



Community and Culture

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PE1554/F

23rd April 2015

By Email:

Ms Sigrid Robinson
Public Petitions Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Ms Robinson,

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1554

Thank you for your correspondence dated 1st April 2015, requesting information in support of the above petition. I am happy to provide the following response on behalf of Cleland Sneddon, Executive Director, Community Services, Argyll and Bute Council.

- **What are the local authority's views on what the petition seeks?**

Argyll and Bute Council is fully committed to promoting a local housing system which ensures that all residents and communities have access to affordable, sufficient and suitable housing within the local authority area. This explicitly includes disabled persons and those with particular needs. Our strategic housing outcomes include the key objective that "more households with particular housing needs will live in their own home as a result of proactive forward planning, investment and support strategies". In support of this aim, the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) and Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) for Argyll and Bute have set out a target for 100% of new affordable housing developments to be built to the Housing for Varying Need standard, as far as is feasible; and in addition a minimum of 10% of SHIP completions should comprise specialist provision, which will include wheelchair accessible accommodation as appropriate. We believe the Housing for Varying Need standard is generally equivalent to a lifetime standard and will provide

sufficient flexibility for future adaptation to wheelchair use, as and when required. We do however note that new build developments should address identified local needs and it is our experience (as evidenced in the Housing Need and Demand Assessment) that the requirement for purpose built wheelchair properties is well below 10% of the total need. It is our view that a wider range of specialist provision is more appropriate and more suited to the diverse range of particular needs of our communities. This will include amenity disabled accommodation as well as sheltered housing and extra care housing, among other models, which will cater for those with a range of disabilities.

In general, this council remains supportive of the principle that housing should be accessible to all; and that no one, whatever their circumstances or particular needs, should be disadvantaged in securing a suitable, affordable home. However, we also believe that the current system and framework for social housing in Scotland does already encompass this aim. Local authorities have a statutory duty to assess the need and demand for housing and housing support within their area, and to implement a Local Housing Strategy which addresses the identified needs. It is therefore implicit that local authorities and their strategic partners should set appropriate targets for different types of housing, based on a “robust and credible” needs assessment. Further prescription could in fact have a counter-productive effect, and we believe that a degree of flexibility is required to ensure the positive outcomes desired by all stakeholders.

- **What percentage of new build homes within your local authority area are adapted to full wheelchair accessibility standards?**

The Council’s Housing Services record and monitor new build in the social rented sector but does not have detailed data on private sector developments. Over the last four years, the SHIP programme has delivered a total of 501 new affordable homes of which 108 comprised some form of specialist provision for persons with particular needs. This amounts to 22% of the total output over that period. The vast majority of all completions have been built to the Housing for Varying Needs standard (the percentage would be in the high nineties) and therefore could be made suitable for wheelchair users if required. Last year, in 2014/15, we estimate a total of 163 completions of which 18 were for specialist provision (comprising 1 wheelchair designed unit; 16 disabled adapted units; and 2 special needs properties), amounting to 11% of the annual total.

Overall, we estimate that around 15.6% of the total social rented stock in Argyll and Bute (1,285) comprises specialist provision, including “other specially adapted” units as defined by the RSLs. It should be noted that a number of Amenity and Sheltered units will also be wheelchair accessible in addition to those purpose designed or specially adapted properties. This estimate does not include figures for the “Stage 3” adaptations to existing RSL stock (which has averaged around 290 properties per annum) and would be in addition to the above totals.

- **How many people within your local authority area are (i) on a waiting list for disabled friendly housing; and (ii) are accommodated with disabled friendly housing?**

- (i) The Council and the main local RSLs in Argyll and Bute operate a common housing register, HOMEArgyll, while the specialist, national RSLs with stock in this authority

operate separate waiting lists or have some other referral arrangements for the allocation of their properties.

The level of duplication/overlap across these lists is unknown, but it is assumed that a small proportion of applicants will have applied to different RSLs.

HOMEArgyll - In 2014 there were a total of 3,338 applicants on the chr lists of which 189 (5.6%) identified themselves as disabled. However, annual RSL returns indicate that only 171 applicants (5%) had requested some form of specialist accommodation - 115 for amenity housing and 56 for sheltered housing. There appear to be no applicants who have specified wheelchair accessible properties.

Bield Housing Association had a waiting list of 81 applicants for its sheltered and amenity homes in Argyll & Bute last year, of which 36 were considered disabled.

Trust Housing Association had 31 applicants for their properties in Argyll and Bute last year of which 11 were considered to be disabled. 14 applicants were for amenity homes; 13 for sheltered housing; and 4 general needs.

Blackwood Housing Association had 14 applicants in total for properties in Argyll & Bute, of which 5 sought wheelchair properties; 3 sought mobility homes; 4 sought general needs/mobility accommodation; and 2 sought general needs only.

- (ii) We are currently collating and verifying RSL returns for 2014/15, therefore the last full year's information available at the moment relates to 2013/14. The Council estimates that 216 households were accommodated in specialist housing that year (143 via the local HOMEArgyll RSLs and 73 via the specialist national RSLs). This amounted to 21% of the total RSL lets during that year. The breakdown by housing type is summarised in the following table. (Again, it should be noted that a number of properties other than those specifically designated "wheelchair" will be accessible for wheelchair users and the majority of these properties would be considered "disabled friendly").

RSL LETS 2013/14 by Type of Provision	
Mainstream	801
amenity	69
sheltered/ retirement	103
Very sheltered	3
Extra Care	23
Supported	4
Ambulant Disabled	3
Medium Dependency	6
Wheelchair	2
total	1014

Source: Annual RSL Returns, 2014

According to the available data, therefore, we do not believe there is a significant backlog of unmet need for wheelchair or "disabled-friendly" accommodation in general in this authority; and through the existing SHIP process we will continue to

strive to deliver appropriate new build developments as required to address all local needs.

Yours sincerely

Allan Brandie
Research & Development Officer
Housing Services
Argyll & Bute Council