

SUBMITTING EVIDENCE TO A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE

DATA PROTECTION FORM

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Date:	26/09/2018
Organisation: (if required)	Shelter Scotland
Topic of submission:	Scottish Budget scrutiny – housing adaptations

I have read and understood the privacy notice about submitting evidence to a Committee.

I am happy for my name, or that of my organisation, to be on the submission, for it to be published on the Scottish Parliament website, mentioned in any Committee report and form part of the public record.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

PRE- BUDGET SCRUTINY- HOUSING ADAPTATIONS

SUBMISSION FROM Shelter Scotland

Introduction

At Shelter Scotland we work to alleviate the distress caused by homelessness and bad housing. We do this by giving advice, information and advocacy to people in housing need, and by campaigning for lasting change to end the housing crisis for good.

We strive every day to give people the help they need and we campaign relentlessly to achieve our vision of a safe, secure and affordable home for everyone. In 2017/18 Shelter Scotland helped 21,290 people through our housing advice and support services. Across all those we helped, the top three issues were: struggling to pay or afford housing costs; housing conditions and issues with their landlord.

Summary

- The supply of adapted and adaptable housing in Scotland is currently insufficient and should be increased across all tenures.
- Scotland is in a housing crisis with insufficient housing across all tenures but particularly in the supply of affordable and socially rented homes. This puts pressure on all parts of the housing system, especially high needs groups including those who are homeless and those who have specific accessibility requirements due to a disability.
- Shelter Scotland works frequently with people who are stuck in housing that does not meet their needs, often rendering them house-bound and cut off from social networks, or forced to make significant and inappropriate changes to their lives including sleeping on sofas, washing at a sink or being carried up multiple flights of stairs.
- The right to adequate housing is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but access to a safe, secure, affordable home is currently denied to those for whom suitable accommodation is not available. The Scottish Government and all other duty bearers in Scotland should ensure that there is a supply of adequate housing which meets everyone's needs.

Housing crisis

Scotland is in a housing crisis, with a chronic lack of housing across all tenures but especially affordable and socially rented housing. There are currently 131,900 people on

local authority housing waiting lists and a further 25,900 on transfer lists¹, and in 2017/18 34,972 households applied as homeless², the first increase for 9 years. At the last count on 31st March 2018, 10,933 households were living in temporary accommodation. The number of children in temporary accommodation has risen for the fourth consecutive year to 6,615 and households with families spend longer in temporary accommodation, primarily because there are insufficient affordable housing options for them to move out of temporary accommodation. It is within this wider context that the housing sector is struggling to meet the needs and support the independence of those with physical disabilities. According to Independent Living in Scotland in 2017, only 0.7 percent of local authority housing stock and 1.5 per cent of housing managed by registered social landlords (RSLs) is accessible to wheelchair users.³ This is despite the fact that demand for accessible housing is increasing, particularly for wheelchair users. Projections indicate that there will be 80 per cent growth in the number of wheelchair users by 2024.⁴

Case study

Kerry and her family including two children and her mother became homeless when their landlord abandoned his property as it was being repossessed. Kerry's daughter has a rare disability which means she uses a wheelchair and requires a number of adaptations and aids fitted in her home. Kerry's mother also suffers from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). They were already overcrowded – her mum has been sleeping on the sofa for years. No suitable temporary accommodation could be found for them so they remained in the flat which was not being managed by anyone. Mistakes were made in their homelessness application resulting in delays and they were restricted in applying for the small number of properties allocated to people with mobility issues. They were given a housing transfer after Shelter Scotland's Law Service got in touch with the local authority and housing associations concerned and their case was reported in a national newspaper. The family's stressful ordeal lasted for more than two years.

Lack of accessible housing

Our advice and support services are often contacted by people who are in housing that does not meet their needs who are struggling to have properties adapted or to find a suitable home to move to and need Shelter Scotland to advocate on their behalf.

¹ Housing Statistics for Scotland - Housing lists (Scottish Government, September 2018)
<https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/HSfS/HousingLists>

² Homelessness in Scotland: 2017-18 (Scottish Government, June 2018)
<https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/06/9554/downloads>

³ Housing and Disabled People: Scotland's hidden crisis (EHRC, May 2018)
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/housing-and-disabled-people-scotland-hidden-crisis-long-summary.pdf>

⁴ Housing and Disabled People: Scotland's hidden crisis (EHRC, May 2018)
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Case study

Carol, a kidney dialysis patient, contacted Shelter Scotland because she faced delays having a shower installed in her housing association home. The delays had a severe impact on her health and wellbeing. Not only did she have to stand at a sink to wash every day, but a complication of her illness is an uncomfortable rash covering her whole body which was being exacerbated by the lack of a shower. After months of delays the housing association acted very quickly once contacted by Shelter Scotland acting on behalf of Carol.

Case study

Linda and her two teenage children became homeless due to marriage breakdown. As a wheelchair user who was also homeless the housing association restricted the homes she could bid on to the small number it allocated for people with mobility problems. However Linda's Occupational Therapist confirmed there were properties suitable for adaptation in the category allocated to people experiencing homelessness which Linda was not allowed to access. Due to the limitations on the properties she could bid for, Linda endured three years in temporary accommodation which was unsuitable for her disability rendering her housebound at times. She was finally offered a suitable home as the result of out of court negotiation between the Housing Association and Shelter Scotland's Law Service.

The lack of suitable accommodation affects people across all tenures – including the private rented sector where a tenant is only permitted to make adaptations with their landlord's permission, though the landlord cannot withhold consent unreasonably. Some physical changes can be more difficult to argue for particularly if there is a lack of security of tenure where tenants are on a short assured tenancy agreement and outwith their initial tenancy period meaning they can be given notice without the need for any grounds, or where the tenant is unsure if they want or will be able to stay in the property long term.

Case study

The mother of a young boy with a severe learning disability needed adaptations in her private let to help her care for him, specifically a wet room because she was struggling to bathe her son. She was reluctant to push for her landlord to adapt the property because she didn't feel it was reasonable for the landlord to make such a major physical change to the property particularly given she did not want to remain in the property permanently. Her Shelter Scotland adviser applied to the community care panel to try to increase her priority rating to help her find a permanent more suitable home in the social rented sector, but this was refused because she had not tried to ask her landlord for permission. An appeal was also refused on the same basis, not taking into account that her reluctance to ask her landlord was based on the fact that the property on the whole was not suitable for her: she had had to give up work to become a full-time carer for her son and was struggling to pay the rent.

New-build housing

Recent analysis⁵ of Strategic Housing Investment Plans and a sample of Affordable Housing Supply Plans on behalf of Shelter Scotland raised several issues relating to accessible housing, including those around funding. The research found that 12% of new homes planned are classed as 'specialist housing' but that it is difficult to track what type of specialist housing they are. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission⁶ has recommended that local authorities should ensure that a minimum of 10 per cent of new housing is built to a wheelchair-accessible standard. Shelter Scotland would agree that, given the housing crisis and the profile of the ageing population, a serious discussion needs to be had about how we increase the amount of accessible housing to meet current and future needs.

Human rights

Shelter Scotland believes that everyone has the right to a safe, secure and affordable home but access to a safe, secure, affordable home is currently denied to those for whom suitable adapted and adaptable accommodation is not available. Access to an adequate standard of housing is a basic human right as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that the Scottish Government and one which all public agencies and stakeholders should be seeking to achieve.

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⁵ Review of Strategic Investment Plans for Affordable Housing (Shelter Scotland, February 2018)
https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/review_of_strategic_investment_plans_for_affordable_housing

⁶ Housing and Disabled People: Scotland's hidden crisis (EHRC, May 2018)
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/housing-and-disabled-people-scotland-hidden-crisis-long-summary.pdf>