

William Powell AM
Chair Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel,
Cardiff Bay,
CF99 1NA

24 June 2015

Dear William,

P-04-623 Improve the Provision of Disabled Friendly housing in Wales

Thank you for your correspondence dated 11th June 2015, inviting Leonard Cheshire to provide further comment on the specific points raised in the Minister for Natural Resources letter to the Committee in response to our petition. We have focussed on three of the Minister's points in particular:

- "Our national planning policy statement, Planning Policy Wales (PPW), encourages local planning authorities to facilitate sustainable residential environments;"
- "Our current planning policy and guidance provides Local Planning Authorities with the flexibility to respond to identified need;" and
- "I would need to be convinced as to how the quota system for wheelchair dwellings the petition calls for would match provision with demand"

We have given a response to these points below, along with our observations on the health impacts of inaccessible homes.

"Our national planning policy statement, Planning Policy Wales (PPW), encourages local planning authorities to facilitate sustainable residential environments."

We are grateful that the Welsh Government's current planning policy and guidance encourages local planning authorities to facilitate sustainable residential environments by promoting 'barrier free' housing developments. We also note that

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.

Unfortunately, we know that a significant proportion of Welsh homes do not meet the goals set out in these guidance documents. They cannot be adapted at all, or 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%) of people with a mobility impairment in Wales report that they live in a home without a properly accessible front door.¹ This means many people struggling to get by in homes that don't fully meet their needs, as well as meaning that of the hundreds of people who acquire a mobility impairment every year, many will have to move house or risk becoming trapped in their own home;
- More than half (54%) of people with a mobility impairment 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

These statistics are reflected in the personal experiences of those waiting for a disabled friendly home.

¹ The Hidden Housing Crisis – Leonard Cheshire Disability

² The Living in Wales Survey 2008

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>

We also know that Local Authorities have very limited information about the size of the problems they are facing.

Of the 14 authorities in Wales who responded to our questions, none had analysed the additional costs of inadequate housing to health and social care. When we asked about housing plans, of the 11 local authorities who responded, a third (36%) either had no housing plan at all, or their plan made no reference to disability.

Further, only 55% of Local Authorities in Wales have an Accessible Housing Register, or similar system. This suggests that almost half the Local Authorities in Wales would struggle to answer a basic question about where disabled friendly housing in their authority actually is.

These facts lead to one inescapable conclusion: it is not encouragement which is needed.

It is direction.

Case study 2: Laura and Blisse

Laura's daughter Blisse is 5 years old and 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.

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).

In order to meet the needs of people like Cody and Blisse, specific, national direction is required.

TAN 12 should explicitly direct planning authorities to normally require that all homes are built to Lifetime Home standards.

Disabled-friendly homes should not simply be an illustrative example of how 'barrier free' housing developments can potentially be achieved, but rather should be an expected standard and a plan for delivering them.

"Our current planning policy and guidance provides Local Planning Authorities with the flexibility to respond to identified need;"

Leonard Cheshire Disability would argue that the approach we suggest would not impact on flexibility. Homes already need to be built to certain access standards, and we believe that Wales can take a lead in strengthening these existing requirements to better meet the needs of disabled and older people. Increasing the quality and adaptability of homes should not equate to reducing flexibility.

We would also argue that the current flexibility in the system is not yet delivering the homes that disabled people need. Strengthening existing approaches should help to ensure that flexibility remains in the system, but the overall quality and accessibility of properties is driven up.

Additionally, our own dialogue with councillors indicates that a number of Local Authorities might actually welcome direction on this matter.

A national requirement for houses to normally be built to Lifetime Home standards would provide them with certainty in negotiations with housing developers, who currently identify and exploit flexibilities in a local authorities' approaches to planning.

Direction would also ensure that individual local authorities would not have to feel that they were 'going it alone' by insisting on such standards, with a risk that they may lose property developers to neighbouring areas.

"I would need to be convinced as to how the quota system for wheelchair dwellings the petition calls for would match provision with demand"

For clarity, we are calling for 10% of new builds to be built as wheelchair accessible homes because we know that for many years, demand for such homes has significantly outstripped supply.

The Habinteg Housing Association and London South Bank University's 2010 report 'Mind the Step: An estimation of housing need among wheelchair users in England,' report notably estimated there to be a 78,300 shortage of wheelchair accessible homes in England. In Wales, it is estimated that 7,000 disabled people are currently on housing waiting lists.³

The Habinteg report also notes that analysis based on the Survey of English Housing 2007/08 shows that there were around 600,000 wheelchair users in England, living in some 590, 000 households. This equates to 2.8% of all households.

Our 10% quota is therefore not solely about meeting the needs of new wheelchair users. Rather, our 10% quota is also about promptly closing the significant gap between the small number of wheelchair accessible homes which are currently available, due to historic building patterns, and the much higher demand for them within the existing population.

As such, we would anticipate that the size of a quota would be adjusted at such time as the supply of wheelchair accessible stock had equalled demand. Clearly, this would also require the Welsh Government and local authorities to be in a position to accurately monitor levels of supply within Wales. The use of accessible housing registers across Wales could also help to ensure that properties are effectively matched to those who need them.

For clarity, this is a matter for all forms of housing: owned, rented and social. The Habinteg report estimated that around 55% of wheelchair user households are owner-occupiers, 39% are social housing tenants, and 6% are private tenants.

The health impacts of inaccessible homes

We would also like to draw the Committee's attention to the benefit of improving the provision of disabled friendly homes would have for the NHS in Wales, as well

³ No Place Like Home, Leonard Cheshire Disability, 2014

social services provision. We know that inaccessible homes also have costs in terms of NHS staff-time.

A poll of 1004 GPs across the UK in January 2014 indicated that:

- 45,000 hours of GP time⁴ had been used up each month dealing with disabled or older people who had suffered injuries, illness or other health problems because of problems with their home;
- 95% of GPs have at least one patient they see because of problems with their inaccessible homes;
- 2.2% of GPs had more than 20 appointments related to inaccessible homes in the last month; and
- 1.5% of GPs spend more than 1/5 of their time (around a day a week) dealing with this issue.
- On average GPs say that 4.1% of their total caseload is down to health problems caused by inaccessible homes.

We also know that 96% of occupational therapists agree that adaptations reduce individuals' need for social care.⁵

If more disabled homes were being properly built to Lifetime Home Standards, efficiencies would be realised within the Health and Social Care budgets, as well as freeing more GP time to deal with clinical problems rather than housing related issues. There would also be significant reduction in the need for, and costs of, Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), which would make significant savings to the Local Authority budgets.

Occupational Therapists working in 2 different Local Authorities which have prioritised building to Lifetime Home criteria, and which are working to update their existing stock, have indicated to us that there has been a corresponding reduction in the need for DFGs, resulting in significant underspends.

There are also concrete examples of the principles of our petition being put into practice. A project undertaken by Cardiff Accessible Homes may be of particular

⁴ On average GPs reported having 4.75 appointments related to inaccessible housing every month. According to the BMA there are around 47,000 NHS GPs practising across the UK. Average GP appointment times are 12 minutes.

⁵ The College of Occupational Therapists carried out a survey with occupational therapists with a specialism in housing in March 2015, which received 104 responses.

interest to the Committee, and we would be happy to facilitate a visit, if that would assist the Committee in their consideration of our petition.

The 'Bungalows in the Sky' are the development of high rise units in Butetown, Cardiff, which offer freedom for people who would otherwise not have been able to access their homes, community and school or work.

These units allow single-level open plan living, of the kind ordinarily limited to a conventional bungalow, using an existing site. Cardiff Accessible Homes were offered 13 units at this complex, comprising of 10x1 bed ground floor flats, and 3x3 bed 'Bungalows in the Sky.' They worked closely with the development team over two years to make best use of the units. The scheme includes a large health centre which all tenants who reside at the scheme have the opportunity to use, as well as a media centre, which includes a cinema, meeting rooms and conference suite. The following link outlines the whole development in Loudon

Square: <http://www.regenwales.org/upload/pdf/110113034035Case%20Study.pdf>

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information, or if the Committee would find it helpful to meet with me or any of our case studies.

Yours sincerely,

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