

INCLUSION SCOTLAND

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

1, Introduction

- 1.1 Inclusion Scotland (IS) is a network of disabled peoples' organisations and individual disabled people. Our main aim is to draw attention to the physical, social, economic, cultural and attitudinal barriers that affect disabled people's everyday lives and to encourage a wider understanding of those issues throughout Scotland. Inclusion Scotland is part of the disabled people's Independent Living Movement.
- 1.2 Inclusion Scotland are concerned that many disabled people are in housing that does not meet their needs, and this restricts their ability to enjoy the same freedom, choice, dignity and control as other citizens.
- 1.3 The Scottish Household Conditions Survey¹ estimates that there are 836,000 households in Scotland where there is someone with a long term condition (LTC) or disability. Of these, 212,000 are defined as family households, 398,000 as pensioner households and 226,000 as "other", presumably single people and couples without children.
- 1.4 The SHCS estimates that there are 493,000 homes that have been adapted for people with LTC or disability, which is 21% of the housing stock. 32% of social housing is adapted, and 17% of private sector housing (owner occupied or private rented).
- 1.5 However, the survey also highlights that there are 129,000 households with a person with a LTC or disability that are in need of being adapted. This is 5% of the total housing stock.
- 1.6 "Mind The Step : An estimation of housing need among wheelchair users in Scotland"², published in 2012 by Horizon Housing Association and the Chartered Institute of Housing, estimated that there is a shortfall of 17,042 barrier free houses, affecting 14% of wheelchair users.
- 1.7 In addition, disabled people have been disproportionately affected by the bedroom tax. Disabled people may be "under-occupying" as they require additional space to store equipment, or because their partner cannot sleep in the same room, or because there was no other housing available that was adapted to meet the requirements of their impairment.

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SHCS/LAtables2012>

² <http://horizonhousing.org/static-content-wysiwyg-downloads/Horizon-Housing-Mind-the-step-report.pdf>

- 1.8 Inclusion Scotland's response to the Housing (Scotland) Bill is made in this context.

2 Right to Buy

- 2.1 Given the shortage of suitable adapted property to meet the needs of disabled people, Inclusion Scotland welcomes steps that will help to preserve the stock of social housing, particularly as a higher proportion of social housing is adapted.
- 2.2 However, it is important to recognise that preventing the sale of social housing to existing tenants will not in itself increase the availability of suitable social housing, as long-standing tenants may choose to remain even without the right to buy. There may also be a surge in RTB sales during the three year period between enactment and abolition of RTB.
- 2.3 In order to increase the availability of barrier free housing that is suitable for disabled people, there needs to be increased investment in new social housing, including housing that is readily adaptable and fully wheelchair accessible.

3 Social Housing

- 3.1 We welcome the assurance in the policy memorandum to the Bill that the broader definition of priority for housing will be of particular benefit to disabled or older people who are more likely to need to move because they are in unsuitable housing. We would be interested to know how the Scottish Government intends to monitor the effectiveness of this.
- 3.2 We would also ask that disabled people and their representative organisations are included in the groups to be consulted by social landlords when considering their rules on priority of allocation under section 4 of the Bill.
- 3.3 It is important that when allocating housing that is considered suitable to meet the needs of disabled people, social landlords take account of how they define rooms, so that disabled people are not punished because they require an additional room as a result of their disability.
- 3.4 We support the proposals to give powers to social landlords to repossess adapted or specially constructed properties where there is no-one occupying it who has special needs, but it is required by someone who has special needs.
- 3.5 Disabled People are often the victims of anti-social behaviour as a result of harassment related to their disability. We therefore welcome further powers to social landlords to deal more effectively with anti-social behaviour.

4 Private Sector Housing

- 4.1 We welcome the proposal to transfer challenges to refusal by a landlord to allow adaptations for disabled tenants to the new Private Rented Sector Tribunal. This should make it easier for disabled people to challenge such refusals.
- 4.2 The policy memorandum does, however, recognise that some private tenants may be reluctant to take issues to the tribunal because of fear of reprisals by landlords; that there will need to be exemptions to any tribunal fees for those who cannot afford to pay; and that certain people with protected characteristics, including disabled people, may need support to participate effectively in proceedings.
- 4.3 We look forward to seeing more detailed proposals from the Scottish Government, and the Scottish Legal Aid Board, on how these issues will be addressed.

5 Private Housing Conditions

- 5.1 We note from the policy memorandum that “the enforcement powers are intended to improve house conditions and support other Scottish Government policies to enable older people to remain in their own homes and to enable adaptations to housing for disabled people.”
- 5.2 However, it is not clear from the Bill or the Explanatory Notes how the enforcement powers will enable adaptations to housing for disabled people. We hope this can be clarified by the Scottish Government during Stage 1.

Inclusion Scotland
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