



**Inclusion  
Scotland**



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## **HOUSING DISCUSSION INVOLVEMENT EVENT REPORT**

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GLASGOW CENTRE FOR  
INDEPENDENT LIVING AND INCLUSION SCOTLAND**

**THURSDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 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 second event, held in conjunction with Glasgow Centre for Independent Living and Inclusion Scotland in Glasgow on Thursday 2 September 2010.

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

## 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:

1. Building more low-cost housing
2. Keeping rents low
3. Giving disabled people priority for social housing
4. Encouraging people to downsize and redistributing larger houses to disabled people who need them
5. Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
6. Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
7. Designing homes that can be adapted much more easily
8. Building more sheltered housing
9. Building more residential care homes
10. 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?

Following 10 minutes of group discussion, participants were asked to feed back their top two aspects of what makes a house a home. The following elements were chosen by the three groups:

- Ability to choose who you live with or to live on your own if preferred.
- The location and proximity to services and friends and family.
- Having security in your home being your own, whether it is owned or rented.
- Having the freedom to come and go when you want.
- The accessibility of the home and suitability for your needs.
- Having two accessible fire escapes.

The other aspects the groups recorded were:

- Level access to local shops with dropped curbs where necessary.
- Mixed community.
- A good view that can be seen through low windows.
- Nearby amenities.
- Good transport links.
- Car park next to or in front of house.
- Accessible front and back door.
- Fixtures at a suitable height.
- Smart technology.
- Atmosphere.
- Comfort.
- Proximity to networks of support.
- The house being big enough.
- Being part of the community.
- Privacy.
- Being able to live independently with whatever support is necessary.
- Decorated in the way you want it to be.
- Choice between a wet floor shower and a bath, or both.
- Not a 'disabled house' – an attractive house where adaptations do not stand out.

These comments show that there is a lot more to a home than the footprint or physicality 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.

Further, disabled people want their homes to be more than just functional and practical. Just like non-disabled people, disabled people want their homes to be attractive and decorated in their own style. Participants reported that this is often disregarded by Occupational Therapists (OTs).

### **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 take into account that disabled people want their homes to be attractive and comfortable, not functional and institutional.

### **3.2 Experience of the housing system and uptake of opportunities**

#### **Difficulties faced getting suitable socially rented housing**

A participant spoke of her frustration trying to get an accessible local authority house. She said she “kept getting bumped off the list as people who were homeless took priority.” She also spoke of the difficulties she had encountered getting a two bedroom flat as she lives on her own but knows that she will need a second bedroom in the future for a personal assistant.

Another participant spoke of her experience supporting a friend of hers to live in a mixed community. She had to purchase the house personally and rent it to him after adapting it. She said “That was the only way he could get what he wanted.”

One participant told of his experience being told by his local authority that they had a suitable accessible house for him. However, when he tried to move in he found 57 areas of non-compliance with building standards. He therefore had to move into a hotel at the local authority’s expense while they made it accessible. He spent six weeks in the hotel and had to threaten to go to the press before serious action was taken.

The group agreed that allocations policies do not sufficiently take into account the needs of disabled people. Participants stated that housing lists do not take into account the diversity of issues that many people experience and that if a family has more than one disabled member, they only take one into account.

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

One participant spoke of being allocated inaccessible housing as a student. The participant is a wheelchair user but the house she was allocated had five steps at the front entrance. She asked the council to install a ramp but they took no action. Instead her father installed a temporary wooden ramp. Then in the winter when the ramp was icy she slipped and broke her arm. When she reported this to the council they sent someone round to evaluate the house and told her that the ramp would take up the whole front garden. As the house was shared she felt that she would not get agreement to do this and it was too late anyway as her degree was coming to an end.

She has now purchased her own house. However she had to buy a house in Stirling as she was told that her community care assessment was not portable. She does not want to live in Stirling and now has to commute to Glasgow every day for work. This means that her personal assistant has to spend two hours of the day travelling with her rather than doing something helpful. This is another example of the link between the housing and social care agenda.

Participants agreed that getting specialist equipment to meet their needs is difficult because OTs rarely ask the people themselves what their needs are. The group agreed that there should be far more discussion with the end users as often OT's often do not understand people's needs. This can result in money being wasted on aids and adaptations that do not suit people's requirements.

Participants agreed that if the current proposals for charging people for adaptations are implemented, that the end user will have to be consulted as they will be paying for it and it would be unacceptable to make people pay for something that was not suitable.

The group also shared common experiences of having to wait a long time to get aids and adaptations. One participant waited two years for a hoist.

Participants also felt that OTs do not think "outside the box". They felt that OTs have a list of adaptations and equipment that they can provide and are incapable of being creative. One participant spoke of his experience of no longer being able to put his seatbelt on in his car. The OT visited and could not think of a suitable piece of equipment to help. Then a friend visited and suggested that he use the passenger side seatbelt fastener to avoid having to bend his arm into his body. This solved the problem.

The group discussed the clash that can happen between the views of OTs and the requirements of disabled people in terms of independent living. One participant shared her experience of an OT she had while at college. The OT insisted that she spend 45 minutes every morning with a devise that enabled her to put her socks on. This made her late for school and therefore impacted on her education. The participant felt that OTs always think that a piece of equipment can solve every problem and that independent living is about doing everything yourself, which it is not.

A participant spoke of his experience being refused a ramp for the front door of his house and being told that he had to move. They moved house and installed a ramp but his family did not like the new house so they moved back to the old house. The original OT was on maternity leave and her replacement was happy to put a ramp in to the original house.

### Difficulties experienced by those wishing to buy

Participants agreed that part of the difficulty in buying your own home is that it takes a long time to find one that is suitable, accessible and close to networks of support. One participant reported that it took her 8 years to find a suitable house to buy.

Other participants said that trying to find something that is suitable is difficult because you often have to go and see the property because it is not possible to tell from photos. There was agreement that the new Home Reports would help with this.

There was also agreement that it is difficult to buy a house in the current climate because it is difficult to sell your existing home.

### Issues of getting accessible and appropriate information and advice about housing

A participant told the group about her experience of becoming disabled at a time in her life when she was looking to buy a house. Her local council advised her that they would give her a grant to adapt her house once she had bought it. However, after she bought it she was told that as she was under 65 she would only get a grant towards the adaptations. This meant that she had to take out a bank loan.

The group agreed that it is difficult to get information about what disabled people are entitled to. This is in part due to all the different pieces of legislation in housing.

### **The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:**

- Reconsider the policy of allocating accessible houses to people who do not have access requirements.
- Reconsider the policy of restricting the size and number of bedrooms that individuals can be allocated.
- Produce revised guidance in relation to allocations policies so that disabled people's requirements are taken into account properly.
- Put in place a timescale for the provision of aids and adaptations to tackle the long delays experienced by disabled people.
- Ensure greater links between the housing and social care agenda.
- Develop national guidelines for OTs that requires them to discuss aids and adaptations with the end user.
- Ensure that new housing policies fit the independent living agenda.

### **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 One:**

1. 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 current standards, let alone meet the actual needs of disabled people. They felt that building authorities routinely ignore building standards.

2. Giving disabled people priority for social housing

The group felt that this was not happening at present and that accessible social housing should be ring fenced for disabled people.

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

Participants felt that OTs do not listen to the opinions of disabled people about what they need. The group felt that disabled people should be empowered to have “voice, choice and control”.

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

The group felt that disabled people should not be stuck in homes that no longer meet their needs and should be supported to move.

5. Designing homes that can be adapted much more easily

Participants felt that new build houses should be flexible so that they can meet the needs of disabled people more easily and at a lower cost.

#### **Group Two:**

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

The group felt that there is no point building new stock that is not accessible.

2. Designing homes that can be adapted much more easily

Participants felt that this would enable local authorities to meet future demand for accessible housing more easily.

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

Participants highlighted that 70% of houses are not new build and therefore that many older houses need to be adapted to meet the needs of disabled people. They also pointed out that a person's home might need to be adapted if they become disabled over the course of their life.

4. Preventing the removal of adaptations that have been made when a disabled person moves

The group came up with this priority themselves. There was strong feeling that the removal of adaptations from local authority and housing association homes when the tenant moved was a gross waste of money.

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

The group pointed out that disabled peoples' needs and wants change and that this could affect the suitability of their home.

Group Three:

1. Keeping housing benefit realistic

The group came up with this priority themselves. At present the amount of Local Housing Allowance paid is calculated on the median (50 percent) of local rent in a given area. From October 2011 this calculation will be based on the 30th percentile of local rents, leading to a significant reduction in the Local Housing Allowance paid.

If these changes come in that they could affect disabled people particularly dramatically. Disabled people might need an extra bedroom because they need more space for equipment relating to their impairment, or because they have a live in carer.

2. Giving disabled people priority for (adapted) social housing

The group felt that disabled people should be given priority for accessible houses that meet their needs. One participant spoke of their experience of being on a waiting list for an accessible house, seeing a suitable house come up in their local area, and then being told that they could not have the house as it was required by a homeless family who had no accessibility requirement.

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

The group felt that it should be the disabled person who wants to move, rather than being told that they must move by professionals. Participants felt that

disabled people in unsuitable homes were being denied dignity and freedom of movement and that this was a breach of the Human Rights Act.

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

The group felt that this should be enshrined in legislation.

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

The group stated that the help is often not there for disabled people. They felt that the adaptations system should be updated to tackle the long waiting times for adaptations and the fact that adaptations often do not meet the disabled person's needs.

The three groups all chose the same five policy areas in their top five priority areas. None of the groups chose any of the following five priorities:

- Building more low-cost housing
- Keeping rents low
- Encouraging people to downsize and redistributing larger houses to disabled people who need them
- Building more sheltered housing
- Building more residential care homes

**The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:**

- Give added weight to the following priorities:
  - Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
  - Giving disabled people priority for social housing
  - Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
  - Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs
  - Designing homes that can be adapted much more easily
  - Giving disabled people priority for (adapted) social housing
- Take action to ensure that all new build housing meets the building standards.
- Consider ring fencing accessible social housing for disabled people.
- Take action to ensure that disabled people have “voice, choice and control” in relation to adaptations.
- Take action to prevent the removal of adaptations from local authority and housing association homes when the tenant moves.
- Take action to keep housing benefit realistic.
- Give disabled people priority for accessible houses that meet their needs.

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

The discussion opened with a statement from a participant that before the decision could be made about what should be state funded and what should be privately funded, the Scottish Government has to decide on the founding principles in relation to adaptations and accessible housing. Whether or not something is means tested or universally provided should then be linked into these principles. Everyone at the event agreed to this. These principles should be drawn up in partnership with the disability movement.

The participants suggested that the main principle should be that the state should fund any adaptations required to make the house fit for purpose for the disabled person. This was defined as what is required to enable the disabled person to take part in community and society to the same extent as a non-disabled person in a similar situation. Following on from this, if a disabled person wants to make adaptations over and above this, they can pay for it themselves. The group agreed that the very basics must be paid for by the state.

No participant at the event thought that disabled people should have to pay for their own basic adaptations. Some participants had paid for adaptations in the past because they had been refused funding, but all agreed that this should not happen.

The group discussed means testing and in particular the importance of setting the threshold for means testing at an appropriate level. Participants agreed that the receipt of funding for adaptations should not be linked to whether or not a person received income support or incapacity benefit. There was a consensus that if funding was linked to these benefits it could act as a disincentive for going into paid employment.

Home-owners in the group shared experiences of having to apply for grants to adapt their homes. They felt that it was unfair that disabled people who own their own home can generally only get a grant of up to 80% of the cost of the adaptation. This was felt to be unfair.

Participants discussed the various ways in which disabled people could fund adaptations privately if they could not readily afford to do so, including bank loans secured on their homes and equity release. One participant stated that it is “Outrageous that people could have to release equity in their home.”

The group then turned to considering who should fund aids and equipment. There was agreement in the group that most people “Just want to get the equipment, they don’t care who is paying for it as long as it isn’t them.”

The group heard from one participant that direct payments can be used to purchase aids and equipment. However, she reported that although this is enshrined in the legislation, local authorities do not generally permit it. The group felt strongly that this had to change as it would empower people. It comes back to “voice, choice and control”.

The group felt that allowing disabled people to purchase their own aids and equipment through direct payments could save the social work and health departments a lot of money in the long run as it would ensure that disabled people got the equipment that they needed to meet their requirements. A participant stated that usually a disabled person requests less cost-wise than what an OT would assess them for.

Another participant shared her experience of being assessed by two different OTs and being told completely different things by each. She said that it would have saved the local authority a lot of money if they had just listened to her in the first place.

Participants agreed that part of the problem was the division of budgets between housing, social work and health. A participant shared a story about a friend of hers who needs a ramp and a wheelchair. However, her social worker was only able to fund 35 hours of care for her. The social worker could not fund the wheelchair or the ramp as she could not access the other budgets. So now this woman is trapped in her home but has a personal assistant. Participants all felt that this was outrageous.

The group agreed that a spend in relation to housing could provide a big saving in community care. In the case above for example, the disabled woman would not need 35 hours of care if her house was adapted for her to live independently.

Participants agreed that there must be some cross use of budgets. The group felt that at present there is no communication between departments and no planning for the best use of all budgets for an overall saving. Participants felt that each department “doesn’t care as long as the money does not come out of their budget”. The group felt that there should be a team to co-ordinate spending in housing, social work and health so that they can “play about with budgets and see the bigger picture.”

### **The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:**

- Work with the disability movement to agree the fundamental principles underlying the right to financial support for adaptations.
- Ensure that the threshold for means testing does not act as a disincentive for disabled people obtaining paid employment.
- Reconsider the limit on grants for homeowners making adaptations to their homes.
- Work with local authorities to ensure that disabled people can access their right to use direct payments for aids and adaptations.
- Explore the centralisation of budgets in relation to housing, social work and community care so that spending can be co-ordinated to ensure the best result for the disabled person and the most effective use of funds by the local authority.

## 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 take into account that disabled people want their homes to be attractive and comfortable, not functional and institutional.
- Reconsider the policy of allocating accessible houses to people who do not have access requirements.
- Reconsider the policy of restricting the size and number of bedrooms that individuals can be allocated.
- Produce revised guidance in relation to allocations policies so that disabled people's requirements are taken into account properly.
- Put in place a timescale for the provision of aids and adaptations to tackle the long delays experienced by disabled people.
- Ensure greater links between the housing and social care agenda.
- Develop national guidelines for OTs that requires them to discuss aids and adaptations with the end user.
- Ensure that new housing policies fit the independent living agenda.
- Give added weight to the following priorities:
  - Making sure that new build housing meets the needs of disabled people
  - Giving disabled people priority for social housing
  - Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to adapt their houses
  - Making sure that disabled people get the help they need to move when their house no longer meets their needs
  - Designing homes that can be adapted much more easily
  - Giving disabled people priority for (adapted) social housing
- Take action to ensure that all new build housing meets the building standards.
- Consider ring fencing accessible social housing for disabled people.
- Take action to ensure that disabled people have "voice, choice and control" in relation to adaptations.
- Take action to prevent the removal of adaptations from local authority and housing association homes when the tenant moves.

- Take action to keep housing benefit realistic.
- Give disabled people priority for accessible houses that meet their needs.
- Work with the disability movement to agree the fundamental principles underlying the right to financial support for adaptations.
- Ensure that the threshold for means testing does not act as a disincentive for disabled people obtaining paid employment.
- Reconsider the limit on grants for homeowners making adaptations to their homes.
- Work with local authorities to ensure that disabled people can access their right to use direct payments for aids and adaptations.
- Explore the centralisation of budgets in relation to housing, social work and community care so that spending can be co-ordinated to ensure the best result for the disabled person and the most effective use of funds by the local authority.

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](mailto:communications@capability-scotland.org.uk).

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