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

16th September 2015

Dear William,

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

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Minister's correspondence of 1 September 2015.

As the Minister outlines, representatives from Leonard Cheshire Disability and the College of Occupational Therapists recently had the opportunity to meet with officials from the Planning, Housing Policy and Homes & Places Divisions.

We are grateful for this initial discussion on the Provision of Disabled Friendly homes in Wales. We are in the process of providing officials with the information that we have gathered to date to support our Home Truths campaign, including examples of both best (and worst) practice. By way of illustration, I have attached at annex 1 a number of key statistics on the provision of Disabled Friendly housing in Wales, which we are in the process of sharing with the Welsh Government. We are happy to continue to work with the Welsh Government to develop an evidence base and welcome further meetings with them to establish what further information we collectively need to gather.

As outlined in the Minister's correspondence, we also understand that Welsh Government officials will try to establish the quantum of Lifetime Homes currently delivered through the planning system by writing to Local Planning Authorities. We believe this is vital, because in our experience the status quo is simply not providing enough disabled-friendly homes.

Although this dialogue has been very welcome, we recognise that it is also at an embryonic stage. For example, it is helpful that officials will examine "Local Development Plans for effective policies which might seek to deliver Lifetime Homes." However, we fundamentally believe that the solution to the horrific conditions facing disabled people in inaccessible homes is for the Welsh Government to explicitly direct planning authorities to normally require that all homes are built to Lifetime Home standards.

The deliberation given by the Committee to our petition has been vital in focussing attention on this issue, and we would be very grateful if the Committee agreed to continue such consideration. We would welcome, for example, the Committee seeking updates from both the Welsh Government and Leonard Cheshire Disability on the progress of this work before the end of the 4th Assembly.

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen **Founder:** Group Captain Lord Cheshire V.C., O.M., D.S.O., D.F.C.
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Yours sincerely,

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Annex 1: Key statistics gathered on the provision of Disabled Friendly Housing in Wales



Our Freedom of Information requests have collected the following information:

- Of the 10 Welsh local authorities who responded to our FOI request, only one (Denbighshire) said that they had a Lifetime Homes policy for housing built in their area, while nine (Bridgend, Cardiff, Conwy, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Swansea, Wrexham) said they did not.
- Only five local authorities (Bridgend, Cardiff, Conwy, Newport, Swansea) were able to tell us how many disabled people were on their housing waiting lists.
 - Between them, those five local authorities had over 2200 disabled people waiting for a home in their area.
 - If the rest of Wales had the same proportion of disabled people on their housing waiting list, we would expect there to be 7000 disabled people waiting for a home across Wales.
 - If, as seems likely, those local authorities who could not tell us how many disabled people were on their housing waiting list have a greater than average proportion of disabled people on their lists, the number would be even higher.
- Based on responses from fourteen Welsh local authorities (Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Swansea, The Vale of Glamorgan and Torfaen) we have found that over the past three years:
 - At least 1,500 people in Wales have waited more than six months for a response to their DFG application;
 - Almost 300 people in Wales have waited more than a year for adaptations to be made to their homes following their application for a DFG being accepted;
 - If we scale up these results proportionately for the rest of Wales, we would expect 2350 people to have waited more than 6 months for a response to their DFG application, and almost 450 people to have waited more than 12 months for their DFG to be paid over the same period.
 - Two thirds (ten – Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Swansea, Torfaen) of the local authorities who responded to us had examples of people waiting more than two years for adaptations after their DFG application had been approved, and two (Torfaen and Neath Port Talbot) had people waiting for more than three years.

We have recently worked with Landman Economics to estimate the social benefits of building all homes in Wales to Lifetime Homes standard. We expect to publish the full results before the end of the year.

Early results suggest that:

- Had all homes in Wales been built to Lifetime Homes standard, the Welsh Government would save around £98m every year in health and social care costs, saved benefit expenditure and increased tax revenue; and
- The cost of building all new homes in Wales to Lifetime Homes standard, and of adapting all those homes to meet the needs of their disabled residents would be paid back within 10 years.
- Over the lifetime of a home built to Lifetime Homes standard (estimated at 50 years) we would expect the Welsh Government to recover savings of £2886 per house, and to make a 160% saving on the initial investment.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a growing need for disabled-friendly homes in Wales:

- Almost three quarters (72%) of people in Wales report that they live in a home without an accessible front door¹ – meaning that of the tens 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;
- 22% of disabled households in Wales are waiting for an adaptation to be made to their home;² and
- One in six disabled people in the UK and half of all disabled children are living in housing that isn't suitable for their needs.³

But many Welsh councils have no estimate of the number of disabled-friendly homes they need, or the impact the lack of disabled-friendly homes is having on health and care services:

- No Welsh councils have analysed the additional costs of inadequate housing to health and social care;⁴ and
- A third (36%) of Welsh councils either do not have a housing plan, or their plan makes no reference to disability at all.⁵

Many councils also do not know where the disabled-friendly housing that they have is – only half (55%) of Welsh local councils have

an Accessible Housing Register or similar system.⁷

Despite the obvious impact of housing on a person's health and wellbeing, there is also a lack of integration between health, social care and housing. More than a quarter (29%) of Welsh local authorities do not have a housing representative on their Local Service Boards.⁸

To secure the growth in disabled-friendly homes the country needs, we are calling for:

- The Welsh government to make Lifetime Homes the minimum standards for all new-builds;
- All political parties in Wales should commit to introducing disabled-friendly standards to all housing in their 2016 manifestos;
- Local councils to ensure all large developments are built to Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS), and at least 10% are built to full wheelchair accessibility standards;
- The development of an accessible housing register or comparable system across all of Wales, delivered and supported by local councils and the Welsh government;
- Private and social housing developers to build all large developments completely to Welsh Housing Quality Standards, with at least 10% of new homes built to full wheelchair accessibility.

¹ ComRes interviewed 2,006 GB adults aged 18+ online between the 4 and 6 June 2014. Data were weighted to be representative of all GB adults aged 18+. Welsh sample size: 108

² The Living in Wales Survey, 2008

³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Housing and disabled children, 2008

⁴ Based on responses from 14 Welsh authorities (64% response rate)

⁵ Based on responses from 11 Welsh authorities (50% response rate)

⁶ Based on responses from 11 Welsh authorities (50% response rate)

⁷ Accessible housing registers bring together vital information about disabled-friendly homes such as whether a particular property is wheelchair accessible; the number of steps to the front door; and whether there is a stair-lift or walk-in shower.

⁸ Based on responses from 14 Welsh authorities (64% response rate)

The human misery of living in an inaccessible home

In our previous report, the Hidden Housing Crisis (2014), we revealed the human misery that results from the lack of disabled-friendly homes.

Almost three quarters (72%) of Welsh adults say that the door to their property is not fully accessible (for example because it has steps, or no ramp), while more than half (54%) say they do not have stairs big enough for a stair-lift to be fitted.⁹

That means that disabled people are stuck washing at their kitchen sink, sleeping in their lounge, and unable to get upstairs to tuck their kids into bed. For people like Ruby it means missing out on precious, irreplaceable time with their disabled children.

CASE STUDY: RUBY NASH

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 that: "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."

What are national governments doing?

The Welsh government

The Welsh government has made some positive steps towards delivering the disabled-friendly homes that people in Wales need. All new social housing is required to be built to Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS), and all social landlords are required to upgrade their existing stock to WHQS by 2020.

However, social housing only makes up 17% of all Welsh housing.¹⁰ That means that for every six new homes being built, only one is guaranteed to be disabled-friendly.

Further, the Welsh government has not set a minimum number of new homes to be built to fully wheelchair accessible standards. That means people like Ruby (left) are stuck waiting for a home for their disabled children that may never be built.

The Westminster government

In Westminster, the situation is even worse. Not only is there no national requirement for any homes to be built to Welsh Housing Quality Standards (or the equivalent Lifetime Homes standards), but the government are now trying to make it **more** difficult to build disabled-friendly homes following extensive lobbying from developers.

The Deregulation Bill, currently in the House of Lords, plans to add costly and bureaucratic hurdles for local authorities to jump through before being able to insist on disabled-friendly standards.¹¹

⁹ ComRes interviewed 2,006 GB adults aged 18+ online between the 4 and 6 June 2014; including 238 who self-identified as having a mobility impairment. Data were weighted to be representative of all GB adults aged 18+. ComRes's polling. Welsh sample size: 108

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/social-housing-stock-rents/?lang=en>

¹¹ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/deregulation.html>, clause 32 (4) accessed 08/10/14

It is a disgrace that the Westminster government is bowing to short-term opposition from some developers, rather than putting the needs of disabled and older people first. Developers are perfectly able to sustain a healthy profit while building the homes that Wales need. Last year, the top ten housing developers made combined profits of £1.6bn – that is 260 times the cost of building every new home built last year in Wales to be disabled-friendly.¹²

The extra costs of unfriendly homes

The NHS

Healthcare in Wales is facing increasing financial pressure. According to the Nuffield Trust, the NHS in Wales is facing a £2.5bn funding gap in the next 10 years.¹³ As with care – it is absolutely vital that the NHS make any savings that it can, that won't endanger patients' health.

The cost to the NHS of unsuitable housing is enormous. Overall, the Building Research Establishment (BRE) estimates that poor housing costs the health service £600 million every year and that the total cost to society – including benefit expenditure and lost tax revenues from those left unable to work – could be as high as £1.5 billion.¹⁴

And a significant proportion of this cost relates to the lack of disabled-friendly housing. When people's homes are not adapted for their needs, it is often dangerous for them to live there. They risk slipping in bathrooms without grab rails and hoists, falling down stairs with no stair lift or scalding themselves in kitchens where they can't reach the kettle properly. And when these accidents happen, it is the NHS that picks up the bill.

Falls are one of the most common reasons disabled and older people are admitted to hospital. But they could be dramatically reduced by providing more disabled-friendly housing features such as stair lifts, grab rails and level access to buildings.

If more people who needed disabled-friendly housing had it, the NHS would save millions of pounds every year. The cost to the NHS of just one hip-fracture – perhaps caused by someone falling down the stairs - is estimated as £28,000.¹⁵ In comparison, it costs only £1,100 extra to build new homes to Lifetime Homes standard.¹⁶

Adaptations

As people become disabled, or get older, their housing needs may change. While some people will need to move to new, disabled-friendly properties, others will want to carry out adaptations to their current home to allow them to continue to live where they feel comfortable.

One way of paying for these adaptations is to apply for a grant from the local council. But the funding available for adaptations is simply not enough to meet demand. Under the current system, applicants are often left waiting years – sometimes more than a decade – to receive the funding they need to make the basic adaptations to their home.

Disabled-friendly homes are, by design, cheaper and easier to adapt than any other homes:

- Installing a stair lift in a Lifetime Home can cost as little as £2,500,¹⁷ but if the wall by the stairs is not strong enough, the cost of replacing or reinforcing the wall could be five or ten times that.
- If a bathroom is big enough for a wheelchair to fit into by design (as they are in Lifetime Homes), the only cost to adapt the home may be around £300 to install grab bars.¹⁸ Whereas, if the doorway needs to be widened and the wall needs to be strengthened, costs could easily be 30 times higher.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building>, Live Table 245, 5,610 new homes built in 2013, multiplied by £1,100 per home, total cost £6.17m ¹³ A decade of austerity in Wales? The funding pressures facing the NHS in Wales, Nuffield Trust, 2014

¹⁴ Roys, M. Davidson, M. Nicol, S. Ormandy, D. and Ambrose, P. (2010) The real cost of poor housing. BRE

¹⁵ Cabinet Office, Unit Costs Database.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ <http://www.rica.org.uk/content/how-much-will-stairlift-cost> accessed 08/10/14

¹⁸ Better outcomes, lower costs, ODI, 2005 prices

Conclusion

Disabled people are being let down by developers, their local councils and national government. All three are thinking short-term and being railroaded by the house building lobby's resistance to regulation, despite the obvious benefits.

Building more disabled-friendly homes will deliver better lives for millions of disabled people, their families, carers and friends, now and in the future. But it will also help the whole country by reducing the pressure on the NHS and social care systems and allowing disabled people to take up more jobs across the country.

National government, local government and individual developers all have a part to play. With an increasing number of disabled voters and customers, they must all seize this opportunity to build the homes we need.