

PE1554/J

North Lanarkshire Council Email of 28 April 2015

Consideration of petition PE1554

I refer to your letter dated 1 April regarding the above and on behalf of North Lanarkshire Council would respond as follows:

What are your Local Authority's views on what the petition seeks?

It is evident that the overall growth in households across North Lanarkshire and components of demographic change will lead to increased demand for more accessible housing across all tenures. We are therefore supportive of the objective to increase the provision of housing that is accessible and easier to adapt for people with a range of needs, including physical disabilities, as reflected in our Local Housing Strategy.

More accessible housing will be required however both within the existing stock and new build provision. It is important to acknowledge that new build provision, although vitally important, is not the only solution to improving the provision of disabled-friendly housing and that investment in existing stock and other areas, such as access to good housing information and advice at the right time are equally as important in achieving improved provision and access to housing that meets needs. Therefore, as well as investing in new, accessible housing, we also prioritise resources to help people with disabilities remain in their own homes by funding adaptations to our own stock, and providing grant assistance to owners to undertake adaptation work. We also provide information, advice and support to people with disabilities regarding their housing options through our Joint Equipment and Adaptations Service and 'Making Life Easier' which is a web based self assessment tool to help people easily access minor adaptations and equipment to help them live independently.

All Council and Housing Association new build homes are built to meet 'Housing for Varying Needs Standards' (HVNS) and this helps ensure that all social rented new build homes are adaptable to changing households needs and are capable of meeting many different households needs, such as families with young children, older people, as well as people with disabilities. We are confident that this standard provides us with new build homes that meet a wide range of needs.

Although the revised building standards have improved accessibility, the standards that are applied in the private sector fall short of the Housing for Varying Needs Standards that are applied in the social rented sector. Given that the majority of new build homes are in the private sector it is important that any consideration of

accessibility standards addresses the need to improve the accessibility and adaptability of private sector new build housing to bring standards closer to full Housing for Varying Needs Standards. This could have cost savings for the public sector in the long run if people are able to remain in their own homes for longer and/or the cost of any adaptation work required is reduced because the house is easier to adapt.

It has been some time since the Housing For Varying Needs Standards were last reviewed, and this may be something the Scottish Government may wish to undertake, possibly in conjunction with a review of current Building Regulations, to consider if the accessibility standards for new build housing could be further improved. However the cost implications of any increased standards for affordable housing would have to be taken into consideration given the current public sector funding constraints. There does appear to have been a shift in emphasis in recent years from improving accessibility standards to increasing energy efficiency and sustainability standards, and although these things should not be mutually exclusive, there possibly needs to be a renewed focus on accessibility standards before any further increases to sustainability standards are considered.

In respect of setting a 10% target of all new homes to be built to full wheelchair accessibility standards, although we agree there is a need for additional full wheelchair standard houses, we believe the emphasis should be focussed on more locally based targets that reflect local population needs rather than a blanket national target. This is in line with the partnership approach of health and social care integration across statutory services and third and voluntary sectors to better identify the needs of their local populations to help support people at home for longer. Establishing the need for new wheelchair standard housing is not straightforward, as often the preferred approach is to adapt a household's existing home, or households who may need to move to purpose built accommodation may not be known to the housing authority at the time when a new build development is planned. We are therefore continuing to work with our partner agencies at a local level to improve how we plan and deliver the range of services, including new build wheelchair housing, to meet local needs. In terms of housing built to full wheelchair standards it should be noted that the development cost of such housing is significantly higher than for mainstream housing, largely because of the plot size such housing takes up. If an arbitrary 10% target was set on all affordable housing sites, because clearly no such standard can be set on private sites, then this could affect the financial viability of some sites, and would require an increase in grant subsidy by the Scottish Government. It is also the case that some sites are unsuitable for wheelchair bungalows, e.g town centre sites where limited or remote parking, or due to topography.

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

As highlighted earlier in this response, it should be noted that all new build social housing is built to HVNS, and we currently use the new build stock to meet a range of needs. For example, with some minor adaptation, our Amenity bungalows are suitable for wheelchair users and we have a 2 storey house type which has a ground floor bedroom and wet room and is suitable for larger households with a family member who is a wheelchair user. Therefore the number of houses built to 'full' wheelchair standards may not provide an accurate reflection of the number of houses suitable for people with a disability, including wheelchair users. In terms of the percentage of new build social rented homes (council and RSL) built to 'full' wheelchair standards, for the period 2011/12 – 2014/15 there were 13 full wheelchair standard units completed, which was just under 2% of all completions. However it should be noted that if amenity bungalows and houses with ground floor wheelchair standard accommodation are included, then this figure rises to 7%. The equivalent figure for private sector completions is not available as this information is not recorded, locally or nationally.

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

- (i) As at 31/03/15 we had 399 applicants on the Common Housing Register (CHR) waiting list who have requested Wheelchair standard housing, these applicants have asked for housing by either the council or any of our partner landlords in the CHR. We also have 434 applicants on our waiting lists who have requested amenity housing, which is housing that will have some low level adaptations to meet the requirements of people with some additional needs. Removing the duplicates where people who have requested consideration for both types of housing means we have 720 applicants who have requested wheelchair standard / amenity housing in the area.
- (ii) In response to the second part of this question unfortunately we are unable to provide a figure for the number of people within the local authority area who are currently accommodated within disabled friendly housing as we do not currently hold a record of all properties in all tenures within the local authority that have been built or adapted to meet the requirements of disabled occupants. Even if this information was available this would not necessarily mean that this housing is currently occupied by someone with a disability.

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