

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Housing and

disabled people

Wales's hidden crisis

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Introduction

The issue

Housing is the cornerstone of independent living, yet many disabled people live in homes that do not meet their requirements. If disabled people are to have choice and control over their lives – then urgent action is required to make sure that current and future housing supply is accessible for all.

The importance of housing is recognised in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which includes ‘the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate housing’.

The right to independent living has also been central to this inquiry: it is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), by which the UK Government is legally bound.

Following its review of Britain's disability rights record in August 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlighted concerns that the situation in Britain was deteriorating in terms of disabled people's right to live independently and be included in the community (UNCRPD Article 19), and that there were insufficient accessibility standards in the UK in relation to affordable housing (UNCRPD Article 9) (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2017).

Wales has a higher proportion of disabled people than any other region or country of the UK - 26 per cent (ONS Family Resources Survey 2015/16). In 2015, Welsh Government statistics showed that there were 112,887 people in Wales who were over 65 and had a mobility impairment. This figure is projected to rise by 58 per cent by 2035 (Welsh Government, Daffodil projections).

The testimony and evidence that we gathered highlighted the impact of inaccessible housing and the challenges that finding appropriate housing has on disabled people's right to independent living. This, coupled with the demographic trends, means that action is needed now to address the housing needs of disabled people in Wales.

The inquiry

In December 2016, the Equality and Human Rights Commission ('the Commission') launched a formal inquiry ('the inquiry') on housing for disabled people across Britain. The inquiry examined whether the availability of accessible and adaptable housing, and the support services associated with it, fulfilled disabled people's rights to independent living.

The principle of independent living recognises that disabled people are best placed to identify and promote improvements in housing and support. The approach of the inquiry was, therefore, to gather evidence from disabled people, and seek their views on housing.

Our approach

Our inquiry has drawn on a wide range of sources, including a 'call for evidence' from disabled people and organisations that represent them, as well as housing providers. We held events with disabled tenants to capture their experiences of housing. We interviewed a range of individuals and organisations with an interest and expertise in the field of accessible and adaptable housing. We commissioned research to capture the lived experience of disabled people, conducted literature reviews, and a survey of local authorities across Great Britain. Some of the statistics on Welsh authorities quoted in this report, drawn from this survey, come from an in-house analysis of the data. Therefore not all the statistics quoted appear in the published report of that survey.

The context in Wales

Housing law and policy is devolved to Wales and, over a number of years, the policy and legislative context has diverged from that in England and Scotland. The National Assembly for Wales has passed a number of pieces of legislation relating to housing, including the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This places duties on local authorities to prevent homelessness and creates a licensing system for landlords. The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 aims to make the process of renting a home easier and more secure, and the Abolition of the Rights to Buy and Associated Rights (Wales) Act 2018 will abolish the right to buy by 26 January 2019.

While the Welsh Government has passed a number of pieces of housing-related legislation in recent years, there has been little reference to accessible and adaptable housing or supporting the needs of disabled people and their right to independent living.

The main priority for housing policy in Wales currently relates to the provision of affordable homes. The Welsh Government has set an ambitious target to build 20,000 new affordable homes by 2021. There is no specific target set within the 20,000 homes figure for how many should be accessible homes; however, 13,500 of the new affordable homes will be built by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and local authorities as part of a Housing Pact signed between the Welsh Government and these sectors. The Welsh Government's Development Quality Requirements require that all new social housing funded by Welsh Government is built to Lifetime Homes Standard.

“Housing that is designed to the Lifetime Homes Standard will be convenient for most occupants, including some (but not all) wheelchair users and disabled visitors, without the necessity for substantial alterations.”

[\(Lifetime Homes\)](#)

There have been other legislative drivers for housing and housing-related support policy in Wales.

[The Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. One well-being goal is a more equal Wales, where everyone can reach their potential. The Act offers the potential to improve services and support for disabled people in Wales.

[The Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) sets out the duties on local authorities, relating specifically to support services for disabled people, and regarding the choice and control disabled people should be able to exercise over support, including where and with whom to live. The [statutory guidance](#) says that: 'when exercising social services functions in relation to disabled people who need care and support and disabled carers who need support, local authorities must have due regard to the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.'

The Welsh Government has adopted a [Framework for Action on Independent Living](#) published in 2013. The Framework aims to fulfil the Welsh Government's obligations arising from the UN CRPD. It includes commitments to improve access to adapted and accessible housing for disabled people and encourages the development of Accessible Housing Registers. The Framework has not driven significant change for disabled people in its current form and is currently being refreshed.

Accessible housing and housing-related support is critically important for disabled people, to enable them to live independent lives, with autonomy, dignity and equality of opportunity. Our evidence suggests that for too many disabled people in Wales, these rights are being denied.

The need to build more accessible and adaptable homes

Disabled people require accessible housing that is appropriate for their needs. For some people this can be minor adaptations, while for others the adaptations may be more significant, such as a ramp to the front door. Ensuring these adaptations and creating accessible homes enables disabled people to live independently, comfortably and with dignity.

Twenty-six per cent of the population of Wales is disabled (ONS Family Resources Survey 2015/16) and this figure is projected to rise significantly in the future. Welsh Government population projections show that the number of people over 65 with mobility problems will increase by 58 per cent by 2035 (Wales Audit Office, 2018). Over 250,000 adults in Wales have a mobility impairment, which is more than 10 per cent of all adults in Wales (Leonard Cheshire, 2014).

With an ageing population and the number of disabled people increasing, the demand for accessible and adaptable homes is going to significantly increase in the coming years. Unless action is taken to address this, disabled people will increasingly be subjected to living in homes, places or contexts that deny them their right to independent living.

Impact on disabled people of living in inaccessible homes

Disabled people shared with us their stories of the impact that living in inaccessible homes had on their lives. We heard about the long waits to be allocated an accessible home due to a scarcity of options in their area. People told us that when properties became available, there was very limited choice and it could mean having to move out of your community and away from support networks of family and friends.

"The person I care for has debilitating and increasing difficulty with mobility. Were we to move, the extremely limited housing choices in our rural area almost guarantee a reduction in independence."

Call for evidence respondent

We heard testimony from people who told us of the impact that living in inaccessible property had on their day-to-day lives.

"I am unable to independently access the first floor or the kitchen appliances. The bathroom is too small so I can't use the toilet. I am currently sleeping in what should be the dining room so don't have much privacy. I can't care for my own young daughter if she is ill as I can't access her bedroom. I can't access the back door."

Call-for-evidence respondent

We heard from parents with disabled children of the impact on the family and carers of living in properties that don't meet their needs.

"I have to carry her (daughter) up the stairs if she needs the toilet. I also have to be upstairs while she bathes to get her in and out and to wash her when she is bad. This affects my physical ability and hurts my back a lot. My girl also wants to be independent but can't get in or out of the bath."

Call-for-evidence respondent

During the inquiry, disabled people repeatedly told us about the problems they face in obtaining an accessible home that meets their needs to live independently. We heard about the long waits disabled people face to be allocated a property that matches their needs; in some cases up to and over five years. This is an issue that was also acknowledged in the evidence we received from housing providers.

Increasing the supply of accessible and adaptable homes

Increasing the supply of accessible and adaptable homes will require action and policy at both national and local government level. It will be determined by making improvements to planning policy, building standards, data collection, collaboration, long-term planning and the involvement of disabled people.

Since 2011, Building Regulations which govern both private and public sector developments have been devolved to the Welsh Government, but no major changes have been made.

The Welsh Government has taken action to ensure that the social housing that it directly funds is built to meet some accessibility and adaptability criteria, through the Development Quality Requirements. These requirements mean that all new publicly-funded houses meet the Lifetime Homes Standard. The Welsh Government has not taken any such action to introduce higher standards of accessibility for building developments in the private sector.

Building Regulations in Wales

Part M – Access to and use of buildings – requires that ‘reasonable provision [should] be made for people to gain access to and use [a] building and its facilities.’ This means that all new homes should ensure level access, have bathroom facilities on the ground floor, and be adaptable.

The UK Government’s own assessment is that when building to the Building Regulations in England, the Part M4(2) standard increases construction costs by £1,100 per home (DCLG, 2014). For smaller one- to two-bedroom houses, there is generally more land required for each house to accommodate a bigger entrance hall, stairs and downstairs toilet. Part M4(2) is broadly equivalent to the Lifetime Homes Standard, incorporating 14 of the 16 criteria.

In England, Part M4(3) of the Building Regulations provides for a fully wheelchair-accessible standard, and includes space for a through-floor lift. No such building standard or regulation exists in Wales.

To retrofit adaptations to a house that has been built to more basic standards is typically complex and expensive and, in extreme cases, can exceed the value of rebuilding the house from scratch. A private developer told the inquiry that they thought that increased building costs associated with building to Part M4(2) would be negligible in the longer term if it became the industry standard.

Development Quality Requirements

The Welsh Government’s Development Quality Requirements require that all new social housing funded by the Welsh Government is built to the Lifetime Homes Standard. The Lifetime Homes Standard is a set of 16 design criteria.

“Designing dwellings to these standards will result in homes that are accessible and convenient for all tenants and that are more adaptable to long term needs. It will ensure dwellings are accessible for the young, the old, single people, families and those who acquire a physical impairment.”

(Welsh Government, 2005)

Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)

The Welsh Government's WHQS requires all social landlords to improve their housing stock to an acceptable level by 2020. Part VII of the document makes clear the need to ensure that, as far as possible, accommodation meets the need of the household, including the requirements of disabled people.

As of 31 March 2017, 86 per cent of social housing in Wales was compliant with the WHQS (Welsh Government, 2017). A number of disabled people we spoke with were positive about the improvements made to their homes under the WHQS.

Case study

Normally, only Welsh Government-funded new social housing is required to be compliant with the Development Quality Requirements. In Newport Council, the Requirements have been written into the local planning policy for Housing Associations. When Housing Associations develop TAN2-compliant affordable housing, including low-cost home ownership, intermediate rent and shared ownership, there is a requirement for it to be compliant with the Development Quality Requirements. This goes beyond Welsh Government compliance, by including tenures other than rented social housing.

Despite the Welsh Government's action through the Development Quality Requirements and the improvement of existing stock through WHQS, governments at national and local level, together with housing providers, agree that there is a significant undersupply of accessible housing. This means that too many disabled people are living in homes that do not meet their requirements.

If all new homes in Wales were built to the Development Quality Requirements, which meet the Lifetime Homes Standard, it would mean that the new housing stock in Wales would be futureproofed and adaptable to meet the changing needs of disabled people. This would have the potential to make significant savings on retrofitting inaccessible homes.

It is important to note that for some disabled people, homes built to the Lifetime Homes Standard will not meet their needs. For many wheelchair users, they will require purpose-designed, wheelchair-accessible homes. Urgent action is needed to ensure that the housing that is developed in the future is adaptable, that there is an adequate supply of accessible housing, and that housing meets the needs of a changing population.

Planning policy

National and local government have the opportunity through effective planning regimes to address the lack of accessible and adaptable housing.

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 9, November 2016) requires local planning authorities to include an authority-wide target for affordable housing, based on Local Housing Market Assessments. No such requirements exist for setting targets for the building of accessible and adaptable homes. Our survey of local authorities found that only one Welsh authority set such a target (EHRC, 2018).

Planning Policy Wales also sets out an expectation that planners should consider the diverse needs of people in their community.

“Local planning authorities and developers should consider the issue of accessibility for all, including the needs of people with sensory impairments, people with learning difficulties and people with mobility impairments, such as wheelchair users, elderly people and people with young children, at an early stage in the design process.”

In spite of this guidance, our inquiry found that many of the Welsh local planning authorities are not meeting these requirements. Disabled people and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) raised concern about the extent to which local authorities consulted and involved disabled people in planning.

In 2018, the Welsh Government began a consultation to revise the Planning Policy Wales guidance to reflect the requirements under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This Act requires the listed public bodies to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the people of Wales. The 'five ways of working' set out in the Act requires public bodies to:

- balance the long-term impact of their decisions against short-term need
- act to prevent problems occurring or becoming worse
- work collaboratively
- involve people with an interest, and
- ensure they integrate the wellbeing goals into the objectives they set.

Applying the duties and 'five ways of working' in the Act to planning policy could be a good way to address the shortage of accessible and adaptable housing. Disabled people are the experts in determining their own needs and in promoting better solutions, so involving disabled people at the strategic and operational housing decision stage will have a positive effect. This will also follow the first two 'ways of working', as investment in accessible and adaptable homes will have positive

benefits in the long term because the costs to services, such as the NHS and social care, will go down as a result of disabled people being more likely and able to live independently.

The evidence gaps

Unlike in England and Scotland, a Welsh Housing Conditions Survey has not been held since 1998 and, while the Living in Wales Survey contains some questions about housing quality, these are not as detailed as a housing survey. This means that the data on accessible and adaptable homes in Wales is inadequate.

It is a welcome development that the Welsh Government plans to conduct a new Welsh Housing Conditions Survey for 2017-18. This new data should help improve the state of accessible and adaptable housing in Wales.

Data held and published by the Welsh Government and local authorities about the number of disabled people living in Wales and their specific needs and impairments is poor. Only 15 per cent of local authorities rated the usefulness of the data they hold on who needs accessible homes as 'good' (EHRC, 2018). Most local authorities told us that they rely on this data for their key strategic documents, to provide evidence of the need for different types of housing, with only 26 per cent of authorities in Wales commissioning an in-house survey.

The lack of national and local evidence on the supply and demand for accessible and adaptable homes was cited as a major barrier to making effective plans to increase the supply.

“It would be useful if data could be collated by a third party on our behalf. Resource issues make it increasingly difficult to conduct robust local research to influence policy.”

Unitary authority, South Wales

We asked local authorities about the data that they held on the accessibility of market housing in their area, i.e. housing that is owner-occupied or rented housing, which is not used for the purpose of allocation to households applying to the local authority for help with housing. Thirty-eight per cent of local authorities said that the information that they held was 'very poor' or 'poor' on this type of property. Thirty-three per cent told us that they did not know what information was held (EHRC, 2018). This suggests that local authorities are relying on a weak evidence base when assessing the provision of housing in their area that is available to meet the needs of disabled people.

This could constitute a significant obstacle to constructing new accessible housing: if the local authority cannot prove a shortfall of accessible housing exists locally, they may find it more difficult to argue in negotiations that developers should provide it.

A significant number of local authorities agreed that it can be difficult to get developers to build accessible homes, as they are seen as more expensive and less profitable. Only 55 per cent of authorities in Wales agree that developers were compliant with accessibility regulations.

“Developers will only build accessible market homes to a higher standard (than) building regulations if they believe they can sell them at a price that considers the larger footprint and therefore the reduced density.”

Local authority, West Wales

What needs to change?

Local authorities in Wales have duties under Section 149 of the Equality Act (the Public Sector Equality Duty) to pay due regard to the needs of disabled people. In Wales, these duties are supported by specific duties that include requirements to engage with disabled people, conduct Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) and gather relevant information.

We heard from disabled people and stakeholder groups that local authorities do not effectively engage with them as they prepare their key strategic plans for housing. It is concerning that our survey found that only 55 per cent of local authorities say that they conduct an EIA on their Local Development Plan; only 20 per cent say that they carry out an EIA on their Local Housing Market Assessment; and only 15 per cent say that disabled people's housing needs are subject to specific discussion or scrutiny when conducting a Local Housing Market Assessment (EHRC, 2018).

Setting targets for accessible homes to be built in new developments, and mandating that all new homes are built to Development Quality Requirements, could be a way to ensure that we build the right types of homes that will meet the needs of disabled people in the future. We are also calling for 10 per cent of all new homes to be built to higher wheelchair-accessible standards.

If local authorities can provide robust evidence of a current and/or future requirement for accessible and/or adaptable housing, they are able, through the planning system, to require developers of new housing to deliver this (EHRC, 2018).

It is vital in the development of strategic housing plans and assessments that local authorities have access to, and make use of, robust data on the accessibility of their housing stock and the demand for this type of housing. Local authorities should engage more effectively with disabled people to better understand their requirements and aspirations, and to assess the impact of their decisions.

Recommendations

Independent living principles recognise that disabled people are the best experts in determining and promoting better solutions. Governments at national and local level need to be much more effective **in engaging disabled people** both strategically and operationally, in order to meaningfully reflect their input, in a continual cycle of improvement.

We are calling for:

- Welsh Government to introduce a national strategy to ensure there is an adequate supply of new houses built to inclusive/universal design standards and to wheelchair-accessible standards, across all tenures. This should include a review of the way that building standards are enforced, particularly in the private rented sector. The strategy should recognise that housing support, advice and advocacy is often necessary to enable people to maintain their housing and their right to independent living.
- National and local governments to take action to improve the way that data is collected and shared, both on the requirements of disabled people and on the accessibility of existing housing stock.
- Welsh Government to require all new homes are built to Development Quality Requirements and to mandate local authorities to ensure that 10 per cent of new homes are built to a wheelchair-accessible standard.
- Welsh Government to publish annual data on the number of accessible, adaptable and wheelchair-accessible homes built.
- Local authorities to apply the five ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in their strategic planning for accessible homes, in particular when developing Local Development Plans and Local Housing Market Assessments.
- Local authorities to publish Equality Impact Assessments alongside their Local Development Plans and Local Housing Market Assessment.

Improving the installation of home adaptations

Adaptations are crucial in supporting people so that they can live independently in their own homes. Although there are many examples of good practice in supplying and installing adaptations across Wales, disabled people find the process of making adaptations to be complex and slow.

Adapting a home can increase its usability and enable people to maintain their independence. Adaptations range from small and relatively inexpensive home modifications, such as a grab rail or a ramp to a door, flashing doorbells for people who have a hearing impairment or colour schemes for people with visual impairments, through to major adaptations, which include structural changes, such as a home extension to allow for a downstairs bathroom or bedroom.

Each year in Wales, around 70 organisations deliver adaptations to assist roughly 32,000 people. A recent review by the Wales Audit Office reported that this number had increased by 11.7 per cent between 2013-14 and 2015-16 (Wales Audit Office, 2018).

There has been increased policy interest in the benefits of home adaptations, particularly insofar as they can reduce health and social care costs. Timely provision of adaptations can result in considerable cost savings, as they help to avoid lengthy stays in hospital, or the need for more intensive housing options such as care homes (ODI, 2007). Care and Repair Cymru, who deliver minor adaptations up to the value of £350, estimate that for every £1 spent on its Rapid Response Adaptations programme a cost saving of £7.50 is made for the NHS and social care (Care and Repair Cymru, 2011). A New Zealand study estimated that 60 per cent of falls take place in the home, and found that relatively low-cost adaptations can reduce falls by around 26 per cent (Keall *et al.*, 2015).

Disabled people across Wales, England and Scotland reported very similar issues with adaptations. We heard many examples of adaptations having a positive effect on people's lives. This reflects findings in a recent report by the Wales Audit Office that found that 'approximately three quarters of people we surveyed who recently

received a housing adaptation have a positive experience...’ (Wales Audit Office, 2018).

Funding adaptations

Disabled people and DPOs across all three nations reported a number of problems with the adaptations systems that are in place. There was a perception that funds had run out. Disabled people believed that budget cuts had impacted on local authorities’ ability to respond to their needs. Over half of local authorities in Wales – 52 per cent – cited a lack of available funding as a major challenge (EHRC, 2018).

In Wales, there are a number of grants that fund adaptations for different tenures, all of which are encompassed within one system called Enable – Support for Independent Living, introduced by the Welsh Government in 2017. The system, as described by the Welsh Government, is intended to enable disabled and other people to better access adaptations funding with just three broad levels of assistance:

- ‘Small’, e.g. grab rails and stair rails.
- ‘Medium’, e.g. adaptations such as walk-in showers, stair lifts and ramps.
- ‘Large’, e.g. adaptations which require major structural changes to a property and/or extensions to it.

The funding streams for adaptations in Wales include:

- the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), which is available to owner-occupiers, private sector tenants and landlords, and some social housing tenants. It is the main source of funding adaptations in Wales, accounting for 55 per cent of all expenditure (Wales Audit Office, 2018)
- the Physical Adaptations Grant (PAG), which is a Welsh Government fund of £8m per year, available for tenants of RSLs
- the Rapid Response Adaptation programme, which is funded by Welsh Government and delivered by Care and Repair Cymru for owner-occupiers and private sector tenants and landlords
- some adaptations funded by the maintenance programmes of local authorities and Housing Associations.

Obtaining an adaptation – a complex system

Disabled people told us that the system for obtaining an adaptation was complex and confusing. Access to different funding streams depended on the tenure of your home, and depended on the status of your landlord if you lived in social housing. A

lack of information and advice on how to navigate the system was often cited as a barrier.

We heard from disabled people and DPOs that there were inequities in the system for receiving adaptations. Access to funding for adaptations could depend on the tenure of your housing. DFG funding is means tested with an upper limit of £36,000, while there is no means test for the Welsh Government's PAG. The result of this can be that disabled people with similar needs receive different responses depending on the tenure of their home or the status of their landlords. People told us that the experience will differ between local authorities.

Our inquiry found that there is a reluctance among disabled people to ask private landlords for adaptations – reasons included a lack of knowledge on both sides about the funding available and the process involved, confusion over who is responsible for maintaining the adaptation if it has been funded through a grant to the tenant, and the degree of flexibility of the local authority regarding DFG assessment criteria, which can sometimes affect the likelihood of getting a home adapted.

“I sleep downstairs and I'm unable to access upstairs bathroom often, only downstairs toilet. My landlord will not permit changes to the property so I'm unable to have grab rails which are needed and other aids, again, making me more dependent on carers and limiting my independence.”

Call-for-evidence respondent

There are potential opportunities in Wales through the licensing schemes introduced by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This legislation introduced a compulsory registration and licensing scheme, Rent Smart Wales, for private rented sector landlords, which includes training. The Rent Smart Wales scheme could be used to promote and inform landlords about the funding schemes and benefits of adaptations.

Waiting times and delays

Disabled people told us of the long delays they experienced in receiving the adaptations they require to support them to live independently. We found that there were many factors that could cause delays.

People told us of the long waits they experienced in obtaining assessments by Occupational Therapists (OTs), who recommend the appropriate adaptation. It was

widely acknowledged by providers and recipients that Occupational Therapy services were stretched, leading to delays.

The Wales Audit Office report found that 64 per cent of landlords stated that they experienced delays as a result of Welsh Government approval for PAG funding; however, housing providers told us that PAGs worked more efficiently than the DFGs, which matches the findings of previous reviews.

Work is underway through the Welsh Government's ENABLE programme to introduce more equitable standards and waiting times based on the level of adaptation rather than the grant needed.

Our survey of local authorities asked about the timeframe within which applications were approved, and then the adaptations actually installed under the DFG system.

Of those with data available, 47 per cent of Welsh local authorities said that they typically delivered a decision within six weeks (EHRC, 2018). Once approved, the adaptation must be installed, a process usually organised via the local authority. Only 21 per cent of Welsh local authorities reported that they completed an adaptation in eight weeks. The average wait from application to installation in Wales is 18 weeks (EHRC, 2018).

Collaborating with disabled people to improve adaptations

Disabled people reported to us that they had experienced problems with adaptations being installed. We heard from disabled people about their experience of adaptations being installed incorrectly, leading to further delays in receiving the adaptations. DPOs told us that the quality of adaptations can depend on who is contracted to deliver the adaptations and the awareness among contractors of disabled people's needs.

Disabled people told us that they didn't feel that they were engaged by their landlords when adaptations are being made. Many people felt that if that engagement had happened at an early stage the works would be completed more efficiently. People noted that as well as delaying the adaptation, this was an additional financial cost to the landlord. DPOs reported that this was a particular issue for small-scale adaptations in general social housing

The best and quickest results can be seen where housing departments have their own OTs who assess disabled people's needs for adaptations or OTs are employed within Accessible Housing Register. We heard that where this was in place the benefits to disabled people and local authorities included the right person being

matched to right property; maximising the use of resources; fewer refusals; and reduced demand on social care and health services.

The role of advice and information

We found housing advice and support to be patchy and inconsistent. People living in social housing are much more likely to be aware of sources of advice, support and information regarding adaptations than home-owners or those living in private rented accommodation. However, we heard from a number of disabled people that they faced problems accessing good information and advice to support them in applying for adaptations. Access to information and advice was particularly cited as an issue for disabled people with sensory loss, who found that landlords were increasingly unable to provide communication support or alternative formats to enable advice to be accessed.

The recent report by the Wales Audit Office (2018), 'Housing Adaptations', identified similar problems stating that 'Accessible information in a range of appropriate formats, such as large fonts for visually impaired users or audio versions for people with hearing difficulties, is often unavailable' (p.9).

What needs to change?

Delivery of adaptations at a local authority level needs to improve, as disabled people wait too long for assessment and installation of adaptations.

Service delivery also improves where multi-disciplinary teams work together and involve disabled people effectively in decision-making.

Local authorities need to publicise DFGs better and address the commonly held misunderstanding that 'there is no money', which can lead people to assume there is no point in seeking advice and support. Advice and advocacy needs to be provided, to help disabled people across all types of tenure.

Renting in the private sector is particularly challenging for disabled people. Private-sector landlords and letting agents in Wales require up-to-date information on the law and policy concerning adaptations and reasonable adjustments. One way to ensure this would be to pilot some training for private sector landlords on accessibility as part of the Rent Smart Wales scheme.

Recommendations

We are calling for:

- Local authorities to urgently address the bureaucratic hurdles and delays that exist within adaptations systems, to ensure that low-cost, minor adaptations in particular can be installed quickly and easily.
- Welsh Government to provide additional funding to disabled people's organisations and advice agencies, to increase the supply of independent advice and information regarding housing options, including adaptations, with a particular focus on the private- rental sector.
- Welsh Government to pilot training for private sector landlords on accessibility as part of the Rent Smart Wales scheme, of licensing landlords and agents under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Matching homes to people who need them

Disabled people are overwhelmingly represented in social housing, because of its lower affordable rent, security of tenure and provision of support. But demand for social housing outstrips supply, and allocation policies and practices frequently disadvantage disabled people.

During the inquiry, disabled people shared with us their experiences and the challenges they faced in obtaining homes suitable for their needs. Many disabled people found the processes and systems to apply for accessible homes complex and difficult to navigate.

Disabled people tend to face a longer wait to be housed in suitable accommodation; this is acknowledged by housing providers. We heard in some instance of people waiting over five years to be appropriately housed. The scarcity of accessible and adapted properties, limited information and advice, and delays in being assessed were cited as key factors. Accessing advice and information is increasingly difficult particularly for people with sensory loss.

There is such a shortfall of social housing, and so few accessible or adapted properties, that it can take several years for disabled tenants to find appropriate accommodation. This is further compounded by a lack of information on what properties are accessible, a lack of detail regarding their adaptations, and pressure on applicants to accept unsuitable properties.

We heard from disabled people who felt that they had limited choice in terms of the properties they were offered. People felt they faced discrimination, particularly in the private rented sector, if they were in receipt of benefits.

"I'm in a situation where my council hasn't got anything for me, tells me that I can privately rent yet every time I look I get turned away for being on benefits. The stress is making me ill and I have 5 weeks to leave my current place with nowhere else to go."

Call-for-evidence respondent

Disabled people reported that they felt pressured to accept unsuitable properties, sometimes being asked to move away from their local communities, where they have support networks of families and friends. People are concerned that if they do not accept the properties offered they will be removed from housing lists.

“It was ‘this is what we are offering you. If you do not take it you will be taken off the list’, basically I was given no choice about it and I had a 13-year-old at the time. Yes we had no choice – we had to take it.”

Interviewee from the lived experience research

Some groups of disabled people faced additional challenges in applying and being matched to accessible homes. The prevalence of online application process, coupled with a lack of advice and advocacy services, mean for some people with learning disabilities applying for a home can be difficult. Disabled people are also more likely to be digitally excluded, which might be because of the inaccessibility of technology, that they lack internet access or have low levels of digital literacy. Seventy-five per cent of disabled people or those with a limiting long-standing illness or infirmity used the internet, compared with 90 per cent of those without such a condition (Welsh Government, 2017).

A major barrier in the allocation process is a lack of engagement with disabled people and misunderstanding on the part of local authorities of their needs. This can be exacerbated for people with mental health conditions. Individuals can face a huge amount of stigma from housing providers because of misconceptions and stereotypes. Research indicates that this additional stress can often aggravate or even cause mental health conditions (Mind, 2017).

There is little understanding of the different types of support that people with learning disabilities may require to live independently. We heard that people with learning disabilities are often allocated general needs accommodation, without account being taken for support they might require from friends and family, and of being housed in areas that would leave them isolated and potentially vulnerable to harassment.

How do allocations policies operate in practice?

The Welsh Government in its Framework for Action on Independent Living (2013) encourages local authorities in Wales to develop Accessible Housing Registers. These can be viewed simply as a list of suitable homes for disabled people with

particular access needs. They usually consist of a list of accessible properties, and/or a list of residents requiring accessible housing.

While in practice approaches vary, in the main part they are set up to give housing providers a way of categorising their properties so that applicants are better informed as to whether a property will meet their needs. This in turn helps housing providers make best use of their available stock.

Fifty-two per cent of local authorities in Wales use an Accessible Housing Register (EHRC, 2018). A 2016 survey found that the majority of local authorities in Wales felt that an Accessible Housing Register was very effective in meeting the needs of disabled people, and enabled them to make the best use of available resources and save money (Welsh Government, 2016).

We heard from a number of housing providers that they had to remove adaptations from some homes to enable them to be rented. This was because most adaptations are not wanted by non-disabled residents, both from an aesthetic point of view and because they do not meet their requirements. For example they want a bath, rather than a wet room. It was noted that there are considerable inefficiencies, because their allocations system cannot effectively match up availability with disabled people on the waiting list who require such an adaptation.

Stakeholders told us that while it was positive that many local authorities in Wales were operating or working to develop Accessible Housing Registers, their effectiveness varied. Guidance on what constitutes an effective Accessible Housing Register and monitoring their implementation and operation would drive improvement.

Wales, England and Scotland all have individual legislative frameworks, which set out the requirement for an allocation policy, and details about managing 'reasonable preference' when allocating properties. Reasonable preference means that certain groups will be given some priority on the waiting list for housing, but it does not necessarily mean that they will be treated as urgent cases.

Although all local authorities are required to have an allocations scheme, not all manage their own housing stock. Half of the authorities in Wales own their own stock. The vast majority retain responsibility for its allocation, often allocating housing in partnership with RSLs via housing registers or choice-based letting schemes. In some areas, local authorities and all RSLs allocate together via Common Housing Registers.

A Common Housing Register means that applicants only need to complete one form to be considered for social housing in their area. Applicants are then prioritised and

ranked according to the allocations policy operating in their area. In Choice-Based Lettings schemes, applicants bid for properties which become available.

Some individuals may be disadvantaged by Choice-Based Lettings because the approach relies on applicants actively bidding on properties, often without sufficient information on the accessibility of the property that is available. In addition, the reliance on online registration and provision also creates a barrier for some groups (Welsh Government, 2013).

In Wales, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places stronger duties on local authorities to prevent homelessness, allowing them to use suitable accommodation in the private sector. The Act identifies a number of groups as priority need, including some groups of disabled people. During our inquiry, we heard from housing providers that the new prevention duty had driven swifter action by local authorities to identify accommodation for some groups of disabled people.

Cardiff Accessible Homes Project – Accessible Housing Register

Cardiff Accessible Homes established in September 2002 is a central housing register for physically impaired people who want to move home. Accessible Homes works closely with its partners (the local authority and seven housing associations) to provide quality homes for people who are looking for adapted or accessible housing. Accessible Homes was originally funded by the Welsh Government but is now fully funded by its partners. The aim of the service is to enable available adapted and accessible properties to be best matched to those people who need them. The service offers re-housing, assessments, advice and support. This involves working in partnership with several agencies and organisations with a view to re-housing the client or obtaining an OT assessment in order for adaptations to be installed. The underlying objective of the service is to help disabled people re-locate/remain within the home and be maintained safely, securely and to continue to enjoy independent living.

Assessment of housing need

To match disabled people to suitable homes, local authorities need to assess applicants' specific requirements.

In our survey of local authorities, they were asked to indicate the ways in which they assess the housing needs of disabled people who require an accessible home. A significant number of authorities in Wales, around two-thirds, use in-house assessors with specific training to deal with applications from disabled people. Thirty per cent of

authorities in Wales use the advice of external OTs compared with an average of 60 per cent of authorities in Great Britain (EHRC, 2018).

For a fifth (20 per cent) of authorities, better engagement, collaboration and cooperation between organisations would help them better understand the housing needs of disabled people. A further 20 per cent of authorities reported that better evidence on the housing needs of disabled people and the demand for accessible housing would help (EHRC, 2018). This was particularly pertinent for disabled people with less visible impairments, whose needs are not always immediately apparent.

During our inquiry we found good practice, and this is often where there are dedicated disability teams or specialists within housing departments, and links with other health and social care professionals. In particular, they help to ensure that information on the accessibility of available properties is more thoroughly assessed and communicated, so that applicants can make an informed choice when bidding.

Waiting times

Once an individual has managed to negotiate the housing application and assessment process, they then face a lengthy wait.

Only 50 per cent of local authorities in Wales record waiting times. Those that do keep records report that, on average, applicants requiring accessible or adapted homes waited 28 months to be allocated suitable housing. In comparison, the general waiting time for housing applicants was 25 months (EHRC, 2018). A typical requirement for housing applicants is that people have to remain active on the system, and regularly search and bid for properties; otherwise they are considered as inactive and face removal from the waiting list.

We came across individuals who were waiting much longer, with some people waiting well over five years. We heard repeatedly from advice agencies that their clients face long waits for fully wheelchair-accessible properties. There is also a particular scarcity of larger accessible family properties.

Finding a suitable property – the issue of data gaps

Local authority data on accessible housing is generally poor: around half of local authorities in Wales do not know whether the social or affordable rented housing in their area is accessible or not (EHRC, 2018). There is also no national data available on adaptable housing stock.

Where local authorities directly own their housing stock, 91 per cent rate the information that they hold on the accessibility of their properties as 'very good' or 'good'. The larger the local authority, the more likely they are to rate their information as 'good' or 'very good' (EHRC, 2018).

Nearly half of authorities in Wales say they don't know what percentage of affordable or social housing in their area is accessible. Sixty-one per cent who offer private rented housing to those applying to them for housing rated the information they held about these types of properties as 'poor' or reported that they did not know what information they hold on housing of this type.

The increasing numbers of disabled people being allocated housing in the private rented sector and the limited knowledge that local authorities report of accessible properties, suggests that those authorities may have greater difficulty in placing disabled people in accessible housing, or in estimating future requirements (EHRC, 2018). This lack of information may make it very difficult for authorities to develop strategies and plans to meet future demand.

Some local authorities are unable to say how many disabled people are on their waiting lists, or what their requirements are in relation to adapted or accessible properties.

Despite this lack of data, 95 per cent of local authorities who managed the allocations process said that they were either very successful or quite successful in matching suitable properties to disabled people. Furthermore, the majority of local authorities report that they are either 'very effective' or 'quite effective' at assessing the needs of people requiring accessible housing. In spite of the efforts made by local authorities and the poor data that they hold, their confidence in their allocations processes is surprising. It is counter to the testimony we received of the lived experience of disabled people.

What needs to change?

While housing allocation processes vary greatly, a common feature is that they are complex and stressful, and frequently fail to provide disabled people with sufficient information to make informed choices about whether the homes they are offered will meet their needs. Lack of specialist advice or support in negotiating the complexities of applying for suitable housing is a growing problem, which further compounds the difficulties that disabled people face.

As indicated by our survey of local authorities, demand for social housing across Wales means that waiting lists are very long. In addition, the information held by housing providers and authorities, in terms of the number of disabled people on their waiting lists, their requirements, and the accessibility or adaptability of what little stock they have, is mixed. Accessible Housing Registers can be an effective way to manage the allocation of properties to disabled people. When operating effectively they should provide a clear picture of the demand and supply of accessible housing in a local area, and enable people to be matched to appropriate housing more effectively.

The effectiveness of Accessible Housing Registers varies and authorities would benefit from clear guidance or standards being developed, outlining what an effective Accessible Housing Register looks like. If this was supported by a system of monitoring their effective implementation, we would likely see an improvement in the experience of disabled people.

There are specific challenges for different types of impairments. There is evidence that housing providers and local authorities do not fully understand the requirements that people with learning disabilities or people with mental health conditions might have. As a result, they prioritise applicants with physical impairments over others. Fully wheelchair-accessible properties are also in extremely short supply, and housing providers find it hard to fully understand what physical accessibility means for disabled people, meaning that they offer properties that are inaccessible.

In order to target resources more effectively, local authorities need much better information about disabled people and their requirements. However, local authorities told us that it was difficult to get data from other key agencies: improved communication, transparency and data sharing would address this.

Local authorities and RSLs should improve the information that is available to applicants at each stage of the housing process and information should be available in a variety of formats. In particular, information should be improved for: the process for applying and securing suitable accommodation; the likelihood of success; the suitability (accessibility/ adaptability) of available properties; and the probable waiting time. Information should be available in a variety of accessible formats.

Housing providers should ensure that any assessment process follows the social model of disability, and considers all the barriers, environmental and attitudinal, that may diminish an individual's quality of life. Local authorities should ensure that allocation policies and systems are compliant with their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Recommendations

We are calling for:

- Local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to embed independent living principles into assessment and allocations policies for social housing, to ensure real choice and control.
- Local authorities to significantly increase their knowledge of existing accessible social housing stock, and develop specialist support and information services to facilitate suitable matching.
- Local authorities to apply best practices on the use of Accessible Housing Registers, with the longer term aim of the use of a standard methodology across all local authorities.
- The Welsh Government to publish standards and monitor and publish effectiveness of Accessible Housing Registers.

Supporting people to live independently

It takes more than bricks and mortar to enable disabled people to live independently; support is also vital. Support can take many forms, yet the provision of good-quality advice, advocacy and guidance for housing is patchy and hard to find. Changes to funding for tenancy advice and supported housing have created uncertainty for disabled people and for housing providers.

Disabled people, and in particular those with learning disabilities, sensory impairments or mental health conditions, report that they have difficulty getting adequate support from housing providers. This includes: providers' reluctance to provide information in accessible formats, such as 'easy read'; an inability to provide communications support, such as British Sign Language interpreters; a lack of specificity in advertisements for accessible properties; and a lack of assistance with applications.

A scarcity of advice services is a well-acknowledged problem in Wales, with the country being long-described as an 'advice desert' (Williams, 2003). Cuts to legal aid and funding for advice providers have exacerbated an already difficult position in Wales. Disabled people told us that they often relied on family and friends to support them in resolving their housing issues. Challenges in accessing advice and support services can be exacerbated in rural areas.

Changes to the welfare system and support to navigate the complex systems and processes were highlighted by disabled people as challenging. The fact that online applications were the default option when applying for welfare payments and many other services was often cited as a barrier to getting support for many disabled people. Disabled people in Wales are significantly more likely to be digitally excluded than any other group.

A clear theme in the testimony that we received was that there is a strong link between physical and mental health, particularly if there are delays to finding suitable accommodation or making adaptations. Effective advocacy and advice to navigate the often bewildering systems is essential in providing both practical and moral support.

Some disabled people said that they had received support from independent advocates, or from health and social care professionals, which made their search for suitable accommodation much easier. Eighty per cent of local authorities in Wales reported using a support worker or advocate to communicate with disabled people. This was significantly higher than local authorities in England (56 per cent) and points to a greater emphasis on a people-centred approach (EHRC, 2018).

The Welsh Government has put greater emphasis on putting the individual at the centre of decision-making and on support that promotes and maintains independence through its Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. The Act, which took effect in April 2016, places duties on local authorities to provide easy access to advice and clear information and advocacy services. DPOs were positive about the impact that the Act is beginning to have.

The Supporting People programme

The Supporting People programme provides grant funding to local authorities in order to provide a wide variety of housing-related support to a range of groups, including disabled people, people with mental health conditions, older people with support needs, and people with learning disabilities, to live independently. The range of support services can include advice and assistance on different housing-related matters, support to manage household budgets, and advice on maintaining tenancies.

This type of support has been found to provide immense social and economic value, because it enables people to live independently in their homes. It helps to minimise the need for high cost interventions, such as hospitalisation and supported housing, and reduce pressure on other services, such as health and social care.

We heard from housing providers of the importance of this programme in providing additional funding to support people to live independently.

The Supporting People programme currently supports more than 67,000 people each year, with a current budget of £124m per year; however, between 2013 and 2017, the total annual budget has reduced by 8.5 per cent (Wales Audit Office, 2017).

Unlike in England and Scotland, the programme budget in Wales is currently ring-fenced. This means that, in Wales, programme funding can only be used to fund housing-related support services to assist vulnerable people to live as independently as possible. A 2017 evaluation by the Wales Audit Office found near unanimous support for the Welsh Government's decision to retain the ring-fencing. However,

there are significant concerns from stakeholders about the future of this programme following the decision to merge the budget from 2020 with other budget lines.

Local authorities, housing providers and disabled people all agree that services to support disabled people are stretched. Nearly all local authorities in Wales (95 per cent) reported that they provide housing support services, but only 30 per cent of authorities felt that they were fully meeting the demand (EHRC, 2018).

When asked about the future of tenancy support services, local authorities in Wales were pessimistic. Only a fifth (20 per cent) expected improvement and nearly half (45 per cent) expected the situation to worsen slightly. Budget and funding issues were seen as the main barrier to the provision of these services (EHRC, 2018).

“We have problems due to the rural nature of much of our county. We re-structured our tenancy support services a year ago... to provide more consistent services in both urban and rural areas, with one organisation providing services to all client groups in area-based contracts. This has proved very successful, with more people being helped, at lower cost, and with faster access to services. However, there are concerns that the Supporting People budget is going to be cut severely from April 2018, which could jeopardise the improvements which we have made.’

Unitary authority, West Wales

What is the role of supported housing?

There has been a lengthy review of supported housing by the UK Government, which has caused uncertainty for disabled people and housing providers. Budgets for Supported Housing are controlled by the UK Government. It is expected that from 2020 funding will be allocated to the Welsh Government to distribute.

We heard a range of views about the role of supported housing, including some concerns that it does not always promote the right to independent living. Concerns raised by stakeholders highlighted that there can be undue pressure to move into supported housing, and that the focus should be about providing the support people need to live independently in their own home, if that is their preferred choice.

More detail on Supporting Housing can be found in the main report.

What needs to change?

Local authorities need to commission and fund the adequate provision of bespoke advice for disabled people, in partnership with RSLs and the third sector.

In Wales, when funding for supported housing is devolved, Regional Partnership Boards and local authorities should jointly commission a range of support, including mental health floating support, to help disabled people sustain their tenancies.

Any new guidance that is issued to local authorities on the commissioning of supported housing and housing support should highlight the importance of engagement with disabled stakeholders, so that they can provide meaningful input to schemes and scrutiny of ongoing programmes.

Rights, freedoms and choice need to be the same for those disabled people in supported accommodation as they are for those with a standard tenancy, and robust complaints mechanisms should be in place.

Recommendations

Across England, Scotland and Wales, we are calling for:

- The UK Government to ensure that the new policy and funding model for supported housing upholds the rights of tenants, and that freedoms and choice are not restricted, in line with the UN UNCRPD. The new model needs to address the current uncertainty and deliver a stable market for both housing providers and those providing specialist support.
- Local authorities to ensure that housing, care and health services are fully integrated and sufficient funds are available to support people to live independently, and that there is an increased focus on prevention.
- Local authorities to provide increased specialist disability advice and advocacy services for housing options.

In England and Wales, we are calling for:

- The UK Government to ensure that its review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 considers the impact of removing housing from the scope of legal aid for disabled people, and takes effective steps to mitigate any identified impacts.

Conclusion

The right to live independently is a fundamental right, enshrined in the UNCRPD. Housing is the cornerstone of independent living. Without appropriate housing it is much harder to access employment, education, or leisure and recreational opportunities. For too many disabled people who shared their experiences with us during the inquiry, the lack of accessible housing and related support in Wales is a significant barrier to them realising their right to live independently.

The benefits of ensuring a supply of new houses that are accessible and adaptable are clear. A greater supply will ensure that disabled people are able to assert their right to independent living and will reduce social care costs for local authorities and health costs for the NHS.

Many of the legislative and policy levers to tackle the issues highlighted by the inquiry exist in Wales, with housing, planning and building regulations all devolved to the Welsh Government. Action to increase the supply of accessible and adaptable homes is possible. The Welsh Government require a strategy and determined action to ensure an adequate supply of new accessible and adaptable housing including wheelchair-accessible housing across all tenures.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides a real opportunity to change the way public bodies approach their decision making. Applying the principles of the Act effectively to planning and housing policy could ensure that the housing stock built in Wales is future proofed for our ageing population. The reissuing of planning guidance incorporating the principles of the Act is very welcome.

Progress to ensure that disabled people have accessible homes that support their right to independent living is unlikely to be made unless disabled people are actively engaged in shaping housing policy and practice. Governments at national and local level need to be much more effective in engaging disabled people at both at the strategic and operational levels to meaningfully reflect their input, in a continual cycle of improvement.

The scarcity and quality of data on accessible housing and disabled people in Wales is an additional and significant barrier for national and local governments to make effective plans for increasing the supply of accessible housing. This was a recurring theme throughout our inquiry and action is needed to address this.

Disabled people told us repeatedly that housing allocation and adaptations systems are complex and difficult to navigate. In this report we have stressed that the importance of thinking beyond 'bricks and mortar'. Advocacy, advice and support to make choices or challenge systems when things go wrong, are essential. Mental health came out as a consistent theme; both in its own right and linked to the stresses associated with inappropriate accommodation.

Disabled people told us about the positive role that adaptations can play in ensuring they can live independently. The increase in funding for DFGs in England and Wales is very welcome, along with a recently announced review aimed at removing the bureaucracy that exists in many authorities.

There are huge benefits for future proofing Wales's housing stock. The human and economic costs of inaccessible housing can be avoided if disabled people's requirements are identified and built into planning and delivery of new housing supply.

Summary of recommendations

Independent living principles recognise that disabled people are the best experts in determining and promoting better solutions. Governments at national and local level need to be much more effective **in engaging disabled people** both strategically and operationally, in order to meaningfully reflect their input, in a continual cycle of improvement.

The need to build more accessible and adaptable homes

We are calling for:

- Welsh Government to introduce a national strategy to ensure there is an adequate supply of new houses built to inclusive/universal design standards and to wheelchair-accessible standards, across all tenures. This should include a review of the way that building standards are enforced, particularly in the private rented sector. The strategy should recognise that housing support, advice and advocacy is often necessary to enable people to maintain their housing and their right to independent living.

- National and local governments to take action to improve the way that data is collected and shared, both on the requirements of disabled people and on the accessibility of existing housing stock.
- Welsh Government to require all new homes are built to Development Quality Requirements and to mandate local authorities to ensure that 10 per cent of new homes are built to a wheelchair-accessible standard.
- Welsh Government to publish annual data on the number of accessible, adaptable and wheelchair-accessible homes built.
- Local authorities to apply the five ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in their strategic planning for accessible homes, in particular when developing Local Development Plans and Local Housing Market Assessments.
- Local authorities to meet their duty to publish Equality Impact Assessments alongside their Local Development Plans and Local Housing Market Assessments.

Improving the installation of home adaptations

We are calling for:

- Local authorities to urgently address the bureaucratic hurdles and delays that exist within adaptations systems, to ensure that low-cost, minor adaptations in particular can be installed quickly and easily.
- Welsh Government to provide additional funding to disabled people's organisations and advice agencies, to increase the supply of independent advice and information regarding housing options, including adaptations, with a particular focus on the private-rental sector.
- Welsh Government to pilot training for private sector landlords on accessibility as part of the Rent Smart Wales scheme, of licensing landlords and agents under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Matching homes to people who need them

We are calling for:

- Local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to embed independent living principles into assessment and allocations policies for social housing, to ensure real choice and control.
- Local authorities to significantly increase their knowledge of existing accessible social housing stock, and develop specialist support and information services to facilitate suitable matching.

- Local authorities to apply best practices on the use of Accessible Housing Registers, with the longer-term aim of the use of a standard methodology across all local authorities.
- Welsh Government to publish standards and monitor and publish effectiveness of Accessible Housing Registers.

Supporting people to live independently

We are calling for:

- The UK Government must ensure that the new policy and funding model for supported housing upholds the rights of tenants, and that freedoms and choice are not restricted, in line with the UNCRPD. The new model needs to address the current uncertainty and deliver a stable market for both housing providers and those providing specialist support.
- Local authorities to ensure that housing, care and health services are fully integrated and sufficient funds are available to support people to live independently, and that there is an increased focus on prevention.
- Local authorities to provide increased specialist disability advice and advocacy services for housing options.
- The UK Government to ensure that its review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 considers the impact of removing housing from the scope of legal aid for disabled people, and takes effective steps to mitigate any identified impacts.

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