



PE1554/DD

Public Petition Clerks,
Room T3.4
The Scottish Parliament

25th September 2015

Dear Ms, Robinson,

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE01554

Thank you for your email regarding Leonard Cheshire Disability's petition, PE1554 in the Scottish Parliament. Leonard Cheshire Disability welcomes the opportunity to consider and respond to evidence regarding disabled friendly housing.

Support for disabled friendly housing

It is very encouraging that so many contributors are supportive of the principle of disabled friendly housing as set out in our petition. In total 13 local authorities specifically said they were favour of the aims of the petition. We strongly support actions that local authorities have taken to improve the accessibility of houses in the both social and privately owned sector, for example placing targets for the number of wheelchair accessible homes. However, we continue to believe that the Scottish Government should take further action to increase the availability of disabled friendly housing.

The lifetime homes standards compared to current Scottish Building Regulations

A number of contributors commented that 14 of 16 Lifetime Homes Standards are already covered by current Scottish building regulations. Leonard Cheshire Disability recognises the steps the Scottish Government has made to improve building regulations and increase the adaptability of Scotland's homes. However, we believe that the 2 Lifetime Homes Standards not currently covered in the regulations and Housing for Varying Needs Guidelines (that is provision for a through floor lift, and the ability to install a tracking hoist) are very significant in ensuring homes are fully accessible and adaptable for both current and future residents.

In the UK every year, 800,000 people become disabled¹. We believe, as set out in Article 19 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Disabled Person (UNCRPD)², that all disabled people “should have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others”. If a person who requires a tracking hoist or through floor lift wishes to be cared for in their own home, a lack of suitable or adaptable housing shouldn't prevent them.

Scotland has been a world leader in its approach to human rights. With the Scottish Government currently consulting on its action plan to deliver the UNCRPD³ and reviewing the technical guidance supporting the building regulations, now is an opportune time to further improve the accessibility of housing for disabled people.

The target of 10% of homes to be fully wheelchair accessible

Some responses questioned why our petition was calling for a 10% target of homes to be wheelchair accessible rather than a figure based on a needs assessment of a given area.

Leonard Cheshire Disability is supportive of any attempt to measure and respond to the needs of disabled people. However, we are calling for a 10% target, because of the backlog of need for wheelchair accessible homes - around 70,000 in England - and the slow delivery of wheelchair accessible homes even when a target is in place.

In addition, as cited above the UNCRDP makes clear that disabled people should have equal opportunity to choose where they live which means that there is a need for more than one fully wheelchair accessible home per wheelchair user. Approximately 2% of the UK population use a wheelchair⁴ and therefore building 10% of homes built to wheelchair accessible standards can provide the choice they have a right to.

The increased cost of disabled friendly housing

¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Social exclusion and the onset of disability, 2003

² The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, 2006, <http://goo.gl/n5M7Dr>

³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) The Scottish Government's Draft Delivery Plan (2016-2020) – Consultation 2015 <http://goo.gl/FJHLzE>

⁴ NHS purchasing and supply agency 2000 report

Thirdly, respondents, particularly Homes for Scotland, were concerned about the effect of disabled friendly housing on the cost of building in Scotland and how this could affect the affordability of homes.

Leonard Cheshire Disability recognises that building homes to standards which go beyond current requirements might entail increased investment by developers. However, the costs to the NHS associated with a lack of disabled friendly housing are enormous. When people's homes are not able to be adapted for their needs, it is often dangerous for them to live there. They risk slipping, falling and injuring themselves and when these accidents happen it is the NHS that picks up the bill. Conversely, homes built to the Lifetime Homes standards are by design, cheaper and easier to adapt: installing a stair lift in a Lifetime home can cost as little as £2500.

We dispute that adopting the Lifetime Homes Standards should increase the cost of buying a home. In 2013, the top 10 housing developers made combined profits of £1.6bn – that is 98 times the cost of building every new home built in that year to be disabled friendly.⁵ We believe that the increased cost of making safe, fully accessible homes can and should be absorbed by the construction industry, not passed onto disabled people.

Furthermore, as the Scottish Government commented on in its submission, before the 2007 improved regulations came into effect, developers attempted to flood the planning system with applications that did not meet the new standards. This shows the lengths to which housing developers will go to avoid the revised accessibility standards and to maximise their profits. We would implore the committee to take such actions into account when considering this petition and the next steps to take.

Conclusions

In summary, Leonard Cheshire Disability strongly believes that ensuring all new homes in Scotland are built to fully meet all the Lifetime Homes Standards, with at least 10% built to full wheelchair accessibility standards is as important step to enabling disabled people to have equal choice and control about where they live.

Yours sincerely,

Philippa Faulkner, Policy and Public Affairs Officer (Scotland)

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building>, Live Table 246
14,820 new homes built in 2013, multiplied by £1,100 per home, total cost £16.3m