

Leonard Cheshire Petition:



1. Leonard Cheshire Disability is very grateful for the opportunity to provide evidence in relation to its petition:

'We the undersigned call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to take action to ensure that all new homes in Wales are built to fully meet all the Welsh Housing Quality Standards ensuring they are as comprehensive as Lifetime Home Standards, with at least 10 per cent of new homes built to full wheelchair accessibility standards.'

About Leonard Cheshire Disability

2. At Leonard Cheshire Disability we work for a society in which everyone is equally valued. We believe that disabled people should have the freedom to live their lives the way they choose - with the opportunity and support to live independently, to contribute economically and to participate fully in society.
3. We are one of the UK's largest voluntary sector providers of services for disabled people with over 250 services across the UK including care homes, care homes with nursing and homecare services. We aim to maximise personal choice and independence for people with disabilities and all of our services are designed to meet the needs and priorities of the people who use them.
4. Our UK-wide [Home Truths Campaign](#) was launched in July 2014, highlighting the very real housing crisis facing disabled people and their families. Our most recent report (the Long Wait for a Home) is accessible at: <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/who-we-are/publications/latest-publications-download/long-wait-home>.

Why have we submitted this petition?

5. There is a hidden housing crisis in Wales: a lack of disabled friendly housing.
6. There are some things none of us should have to endure in twenty-first century Britain. That includes washing every day in your kitchen, at the sink where you peel your potatoes and wash your plates, being unable to get to your child's bedroom to tuck them in, or using a toilet that has no privacy because a door prevents someone using a wheelchair from entering. But our nation's shortage of disabled-friendly homes is forcing thousands of people to live in these Victorian conditions every day.
7. Anyone can become disabled, which means our homes need to be adaptable: so that at some point in the future they can include grab rails and wet rooms, stair lifts or hoists. But while some homes in Wales are

fully accessible, or ready to be adapted, many more are simply not disabled-friendly.

8. A significant proportion of Welsh homes can only be adapted to include features such as stair lifts, grab rails or a wet room at significant cost, while for hundreds of thousands of others these adaptations are simply impossible. Critically:
 - Almost three quarters (72%¹) of people in Wales report that they live in a home without an accessible front door. This means that of the hundreds of thousands of people who acquire a mobility impairment every year, most will have to move house or risk becoming trapped in their own home;
 - More than half (54%) of people in Wales say they do not have stairs big enough for a stair-lift to be fitted;
 - In 2008, the 'Living in Wales' survey found that 22% of households including someone with a long-term illness, disability, or infirmity, had adaptation needs that had not been met.²
9. The severe shortage of adaptable and accessible homes is placing enormous stress and pressure on thousands of disabled and older people, as well as the care system and the health service. In a recent survey 96% of occupational therapists across the UK agreed that adaptations reduce the need for social care: further emphasising the need to act.³
10. Living in suitable accommodation is crucial to our wellbeing. The Building Research Establishment reported in 2010 that 45⁴% of all injuries occur in the home - and that the less accessible someone's home is, the more likely they are to suffer an injury. In total, the cost of poor housing to the NHS alone amounts to more than £1.4bn (across the UK) every year.⁵
11. As a result of their homes not being disabled-friendly, far too many people are forced into care or hospital when they would rather continue to live at home. This has a severe impact both on individuals and Welsh taxpayers as a whole, because a single trip to hospital (for someone who slips on the stairs because they can't install a stair-lift or a grab rail) costs an average of almost £1,800.⁶ This is 60% more than the average cost of building a new home to Lifetime Homes standards.

¹ The Hidden Housing Crisis – Leonard Cheshire Disability

² The Living in Wales Survey 2008

³ The College of Occupational Therapists carried out a survey with occupational therapists (OT) with a specialism in housing in March 2015, which received 104 responses.

⁴ Roys, M. Davidson, M. Nicol, S. Ormandy, D. and Ambrose, P. (2010) The real cost of poor housing. BRE

⁵ Simon Nicol, Mike Roys, Helen Garrett (2015) The cost of poor housing to the NHS. BRE

⁶ Source: Cabinet Office unit cost database (2011/12)

12. Further, every hip fracture costs the NHS over £28,000⁷ - and brings no end of pain and upset to families across the country - but many could easily be prevented by the installation of grab bars in halls and bathrooms, for less than a fifteenth of the price.⁸ These unnecessary accidents and hospital admissions place extraordinary resource pressures on care services, paramedics and hospital wards. It also contributes to preventing a large and growing section of society from living independently with dignity and being afforded the same rights as non-disabled people.
13. Currently, 1 in 10 people in Great Britain report some kind of mobility problem⁹ - that's approximate 310,000 people in Wales who are likely to need a disabled-friendly home.¹⁰ As the number of disabled and older people grows, this hidden crisis is only going to get worse.
14. Ultimately, the current shortage of disabled-friendly homes is not conducive to community or individuals' wellbeing. Nor is it in line with the aims and intentions of the 'Framework for Action on Independent Living' launched by the Welsh Government in September 2013.

What is the solution?

15. Building a home to disabled-friendly standards - called Lifetime Homes Standards¹¹ (broadly equivalent to Welsh Housing Quality Standards) - involves, among other things, building it with wider doors and walls strong enough for grab-rails to be installed in case the owners need them in the future. It is estimated that building homes to such standards costs an average of only £1,100¹² extra per property.
16. Wheelchair accessible homes, specifically designed for those who use wheelchairs, cost more¹³ but are essential to ensuring that disabled people can live comfortably and safely.
17. Building more of these homes is not only the right thing to do: it's also the sustainable thing to do. It's something that both actively secures the well-being of future generations, and meets the needs of the current

⁷ Better outcomes, lower costs: Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvements and equipment: a review of the evidence

⁸ Calculation based on £1800 / £28000 – Source: Cabinet Office unit cost database (2011/12)

⁹ The Hidden Housing Crisis -Leonard Cheshire Disability

¹⁰ The Office of National Statistics' June 2014 population estimate for Wales was 3.1 million. 3.1 million / 10 = 310,000

¹¹ Full details available here:

http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/data/files/For_Professionals/accessible_revisedlthstandard_final.pdf

¹² Estimates vary. The CLG Housing Standards Review Consultation Impact Assessment estimated the average cost as £1,100. A previous CLG estimate put the average cost at £547. DCLG The Future of the Code for Sustainable Homes, 2007

¹³ Around £13,000 for all sizes of home, according to CLG, Housing Standards Review Consultation: Impact Assessment

disabled population. Table 1 compares the costs of adaptations between a lifetime home and a standard home:

Adaptations	Cost of adaptation in a standard home	Cost of adaptation in a Lifetime Home*
Installing a ramp	£450	£0 (comes as standard in a Lifetime Home)
Widening entrance door	£2,500	£0 (comes as standard in a Lifetime Home)
Widening internal doors	£2,000 (estimate assumes there to be four internal doors)	£0 (comes as standard in a Lifetime Home)
Installing a stair-lift	£9,600	£2400
Installing ten grab bars	£2,500	£500
Wet-room conversion of bathroom	£3,500	£0 (an accessible bathroom comes as standard in a Lifetime Home)
Initial building costs	£0	£1100
Total cost of adaptations	£20,550	£4000

(Table 1: Comparison of costs of adaptations between a standard and Lifetime home)

18. Clearly, adapting a property after it has been built is much more expensive and less effective. Not adapting a property at all condemns people to the misery of Victorian strip washes, forces them to sleep in their living room rather than their bedroom, or exposes them to nasty and costly slips, trips and falls caused by lack of grab rails, hoists or stair-lifts.

The need for national direction

19. We are grateful to the Committee for raising the issue of disabled housing with the Minister for Natural Resources. We do not dispute the Minister's statement that the Welsh Government's current planning policy and guidance provides Local Planning Authorities with flexibility. The problem is that flexibility is not the quality required to address this issue: it is direction.

20. Currently, local planning authorities are encouraged to facilitate sustainable residential environments by promoting barrier free housing developments. But we know that encouragement is not getting the job done. The Welsh Government's Technical Advice Note 12: Design highlights the importance of meeting existing and future needs and refers to Lifetime Home standards as an example of such, but it does not explicitly direct planning authorities to normally require that homes are built to such standards.

Planning Ahead: Austria

21. There are already international examples of a proactive, nation-wide approach being successfully applied to improve the provision of disabled

housing. In Austria, which is among Europe's highest spenders on health and care,¹⁴ building homes which disabled and older people can live in for as long as possible is already considered best practice, and key to efforts to manage the cost of an ageing population.

22. Since 2008, Austria's municipal government has required most new homes to be built to the equivalent of Lifetime Homes standard, and has introduced measures to retrofit existing homes to ensure disabled and older people can live in them for longer. We think this approach should be replicated across the UK.¹⁵

The human impact of this hidden housing crisis

23. In the worst circumstances, people like Ruby and Laura (below) lose invaluable time with their disabled children due to the inaccessibility of their homes. This is a disgrace, and one which needs to be addressed immediately.

Case study 1: Ruby and Cody

Ruby lives in Barry in South Wales with her son Cody, who has the degenerative muscle condition Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Cody currently finds it difficult getting up the stairs on his own, and this will only get worse as time goes on and his illness progresses. Ruby told us:

“I'm very worried about what will happen if we have to stay here once Cody has to use a wheelchair. He won't be able to sleep in his bedroom, or use the bathroom privately, and the impact on his life, our lives, will be enormous.

“There are new developments being built in Barry, but neither the council nor private developers are building enough homes to cater for families like us who need them. We are gold priority on the Homes 4U list (the local housing association), but there's not a single available home in the area which is suitable.

“The life expectancy for someone living with Duchenne is only 27 years. Our precious time together shouldn't be wasted struggling to get out of the front door, or get down the stairs, we should be able to enjoy our lives together while we can.”

In 2014, Ruby launched her own Change.org petition, asking that the Vale of Glamorgan to build her a home suitable to meet needs of her disabled son. Her petition is accessible at: <https://www.change.org/p/correspondence-carl-sargeant-vale-council-help-us-find-a-home-suitable-for-our-son-cody-create-more-homes-for-families-with-disabled-children> The petition has almost 65,000 signatures and was recently handed into 10 Downing Street.

¹⁴ For Future Living: Innovative Approaches to Joining Up Housing and Health, IPPR, 2014

¹⁵ Klenovec M (2013) Independent living in Austria & review of European Access Awards, Centre for Inclusive Design

Case study 2: Laura and Blisse

Laura's daughter Blisse is a 5 year old girl who was born with Periventricular nodular heteropia and polymicrogyria. Her conditions mean that she is life limited and the family have access to the local children's hospice for children who are not expected to live past 19. Blisse suffers with severe epilepsy, having almost constant mini-seizures and breathing difficulties. She requires 24hr constant care, including medication being administered during the night, and therefore one of Blisse's parents must sleep in the same room as her.

The room in which Blisse and Laura spend their lives is small, and crowded by the equipment that Blisse requires. It is not suitable for house visitors as there is nowhere for anyone to sit comfortably, and results in the family effectively not living together.

Laura told us "Currently we exist at home, it's a living hell. Blisse is trapped in one room. We have no space in the house to spend time as a family, so we exist separately. My own health is failing and I am unable to lift Blisse safely: as she grows it will get to a point where I will not be able to lift her at all. As our bathroom is upstairs I have to carry Blisse for her to be bathed, and as she is peg fed it is vital for her to be washed daily. We have been on the Vale of Glamorgan's accessible housing list for almost five years, because the house we need doesn't exist. I am desperate, our family's situation is desperate and we need action now, not in another five years from now.'

The home they are living in was built to WHQS. However, it was not built to full wheelchair accessibility standards. As such, they require a ground level extension, track hoisting throughout an open plan style living area, and a specially adapted bathroom with a full size bath that can accommodate two people working either side of the bath (as Blisse has fits if she is placed in a shower).

Conclusion

24. We believe that the Welsh Government should make a public commitment to:

- **Ensure every new home in Wales is built to fully meet all Welsh Housing Quality Standards (ensuring they are as comprehensive as Lifetime Homes standards); and**
- **Ensure at least ten percent of all new homes are built to full wheelchair accessibility standards.**

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