative equity. Desperate, the family went back to the local authority to see if there was any further assistance they could get. Their home was reassessed and this time it was decided that a more comprehensive adaptation was possible, though very expensive.

Under the local authority's Scheme of Assistance, the local authority agreed a grant to the family of 80% of the costs of the adaptation.

Plans were drawn up to create a larger open plan area downstairs as well as a bedroom and bathroom for Wiktorja. Under the local authority's Scheme of Assistance, the local authority agreed a grant to the family of 80% of the costs of the adaptation. As the family do not have the money for the remaining 20% of the adaptation costs, they have been fundraising for the balance.

Gosia thinks the local authority has been helpful in the advice they have given, and that they were quick to carry out a second assessment and to decide to award them a grant. They are pleased that the 80% gives them a good start, but it still leaves them short. The local authority then referred them to an information and advice agency for help in raising the remaining 20%. Gosia knows from the advice agency that people in other local authorities would not even have been awarded the 80% and so she is not complaining. However, she is still aware that families in her situation have quite different experiences depending on where they live.

"Families in this situation have quite different experiences depending on where they live."

2. The research project

2.1 Previous research

The Scottish House Condition Survey contains some specific information on the housing circumstances of wheelchair users. This provides a firmer basis than was previously available for estimating the scale of unmet housing need. In the 1990s, a review study (Harris *et al*, 1997) revealed the wide disparity in the figures arrived at in various previous studies, as well as showing that some estimates were focused on the need for new, purpose-built housing only, while others defined shortfall more widely and included the need for adaptations to existing homes. In 2004, a Communities Scotland study, **Mind the Gap** (DTZ Pineda, 2004), used national surveys – the Scottish House Condition Survey, Census and Scottish Household Survey – to establish a picture of the balance between demand and supply for housing for disabled people. This too identified issues due to the variations in categories and definitions used, and changes in these over time.

Research commissioned by Habinteg and the Papworth Trust in 2000 centred on developing a planning model and method to map supply and demand in respect of wheelchair accessible housing (Papworth Trust *et al*, 2001). The model was then tested out in three English local authorities. Use of the planning model required local authorities to carry out further primary data collection, as basic information in this area was very limited, and this proved a barrier to wide take-up of the method. A few Scottish local authorities did invest in its application. While the method drew out much significant information in relation to the experience of wheelchair users in those areas and actions required, each noted limitations of the approach in terms of planning, due to the absence of much of the primary data needed to support it.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive published a report in 2006 entitled: **Wheelchair User Housing Study: An evaluation of users' experience and the evolution of design standards** (NIHE, 2006). This research used a qualitative approach to explore the functional, social and financial circumstances of people living in wheelchair standard housing. It looked at levels of satisfaction with the home and surrounding environment and explored the question of whether wheelchair standard housing was meeting the needs of its residents. Among its findings, the study reported that space restrictions, lack of storage and problems with external surroundings were reasons for dissatisfaction among the one third of respondents (10 individuals) who were not satisfied with their wheelchair standard home.

There is no equivalent research specifically exploring the views of wheelchair users in Scotland on design standards. However, Capability Scotland's 1 in 4 poll on housing (2010), explored the views of 151 disabled people on access to housing, tenure options and priorities for development and identified that 20% of respondents had access difficulties to or within their home. They also identified the general lack of accessible or adaptable housing, and difficulties in obtaining help with adaptations, as the main barriers for disabled people.

The research presented here produces a considerably lower estimate of unmet housing need than that given by the John Grooms Inquiry (Ackroyd, 2003) and in DTZ Pida's study for Communities Scotland (2004). Respectively, these estimated shortage UK-wide 'up to 300,000 new or adapted wheelchair accessible homes' and for Scotland 'an additional 29,221 properties needed'.

The **Mind the Step** calculation method:

- starts with the figure for the total number of wheelchair user households, based on survey data from the Scottish House Condition Survey 2009/10; then
- takes account of variation in levels of wheelchair use ('indoors' and 'outdoors only');
- takes account of the diverse reasons why people may report their current home as unsuitable; and
- refers only to people living in private households and does not include unmet housing need among long term residents in residential or nursing homes who wish to move.

2.2 Aims of the research

The research presented here relates to wheelchair users in Scotland. The aims are:

- To demonstrate the extent of need for homes that are designed to full wheelchair standard, or can be easily adapted for residents who are wheelchair users
- To set out the legislative and policy context for developing accessible and adaptable homes
- To explore the significance of accessible housing in facilitating national policies and strategic plans e.g. inclusive communities, independent living, preventative services and personalisation
- To produce a national estimate for Scotland of the unmet need for wheelchair user homes
- To make recommendations on ways of reducing the unmet need and improving the response to demand for wheelchair user homes

2.3 Project design and method

The research was desk-based and did not include collection of primary data. There were four main tasks, all of which involved secondary data analysis or review of existing literature and documents:

- To produce a national estimate of unmet need for wheelchair user homes, based on the data relating to wheelchair users provided by the Scottish House Condition Survey
- To define and lay out the context of national policy and arrangements for strategic planning
- To identify the particular groups of people requiring wheelchair standard homes and summarise any relevant recent research
- To consider how local authorities and housing providers can make effective use of existing wheelchair standard homes and increase the supply of accessible properties



Chris and Julie

Chris has a degenerative neurological disorder and has no use of his lower or upper limbs. Unable to adopt a sitting position, he has a specially designed wheelchair that is longer and wider than a standard wheelchair. The couple owned a mid terrace property: Chris could not get in and out of this, it did not have storage space for his equipment and the bathroom was not suitable. The type of property meant there was no possibility of adaptation. Chris said he felt like a prisoner in his own home.

The couple initially sought help from their local authority, NHS staff and social work department about re-housing. They say that all the advice available locally was geared towards social renting although they had equity in their current home and were keen to use this to find something more suitable, although they knew it was unlikely to be enough for the type of home they needed. They found it very difficult to find any advice about finding a suitable home for home ownership, whether purpose built or to buy and adapt. It was only after a long letter writing campaign to local councillors, MPs, MSPs and the First Minister, that they found the advice that they needed about Government schemes to support home ownership and how these could be adjusted to allow disabled people to benefit.

“It’s a life-changing experience. Simply by enabling access to other ground floor areas I can participate in most areas of normal family life and enjoy being outdoors, for the first time in twelve years.”

Chris’s extensive medical and physical needs meant he and Julie needed a property where the size and layout could accommodate the equipment, hoists and room for paid staff to provide assistance. The design of the property and its adaptability were critical: it needed to have plenty of space and be single storey. The location was just as important. Chris had built up a support network in the local area: his staff team, doctor, Occupational Therapist and, of course, family all play a vital role in his care, and disruption to this would have a significant impact on Chris’s quality of life.

Chris and Julie found a home to buy and adapt, and were able to do this with the help of a Scottish Government shared equity scheme. This was only after intervention from an advice provider, making the case that exceptions should be made to the standard criteria in terms of the size and type of property required to meet Chris’s specific needs, and associated price caps. The couple have now moved in to their new home, one able to be adapted with relative ease to provide a suitable bathroom and tracking hoist.

Chris and Julie feel that the current systems to support people to contribute their own resources and respond to very individual needs do not have sufficient scope for fast ‘reasonable adjustment’ to be able to respond to situations like theirs, both at a local and national level. They have become aware that there are vast differences in the advice, information and practical help available at local levels and the different challenges faced by authorities operating in urban and rural areas mean very uneven outcomes for people who need housing for a wheelchair user. Chris describes the impact of living in a suitable home: “It’s a life-changing experience. Simply by enabling access to other ground floor areas I can participate in most areas of normal family life and enjoy being outdoors, for the first time in twelve years.”

3. The policy context

The policy context within which this research on housing for wheelchair users is set looks very different from 30 years ago: changes in public attitudes towards disability, and a political consensus to create a more inclusive society, have been reflected in substantial changes to the overarching legislative and policy framework. Discrimination and equalities legislation have created a platform of rights, which wheelchair users benefit from as much as other disadvantaged groups.

Policy interest in the provision of housing for wheelchair users has, however, ebbed and flowed over the course of the last 30 years, reflecting a pattern that affects many groups with particular needs. In spite of growth in the numbers of people using wheelchairs, the particular housing issues they face and the constraints on their housing options have been given only limited direct policy attention in recent years.

This chapter draws out the key features of the current policy context, and identifies the main 'drivers' shaping policy development in Scotland now and for the foreseeable future. It looks at the overarching legislative and policy framework and then considers the specific housing policy context for wheelchair users. Finally, the strategic planning arrangements around housing choices for wheelchair users are considered.

3.1 Overarching legislative and policy framework

The new public sector general equality duty introduced by the Equality Act 2010 requires Scottish public authorities to pay 'due regard' to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, victimisation and harassment; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This single duty replaced the three previous separate duties, which distinguished disability, race and gender, and embodies principles of inclusion and access for all rather than separating groups on social or health grounds.

By the nature of the legislation in establishing a broad and common framework, the particular issues affecting wheelchair users as opposed to other disabled people, or indeed the consequences for their housing options and choices, are not considered. However, the Act and the associated performance regulations set a tone around accessibility and inclusion which, over time, can be expected to affect the scope and shape of policy and practice across all services, not just housing. Its intention is to make equality a core part of public authorities' business and to encourage mainstreaming (EHRC Scotland 2012).

The Equality Act reflects broad social changes which have occurred over recent decades around disability. In housing terms, the most significant have been the independent living movements and the associated closure of the long stay learning disability hospitals: more than 10 years after its publication, **The Same as You**, the national policy on independent living for people with learning disabilities, remains one of the most influential policy documents produced in the period.

“Current national strategies do not assess the need for housing for wheelchair users.”

The Independent Living project established in 2008 by the Scottish Government, hosted by the EHRC and led by people with disabilities, has raised the profile of housing as a core component of independent living. Its **Ready for Action** (ILiS 2009) report sets out an agenda for housing, which specifically identifies the need to increase the number of wheelchair accessible homes, distinguishing this from the importance of all new housing being barrier-free.

Principles of social justice and inclusion have underpinned the policy support for independent living, but reductions in public spending have now introduced a new dimension. The drive to support independent living (as personal growth, choice and opportunity) is now also associated with the drive to reduce expenditure by focusing on less expensive forms of care and support (non-institutional, informal arrangements for care and support). This coincidence of interest in independent living – furthering equalities and social justice, with reducing public expenditure – is also connected to the current policy emphasis on prevention. In its consultation proposals in **Integration of Adult Health and Social Care in Scotland** (Scottish Government 2012), a key element of the new system involves a reduction in the proportion of investment in residential or institutional care and reinvestment in community provision. The consultation report on **The Same As You (2012)**, summarises an evaluation of progress on the 10-year strategy launched in 2000 and notes that lack of available housing delayed progress in institutional closures. Poor or inadequate housing is identified as a continuing issue for those who also need social care, and the housing implications of longer life expectancies for people with learning disabilities and dementia, are also identified.

Homes Fit for the 21st Century (2011), the Scottish Government’s strategy and action plan for housing for the next ten years, makes commitments on independent living for older people and disabled people. The national strategy on housing for older people, **Age, Home and Community (2011)** while having a particular focus on older people, explicitly states that it is expected that many of the initiatives will have equal relevance to disabled people. Further actions include development of a national register of accessible housing; streamlining the arrangements for housing adaptations; and ensuring needs of older and disabled people are better reflected within planning and housing investment processes.

None of these strategies, however, at this point identify or recognise that delivering or maintaining independent living for disabled and older people entails availability of suitable housing and that a proportion of this will need to be to wheelchair user standard. Separate strategies do not assess the cumulative impact on need for housing for wheelchair users arising from demographic change in relation to age, longer life expectancy of those with disabilities, and the increasing prevalence in Scotland of people with deteriorating neurological conditions, diabetes and obesity.

3.2 Accessible homes

New building

A considerable and sometimes unhelpful emphasis in relation to accessible and adaptable housing for wheelchair users has been on numbers – counting the number of units built and available. Wider issues associated with accessibility, embracing space standards, the wider environment, tenure choice, adapting existing housing, and ‘house hunting’ issues, have received relatively less attention. Ironically, the current constraints on public sector funding are now encouraging a more imaginative and broader approach.

Guidelines issued in 1991, and updated in 1994, set out recommended levels of provision for wheelchair housing units alongside guidelines for sheltered and amenity housing for older people based on the likely incidence of disability/older people in the local area. New build ‘special needs’ programmes formed a substantial part of the investment made by the then Housing Corporation and the Scottish Special Housing Association, during the 1980s and early 1990s. These agencies had gradually replaced the local authorities as the main funders and developers of rented housing. A focus on small, easy to heat units in sheltered housing widened to include ‘wheelchair units’ to provide greater space standards and specialised fittings, such as lowered work surfaces.

Associated guidance was provided about the standards which were required in order for the units to comply with the definition of ‘wheelchair units’, but the product was recognised as not necessarily suitable for all, particularly for those with greater levels of disability. Margaret Blackwood, and the association named after her, was influential in creating more specialised provision.

Shifts in public attitudes towards disability saw a change in guidance on design in the late 1990s. **Housing for Varying Needs** built on principles of inclusion and wider definitions of accessibility: it introduced a requirement that all new public housing should meet ‘barrier-free’ standards. For wheelchair users, however, the assumption was that the housing would need to include integral support: higher specification guidance was provided in a second volume focusing on housing with integral support, all of which should be suitable for wheelchair users.

The Housing for Varying Needs standards apply only to publicly funded housing provision, reflecting the dominance of the social rented sector in providing housing suitable for wheelchair users. The guidance also only applies to new building, although these standards were not required for the Scottish Government’s Innovation and Investment Fund programme. For the private sector, and for existing homes undergoing upgrading or conversion, the standards are governed by Building Regulations. New regulations have significantly increased the requirements for ensuring access for disabled people within updated Building Regulations (Part M), applying to new house building, commercial and public buildings, and businesses. Design policy statements provide further guidance, including in relation to the wider environment. **Designing Streets** (2010) requires that street design should be inclusive, providing for all people regardless of age or ability including specifically wheelchair users and mobility scooter users.

Further changes are anticipated in standards for new building which receives public funding. **Age, Home and Community** questions whether Housing for Varying Needs still has a role to play in the context of standards in building regulations and sets out plans to examine whether streamlining would be possible in the standards used across different housing tenures. There are, however, still critical differences between Housing for Varying Needs and the Building Regulations in terms of achieving inclusive and adaptable design.

In the period from 2002 – 2009, an average 162 new homes per annum were provided to wheelchair user standard in the social rented sector. This represented an average of 3.4% of the affordable housing supply programme for social rent. As grant levels reduce and alternative tenures are promoted in response to public sector funding constraints, Scottish Government guidance for the National Housing Trust and Shared Equity programmes is silent in terms of encouraging building to wheelchair user standard. While an emphasis on numbers alone is not helpful, care is needed in this environment that proportions of new homes built to wheelchair user standard do not drop; and that new tenures do not exclude wheelchair users and others with impaired mobility.

Adapting existing homes

In discussions about accessible homes, greatest attention has tended to be given to the profile and specification of new building programmes. In reality, of course, the great majority of the current population, including those who use wheelchairs, will live in housing which already exists. The current financial context has emphasised this still further, and been influential in shifting focus towards services which modify existing homes to improve their accessibility, including for those using wheelchairs.

Comprehensive new guidance was issued in 2009 (CCD 5/2009) on the responsibilities of NHS Scotland and local authorities for providing equipment and adaptations, including major (housing) adaptations. It embodies the principles of personalisation, choice and control for the user, and requires all those providing services to use their interventions to support the person to achieve their personal outcomes.

The 2009 guidance is set within the current legislative and funding framework, and cannot tackle some of the underlying difficulties for users (and providers) with the current arrangements for major (housing) adaptations. Access to adaptations is tenure and location specific – the service depends on the tenure of your current home and the area in which you live. Provision is described as fragmented, lacking consistency, and under-funded. Pressures on budgets have resulted in reductions in funding for housing association adaptations (Stage 3) funded through the national housing investment programme.

Greatest issues are faced by those living in the private sector, who require a substantial alteration to their homes. In principle, there should not be an issue. New arrangements introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 and associated guidance (Volume 6) created a duty on local authorities to provide mandatory grants to those eligible at a minimum of 80%, passported to 100% where the applicant receives certain specified benefits. However, the cost of adaptations has been rising and raising 20% of the cost of an adaptation can be a substantial barrier.

Adaptations, along with other housing related services, are given considerable prominence in the recently published national housing strategy for older people, **Age, Home and Community**. This strategy for the first time sets the agenda in relation to adaptations within the overall housing system, showing the contribution that housing and housing related services makes in supporting independent living and the wider reshaping care programme. An early priority for the Scottish Government's work on improving the national policy framework as it affects older people has been to review the policy and funding arrangements for adaptations: **Age, Home and Community** commits to both streamlining arrangements and considering more fundamental review to create a tenure-neutral system which provides equitable access for all.

Wider issues around access

The Ewing Enquiry, set up in 1993 by Disability Scotland, found amongst other conclusions that the housing market did not offer choice for disabled people and that the social rented sector was the inevitable form of tenure. Six years later, the Housing Reference Group to the Disability Rights Task Force concluded in its review of the housing circumstances of people in Scotland, **A New Threshold for Disabled People?** (Herd, 1999), that little had changed. More than 12 years on, there continues to be significant barriers to owner occupation for wheelchair users, as other disabled people. The issue is in part about design and space standards, but it is also about costs, and about mechanisms for connecting demand to supply or potential supply.

There are continuing reports of properties designed for wheelchair users lying empty because it has not proved possible to identify a suitable applicant or being allocated to households which do not include a wheelchair user; other frustrations include adaptations being removed in order for a property to be let to someone not using a wheelchair. However, objective data on these topics is not gathered and so it is difficult to determine the real extent of any mismatch, or the underlying reasons for this.

Solutions are not easy to find. There has long been an interest in developing registers of adapted properties, while others have sought to focus on the characteristics of properties that would be suitable for adaptation and use by, amongst others, wheelchair users. The Scottish Government is currently supporting the development of a national register of properties suitable for disabled people and available for let or purchase: Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living is leading work to develop the Scottish Accessible Housing Register (Homes 2 Fit), piloting this in 2012 with a few local authorities in partnership with Disabled Persons Housing Services.

3.3 Strategic planning

Housing strategic planning is expected to support the delivery of national outcomes for the people of Scotland, in collaboration with other partners and stakeholders in the public and private sectors. That national framework places emphasis on independent living, prevention, inclusion and personalisation.

In principle, individual sector strategic plans (housing, planning, health, transport) should be co-produced with service users and collectively deliver outcomes which are cross sector and mutually supportive: so, all plans should be focused on

changes required to deliver housing suitable for wheelchair users. In practice, the current arrangements have some way to go before they can claim to have achieved this level of clarity, alignment or integration.

In relation to housing, local housing authorities are required to undertake a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA), which will inform their Local Housing Strategy (LHS). Requirements are set out in guidance issued in 2008. The sections of most direct relevance to wheelchair users are included under 'equalities' and are set in very general terms with no specific reference to wheelchair users or any other group. The HNDA guidance requires local housing authorities to be able to produce an estimate of groups who have specific housing requirements, including disabled people: there is no direct mention of wheelchair users in terms of the core output.

Feedback from local authorities to Scottish Government has included particular concern about the requirements in relation to particular needs, commenting that the current guidance on HNDA does not provide assistance in terms of method. **Good practice on Local Housing System Analysis** (2004) prepared by Glasgow University does include a chapter on community care housing needs assessments, but this has not been updated.

Other practical difficulties are also reported, particularly in relation to securing information from partners in health and social care, where approaches to strategic planning differ. There are also issues for the housing sector in the use of traditional care group classifications, reflecting service and organisational divisions in health and social care, which create difficulties in considering cross cutting issues affecting housing options, such as wheelchair use.

There are important new developments in relation to strategic planning, which have the potential to improve the connection and alignment between the LHS and plans in health and social care. During 2012/13, local health and social care partnerships are required to prepare a joint commissioning strategy, which will be focused on outcomes: the housing implications of health and social care plans are to be identified and action, as necessary, taken within the LHS. When combined with the forthcoming integration of health and social care for adults, this has the potential to transform the strategic planning landscape for wheelchair users.





Margaret

When Margaret was admitted to hospital to have an operation on her spine, she took sick leave from her job and expected to return to this and to her third floor flat. After the operation she lost the use of her legs and was admitted to a rehabilitation hospital. During her rehabilitation, Margaret realised that she would not be able to return home as she now needed to use a wheelchair, and would have to stay in hospital until an alternative could be sorted out.

She decided that her best option was to sell her flat and buy another one on the ground floor or all on one level. She got independent financial and legal advice and put her home on the market hoping to sell it quickly. After several months and very few viewers, Margaret realised that she was a victim of the slump in the housing market.

With assistance from several organisations, she was awarded a high priority and within a matter of weeks she was allocated a bungalow, fully adapted for a wheelchair user and near the area in which she had lived previously.

Still in hospital and unable to return home, Margaret then found out that she would be eligible to apply for socially rented accommodation. With assistance from several organisations, she was awarded a high priority and within a matter of weeks she was allocated a bungalow, fully adapted for a wheelchair user and near the area in which she had lived previously. She is settled into her new home, and through physiotherapy has now regained enough mobility to work on a part time basis with support from her employers. She has not managed yet to sell her property, but is renting it out to cover her costs.

Margaret points out that once she was given the right advice, it took a matter of months to get a property through the Council's allocation process. However she spent months longer than necessary in an NHS unit, at significant financial cost to the NHS and financial and personal cost. She says that she felt stuck and frustrated. Her initial problem was difficulties in selling her home, and then in getting the right advice for her situation while in hospital: for example an Occupational Therapist focused on how she could return to the third floor flat and manage with 'an egress plan'. Similarly, it was difficult to find advisors able to provide advice tailored to Margaret's particular situation and which required an understanding of the ownership market and options, and both social and private rented sectors.

"Margaret spent months longer than necessary in an NHS unit, at significant (financial and personal) cost."

4. Estimate of unmet housing need in Scotland

4.1 Data, definitions and assumptions

This chapter provides an estimate of unmet need for wheelchair user housing in Scotland. For the purposes of the study, 'wheelchair user housing' includes both properties that are built to wheelchair design standard and housing that has been adapted to enable individual wheelchair users to make full use of their home.

There has been a number of approaches to estimating the need for wheelchair user housing, although no research has been carried out recently at a national level. This study uses data from the Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) as the basis for the calculation. More specifically, the data used are taken from three questions asked in the SHCS 2009/10:

- **What adaptation or aids do you/does (name of person) use to get about indoors? (Note: the list includes 'wheelchair self-propelled' and 'wheelchair (powered)')**
- **Does your home require adaptations to make it easier for you (or anyone in your household) to go about daily activities?**
- **How suitable is this accommodation for your/their needs?**

The calculation is based on the following broad definitions and assumptions:

- Households that have a wheelchair user (referred to as 'wheelchair user households') provide the basis for the calculations. It should be noted that the number of wheelchair user households is slightly lower than the number of individual wheelchair users. While the figure for individual wheelchair users is not available for Scotland, the data for England (Survey of English Housing) show that 4% of wheelchair user households have more than one wheelchair user.
- The unmet housing need among 'indoor' wheelchair users is drawn from the number of wheelchair users who report in the SHCS that their home requires adaptations and their accommodation is not suitable for their needs.
- Unlike the Survey of English Housing, the SHCS focuses on indoor wheelchair users and does not ask about those who use a wheelchair outdoors only. It is assumed that the proportions of 'indoor' and 'outdoors only' wheelchair user households are the same in Scotland as in England (26% and 74% of all wheelchair user households, respectively).

- The same assumption is made as in **Mind the Step** for England that 48% of outdoor wheelchair users who think their home unsuitable report this on the grounds that the property is not designed or suitable for wheelchair use (Joseph *et al*, 2010). The 48% figure is derived from previous research findings, which indicated the reasons (including 'home not designed for wheelchair use') why wheelchair users consider their housing unsuitable (Papworth Trust *et al*, 2001).
- As the unmet housing need among 'outdoors only' wheelchair users cannot be drawn from responses to the SHCS, cross-multiplication is used to produce the estimate. The method adapts the unmet need figure for England to allow for the higher proportion of households in Scotland that have someone with a disability or longstanding illness ('disabled households'). It then produces a figure for unmet housing need among 'outdoors only' wheelchair user households, as a percentage of all disabled households. This translates to the final number of such households with unmet housing needs.

As noted in chapter 1, the needs estimate does not take account of wheelchair users who are living in residential care and nursing homes. It also excludes disabled people who are not wheelchair users but who may benefit greatly from living in accommodation with the space and design features found in a wheelchair standard property e.g. users of a walking frame or frail older people of small stature.

4.2 Calculating the unmet housing need

The steps in determining the need for wheelchair user housing in Scotland are set out below. The calculations are provided in Table 1.

Step 1: Using raw data from the Scottish House Condition Survey, statistical analysis (SPSS) was used to determine the number of households with an indoor wheelchair user.

Step 2: Applying data from the Survey of English Housing, the assumption was made that Scotland has the same proportions of 'indoor' or 'outdoors only' wheelchair users. The number of 'outdoors only' wheelchair user households was calculated on this basis.

Step 3: The level of unmet housing need among indoor wheelchair user households was determined from responses to the three relevant questions in the SHCS.

Step 4: The level of unmet need among 'outdoors only' wheelchair user households was determined by a method of cross-multiplication (see section 4.1 above).

Step 5: The final estimate of unmet housing need for all wheelchair user households was calculated by adding together the two unmet need figures for indoor and outdoor wheelchair users.

Table 1

Steps	Calculations	Results
Step 1	Number of 'indoor' wheelchair user households 26% of 119,800 wheelchair user households	31,141
Step 2	Number of 'outdoors only' wheelchair user households 74% of 119,800 wheelchair user households	88,659
	Total wheelchair user households in Scotland (2009/10)	119,800
Step 3	Unmet housing need among indoor wheelchair user households $31,141 \times 25.4\%$ (require adaptations and accommodation unsuitable)	7,910
Step 4	Unmet housing need among 'outdoors only' wheelchair user households $815,327 \text{ 'disabled households'} \times 1.12\%$	9,132
Step 5	Total unmet housing need among wheelchair user households in Scotland $7,910 + 9132$	17,042

4.3 Priorities for local planning

The SHCS data in relation to wheelchair users cannot be broken down to a local authority level due to small sample sizes. A local authority with a relatively high proportion of older people (age 65+) is likely to have more wheelchair users, although it should be noted that data for England show that a lower percentage of older people use their wheelchair indoors as well as outdoors (CLG, 2009).

Income levels and relative affluence or deprivation are also relevant factors. In general, households containing someone with a disability have a lower household income than other households (DWP, 2010). Some areas, on the other hand, have a relatively high number of more affluent older people who are in a position to resolve their housing needs through paying to adapt their home or purchasing a suitable new property.

A further factor to consider is the current level of local provision: if there is a relatively good supply of accessible and adapted homes, both in the private and public sector, and if social housing is appropriately allocated, the level of unmet need should clearly be lower.

A local authority may decide to carry out specific research to investigate the circumstances and housing needs of particular groups of wheelchair users, or to build up a clearer picture of existing housing supply and availability. Among the groups considered in chapter 1, there is often very little information (for planning purposes) on the housing needs of young and 'young middle-aged' adults living with parents, disabled parents with dependent children or people (of any age) living in residential care homes. Key research partners and groups to be included are: organisations of disabled people, occupational therapists, social care and health commissioners, care managers, housing and lettings managers, specialist schools and colleges, carers' organisations, voluntary agencies offering advice, advocacy or specific services, tenants' and residents' groups and providers of housing and support.

The approach taken in this research is that the unmet housing need can best be tackled through a judicious combination of the following: developing new homes to wheelchair standard; adapting existing homes; and (in the public sector) allocating vacant accessible and adaptable homes to appropriate households. While these are all well-established approaches, they need to be linked and considered together so that decisions can be made about which aspects require greater focus and attention.

With regard to new housing development, a number of authorities in England have adopted the policy that 10% of all new homes should be built to full wheelchair standard – or to a standard that makes them readily adaptable for wheelchair users. Few Scottish authorities have made a similar commitment, although Glasgow City Council offers a notable exception with its introduction in 2010 of a planning policy that any development with more than 20 dwellings should include 10% to wheelchair user standard. A 10% policy also raises the profile of wheelchair user housing and brings it into mainstream planning for all housing tenures, which is important in promoting wider choice for wheelchair users.

Getting a good balance between types and sizes of new properties is also important. Extra care housing and housing designated for older people can be very popular, especially if well situated in terms of access to transport and other amenities. Other older people may simply wish to move to a bungalow or other smaller home with good accessibility. There also needs to be a full range of homes for families, couples and single people, some of whom require an extra bedroom to accommodate a personal assistant. In addition, there should be some provision for fully accessible supported housing, with or without shared facilities.

In England, the annual CORE data on social housing lettings indicate that the great majority of vacant wheelchair accessible homes are not let to a wheelchair user household. Similar data is not available for Scotland, but there may well be a degree of such inefficiency within Scottish lettings. Herd (1999) found only 3 in 5 properties in Scotland, which had been designed for wheelchair users, to be occupied by wheelchair users. However, subsequent reporting is anecdotal.

The findings of the **Space to Move** study in London (Joseph *et al*, 2011) point to a number of contributing factors in the misallocation of accessible homes:

- Properties being wrongly categorised as wheelchair accessible (or not accessible)
- Short void turnaround time, due to pressure on housing providers to let properties quickly in order to meet targets and avoid loss of rental income
- Lack of access to online lettings systems, where disabled people need assistance to search and bid for properties and support is not available
- Applicants rejecting properties, often because of design issues or location
- Lack of inter-agency working aimed at identifying households with specific housing needs
- Limited staff training in how to recognise, categorise and allocate accessible homes

With regard to adaptations, it is important to bear in mind that the **Mind the Step** figure for unmet housing need only relates to wheelchair user households. While wheelchair users will sometimes (but by no means always) need relatively major adaptations if living in an unsuitable home, in numerical terms they comprise a minority of disabled people and there will be many others who also require support through provision of adaptations.





The Shepherd family

Lesley-Ann lives with her partner and son, Jack, in a 2-bedroom, 2-storey house rented from a housing association. Jack, who is 14, has complex physical and cognitive impairments and uses a wheelchair. Lesley-Ann carries Jack up the stairs morning and night and any time he needs to go to the bathroom. As Jack has got older and heavier, the risks of this unsuitable housing, to both Lesley Ann and Jack's health and safety, are increasing. The Shepherds have been looking for another home to rent – whether in the social or private rented sector.

Their current home could be adapted and extended, but the Housing Association was unable to access the funds for a large adaptation. The Housing Association was open to discussing what help they could offer but said that the large costs for an extension would need to be raised by the family. The family considered this but were unsure if they would be able to raise the funds needed and how long it might take to do this.

“All disabled families need to have access to social rented housing in the same way that other families do. Often when you have a disabled person in your family it feels like you have to just take what you are given.”

Around this time, the family was offered a new purpose-built property with another Housing Association, the result of a priority referral by the Local Authority. The Shepherds had to make a difficult decision about whether to try and raise the funds to extend their current home or to accept the new house. For Lesley-Ann, the main drawback with the new property was that it would only have two bedrooms, reducing their choice to extend their family in the near future. However, when they considered Jack's complex needs and the uncertainty with timescales and costs for adapting their current home, they decided they should move to the new purpose-built property and are looking forward to moving into their new home when this is completed.

Lesley Ann says: “All disabled families need to have access to social rented housing in the same way that other families do. Often when you have a disabled person in your family it feels like you have to just take what you are given.”

“Housing conditions of families with a disabled child were generally worse than those of families with a non-disabled child.” Stalker, 2000.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The majority of households with a wheelchair user report that their home is suitable for their needs, with one in four (25.4%) saying it is unsuitable. This is slightly higher than demonstrated in Habinteg's research for England (21%). The national estimate for the number of wheelchair user households with unmet housing needs (17,042, or 14% of wheelchair user households) is significant but not insurmountable: the solutions are not complex and most of the mechanisms to increase the supply of suitably designed homes and improve accessibility of people's existing homes are already in place. It will, however, require a concerted and joint effort between Scottish Government, local and health authorities, and housing providers in all tenures to address the unmet needs. It will need careful management of resources and integrated thinking about the need for capital investment to support policy objectives and to achieve revenue savings over the medium and long term.

The benefits for individuals, for the community and for the public purse are clear. A well-designed and manageable home can be the key factor in enabling younger disabled people to leave the parental home and achieve independent living in an appropriate and timely way. For older people, it can make the difference between staying in their own home or moving into a residential care home, as well as reducing the need for home care and helping to prevent falls and other accidents resulting in hospital admission. And for families with children, it helps to ensure that disabled children can gain confidence and self-reliance through enjoying and having control over their home environment. This in turn helps to lay the groundwork for more independent living in adult life. All of this has consequent benefits for family members and informal carers, as well as facilitating greater involvement in community and social life, education and employment.

As already suggested, a strategic approach to housing for wheelchair users, and accessible housing more generally, involves balancing the need for new-build homes, adaptations to existing homes and effective allocation of rented homes. It is for individual local authorities and their partners to decide how to strike this balance, taking into account:

- the current pattern of housing supply
- the prospects for new build developments – both in private and public sector housing
- demand for (and provision of) home adaptations
- turnover of accessible homes available for renting to new tenants.

Recommendations

- 1. The Scottish Government should ensure that 5% of funding approvals is for new wheelchair standard homes.** These homes should include a range of types and sizes of properties to suit wheelchair users of all ages. Accepting that overall public funding for housing has reduced, given the policy and demographic imperatives, this is essential to prevent increases in this unmet need. An average of 3.4% of new RSL properties from 2002/3 – 2009/10 were to wheelchair user standard. Data should be made available on the number of wheelchair standard homes (their size, type and geographical location) completed with Scottish Government funding each year.
- 2. The Scottish Government should raise grant subsidy caps, where these apply, to encourage building to wheelchair user standard in all tenure types.** This should include new tenure forms such as mid market rent. A parallel scheme to the scheme for encouraging ‘greener’ homes would see a grant of £9,500 per property awarded for provision of wheelchair users’ properties within developments demonstrating inclusive and integrated design. Mechanisms for encouraging and supporting the private sector to contribute are essential for improving access to mainstream housing options: a key issue for private developers is that the additional space needed for a property designed for wheelchair users is not reflected in valuations.
- 3. Local authorities, through their planning function, should require the inclusion of wheelchair standard homes in all new developments that are suitably located and provide reasonable access to local amenities.** The type, size and market for such homes should be carefully considered at the planning stage, to avoid stereotyping of wheelchair user households and their needs. Planners should play a more positive role in ensuring routine adherence to requirements for inclusive design, and hence adaptability, that are contained within the Building Regulations.
- 4. Local authorities and their partners should set targets for the development of new wheelchair standard homes over a period of five years,** which takes account of priorities in relation to national and local priorities for health and social care. The steps used to calculate national unmet need can be used to calculate unmet housing needs of wheelchair users on a local authority basis. To enable this, **the Scottish Government should update its guidance on Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (2008).** This does not currently require any specific assessment of need and demand in relation to wheelchair users or give guidance on how to approach this.
- 5. Housing for Varying Needs standards for wheelchair users’ housing should be reviewed:** current expectations and policies are that most wheelchair users will live in ordinary housing, not supported accommodation; and technical standards need to reflect changes in the sizes and types of wheelchair and the equipment and technology now commonly used by wheelchair users.

- 6. Local authorities and their partners should review their current position and decide how they intend to use adaptations and housing allocations to extend choice and meet unmet needs of wheelchair users in their area.** Effective housing allocations and adaptations are integral to the achievement of equality in housing – ensuring that disabled people can make choices and live alongside others in their own homes. Initiatives such as identifying adaptations potential and reserving vacant adaptable properties for allocation to wheelchair users may need investment in staff training or in specialist Occupational Therapists.
- 7. A holistic approach to planning and provision of adaptations in all tenures, and to mechanisms for enabling the purchase and adaptation of individual properties to meet unmet needs, should be integrated into local strategic planning for housing, social and health care.** This will support policy objectives with regard to planning for an ageing population, prevention strategies in health and social care, promotion of independent living and fostering of stable, safe and sustainable communities.
- 8. Local authorities and housing providers should address the barriers facing disabled people who are looking for a home.** Some of these barriers run counter to wider strategic plans, such as the promotion of independent living, enabling people to keep or take up employment, reshaping care for older people and creation of inclusive and sustainable communities. Personal housing planning is an important tool for households which include a wheelchair user. The issue of a wheelchair for indoor use could trigger a referral for a personal housing plan or housing options advice. At the same time this would yield information for strategic planning purposes.
- 9. Local authorities, housing providers and other agencies should invest in the Scottish Accessible Housing Register (SAHR).** This will hold information on wheelchair accessible and adaptable properties and details of households requiring such properties. It aims to make better use of accessible housing, to increase choice for disabled people and to inform strategic thinking about patterns and trends in need and demand for accessible homes.
- 10. The hidden needs of people who are not listed on a housing register (and whose needs are not reflected in the national estimate of unmet needs) should be investigated and taken into account in local planning.** This includes people living in residential care homes (in or out of area), adults living in the parental home who want to live independently and emerging need from children from the age of 14 whose future housing needs should be assessed at this transitional stage.
- 11. Housing planning, investment and service responses should be more closely integrated with those of health and social care.** Strategic housing planning should take into account information from local health authorities on people with particular deteriorating or long term health conditions with implications for mobility and future wheelchair use.

- 12. Estate agents and home lettings agencies should follow the example of travel companies and work to ‘mainstream’ accessibility as a selling point in the advertising of homes for sale or rent.** At a strategic level, local authorities should consider how to involve and engage the local private sector providers – landlords, estate agents and developers – in meeting unmet housing needs.
- 13. Better use should be made of the Scottish House Condition Survey, the Scottish Household Survey and the Census information to improve national and local planning.** More specific information should be gathered and analysed e.g. use of wheelchairs indoors and outside, manoeuvrability of a wheelchair inside the home and level of adaptation of the current property. Subsequent analysis should also be carried out on a regional or combined housing market area basis.
- 14. The Scottish Government should support better understanding of the key characteristics of wheelchair users and their households in its published household analyses. This would report on the age profile, gender, ethnicity, economic status, and household size of wheelchair users in Scotland.** This is needed in order to plan for and respond to subsets of wheelchair users including older people, children and people from black and minority ethnic households. We hope such an analysis can be published as a later addendum to this report.
- 15. The Scottish Government should consider amending the SCORE (Scottish Continuous Recording of lettings in social housing) recording system to track the extent to which housing designed for wheelchair users is allocated to households who do not require this.** A similar analysis of tenure of wheelchair user households, the type of housing currently occupied and the number of bedrooms should also be carried out, to support planning and to assess particular impacts of threats from welfare reform such as the ‘bedroom’ tax.



Tommy

Now aged 74, Tommy lived in residential homes from the age of 30, first living in a dormitory room shared with three other men and then moving in 1980 to a new home for 42 disabled people where he had his own room. He lived here for 24 years and says that life was good. So when it was decided that the home was to close, Tommy could not imagine an alternative and he has vivid recollection of the 'dread' he felt and his fear of losing friends and being isolated and lonely. After more than 50 years in residential care, it did not occur to him that he might have his own home.

Eight years ago he took up a tenancy in a new purpose built wheelchair user's house in a small integrated housing development. Tommy uses a 'light writer' type talk machine to communicate and says clearly that having his own home has opened up a new world for him. Well designed and situated where he has safe and level access to his neighbours, to the shops and library, Tommy's life is full of activity and relationships. He has his own car and he travels the length and breadth of the country. He has watched the three young children of his immediate neighbour grow up, and is aware that as he looks out for them so they look out for him, noticing when he has not been out and calling to ask if he is well.

“If I had known what independent living meant, I would have moved out of residential care years ago.”

Tommy points out one design feature that could be improved – a back door that opens into his living room limits the furniture layout – but otherwise feels the house is ideal for his needs. It is obviously just as important to him that it meets the needs of his personal team of carers. He has enough space to move around in his wheelchair and the bathroom is large enough for his carer to support him with personal tasks. “If I had known what independent living meant, I would have moved out of residential care years ago.”



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APPENDIX Criteria used by the Scottish House Condition Survey to describe 'adapted or accessible for wheelchair use'

Wheelchair access to entrance door of dwelling or common block

Internal circulation is barrier free

Pathways from road and /or car spaces up to but not including the entrance door are step free

Door bell/entry system to dwelling or common block is accessible to wheelchair users

Separate WC compartment suitable for wheelchair user

Primary heating controls are accessible for a wheelchair user

Lifetime Homes revised criteria

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1 Parking (width or widening capability)

1a 'On plot' (non-communal) parking

Where a dwelling has car parking within its individual plot (or title) boundary, at least one parking space length should be capable of enlargement to achieve a minimum width of 3300mm.

1b Communal or shared parking

Where parking is provided by communal or shared bays, spaces with a width of 3300mm should be provided, in accordance with the specification detailed within Lifetime Homes Design Guide.

2 Approach to dwelling from parking (distance, gradients and widths)

The distance from the car parking space of Criterion 1 to the dwelling entrance (or relevant block entrance or lift core) should be kept to a minimum and be level or gently sloping. The distance from visitors' parking to relevant entrances should be as short as practicable and be level or gently sloping.

3 Approach to all entrances

The approach to all entrances should preferably be level or gently sloping, and in accordance with the specification below.

4 Entrances

All entrances should:

- a) Be illuminated
- b) Have level access over the threshold; and
- c) Have effective clear opening widths and nibs as specified below.

In addition, main entrances should also:

- d) Have adequate weather protection
- e) Have a level external landing.

5 Communal Stairs and Lifts

5a Communal Stairs

Principal access stairs should provide easy access in accordance with the specification provided in the reference guide, regardless of whether or not a lift is provided.

5b Communal Lifts

Where a dwelling is reached by a lift, it should be fully accessible in accordance with the specification provided in the reference design guide.

6 Internal doorways and hallways

Movement in hallways and through doorways should be convenient to the widest range of people, including those using mobility aids or wheelchairs, and those moving furniture or other objects.

As a general principle, narrower hallways and landings will need wider doorways in their side walls.

The width of doorways and hallways should conform to the specifications detailed in the design guide.

7 Circulation Space

There should be space for turning a wheelchair in dining areas and living rooms and basic circulation space for wheelchair users elsewhere.

8 Entrance level living space

A living room / living space should be provided on the entrance level of every dwelling (see design guide for definition of 'entrance level').

9 Potential for entrance level bed-space

In dwellings with two or more storeys, with no permanent bedroom on the entrance level, there should be space on the entrance level that could be used as a convenient temporary bed-space.

10 Entrance level WC and shower drainage

Where an accessible bathroom, in accordance with Criterion 14, is not provided on the entrance level of a dwelling, the entrance level should have an accessible WC compartment, with potential for a shower to be installed – as detailed in the specification within the design guide.

11 WC and bathroom walls

Walls in all bathrooms and WC compartments should be capable of firm fixing and support for adaptations such as grab rails.

12 Stairs and potential through-floor lift in dwellings

The design within a dwelling of two or more storeys should incorporate both:

- a) Potential for stair lift installation; and,
- b) A suitable identified space for a through-the-floor lift from the entrance level to a storey containing a main bedroom and a bathroom satisfying Criterion 14.

13 Potential for future fitting of hoists and bedroom / bathroom relationship

Structure above a main bedroom and bathroom ceilings should be capable of supporting ceiling hoists and the design should provide a reasonable route between this bedroom and the bathroom.

14 Bathrooms

An accessible bathroom, providing ease of access, in accordance with the specification contained within the design guide, should be provided in every dwelling on the same storey as a main bedroom.

15 Glazing and window handle heights

Windows in the principal living space (typically the living room) should allow people to see out when seated. In addition, at least one opening light in each habitable room should be approachable and usable by a wide range of people – including those with restricted movement and reach.

16 Location of service controls

Service controls should be within a height band of 450mm to 1200mm from the floor and at least 300mm away from any internal room corner.



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