



Housing LIN

*Connecting people, ideas and resources*

## Case Study 169

# Accessible and inclusive housing – bringing together a focus on adaptations as an integrated priority across policy agendas in Scotland

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# Introduction

In Scotland, we continue to have a chronic shortage of accessible housing. Disabled people and older people often:

- experience ill-health/injury as direct result of being inappropriately housed.
- wait years for a suitable house.
- wait unnecessarily in hospital.
- face problems and long delays getting their homes adapted.

It is for these reasons we are very much invested in the [Enhancing the accessibility, adaptability and usability of Scotland's homes: consultation](#) being conducted at the moment by the Scottish Government (closing date 21st December 2023). This is focused on updating the Housing for Varying Needs Standard first introduced in 1998. We are encouraged with the process, but also note that this is focused on new build while many older and disabled people currently live in inappropriate homes that do not meet their needs. There must also be a focus on making adaptations and retrofitting work to support the varying health needs within homes that exist already.

## About the Accessible Housing Network

The Accessible Housing Network was formed in 2021 following Horizon Housing Association's Summit – *Getting Accessible Housing on Everyone's Agenda*. Speakers and participants agreed it would be good to establish a network and continue to meet to share ideas, research, initiatives and, importantly, promote this important agenda.

Our wide and varied network includes the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA), Stirling University, Anderson Bell Christie Architects, Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD), health and social care partnerships, West Lothian Council, independent Occupational Therapist, Inclusion Scotland, Motor Neuron Disease Scotland, Hub North Scotland, Age Scotland, Housing Options Scotland, Scottish Community Safety Network, and Horizon Housing Association, to name but a few!

We are committed to getting accessible housing and homes for life on everyone's agenda – government bodies, health, social care, developers, the Scottish population. Only then can we start to change legislation, policy and behaviour and attitudes to ensuring we have flexible homes for life where people can remain in their homes as their needs change. It's proving to be an uphill struggle, but one we are not afraid to tackle.

# Linking in with Policy Developments

The previous [2013 Sustainable Housing strategy](#) for Scotland focused on energy efficiency, new build and low carbon homes. This is very important, but the strategy took those elements to be separate to key issues of adaptations, inclusive design and accessible housing. [Housing to 2040](#) highlights a more linked and holistic vision for housing, but often sustainability is narrowly focused on energy efficiency and low carbon activities within the housing sector. Accessibility is a fundamental aspect of sustainability.

The Accessible Housing Network want to point out that building a warm, sustainable home must go hand in hand with inclusive design, adaptations and increasing accessibility. After all, you may have a warm, insulated home - but if you cannot access it, or it is not suitable or flexible enough for supporting health needs, the ultimate aim of improving wellbeing and quality of life will not be met for people all over Scotland.



*True 'Sustainability in Housing' must reflect a balance between responding to our current challenges while futureproofing for the needs of current and future generations, ensuring a holistic approach to inclusive accessibility, environmental care and health & social well-being.*

Members of the Accessible Housing Network have been working on building a wealth of evidence that supports a focus on adaptations and positioning [accessible housing as a human right](#). This compliments and links in with a truly sustainable housing agenda.

The policy landscape around accessibility continues to develop, with the latest Scottish Government Health & Social Care Directorate [guidance](#) on equipment and adaptations provision now published. This includes responsibilities for NHS Scotland, Local Authorities, Integration Authorities, and their Housing and Education partners for the provision of equipment and adaptations to support more equitable and accessible services. There is significant emphasis in the document, on the need for much earlier intervention with people around their housing needs. The aim is to encourage far wider ownership within services, to make housing needs 'everyone's business', and recognition that the right home environment will be critical in supporting all other interventions. The new Guidance:

*acknowledges the barriers to people's independence within and out with their home and puts far greater emphasis on the need to fully explore rehousing.*

This emphasises the need for health and social care to work much closer with housing services and review strategies and policies to make sure partners support a whole system approach to housing-based needs, avoiding crisis responses to providing traditional solutions (adaptations) which in themselves, may not resolve a person's long-term needs.



# The Evidence

The Adaptations Policy and Practice Projects, co-ordinated by CaCHE (The UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence) involves collaborations across the University of Glasgow, University of Stirling, Horizon Housing Association and HACT focusing on understanding both the academic evidence and policy landscape behind home adaptations. It links insights generated from a [Evidence Review of Home Adaptations in the UK and Other OECD Countries](#), [Social Value Analysis](#) and [examination of the adaptations policy process](#).

Figure 1: Adaptations Policy and Practice Projects (click pictures to link to reports)



The University of Stirling in partnership with Age Scotland also examine adaptations through the perspectives of older people in a report titled [Making Adaptations Work for Older People in Scotland](#) focusing on the experiences faced by older people. From the perspectives of those growing older in Scotland, there is no line or separation between sustainability, energy efficiency, technology and adaptations – all these elements together must be considered in a more household approach to supporting needs as they evolve and change through time. This quote from an older participant highlights the range of considerations when thinking about making our homes more accessible and supportive of our needs:

*“Adaptation seems to be considered not only in the physical aspect but in the emotional side and indeed, to facilitate people and empower them to be able to access all the facilities they require” (Participant 15, cited in [McCall et al 2023](#)).*

The role of technology, aids and adaptations has also been examined in the [INVITE Project](#), noting the huge impact of small, low cost interventions from hot water dispensers to jar openers in improving quality of life and wellbeing. The evidence gathered highlights a merging of factors that spans across physical adaptations and home modifications, energy efficiency and technology agendas. The challenges can be more acute for certain groups, such as those with physical, mobility, sensory or learning disabilities.

## No Time to Lose: Addressing the Housing Needs of People with MND

The insights to added barriers and challenges to accessible housing for particular groups is shown clearly in the MND Scotland report [No time to lose: Addressing the Housing Needs of People with MND](#), March 2022. Motor Neuron Disease (MND) is a rapidly progressing terminal illness which can cause people to lose the ability to walk, talk, eat and breathe unaided. As people become increasingly disabled, they struggle to move around their home safely and need adaptations such as ramps and wetrooms. If adaptations cannot be made to the home, an alternative accessible home must be found. However, despite an average life expectancy of just 18 months from diagnosis, people with MND reported long waits for the adaptations and accessible homes they need. Tragically, for many, these never come in time. Local authorities confirmed these findings with one local authority reporting an average wait time for anyone needing a ramp of more than 15 months. Another local authority reported waits of 4 years for an accessible home. Waits, such as these, are terrible for anyone, but are inconceivable for someone with an illness like MND. MND Scotland's report includes 12 recommendations for the Scottish Government. More than one year on from its launch, there is little progress to report. These challenges and the potential solutions are all significant as they apply to a wide range of people with limiting conditions and ill health.

## People with Learning Disabilities

The Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities and our partners know that accessible, sustainable housing options are essential if the right to independent living as detailed in the UNCRPD is to be achieved for disabled people including people with learning disabilities. There is no one-size fits all answer - adaptations both to existing housing stock and new build are critical if we are to ensure that everyone's individual needs are to be met. This can be as simple as ensuring step-free access to a home, providing a barrier free interior all the way through to a state-of-the art new build which incorporates a whole range of adaptations which provide technology enabled care. All too often people with learning disabilities are being detained in hospital or are homeless because there is no accessible housing option in the community. SCLD's Housing Advisory Group is delighted to work in partnership with the Accessible Housing Network to create a different future for people with learning disabilities where they are given choice and control over where they live.

# Getting Involved



The Accessible Housing Network are committed to developing and enhancing the evidence base to support the ongoing focus and investment in accessible housing. This has included linking in with the [Designing for Healthy Cognitive Ageing \(DesHCA\)](#) project (funded by the UKRI and led by the University of Stirling) working with innovative methodologies such as 'Serious Games' to help people understand the role of housing and planning for ageing and adaptations.

*Figure 2 (above & right): The Accessible Housing Network playing the Serious Game at University of Stirling*

Many of the Accessible Housing Network also attended a conference in Glasgow this year to explore ways on how to tackle stigma related age, disability, place, homes and adaptations as part of the [Intersectional - Stigma of Place-Based Ageing \(ISPA\) Project](#) (funded by the ESRC and led by University of Stirling, and hosted by the Housing LIN). The network are supporting an Inclusive Living Alliance as part of the project, to investigate the lived realities of disabled adults with sensory and mobility impairments, identifying how different types of stigma (related to age, disability and place) converge to produce added barriers to living inclusively.



*Figure 3: Accessible Housing Network at the ISPA conference May 2023*

The Accessible Housing Network, alongside the projects we are involved in is an open door for those interested in working towards accessible and inclusive housing and bringing together a focus on adaptations as an integrated priority across policy agendas.

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# Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

## About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 20,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations

Access a selection of related resources curated on the Housing LIN Scotland pages at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Regions/Scotland/>

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