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Your ref: PE1554

28 October 2015

Dear Ms Robinson

## CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1554

Thank you for your letter of 7 October 2015 to Mr Neil, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights. I am responding as Scottish building regulations fall within my area of responsibility. I have read the transcript of the Public Petitions Committee meeting of 6 October and I am happy to respond to the observations made by Mr MacAskill and Mr Wilson.

In 2007 when revising standards and guidance for accessibility within new dwellings, measures were considered that would facilitate future installation of tracks for ceiling hoists and also through-floor lifts. At the time it was concluded that there were good reasons why these measures should not be introduced and these are outlined in the paragraphs below.

### Preparation work for tracks for ceiling hoists

It is acknowledged that some persons that need the use of ceiling hoists on tracks can operate such equipment themselves. However this tends to be the exception rather than the rule and it is expected that there will usually be a live-in carer where the occupant requires assistance through use of a hoist. To make the best use of an integrated hoist, a dwelling needs to be designed around such an installation. This goes beyond building regulations and into the territory of how the layout of an individual dwelling is set out. Also, the floor or roof structure, above where the track would run, would need to be over-engineered in most cases to support the future additional loads. Walls would need to be designed with 'knock-out' panels, which could have implications for lintels over doorways. Scottish building regulations and associated guidance set very good but minimum standards for new housing of all tenures. They are not intended to cover housing where the occupants require specialist care. In view of all of the above it was felt appropriate in 2007 that preparation work for a hoist track should not form a part of building regulations guidance.



### Preparation work for a through-floor lift

It needs to be borne in mind that a case of 'double-banking' of future proofing measures was already being introduced in 2007, namely:

- the future-shower provisions – that could facilitate living on one floor for a period of time; and
- the wider stairs – that could allow the installation of a stairlift which would enable many people with disabilities to move between storeys.

A 'triple-banking' of future proofing measures, with similar intent, would then have occurred if preparation for a through-floor lift had been included in building regulations guidance. As all of these measures (when introduced to a dwelling) occupy space, it would be highly likely that only one measure per dwelling would ever be eventually introduced, so it was considered inappropriate to apply them all. By the time a householder would consider implementing one of the measures (with public funding often being provided), the lowest cost appropriate option would usually be chosen. With shower and stairlift installations being upwards of circa £2,000 and through-floor lifts upwards of around £8,000, the through-floor lift (all things being equal) would be the least preferred choice. In other words, this would make any preparation measures for a through-floor lift for new housing on more than one floor, the least cost-beneficial.

Over the last two years we have 'taken stock' of the accessibility measures that were introduced in 2007. As part of a wider 'better regulation' review, some of these measures were adjusted to better reflect the intent of the building standards and improve design flexibility, with no loss of amenity. In particular the opportunity was taken to improve the guidance supporting the standards, thereby supporting consistency of the approach to be taken throughout Scotland. We therefore have no plans at present to carry out a further review of the accessibility standards and guidance in Scottish building regulations. However, when we next carry out a comprehensive review of such measures, we intend to commission research into the costs and benefits of making all new homes ready to receive hoists with associated tracks.

Turning to the second part of Mr Wilson's observations. Local housing and Planning authorities are responsible for assessing all housing requirements in their areas and planning to meet these through their Local Housing Strategies (LHS) and Local Development Plans (LDP). They are required to take forward a Housing Need and Demands Assessment (HNDA) to assess current and future housing requirements across all tenures and types including any requirements for specialist housing.

Since 2012–2013, the Scottish Government Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) has adopted a three-year resource planning approach. This enables each council to exercise its strategic role more flexibly and to put forward to Scottish Government strategic local proposals for social and affordable housing developments, based on their LHS and associated Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP). This would include information on the mix of types of housing required including requirements for wheelchair housing.

The AHSP supports the delivery of flexible housing capable of being adapted to suit peoples' changing requirements. Therefore wherever possible, housing projects receiving grant funding through the AHSP should comply with published guidance on the essential aspects of Housing for Varying Needs (HfVN). As well as meeting the HfVN guidance, new social housing must be constructed in accordance with national building regulations.

Officials are currently working with a number of Disabled People's Organisations to look at a number of issues they have raised in relation to accessible housing provision and to consider what further action may be necessary.

Ministers are also committed to improving existing arrangements for adaptations to existing homes. We are taking forward the recommendations from the 2012 report from the independent Adaptations Working Group which recommended that fundamental changes were made to the delivery and funding arrangements for housing adaptations. The Working Group also recommended piloting its recommended approach to test the viability of the proposals. To do this five demonstration sites have now been identified: Aberdeen, Borders, Falkirk, Fife and Lochaber. These will run to the end of 2016 and evaluated with the evidence used to inform consultation and shape new guidance.

I trust that this letter helps the Committee with its decision.

**MARCO BIAGI**