

# Housing Development and Homelessness

## Briefing Note

Still Minding the Step

May 2018



## **Introduction**

Welcome to a series of regular briefings prepared by the Housing Development and Homelessness team on the big issues concerning housing. These briefings will be shared with staff, tenants and elected members and keep everyone up to date with regards the ever changing policy context that we are operating within.

The Housing Development and Homelessness section is responsible for:-

- Providing the statutory Strategic Housing Authority role within the local authority area;
- Strategic Housing Asset Management delivery;
- The delivery of the Council House New Build Programme and the delivery of the affordable Housing supply programme;
- Supporting the development of a culture of continuous improvement in Housing Services and to facilitate opportunities to excel;
- Developing and implementing effective strategies for all Housing Services within West Dunbartonshire;
- Developing the Council's housing strategy to ensure that it supports the delivery of our strategic priorities;
- Ensuring the meeting of statutory responsibilities under the Scottish Social Housing Charter, including compliance with the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework;
- The wider service development role across Housing Services including co-ordinating benchmarking activities and customer feedback opportunities in order to improve services and to ensuring compliance with new legislation and guidance relevant to the sector;
- Tenant Participation and Involvement covering all of our statutory responsibilities, including supporting Tenants and Residents Groups as well as developing our wider Tenant Scrutiny activities across all aspects of Housing Services;
- The delivery of homelessness and homelessness prevention services with a key role in tackling poverty and inequality in West Dunbartonshire through implementing a range of services to prevent and alleviate homelessness;
- The Integrated Housing Project including the successful implementation of an Integrated Housing Management System; and
- The Refugee Resettlement programme.

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## **Background**

“Still Minding the Step” is the second publication from Horizon Housing and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) on the issue of under provision of suitable wheelchair accessible homes in Scotland. It is a reminder 6 years on that there is still a long way to go to meet the estimated demand of suitable accessible homes in the future. Over 17,200 wheelchair users in Scotland do not have a suitable home and this unmet need is set to increase by 80% by 2024, taking the increase in unmet needs from 17,226 to 31,007 households by that date.

Between 2014 – 2039, it is forecast there will be an 85% increase in the number of people in Scotland over 75 years of age, equating to an extra 370,000 people many of whom will have health and long term conditions, or simply frailty, giving rise to a growth in wheelchair use inside and outside of the home. Mobility device usage will also increase and the use of these requires similar space requirements to those of wheelchair users. There is, therefore, a definite need for innovation and design in the layout of new homes to the needs of the future are met.

## **Main issues**

New housing supply has on average only provided homes to wheelchair standard in approximately 1.07% of all new completions and 3.4% of the new affordable housing supply completions. Meeting the growing demand is largely left to the affordable homes sector, meaning that disabled people and their households have less choice within the housing market than non-disabled households. It is positive that local authorities are looking at the long term housing needs of their residents, however, more needs to be done by the housing sector as a whole in order to meet this growing demand.

The report makes 9 recommendations:

1. The Scottish Government should set and monitor a national guideline target for 10% of new homes to be wheelchair user standard.
2. Local authorities should set and monitor targets for the provision of new and adapted homes to wheelchair user standard.
3. Policies and guidance should require that Local Housing Strategies plan for wheelchair standard housing as an explicit element within mainstream housing planning; with specialist housing as an additional consideration.
4. The Scottish Government should introduce a ‘wheelchair space standard’ subsidy to its grants benchmarks.
5. Strategic commissioners and investment planners in housing, health and social care, including Integrated Joint Boards, should apply a three tier approach to meeting needs.
6. The Scottish Government should consider a national funding support mechanism to enable wheelchair user’s households, including current home owners, to buy suitable or adaptable homes.

7. The Scottish Government should review guidance to local authorities on the use of the Scheme of Assistance and extend the Housing Options approach.
8. Clearer and nationally applied definitions should be developed for different levels of accessible homes, related to review and development of consistent and up to date design standards which apply across all tenures.
9. The Scottish Government, local authorities, health bodies and housing providers should invest in addressing the data gaps.

### **A Three Tiered Approach**

The circumstances of wheelchair users are diverse and, in order to tackle this, the report recommends a three tiered approach to addressing need, which should include the design and supply of new homes, adaptations and effective allocation of adapted rented housing.

#### **Accessible Homes – Supply & Design**

Building regulations (2004 and as amended 2017) introduced a number of accessibility requirements for all new homes, including level access and space on the ground floor to convert a WC into a shower area. Before this, the design of Scotland's homes routinely had steps to the front door and tended towards maximizing the number of rooms, often at the expense of space which reduced accessibility and adaptability.

The initial report by Horizon Housing and CIH called 'Our Place, Our Space' called for 10% of all new homes to be built to wheelchair housing space standards, distinguishing this from the importance of all new housing being to inclusive design standards, such as Housing for Varying Needs.

The Scottish Government has committed to investing £3bn to build 50,000 affordable homes over the next 5 years, yet there is no explicit commitment in its Joint Housing Delivery Plan (2015) to ensure that a proportion of the new homes are provided with design & space standards to meet the needs of wheelchair users into the future. In 2016, there was an increase in grant levels for social housing and supply is starting to respond in this sector, however, wheelchair user housing continues to be negotiated on a site by site basis.

#### **Adapting Existing Homes**

The Scottish Government policy is to support independent living and enable people to stay in their homes for as long as they want and are able to do so. The principles identified as being fundamental to the delivery of adaptations services are: self-direction, person centeredness, prevention and enablement. The experience of disabled people seeking adaptations varies between tenures and funding conditions.

## Allocation of Adapted Housing

Allocating adapted properties in the social rented sector is important to help tackle the housing needs of disabled residents in the community. The pilot study in effectiveness in letting adapted social housing 'Matching Up' states the allocation process in these circumstances needs to be more inclusive of the applicant, with the disability to empower them more and meet their needs. The report also highlights how developing a register of adapted properties may help this.

The report looked at all 32 local housing strategies and stated a quarter of local authorities do not specifically plan for housing to a wheelchair standard. It highlights the importance of arriving at a national assessment, as there is not a standard definition of what is meant by accessible housing. The term 'particular needs' is used as a catch all, which obscures the degree to which design and space to wheelchair user standard has been provided and is required.

Greater supply in all tenures of homes to inclusive design standards, with improved housing for varying needs or lifetime homes standards is necessary, but too often this is combined with housing which is suitable for wheelchairs. There are too many instances of people with complex needs – including those using a wheelchair – effectively living in hospital because suitable alternatives in the community are not available.

The report is therefore not only useful for Housing staff but also Health and Social Care, where pressures and costs will also increase if wheelchair users have to live in inappropriate housing. There is a large human impact of not getting this right.

### **What it means for West Dunbartonshire**

WDC is already looking to move towards this three tiered approach by ensuring that projects included within the SHIP have a notional 10% element of specialist housing provision included. In most cases this is identified as specialist wheelchair. Where specialist elements are being included in new build properties, particular households are identified through our waiting list and in consultation with HSCP.

Our approach to the provision of this form of housing is a client centred one, with the design of the property, where possible, being tailored to the needs of the prospective tenant.

Planned provision of specialist wheelchair housing in the current SHIP is summarised in the table below:

<b>New Housing –Specialist Wheelchair Provision SHIP Years 1-3 2017/18 - 2020 (All houses at least meet Housing for Varying Needs Standard)</b>			
<b>Project</b>	<b>Total Units</b>	<b>Specialist Provision - Wheelchair Units</b>	<b>Est Completion Date</b>
Second Avenue/Singer St, Clydebank <b>WDC</b>	39	1 Specialist Wheelchair bungalow	Early 2018

St Andrew's, Clydebank <b>WDC</b>	68	8 proposed	Est late 2019
Former Bingo Hall, Radnor Park <b>Clydebank HA</b>	40	4	late 17/18
Dumbarton Harbour Phase 2 <b>Dunbritton HA</b>	47	5	Est 19/20
Dumbain/Carrochan Road Haldane <b>Dunbritton HA</b>	35	3	<i>Est 18/19</i>

### **West Dunbartonshire Design Standard for New Affordable Housing**

West Dunbartonshire Council has also introduced a Design Standard for all new homes supported by the affordable housing supply programme requiring that they meet higher energy efficiency and encourages better design, particularly in respect of accessibility and floorspace. The Design Standard is being reviewed this summer with a view to a report being made to Housing and Communities Committee in August 2018. An increase in the fully wheelchair accessible requirement is one of the considerations of the review.

Two Housing Occupational Therapists have been employed to ensure that assessments are being carried out for West Dunbartonshire Council tenants requiring adaptations to enable them to continue living in their homes. The new allocations policy also aims to ensure that adapted properties are only allocated to those tenants who require the adaptations. If no suitable applicant requiring the adaptation is on the list at the point of allocation, the property can be utilised for temporary accommodation until an applicant requiring the adaptation comes on to the housing waiting list.

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