



equality • choice • control

HOUSING DISCUSSION INVOLVEMENT EVENT REPORT

LAUNCH EVENT

THURSDAY 19TH AUGUST 2010



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1. Background to the Event

Capability Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Independent Living (GCIL) were selected through the Housing Voluntary Grant Scheme as the Scottish Government's key strategic partner for housing and disability issues.

A key part of this project is a series of seven involvement events giving disabled people the opportunity to tell the Scottish Government about their housing issues and ways in which the housing problems faced by disabled people can be solved. The involvement events are running from August to October 2010.

This information is intended to feed into the Scottish Government's discussion "Fresh Thinking, New Ideas" which is calling for radical solutions to the housing crisis in Scotland.

This is the report of the first event, held on Thursday 19th August 2010.

22 disabled people with a range of different impairments and conditions attended the event including people with hearing impairments, wheelchair users, people with physical impairments, people with visual impairments and people with learning disabilities and difficulties.

2. Design of the Event

The involvement day was designed around four key discussion areas:

1. What makes a house a home?

The participants were asked to think specifically as disabled home owners or tenants and consider what makes a house a home.

2. Experience of the housing system and uptake of opportunities

This was an open discussion about disabled people's experiences of the housing system in Scotland. We were particularly interested in:

- Difficulties faced getting suitable socially rented housing
- Barriers faced by disabled people needing to adapt their homes or get specialist equipment
- Difficulties experienced by those wishing to buy
- Problems experienced by those renting privately or wishing to rent privately
- Issues of getting accessible and appropriate information and advice about housing

3. Priorities for Government spending

This was a group activity in breakout groups using an A3 activity sheet and pre-printed post-it notes. We asked participants to pick five priorities from the list below and rate them one to five:

- Building more low-cost housing
- Keeping rents low
- Giving disabled people priority for social housing
- Encouraging people to downsize and redistributing larger houses to disabled people who need them
- Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
- Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
- Designing homes that can be adapted much more easily
- Building more sheltered housing
- Building more residential care homes
- Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs

4. What should be state funded and what should be privately funded?

This was a discussion about what sort of adaptations participants thought should be funded by the state and what sort of adaptations disabled people should pay for themselves. Participants also discussed the factors that should influence this such as income levels and priority of need.

3. Results of the Discussions

3.1 What makes a house a home?

Over the course of 10 minutes of group discussion, participants identified the following aspects in relation to what makes a house a home:

- Freedom to do what you want.
- The ability to be independent.
- Being close to amenities.
- Living in a good neighbourhood.
- Physical security.
- Being close to friends and family.
- The ability to access all rooms in the house.
- Being surrounded by your own stuff.
- The feeling of permanence.
- Privacy.
- Having enough space for the storage of disability-related kit.
- Good neighbours that one can visit.
- Proximity to formal and informal support networks.
- Proximity to leisure opportunities.

- Accessible surrounding environment (“There are no drop kerbs on my street. When I complained to the local authority they said that I would have to use driveways and the road. I was flabbergasted as there was absolutely no care for my safety at all”).
- Proximity to transport links.
- Good street lighting.
- Secure locks so that the person is safe in their home, especially if they cannot react quickly to intruders.
- Being comfortable.
- The location of the property.
- The suitability of the house to the person.
- Good physical access.
- An accessible garden.
- Good insulation.
- Enough space to entertain friends and family.
- Furniture arranged the way the person wants it.
- Internet access in the correct room.
- Being able to personalise it.

These comments show that there is a lot more to a home than the physical structure of the house. Accessibility and design are clearly important, but location, proximity to networks of support, good transport links and inclusive communities are also vital.

The group stressed that everyone’s needs are different and that to be your home, a house must suit your particular needs. Adaptations and adjustments must be designed for the person and in communication with the person.

The ability to personalise the house and make it one’s own was a key theme in the discussion. Participants compared living in their own home to living in a council house. One participant spoke of her time as a council tenant and said “I had to obtain permission to do anything including painting and decorating and even putting a nail in the wall to hang a picture. I wasn’t allowed to do any gardening. I planted some bulbs and put up a small fence but the council gardener destroyed the fence and mowed down my bulbs. I could never consider it ‘my home’ as I wasn’t allowed to personalise it. It was merely somewhere to stay”.

The participant also said that “If you are not able to get out much and spend most of your time in your house it has to be somewhere you feel ‘at home’ in with ample space for hobbies and entertaining. I can’t access my friend’s houses due to steps and no accessible toilet so they always have to come to me”.

The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:

- Ensure that all relevant policies take into account the bigger picture in relation to disabled people’s housing needs rather than concentrating only on the accessibility of the house itself.
- Ensure that all relevant policies promote the design and implementation of adaptations in partnership with the end user.

3.2 Experience of the housing system and uptake of opportunities

Difficulties faced getting suitable socially rented housing

One participant shared her experience of trying to get suitable accommodation for her family, including her three year old daughter who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. Their local authority agreed that their current house, a two storey, mid terrace house, is not suitable. An Occupational Therapy assessment highlighted that she would need a three or four bedroom bungalow with an accessible shower and wheelchair access. But there is no suitable house in her local authority area. The only suggestion made to her was to move across the border to the neighbouring local authority where she may have a better chance of getting a suitable house. The participant said she “has exhausted every avenue with no success and is just been moved from pillar to post with no one able to help her.”

Participants shared their experiences of the problems they’d found trying to get the right house in the right place. The group agreed that the location of the property was of great importance, not just the accessibility of the house itself. One participant said that “When applying to a housing association there is absolutely no guarantee that you’ll be offered a house in the location that you want it. This makes it really difficult when you have a network of support around you and you really don’t want to move away from it but at the same time still want your own home”.

Barriers faced by disabled people needing to adapt their homes or get specialist equipment

One participant spoke of her experience trying to adapt her rented house in order to make it suitable for her 26 year old son who is paraplegic following an accident in Spain. The family were told they couldn’t get funding from the Social Work Department because they only had a six month lease on the property despite the fact that the property’s landlord was happy for the changes to be made. The family were so desperate to make the house suitable for their son that they decided to pay for the adaptations themselves, which totalled £5,000. They hope that they will eventually be able to buy the house.

Participants agreed that part of the problem was the division of budgets between housing, social work and health. One participant shared her experience: “I’ve been waiting two years for a wet room. I’m not safe in the bathroom at the moment as I can’t get in and out of my shower. My case is constantly being moved from one department to another. I think they are just passing the buck as they don’t want to pay for it out of their own budgets.” The group agreed that there should be some cross use of budgets.

Participants agreed that having adaptations made to property is particularly difficult if the person works full time as they have to take time off work to oversee the work being done.

Difficulties experienced by those wishing to buy

Participants discussed how difficult it is to get a mortgage at the current time. There was agreement that these problems were also experienced by non-disabled people but that there are added barriers for disabled people. One participant said “I went to my local bank and asked about a mortgage. The guy there said ‘why do you want information on a mortgage, you’re disabled’, as though I couldn’t afford one. We really need to change attitudes towards disability.”

Issues of getting accessible and appropriate information and advice about housing

Participants felt that there should be a national advocacy service for disabled people experiencing housing issues. This could function as a one-stop shop for all housing issues for disabled people.

The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:

- Ensure that policies in relation to grant funding promote taking into account disabled people’s individual circumstances rather than placing blanket bans on certain circumstances such as length of lease.
- Consider promoting greater links between housing and social care budgets for long term savings.
- Recognise the importance of disability equality training in ensuring that disabled people receive an appropriate service from public bodies and financial institutes and consider providing funding.
- Consider funding a national advocacy service for disabled people experiencing housing issues.

3.3 Priorities for Government spending

Following 30 minutes of discussion in three small groups, the participants reported the following as their top five priority areas for the Scottish Government in relation to housing:

Group 1:

1. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs
2. Designing homes that can be adapted much more easily
3. Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
4. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
5. Building more low-cost housing

Group 2:

1. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs
2. Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
3. Giving disabled people priority for social housing
4. Building more residential care homes
5. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses

Group 3:

1. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
2. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs
3. Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
4. Building more sheltered housing
5. Building more residential care homes

Group 4:

1. Designing homes that can be adapted much more easily
2. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
3. Giving disabled people priority for social housing
4. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs
5. Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people

The four groups chose a variety of priorities as their top five. Only two of the possible priorities were not chosen by either group for their top five:

- Keeping rents low
- Encouraging people to downsize and redistributing larger houses to disabled people who need them

The four groups agreed that the following priorities were the most important:

- Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses

It was agreed that since the majority of disabled people acquire their impairments later in life it was likely that they would already have a home and that it was preferable for their existing home to be adapted than having to move.

- Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs

Following on from the point above, participants felt that for people whose homes could not be adapted to meet their needs, they should receive support to move and in some cases to be temporarily housed until an accessible home could be found.

One participant said “After my accident I was hospitalised for months. I couldn’t access my old flat as it’s a third floor flat so I was considered homeless. I was put on a waiting list for sheltered housing as there was no suitable house for me to move straight into. Sheltered housing was great for me as it allowed me to adjust to living as a disabled person on my own (I had never lived on my own before) with the security of knowing that there was a warden around if anything went wrong.”

- Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people

Participants felt that in many cases new build housing does not even meet the existing standards, let alone meet the actual needs of disabled people. It was felt that building standards must take into account the varying needs of disabled people across all impairment groups, including wheelchair users and visually impaired people, and that in some cases what one person finds accessible is inaccessible to someone else. An example was given here that wheelchair users require ramps while many visually impaired people prefer stairs.

One participant stated that “All new builds should have wider door frames as standard, regardless of whether a disabled person is moving in or not.”

The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:

- Give added weight to the following priorities:
 - Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs
 - Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
 - Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
- Continue to involve disabled people and their organisations in the setting of priorities.

3.4 What should be state funded and what should be privately funded?

The participants held different views on the question of what should be state funded and what should be privately funded in relation to aids and adaptations. Opinions ranged from disabled people being required to pay whatever they can afford to everything being means tested.

Those who felt that disabled people and their families should pay whatever they can afford towards aids and adaptations before receiving state funding felt that it was only fair that people should contribute what they can. It was felt that this would prevent people from getting unnecessary adaptations as they would only pay for what they really needed.

Others disagreed with this perspective. One participant pointed out that disabled people should be able to spend part of their income on leisure activities, holidays and other quality of life activities, and should not have to spend all the available money on just being able to live independently in their own home.

Some participants felt that all state support should be means tested so that the limited available funding went to the people most in need. One participant said “I applied to my local authority to get funding for a washroom upstairs as I get stressed when I need to use the bathroom in the night. They wouldn’t give me any money. It’s ok if you can afford to pay for the adaptations yourself but you are totally stuck if you can’t afford it.”

However other participants had reservations about means testing. One participant stated that “The idea of means testing people or insisting that people pay extra for a basic level of living is not fair. It’s moving away from equality.”

Another participant was concerned that means testing people for aids and adaptations might put people off getting into paid employment as they might then have to pay for more than they would have had to otherwise. This participant stated that “Means testing for care and adaptations acts as a disincentive for work.” There was widespread agreement on this, with one participant stating “If I got even a part time job I could not afford my flat”.

One participant suggested that a compromise could be to have set limits for public funding for each different type of adaptation and make these limits publicly available. The suggestion is that people who could afford it could supplement the basic level of funding available if they wanted a more advanced aid or a more extensive adaptation.

One participant said that whether or not there was public funding for an adaptation, some people will want to fund it privately. She said that “When I bought my house it needed some additional features and adaptations including ramps, a lift, a change in height of the bathroom sink and kitchen cabinets and relocation of the plugs. The reason we put in everything ourselves was to have a choice of colour/shape/ style etc and so that we did not have to wait a long time to get the work done”.

The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:

- Consult with disabled people widely on the issue of what should be state funded and what should be privately funded.
- Ensure that the threshold for means testing does not act as a disincentive for disabled people obtaining paid employment.
- Consider setting limits for public funding for different types of adaptation, making these limits publicly available and giving people the option of self funding anything over and above this.

4. Summary of Views Expressed

- Ensure that all relevant policies take into account the bigger picture in relation to disabled people's housing needs rather than concentrating only on the accessibility of the house itself.
- Ensure that all relevant policies promote the design and implementation of adaptations in partnership with the end user.
- Ensure that policies in relation to grant funding promote taking into account disabled people's individual circumstances rather than placing blanket bans on certain circumstances such as length of lease.
- Consider promoting greater links between housing and social care budgets for long term savings.
- Recognise the importance of disability equality training in ensuring that disabled people receive an appropriate service from public bodies and financial institutes and consider providing funding.
- Consider funding a national advocacy service for disabled people experiencing housing issues.
- Give added weight to the following priorities:
 - Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs
 - Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
 - Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
- Continue to involve disabled people and their organisations in the setting of priorities.
- Consult with disabled people widely on the issue of what should be state funded and what should be privately funded.
- Ensure that the threshold for means testing does not act as a disincentive for disabled people obtaining paid employment.
- Consider setting limits for public funding for different types of adaptation, making these limits publicly available and giving people the option of self funding anything over and above this.

This report is available in a variety of accessible formats. To discuss your requirements please contact the communications team at Capability Scotland on 0131 347 1052 or communications@capability-scotland.org.uk.

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