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HOUSING DISCUSSION INVOLVEMENT EVENT REPORT

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PEOPLE FIRST
(SCOTLAND)**

MONDAY 4TH OCTOBER 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 ran 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 fourth event, held in conjunction with People First (Scotland) in Edinburgh on Monday 4 October 2010.

28 People First members attended the event, all of whom have learning difficulties, and some of whom have multiple impairments.

2. Design of the Event

The involvement day was designed in a different way to the other events to as to ensure full accessibility for the People First members. The event consisted of an open discussion and then two activities:

1. General discussion

Participants were asked their general thoughts about access to housing for people with learning difficulties.

2. Which issues are more/less important to you?

This was a group activity in breakout groups using a piece of flipchart paper and cards pre-printed with issues relating to housing. Participants were asked which of the issues on the cards were important to them and which were less important.

3. What issues do you feel should be the priorities for the Government?

This was a group activity in breakout groups using a piece of flipchart paper and cards pre-printed with issues relating to Government priorities. Participants were asked which of the issues on the cards should be priorities for the Government.

3. Results of the Discussions

3.1 General discussion

Participants were asked their general thoughts about access to housing for people with learning difficulties. There was general agreement that people with learning difficulties don't get a chance to choose where they want to live or who they want to live with. Participants felt that other people, often social work professionals, decide where people with learning difficulties will live and often do not consult with the individual.

Participants also felt that it is difficult to move house to a new area if they do not like where they are living. People felt they can easily "Get stuck in the wrong place".

A key theme in the discussion was the lack of consultation with people with learning difficulties. One participant stated "People don't listen to me. They're not interested in my wellbeing".

Participants felt that there are not enough houses in the good areas in which people want to live. Participants agreed that the area in which a house is located is of great importance, particularly to avoid harassment. People felt that harassment was a big issue and that there is a lack of support in relation to dealing with it.

The participants felt that the points system used in allocating housing is difficult to understand. One participant said that she did not know how many points she needed to get a house.

Participants agreed that the allocations policies of local authorities created problems generally. They felt that the bidding process was not clear and resented being told to "take it or leave it".

Participants who live in supported accommodation said that they were not given the chance to live independently.

Participants who had been in secure hospitals said that the stigma of this stayed with them throughout their lives.

The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:

- Ensure that relevant housing policies and strategies promote the importance of consultation with disabled people over their housing choices.
- Ensure that the new Social Housing Allocations Guide is effective in providing guidance in relation to issues facing people with learning difficulties.
- Invest in building more accessible and low cost housing in good neighbourhoods.

3.2 Which issues are more/less important to you?

Participants were asked which issues in relation to housing were important to them and which were less important. The most important issues highlighted by the groups were:

1. To be able to choose **where I live**.
2. To **understand the bidding** process.
3. To have the ability to **choose my own home regardless of needs**, including being able to live in a group home, with family, or independently if I wish.
4. To be able to choose the **size of house** I live in.
5. To be able to have **friends to visit** whenever I wish.
6. To have the right to live in a **safe area**.

Group 1

Everything was important for this group, with some issues more important than others.

Safety was a very important issue for this group because it impacts on their community participation and social life. They said that if they did not feel safe they would be too scared to go out.

The group felt a social life was very important and that housing had a key role to play in this as it was important to be able to choose where they live and have the freedom and independence to go and see friends as well as being able to welcome friends into their home.

Having the choice to move to a particular area, town or country was also important to this group so they could maintain relationships with friends and family. The group members felt that without a social and support network many people can feel isolated which could lead to mental ill health. This also included the need to move somewhere with good public transport and they felt often the nicer or safer areas didn't have as many transport links.

Another issue surrounded the choice to remain in the family home. Many people felt it was important not to be under pressure to move or make decisions about moving too quickly. Having support to understand the bidding process was significant and people felt the government needed to do more to make the information accessible.

Group 2

This group felt that it is too difficult to buy a home on benefits as they cannot afford mortgage payments. They also felt it was important to have the choice to buy part of their own home if they wanted to.

The group felt that having priority for social housing ahead of people coming out of prison was not important. They felt that all people should be treated equally regardless of their past.

They felt it was important to live in an area they feel safe in and not threatened by others, and being able to choose a nice area with a good support network and neighbours. The group felt that if they felt more supported and safe they would go out more at nights with friends, such as going to a pub or club. They also felt that if they lived in a better area they may have less damage to their house like smashed windows which could mean fewer expenses.

The group felt that where they live should be their own choice and that they should not feel under pressure to move out of their family home. However they agreed that moving out of the family home could lead to more independence and a better relationship with their parents. They feel that better information, support and advice is required by people considering leaving home.

The group felt that more support may be needed for people to live on their own but that everyone should have the choice to live independently, even if they required 24/7 support.

The group felt that being able to choose not only the area but also the type of house is important so that friends and family can stay the night or there is space to have a housemate if the person does not want to live alone.

Group 3

This group felt that everyone should be equal in priority for housing and that single parents shouldn't be considered a priority above others. They also felt that the ability to move to another country was not a priority however people should have the choice to move especially if they have connections abroad.

This group felt that it was most important that people did not feel pressured to move especially if their choice was limited or the person was unsure. They felt being able to understand the bidding process was important to moving which may mean that they need support throughout the process and more information should be given.

Having a support network such as friends and family who can visit when you want is important so you do not feel alone, can have an active social life and keep connections in the community.

The house should be close to local amenities such as a bank for ease of paying bills and a friendly neighbourhood. This support might help ease the transition and help family to feel less anxious too.

The group felt that having further information about the bidding process and the areas in which houses are located would help them to make an informed choice rather than feeling pressurised by the council to accept any house. They felt that people should have a choice over their house whether that is living independently, in a group or with your family.

Group 4

This group also felt that it was less important to have priority for social housing, ahead of people coming out of prison and stated that the reason for this was that it is not possible to know what the person has done and people should not be judgemental.

The group felt that the most important factors were being able to understand the bidding process and being able to choose where to live. Another important issue was having the support an individual needs to get their house adapted to their needs, and they expressed the desire to have help to 'fight your corner'.

Alongside this they prioritised the issue of being involved in the design of their new adapted house as they felt this would mean they could use the house to the best of their ability.

This group also felt that it was important to be able to buy their own house with their benefits, and talked about the importance of feeling safe to go out at night and also the issue of not getting harassed in the street.

The group also felt that it was important to have support to understand the bidding process and place bids for social housing.

They also felt it was important to be supported to speak to their parents about moving out of the family home. Some participants felt that their parents had power over them and that it can be difficult to tell them because they did not want to upset them.

Lastly, being able to live in a group home if they wanted to was important to them, and they stated that everyone should have a choice about where they live.

The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:

- Ensure that relevant housing policies and strategies promote the importance of the various processes in the housing system being accessible to everyone.
- Ensure that relevant housing policies and strategies promote the importance of producing information in Easy Read for people with learning difficulties.
- Work with organisations of disabled people to ensure that the appropriate support can be provided to people with learning difficulties to have equal access to the housing system.
- Ensure that staff working in the Housing and Regeneration Directorate understand the issues facing people with learning difficulties.
- Take action to ensure that home ownership (partial or full) remains a realistic option for people on benefits.

3.3 What issues do you feel should be the priorities for the Government?

After group discussion the following issues were found to be of highest priority:

- The right to advice and guidance on housing issues:
 - All advice should be accessible so that people know what they are and are not entitled to and can make the right decisions.
 - Advice and guidance should be 'easy-read' and part of the housing package.
- The right to have a proper social life and feel safe:
 - Lack of a social life can lead to feeling isolated and this can lead to mental health problems.
 - This should be taken into account when people with learning difficulties apply for houses.
 - More information should be given by staff in housing associations and local councils about the area in which a proposed house is situated, including the local amenities and how safe the area is.
 - Even though some people will have less of a social life, everyone should have the same rights to access things.
 - People with learning difficulties should have the right to mix in the community.

- The right to feel safe where you live:
 - Feeling safe allows people to go out and be more comfortable in their own home and confident in their community.
 - It should be recognised that using a wheelchair can make people feel vulnerable.
 - Community police should be involved in making sure everyone feels safe.
- Build more social housing in good areas:
 - More houses should be built in areas which people actually want to live and feel safe.
- Build more accessible and suitable housing:
 - More houses should be built that meet the needs of disabled people.
- The right to choose the area you live in:
 - The group felt that it is important to live in the same area as friends and family so as not to feel isolated.
 - However people also felt that it should be their choice whether or not they live with or near family.
- The right to choose to live in your own home, group home etc:
 - Some participants shared positive experiences of group homes but other people preferred not to share.
 - The group felt that it is important to recognise that everyone is different and that everyone should have the right to live in the sort of housing that they want to.
 - Privacy is important.
 - It is important to participants to be able to control their own living situation, including who they live with and the staff who support them.

The following represent a consolidation of the views expressed:

- Ensure that advice and guidance on housing issues is accessible and available in Easy Read.
- Take action to build more social housing in good areas.
- Take action to build more accessible and suitable housing.
- Ensure that people with learning difficulties are at the centre of decision making in relation to their housing options.

4. Summary of Views Expressed

- Ensure that relevant housing policies and strategies promote the importance of consultation with disabled people over their housing choices.
- The Scottish Government should ensure that the new Social Housing Allocations Guide is effective in providing guidance in relation to issues facing people with learning difficulties.
- Invest in building more accessible and low cost housing in good neighbourhoods.
- Ensure that relevant housing policies and strategies promote the importance of the various processes in the housing system being accessible to everyone.
- Ensure that relevant housing policies and strategies promote the importance of producing information in Easy Read for people with learning difficulties.
- Work with organisations of disabled people to ensure that the appropriate support can be provided to people with learning difficulties to have equal access to the housing system.
- Ensure that staff working in the Scottish Government Housing and Regeneration Directorate understand the issues facing people with learning difficulties.
- Take action to ensure that home ownership (partial or full) remains a realistic option for people on benefits.
- Ensure that advice and guidance on housing issues is accessible and available in Easy Read.
- The Scottish Government should take action to build more social housing in good areas.
- Take action to build more accessible and suitable housing.
- Ensure that people with learning difficulties are at the centre of decision making in relation to their housing options.

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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