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Disability Research on Independent Living & Learning

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MATCH ME -

What works for adapted social housing lettings? Action research to enhance independent living for disabled people.

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University of Stirling, July 2019

‘Extended lived experience of inappropriate housing causes disabled people physical and mental harm’.

‘Ideally, a single named contact should support disabled people to navigate complex application and lettings systems.’

‘Flexibility in matching processes and lettings times can achieve more sustainable matches for adapted/accessible homes.’

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all of the following for their contribution to this research.

Our project funders: DRILL (Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning) and the Big Lottery Fund.

Our project partners: Julia Fitzpatrick, Former CEO, Horizon Housing Association and Moira Bayne, CEO Housing Options Scotland.

Our Project Advisory Group.

- Margaret Follon: Chair, Housing Options Scotland and Chair of Advisory Group
- Emma Muldoon: Simply Emma
- Ann Marie Penman
- Lois Speed
- Janice Conner: Head of Housing Service, Link Housing Association Ltd.
- Jean Morrison MBE: Representing Aberdeen DPHS (Disabled Person Housing Service)
- Lesley Baird: CEO, TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) Scotland
- Pedro Cameron: Housing Options Scotland, Administrative Support to Advisory Group

Our three peer researchers, who contributed significantly to gathering interview data from disabled house-seekers and tenants, as well as providing valuable insights throughout the project.

The organisations and individuals that took part in the research are not identified in this report, but we are extremely grateful for their generosity of time and resources.

We thank everyone above for their invaluable support and participation throughout the project. We were privileged to be entrusted with private, sometimes sensitive and highly personal information. Without you, this research would not have been possible. Thank you.

Match Me: Executive Summary

Introduction

This summary presents the key findings from research into the effectiveness of allocations and lettings practice for accessible and adapted social housing in Scotland. Research to date has argued for a 'three pronged' approach to meeting disabled people's housing needs[1].

1. Development of new wheelchair standard homes for owner-occupiers and tenants
2. Support for home adaptations across tenures.
3. Efficient allocation of accessible and adaptable homes in the affordable and social rented sectors.

The study focused on the third strand, seeking to better understand the processes behind applying for and moving into social rented housing, from the perspectives of disabled people, as well as housing providers.

The research was funded as part of a wider programme of work on independent living and learning for disabled people. The study was conducted in collaboration with Housing Options Scotland and Horizon Housing Association. The research sought to be disabled-led by also involving self-identifying disabled peer researchers and advisory group members.

The study sought new evidence from an in-depth examination of three local authority areas including:

- Hearing the experiences of disabled applicants and tenants over an extended period (initial interview, interim follow up and second interview).
- Understanding the approaches of housing providers and engaging them in discussions about their practice and the experiences of applicants and tenants.

The research follows on from a pilot study (Anderson et al, 2017) that designed and tested a co-production approach for evaluating effectiveness of lettings practice for accessible and adapted social rented housing. The co-production method was replicated and further developed in the Match Me study, to address key research questions on how to improve disabled people's access to social rented housing.

The policy and research context for the study

The research identified a substantial body of legislation and policy which underpins strategies to meet the housing needs of disabled people – from the introduction of 'Housing for varying needs' in 1998, to the Scottish Government's 2019 guidance on delivering more wheelchair accessible accommodation across all tenures.

Nonetheless, research evidence and literature confirms the continuing, often negative, impact of unsuitable housing on the lives of disabled people. There remains a need for a

Anderson, I., Theakstone, D, Baird, C. and Jago, L. (2017) *Matching up? A pilot study of effectiveness of letting adapted social housing.* Horizon Housing Association.

[1]Most recently, in Fitzpatrick, J., Lees, F., McDonald, E., and Galani, E. (2018). *Still minding the step? A new estimation of the housing needs of wheelchair users in Scotland.* Livingston: Horizon Housing Association

strong voice for further improvement to national policies and local procedures to improve disabled peoples' access to suitable homes. The Match Me research was also informed by developments in co-production research to support the involvement of disabled people, including peer researchers. The study explored to what extent co-production featured as part of local housing providers' commitment to service user involvement.

Research Method

The aim of this study was to examine the practices, policies and systems that enable effective allocation of adapted and accessible social housing, through four key research questions:

1. How can social landlords achieve more, better and faster routes to independent living for disabled people?

2. What improvements to allocations policies and practices will deliver equal housing opportunity for disabled people?

3. What support do disabled house seekers require in the social housing application and lettings processes?

4. How can adapted and adaptable housing better enhance independent living?

The study adopted qualitative research methods with the aim of better understanding the processes and experiences 'behind the statistics' on disabled people's access to housing .The research compared landlord practice and applicant/tenant experiences in three local authority areas in Scotland, to provide new evidence on disabled home-seekers' needs, experiences and outcomes. Within each local authority case study area, the following research methods were adopted:

• Contextual research on local lettings policy and practice.

• Semi-structured interviews tracking the experiences of a cohort of disabled home-seekers/new tenants over a period of up to one year (first interview, interim reflective follow up, second interview)

• Observations and discussions of lettings practice in the three local authority areas (focused group discussions)

• Feedback sessions in the three local authority areas to triangulate findings from disabled participants and housing providers, and to develop study conclusions and recommendations.

The co-production approach to the study was effective in achieving the following outcomes:

1. Involvement of a Project Advisory Group, including a number of self-identifying disabled people, as well as practitioners with expertise in disabled people's access to housing.

2. Review of local housing context and strategy to inform fieldwork.

3. Recruitment of self-identifying disabled Peer Researchers (two with mobility impairments and one with a visual impairment) and development of a supportive approach enabling them to contribute significantly to data collection for the study.

4. Recruitment of twenty-eight disabled social housing applicant/new tenant households each of which included at least one person who had limited mobility. These interviewees participated in face-to-face semi-structured interviews about their housing application experience. Interviewees were invited to take part in two interviews over the course of a year and between these interviews, to participate in a reflective account of any changes in their situation.

5. Observations of lettings practices in each of the three local authority case study areas. These sessions involved a combination of one-to-one semi-structured interviews and focus groups with staff involved with the allocation processes of adapted/accessible social housing. Participants included representatives from housing and social work/occupational therapy staff.

6. Local authority feedback sessions in each case study area with a total of 60 participants. These participants included peer researchers, service providers, tenant group representatives and local organisations/individuals involved with disabled peoples' housing issues.

For reporting, all data was analysed thematically to address the study research questions and triangulated across data sets (context/prior evidence, disabled home-seekers, housing providers). The action research approach enabled discussion of emerging findings with the Project Advisory Group and through the local feedback sessions, in order ensure the maximum degree of co-production of research findings and recommendations.

The experience of co-production and peer research

Reflections from the research and co-production participants on their experiences of involvement indicated a broad consensus on the benefits of a co-production approach. The research design, execution, analysis and dissemination have all been informed by the lived experiences of disabled people. Some individual participants reported an increase in knowledge, self-confidence, and skills which contributed to their personal development. Challenges for effective co-production research included ensuring enough time and resources for effective participation (concurring with prior literature). Some participants may need support to maintain motivation throughout a lengthy project period. Practical challenges included the inaccessibility and lack of public transport, as well as the inaccessibility of interviewees' homes. For those in receipt of benefits, the social security system does not easily enable short-term involvement of disabled people in peer researcher activities. For the Project Advisory Group, initial input in explaining the complexities of the research process (e.g. challenges of data collection in the field), as well as adequate resources to support involvement helped sustain participation throughout the project lifetime. The passion and commitment demonstrated by many of the Match Me co-production participants made a huge contribution to the study and added to learning for future research design.

The housing application process

Rachel – seeking a more suitable home
Even with a stairlift installed, in order to use the upstairs toilet, Rachel has to make eight transfers between chair, wheelchair, stairlift and toilet – and back down again. This impacts negatively on her health and disability.

The three example local authorities used different systems to assess and prioritise housing needs: Priority banding (A-D) for elements of housing need; Group plus points (Transfer; General Need; Specialist/Adapted Property; Sustainable Communities); and Group Plus Points (Homeless, Transfer, Aspirational transfer or General group).

All three also had distinctive mechanisms for assessing health and housing need:

- Housing staff only (as considered to be a housing assessment and not a medical assessment);
- Completed Health and Housing Priority forms with supporting evidence are sent to the Health and Housing panel, which includes OT, SW, Housing staff; and
- Housing services staff, and if required, will ask for assistance from Social Work and health professionals.

None of our case study authorities requested medical practitioners to assess health-related housing need.

The Health and Housing assessment processes thus demonstrated a shift towards the adoption of a social model of housing needs assessment, which better corresponds with disability rights frameworks than prior medical approaches. Each local authority had some means of gathering and assessing supplementary information about health and housing needs that could lead to higher priority for housing.

Each local authority demonstrated considerable reliance on Occupational Therapists' and Housing Officers' knowledge of the needs of applicants, and of property types, to generate creative responses and appropriate housing offers. In particular, Occupational Therapists may have knowledge of people who are in need but not currently on the housing register, and this may avoid returning a 'hard to let' accessible property to general housing stock.

In all case studies, participants discussed, at some level, the impact of homelessness targets and the requirement to prioritise allocations to homeless people. While welcomed, these targets may impact on the housing availability for other priority groups, including disabled people, depending on demands for specific property types. Similarly, each local authority identified the potential of the Housing Options approach to improve advice and solutions offered to disabled applicants.

There was widespread recognition that not all properties which become vacant for re-let can be adapted to meet the needs of disabled applicants. Such information is vital so that

disabled housing applicants are rehoused in a property that improves their current housing situation. This may mean some applicants may need to widen their choices of location, especially in higher demand areas.

Important opportunities to improve practice emerged from interviews with disabled home-seekers and tenants:

- In households where more than one applicant had housing needs there was a requirement for better consideration within allocations systems to fully reflect the overall needs of the household.
- Applicants strongly favour a single named contact to support them through the application process. There was evidence from two local authority areas that a named Housing Officer or allocations contact, identified at the point of application, also provided benefits for the landlord, but one local authority thought this approach might be too resource intensive.

Lettings – matching up applicants and vacancies

Effective matching of disabled applicants to adapted/accessible properties involves several areas of lettings practice: core allocations systems; reletting processes; recovery of properties no longer occupied by a disabled person; nominations to Registered Social Landlords; and letting newly built dwellings.

For Local Authorities to be able to make better use of existing housing stock they need data from a full audit and assessment of existing housing stock to determine what properties have adaptations (and what these are), and what properties have the potential to be adapted. If this information could be collected during routine visits to the properties, rather than waiting for properties to become vacant, this would better inform future planning of the pool of potentially accessible housing. All three case studies discussed the potential effectiveness of new technologies in facilitating holding of up to date information on applicants' needs and the property characteristics in order to achieve effective matches.

Different methods of procurement of new build housing appear to result in different standards of specification and therefore of adaptability, and in turn accessibility to, homes suitable for disabled people. This could be addressed as an equalities issue by Local Authorities, Housing Associations and Scottish Government in commissioning procedures (for example, drawing on Scottish Government 2019 Guidance on increasing wheelchair accessible housing).

Practitioners discussed the housing management conflict between minimising rent lost on vacant properties, and acknowledging the extra time needed to successfully match vacant properties to disabled applicants. In one local authority, pre-approval of adaptions required to make a home accessible to disabled applicants removed some of the factors that can lead to a delay in re-letting an adaptable home. The case was also made for flexibility in target letting times for adapted or accessibly designed vacancies.

Offers and viewings

A high proportion of participant home-seekers received inappropriate housing offers, or no

offers at all, during the tracking study. Evidence indicates strongly that disabled applicants who remain without an offer of a suitable accessible/adapted social house over a significant period may experience negative and/or adverse emotional and mental distress.

Practitioner participants highlighted that having up-to-date property information helped to minimize the number of unsuitable offers of adapted/accessible social housing. This not only saved scarce resources for housing providers, but prevented causing unnecessary frustration for disabled housing applicants.

The research uncovered important evidence that the assessment of the suitability of an adapted/accessible property should not only consider the access and internal features of the home, but should also assess accessibility of the external environment and the opportunities for the applicant to maintain local support networks. Some disabled interviewees' argued strongly that access to a garden should be recognised by allocation systems as a facilitator for emotional and mental wellbeing. Home-seekers also made the case that in order to tailor suitable offers, the needs of the entire household should be taken into consideration by allocation systems, not solely those of the main applicant.

Both practitioner and applicant participants highlighted the need for processes that actively manage housing applications. This may take the form of shorter review periods especially where there has been no offer of suitable housing for 6-8 months. Active management of housing applications would reassure those in need of housing and enhance the accuracy of information held on housing applicants' needs.

A potential area for future good practice was the increased use of new technologies to provide virtual property viewings for disabled housing applicants who are unable to leave their current unsuitable accommodation or unable to attend due to health or accessibility reasons.

Local authorities should ensure they make effective use of nominations agreement to suitable RSL properties. All housing providers could develop more effective mechanisms to seek nominations for adapted/accessible vacancies from other housing providers, if they have an adapted/accessible vacancy but no suitable applicant. This could be extended to seeking nominations from hospital discharge units and relevant third-sector organisations (including from outside of the local area if there is no suitable applicant on their register). Additionally, support could be provided to help disabled housing applicants navigate the schemes to arrange a home swap, possibly by improving coordination between multiple households to avoid withdrawals at a late stage in the process.

Moving in and making a home

Sam - emotional and social benefits of moving to an adapted/ accessible property.
Sam declared 'I can do the dishes now, cook, move unaided around the house - and I'm rediscovering my relationship with my husband, whose stress is reduced by having fewer caring tasks'.

Participants discussed the moving-in process and the experience of settling into their new tenancy. Difficulties disabled tenants had faced in sustaining their tenancies included the need to more precisely adapt existing and newly built properties to fully meet their needs. Some required support to successfully prepare for and undertake a move to a new home. However, participants also emphasised the many social and emotional benefits they gained from moving to a suitable accessible/adapted property. There was evidence that some disabled tenants would benefit from support to move-in, settle-in and sustain their tenancies. Social housing providers should review their tenancy sustainment strategies to ensure they are inclusive of disabled housing applicants, and that they are empowered to make a new tenancy into a sustainable home. Improved communication between housing providers and support providers could lead to better joint working and more effective use of scarce resources to support tenancy sustainability.

Although co-production is enshrined in national policy development, it remains under-developed in local practice. However, good practice was identified in the Match Me study, including involving disabled people and housing professionals, enhancing service user feedback mechanisms and developing strategic approaches to the provision of accessible/adapted social housing and accessible communities.

There was considerable consensus across participant interviewees that construction of newly built accessible and adaptable properties provided significantly greater scope to meet individual housing needs, compared to adaptation of older housing stock.

Conclusions

Housing provides some of our most fundamental needs. It gives us a material base from which to build a livelihood and take part in the life of the community. Several key messages emerge from this research. The study has shown that while housing providers are proactive in reviewing policy and practice to better meet the housing needs of disabled people, there remains some 'distance' between landlord goals and applicant experiences. Disabled people's extended lived experience of inappropriate housing, while waiting for a more accessible home, clearly causes considerable physical and mental harm. Improved understanding comes from hearing the voices of disabled people through co-production approaches in both research and in development of good policy and practice.

Allocations policies and choice-based lettings schemes remain complex and often difficult for disabled people to understand. Depending on their impairments, disabled people may need support with the application, viewing and moving-in processes. The complexity of disabled people's housing needs means that the matching process for suitable adapted or accessible housing is also complex. What works for one household or property may not work for another – so there is often a need for quite individualised solutions. Potential practice improvements to speed up access to housing include making better use of technology to improve quality of data held on accessible/adapted properties and on the specific needs of applicants; flexibility in lettings practice to facilitate a good match; and flexibility in interpretation of disabled people's housing needs (for example to recognise the needs of all household members and the importance of the external environment as well as housing design).

Adaptations can make some of our older housing stock more liveable for some disabled

people, but newly built accessible housing offers much more potential to appropriately meet complex mobility and other impairment related housing needs.

Our research findings support disabled people's requirements for:

- A commitment from Scottish Government for a national strategy to improve provision of accessible homes in Scotland.

- Clear guidance for robust local target setting for the delivery of accessible homes across tenures; this should extend beyond wheelchair accessible housing to meet the needs of disabled people with a wide range of impairments.

- A recognition that current design standards need updating and a consideration of the potential to create a new cross tenure design and space standard that incorporates universal design and full wheelchair access within mainstream housing.

Disabled people and their families should have equal housing opportunities and the right to an accessible home in the community that ensures and protects their human rights. Housing accessibility should be a national goal/objective - recognising that "accessibility" is different for different people in different circumstances. Adoption of universal/inclusive design standards across tenures would deliver huge progress towards achieving the goal of accessibility, including accessible and sustainable neighbourhoods, as well as accessible and liveable housing.

Recommendations

Recommendations below are addressed to Housing Providers and their partner agencies, Government and the Housing Regulator. Policy and practice going forward needs to prioritise the urgency of tackling the housing stress and exclusion faced by disabled people. A starting point will be the setting local targets for expanding the supply of accessible housing in line with Scottish Government (2019) Guidance and the evidence from this research will inform future lettings practice. We believe that the Scottish Government's approach to housing supply beyond 2021 gives us a real opportunity to make poor housing experiences of disabled people in Scotland a thing of the past.

Local Authorities and RSLs

Establish co-production groups across all 32 local authorities in Scotland involving disabled people across housing tenures, in order to inform decisions on housing and its interconnections with independent living.

Consider canvasing widely across partner organisations for nominations where an accessible or adapted property cannot be matched to any disabled applicants on the housing list, including local disability organisations and housing providers beyond the local area.

Scottish Government (2019) *Guidance for setting of Local Housing Strategy (LHS) targets to support the delivery of more wheelchair accessible housing.* Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Explore the use of new technology to improve intelligence on adapted/accessible properties and to enable remote viewing for applicants who are unable to visit in person.

Develop standardised methods for classifying the accessibility of properties.

Consider developing a peer support network whereby, upon request, disabled housing applicants can be matched to an existing disabled tenant who has experienced the social housing application process.

Recognise that housing needs assessment for disabled people should include, for example, access to a garden for emotional well-being, access to local accessible public transport links and ability to maintain local connections, such as remaining with the same GP.

Review organisational policies or procedures that require a tenant, upon leaving, to revert the property to its original state (for example, changes made could be useful to a future disabled tenant).

Review allocations systems to ensure that applicants who can make some 'liveability' improvements to their homes while waiting for an accessible property are not disadvantaged in allocations or lettings priority schemes.

Scottish Government

Review operational support for the Scottish Accessible Housing Register, (which was rarely mentioned by participants in this study) as part of a national strategy to support the best use of accessible/adapted housing.

Utilise the model outlined in Still Minding the Step (Fitzpatrick et al, 2018) for the standardisation of approaches towards local housing need calculations, as part of strategy to increase the pool of accessible housing.

Continue to encourage local housing need assessments to produce local targets that are proportional in relation to the amount of new built accessible/adapted housing required across tenures.

Improve accessibility standards for new build social housing so that it is more economical and easier to adapt in the future.

Scottish Housing Regulator

Scottish Housing Regulator to recognise that void periods for accessible/adapted social housing may require additional time to allocate and carry out necessary adaptations before an applicant is able to move in. These properties could receive a specific specification that gives them exemption from standard targets for re-let times.

Glossary

The definitions below are those adopted for this study.

Accessibility: the degree to which information, a service or a device/product is available to as many people as possible, including people with different impairments.

Adaptation: works to make an existing home more suitable for disabled people, such as those with mobility problems.

Affordable Housing: affordable housing includes social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided at below market cost, to households whose needs are not met by the market. Affordable rented housing is let by Local Authorities, Housing Associations (or subsidiaries) to eligible households.

Allocation System: the way in which individual households applying for housing are formed into a queue or set of queues which reflect the organisations' objectives, principles and stated priorities, within the legal framework.

Barriers: those things that prevent a person with impairment from being able to get to, or use, information, services or devices/products.

Choice Based Lettings: Choice Based Lettings is a lettings approach used by some Councils and Housing Associations. Applicants register with participating social landlord(s), vacant properties are advertised online, and applicants 'bid' for available properties rather than waiting to be offered a house. Applicants are grouped in different levels of priority need and if more than one 'bid' is made on a vacancy, the applicant with higher priority is offered the property.

Common Housing Register (CHR): a register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more social landlords within an area. People have to meet certain criteria to join the register and it prioritises those in the greatest housing need.

Design and Build: an arrangement where a Council or Housing Association produces a detailed brief and then advertises for suitable contractors to tender for the contract. The contractors are responsible for undertaking or developing the design, either in-house or by appointing consultants, and for the construction of the dwellings.

Disability: how impairments affect someone's life; this is determined by the extent to which society is willing to accommodate people with different needs.

General Needs Housing: applies to general family housing and dwellings for adults/ households who do not need any special support, usually self-contained houses or flats.

Housing Association: a not-for-profit organisation set up to provide affordable housing. Housing associations range from small community-led groups to larger organisations involved in house building and development.

Housing List or Housing Register: the list of applicants for housing that is held by social landlords, for consideration for vacant properties.

Housing Options: a housing advice process whereby social landlords offer housing applicants a 'housing options' interview to discuss the range of options to meet their housing and support needs, and to signpost, make referrals and provide guidance that will empower the applicant to be able to make informed choices about housing solutions.

Impairment: difficulty in physical, mental or sensory functioning.

Intellectual disability: a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday tasks; the term 'mental disability' is similar, but can include mental disorders such as depression or schizophrenia. Other terms used for intellectual disability include 'learning disability' and, previously, 'mental handicap'.

Lettings practice: the processes for letting vacant properties to new tenants, including both allocations schemes and choice based lettings.

Locomotional impairment/Mobility impairment: difficulty with walking or moving around. People with mobility impairments may be wheelchair users or use crutches or may need extra time or support from another person to move around.

Mid Market Rent: Properties rented at a rate that is higher than the rent charged for social housing properties, but below that charged in local market for private rented properties.

Occupational Therapist: a professional who works with residents in order to improve their ability to perform everyday tasks in their home.

Registered Social Landlord (RSL): a landlord providing social rented housing, usually a Housing Association or Housing Co-operative, registered with and regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Scottish Housing Regulator: an independent regulator of RSLs and the landlord and homelessness services of local authorities.

Sensory impairment: visual and/or hearing impairment.

Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST): The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 established the Scottish Secure Tenancy as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 updated the legal framework for Scottish Secure Tenancies.

Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST): Section 34 and schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 established the basic conditions when a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy can apply to some tenants of social landlords in Scotland in place of a full SST. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 updated the legal framework for Short Scottish Secure Tenancies.

Social rented housing: rented housing owned and managed by Local Authorities, Housing Associations or other providers registered with the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Tenant: a tenant is a person who rents self-contained accommodation from a landlord. Tenants have rights which are protected by law. These rights differ depending on what kind of tenancy you have.

Tenure: the terms by which a person or household occupies a property e.g. tenant, lodger, owner-occupier.

Transfer: the opportunity for tenants who are living in homes that do not meet their needs to register for a move to a more suitable alternative in another of the landlord's properties.

Void: a vacant property without a tenant. Voids occur in the period between one tenant leaving and another taking over the tenancy

Void period: the void period is the time, measured in calendar days, between the date of termination of a previous tenancy to the start of a new tenancy.

1 Introduction

Rationale for this Research

This report presents the findings from research into the effectiveness of allocations and lettings practice for accessible and adapted social housing in Scotland. The research followed on from a pilot study that designed and tested a co-production method for evaluating the effectiveness of procedures for letting accessible and adapted social rented housing to disabled applicants (Anderson et al, 2017).

Across the UK, policy and strategy is changing to reflect the demographic trend of an aging population. There are requirements for long-term viable housing solutions with minimal reliance on costly residential care settings (Skidmore and Davis, 2017). However, policies also need to enshrine disabled peoples' rights to independent living across the life course (United Nations, 2006) especially since survey findings from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (2017) indicated that, for the first time, the financial impact of working age people with long-term care and support needs outstripped that of older age groups.

In 2018 the population of Scotland was approximately 5.5 million (National Records of Scotland, 2018), with an estimated 22% of the population (1.1 million) reporting they were disabled (Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), 2019). It is projected that by 2039 Scotland will experience an 85% increase in the number of people over 75 years of age (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). As Skidmore and Davis (2017) highlight, an aging population will lead to more people with impairments due to long-term health conditions or frailty. As well as an increase in future demand for wheelchair use indoors and outdoors, there will be a rise in the number using mobility devices such as wheeled walking frames or two walking sticks that require similar accessibility standards to wheelchair users (O'Hare et al, 2013; Gell et al., 2015).

The analysis conducted by Fitzpatrick et al., (2018) found that there are around 87,340 households with a wheelchair user in Scotland (3.6% of all households), based on figures from the 2015 Scottish Household Survey. Some 17,226 (19.1% of all wheelchair user households) currently have unmet housing needs (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018). Due to demographic changes, it is anticipated that there will be an 80% increase in the population of wheelchair users by 2024 with unmet housing need rising to 31,007 households.

Research conducted by Anderson, Bell and Christie (2017) demonstrated that the standard housing type used by housing developers across tenures needs to incorporate higher accessibility specifications. Research evidence has also outlined the social and financial benefits of home adaptations with several sources highlighting the principles that should underpin the delivery of home adaptations in Scotland: self-direction, person-centeredness, prevention and enablement (Heywood & Turner, 2007; Scottish Government, 2015; Powell et al, 2017). These principals were tested in practice across five demonstration sites in Scotland, revealing that future progress of home adaptation delivery still faced challenges surrounding sustainable partnerships and cross-sector collaborations (Craigforth, 2017).

Disabled people and households seeking to access social rented housing will require particular design or adaptation features to meet their impairment and mobility needs. The process of matching applicants to suitable properties is a critical element in meeting the housing needs of disabled people which has received relatively little research attention. This study contributes new evidence by examining disabled peoples' lived experiences of the social housing application system in Scotland, alongside social landlord allocation and lettings practices for adapted/accessible social housing. The study examines the impact of

allocation policies on making best use of adapted/accessible housing stock in the context of current housing and equalities legislation (e.g. Housing (Scotland) Act 2014; Equality Act 2010) and the Scottish Housing Regulator's monitoring framework for social rented housing.

This research follows from an earlier pilot study that designed and tested a co-production method for evaluating the effectiveness of procedures for letting accessible and adapted social rented housing to disabled applicants (Anderson et al, 2017). Focusing on one case study local authority area, the pilot co-production approach involved: A Project Advisory Group of six self-identifying disabled members (with lived experience or professional involvements with the social housing letting process); supporting a self-identifying disabled peer researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews with disabled housing applicants; and a local authority feedback session to discuss key findings.

Illustrative findings from the pilot study indicated barriers to effective lettings including:

- Challenges of building in accessibility to existing properties and avoiding the removal of adaptations
- Lack of capacity to record up to date property information related to accessibility
- A short term focus on prompt lettings rather than recognising the importance of meeting housing needs over the long term, and
- Broader financial and staffing pressures in landlord organisations (Anderson et al, 2017, p5).

Effective allocations which achieved a good fit between property design and applicant needs demonstrated the significance of good initial design; flexibility or reasonable adjustment in application of allocations policies; and flexibility and creativity in developing technical or design responses to meet needs which otherwise would be difficult to meet. The importance of new supply of accessible homes was also highlighted as offering the most scope for providing homes truly tailored to a household's needs. Disabled participants' suggestions to improve practice included:

- Building more fully accessible properties to meet needs associated with health conditions and impairments over the long term
- Better recognition of the full range of impairments in lettings systems
- A single named contact to assist with disabled people's housing applications
- Ensuring the needs of all household members are taken into account in the lettings process (Anderson et al, 2017, p6).

Drawing on these findings from the pilot study, the research team developed the *Match Me* study - *What works for adapted social housing lettings?* The key research questions for the study were:

1. How can social landlords achieve more, better and faster routes to independent living for disabled people?
2. What improvements to allocations policies and practices will deliver equal housing opportunity for disabled people?
3. What support do disabled house seekers require in the social housing application and lettings processes?
4. How can adapted and adaptable housing better enhance independent living?

Chapter Three sets out the research approach in detail. Importantly, this study sought to be disabled-person led and disabled-person oriented. Mechanisms to achieve this included working with a disabled-led Project Advisory Group and with self-identifying disabled peer researchers. Chapter Four presents reflections on this co-production approach, including discussions of the benefits and challenges encountered, which we hope will inspire and inform future co-production research.

Key Terms Used in this Report

This report contains a number of key terms used in the housing sector. Most are explained in the glossary at the beginning of the report (for example, working definitions of phrases such as 'social landlord', 'void' and 'letting'). The term 'lettings' is used to include both choice based lettings systems (where applicants bid for advertised vacancies, usually according to some assessed priority level of housing need) and allocations systems where staff select tenants for vacant properties, based on points or other approaches to prioritising housing needs of applicants.

The term 'disabled' is used in its broad sense to denote how society and the environment can render pan-impairment groups less able to live independently. In this report, we have chosen to use the term disabled people, in line with affirmative language and emphasising the ways that society can disable/disempower individuals with impairments. The study draws on Oliver's (1990) social model of disability whereby structural barriers are considered to hinder the capacity of some individuals with impairments to fully participate in society. These barriers are categorised as environmental, educational/employment, financial, political and attitudinal.

The terms 'adapted' and 'accessible' housing are distinct terms. Adapted housing refers to properties in the general housing stock which have been modified in some way to improve accessibility for an individual's specific housing needs; or a property that has been designed so that it can easily have home adaptations installed. Accessible properties are those which are constructed to meet inclusive design or accessible standards such as 'Housing for Varying Needs Part 1 criteria (Scottish Homes, 1998; Watson and Joseph, 2012) or Lifetime Homes (Goodman, 2011; Lifetime Homes, 2019). In this report, properties are described as adapted/accessible when both designs are relevant and are referred to separately when only one form of design is relevant.

The key focus of this research is on the matching process of a suitable adapted/accessible social house to a disabled housing applicant. The study examines the organisational processes and decision-making involved in the allocation/letting of an adapted/accessible property to an applicant whose needs broadly fit the accessibility of the dwelling. However, it is important to recognise that individual allocations are part of a broader process that encompasses several stages: applying for housing: matching to a suitable property; offers of a property and viewing; acceptance of an offer and moving house; and settling in to a new tenancy. The report structure reflects this interpretation of the allocations process.

Outline of the Report

Chapter Two of this report sets out the wider context for the study, reviews recent literature on access to housing for disabled people and sets out the project aims and objectives. Chapters Three and Four present the research method and reflections on the co-production approach with contributions from the research team, Project Advisory Group and disabled

Peer Researchers. Chapters Five through Eight present the main findings from the study. Chapter Nine sets out our conclusions and recommendations key for stakeholders in policy and practice.

Summary

This report presents the findings from research into the effectiveness of allocations and lettings practice for accessible and adapted social housing in Scotland. The research follows on from a pilot study (Anderson et al, 2017) that designed and tested a co-production approach for evaluating effectiveness of lettings practice for accessible and adapted social rented housing. The co-production method is replicated and further developed in the Match Me study, to address our key research questions on how to improve disabled people's access to social rented housing and enhance their independent living.

2 The Policy and Research Context for the Study

National Housing Policy and Disabled People

Table 1 outlines the key policy and national strategy developments in Scotland over the past 20 years which have addressed access to suitable accessible/adapted social housing for disabled people. The table covers policy on social care as well as housing, reflecting key policy and practice interconnections – adequate social care enables access to homes and external environments for many disabled people. The sources listed shape the housing environment in which disabled people seek to achieve independent living and the policy and practice context for this research.

Table1: Key policies and strategies for accessible housing

Policy/Strategy	Year	Action
Housing For Varying Needs: A Design Guide	1998	Scottish Homes produced design standards for accessible wheelchair properties.
Human Rights Act	1998	Introduced the European Union Convention of Human Rights into UK law.
The Same as You?	2000	A review of services for people with learning disabilities. Reviews learning disability and includes Asperger's syndrome. Sets out the need to de-institutionalise support for people with learning disabilities and to embrace independent living within communities.
Housing (Scotland) Act	2001	Wide ranging Act placing duty on local authorities to produce Local Housing Strategies, including future accommodation and services to support independent living.
The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CPRD)	2006	The UN convention outlines four strategic outcomes for disabled people internationally: a healthy life, choice and control, independence, and active citizenship.
Autism Act	2009	Requires a strategy for meeting the needs of autistic adults in England through improving access to key services such as local authorities, NHS bodies and NHS foundation trusts.
Equality Act	2010	Wide ranging Act - social landlords must recognise disabled individuals' access requirements and adhere to fairness in the provision of services.
Housing In The 21st Century: A Strategy	2010	Scottish Government Housing Strategy which supported the design of a national Accessible Housing Register.
The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act	2010	Transformation of public services to embed co-production, involvement of local communities/users during the design of services, use of evidence to inform policy and practice, concentrating upon prevention and early intervention.

UK Autism Strategy	2010	The first strategy to focus on autistic people living in England, the autism strategy calls for public sector services to work together to enable adults with autism to lead better lives.
Housing (Scotland) Act	2010	Created the new Scottish Housing Regulator to safeguard the interests of tenants and prospective tenants.
Commission On The Future Delivery Of Public Services (Christie Commission)	2011	Efficiency and effectiveness of public services relies on improved joint working across services and co-production.
Scottish Autism Strategy	2011	Following the UK Autism strategy, the Scottish Strategy for Autism outlines key steps to be taken to ensure that autistic people living in Scotland can access high quality services.
The Social Housing Charter (Scottish Housing Regulator)	2012	Sets out what tenants can expect from their landlords in terms of quality and value for money, the standard of their homes as well as opportunities for communication and participation in the decisions that affect them.
Welfare Reform Act	2012	Introduced a range of benefit changes, which evidence suggests have had an adverse cumulative impact on disabled people.
Adapting for Change	2012	Independent report to Scottish Government whose recommendations for change to adaptations systems were fully accepted by Scottish Ministers.
The Social Care (Self-Directed) Support (Scotland) Act	2013	Local authorities to provide information on support options to social care users and a choice of support providers.
Keys to Life Strategy	2013	Defines learning disability as a significant, lifelong, condition that started before adulthood. Such conditions may impact an individual's ability to understand information, learn skills, and live independently.
Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act	2014	Created new Health and Social Care partnerships; emphasises community-based housing solutions rather than institutional care. Housing Contribution Statements to Health and Social Care Partnership should include provision of home adaptations.

Housing (Scotland) Act	2014	Wide ranging Act. Introduces powers to use a Short Assured Tenancy with a non-disabled tenant living in an adapted/accessible property until a suitable disabled tenant with appropriate housing needs is found. Replaces previous housing allocation 'reasonable preference' categories with three groups: social housing tenants who are under-occupying their home; homeless people with unmet housing needs; and people who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions with unmet housing needs. Amends provisions of Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to recover possession of an adapted property when there is no-one occupying this who requires it.
Self-directed Support (Direct Payments Regulations) (Scotland) Act	2014	Sets out rules governing optional means-testing by local authorities and grounds for review or termination of Direct Payments.
Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act	2015	Powers to local communities to set up local bodies to facilitate user engagement.
Keys to Life Implementation Framework	2015	Outlines key aspects of an implementation framework for delivering the Keys to Life Strategy (2015-2017).
A Fairer Scotland For Disabled People	2016	Scottish Government adopts the UN CRPD framework to recognise that provision of accessible/adapted housing benefits other areas of independent living.
Scotland Act	2016	Devolves further powers from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament, concerning social security benefits. The Scottish Government has powers to replace, top-up or make discretionary payments. In relation to social care the following benefits are devolved: Ill Health and Disability Benefits, Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance and Severe Disablement Allowance.
UN Convention on the Rights Of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD) Inquiry Concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	2016	Details breaches of the human rights of disabled people including access and control over social care arrangements.
Carers (Scotland) Act	2016	Adult carers entitled to Self-Self-directed Support,

Age, Home and Community: A Strategy For Older Peoples' Housing	2017	Scottish government review of the links between the aging population and the role of home adaptations to sustain independent living.
The Building Regulations	2017	Includes accessible standard for new build housing with provision that ground floor is level access with the capacity to install a wet floor shower.
Social Care And Health Standards	2018	Quality assessment framework for use in social care, early learning and childcare, children's services, social work, health provision, and community justice. Based on 5 principles: dignity and respect, be included, compassion, responsive care and support, and wellbeing
Social Security (Scotland) Act	2018	Sets out a national approach in Scotland towards newly devolved powers over welfare benefits.
Housing Beyond 2021	2018	Early stage discussion paper on developing housing strategy for 2021 – 2040.
Guidance for setting of Local Housing Strategy (LHS) targets to support the delivery of more Wheelchair Accessible Housing	2019	Scottish Government guidance to Local Authorities and RSLs to support the delivery of more wheelchair accessible homes across all tenures.

Lived Experiences of Housing and Disability

Recent evidence on disabled peoples lived experiences of housing has emerged from the Independent Living in Scotland (ILIS) Disabled People's Housing Summit's *Our place, Our space* report (Independent Living in Scotland, 2017). These lived experiences are framed by existing policy and practice and participants identified a number of barriers in the housing system and finding a suitable home:

- Experiencing injury or ill-health directly as a result of being inaccessibly housed.
- Waiting years for a suitable house or adaptation; facing other problems getting an adaptation.
- Delayed hospital discharge, or time in residential care against their will due to lack of housing; or being inappropriately discharged into an inaccessible home.
- Finding it impossible to find an accessible home to rent or buy.

Disabled people at the summit reported that at its worst the current housing system in Scotland traps disabled people in hospitals and care homes, who would otherwise be able to live independently (Independent Living in Scotland, 2017). This was mainly due to a lack of adapted/accessible housing and/or problems accessing information about the availability of such housing. Shortcomings in the housing system can place additional and avoidable costs on NHS and social care budgets. The summit reported that a failure to build, adapt and allocate enough accessible homes across Scotland puts needless strain on disabled people and their carers, and generates avoidable cost for health and social care services. Living in inappropriate housing prevents disabled people from fully contributing to society and constrains their participation in the economic and social life of their communities. ILIS recommend that 10% of all new homes should be built to wheelchair housing space standards. ILIS also argued that the Scottish government should revisit its Joint Housing Delivery Plan (2015) to reverse the lack of commitment to ensure that a proportion of the 50,000 new affordable homes (to be built by 2030) include accessible homes. A final recommendation from the 2017 ILIS summit was that grant subsidies for social rented housing should recognise and prioritise the additional costs required for the construction of fully wheelchair accessible properties on suitable sites.

Ormston, Eunson and McAteer's (2017) report for the Scottish Commission for Learning Disability examined the housing landscape for people with learning disabilities living in Scotland. Their research revealed that people with learning disabilities were much more likely to live in social housing (52% compared with 21% of the population as a whole) and much less likely to live in a home they or their family own (39% compared with 66%). While most people with learning disabilities lived in ordinary housing, a significant proportion lived in a more institutional setting - 17% of those known to local authorities lived in supported accommodation and 7% in registered adult care homes. Over a third of adults with learning disabilities (35%) lived with a family carer, rather than on their own. The research also found evidence that households including someone with a learning disability were more likely than the general population to experience difficulties paying their mortgage or rent; and less likely to be satisfied with their property condition and size (p7).

The study on learning disability also drew attention to UK Government's range of austerity measures that have led to financial challenges for disabled people in general (Ormston et

al, 2017). Policies including the 'bedroom tax', restrictions to housing benefits for those aged under 35, the introduction of a cap on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for housing benefit, reassessments of disability benefits and the move from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) had all impacted on disabled people's lives. These policy changes were introduced into what was already a complicated housing landscape from independent living through supported living to residential care.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) inquiry on housing for disabled people (2018) examined whether the availability of accessible and adaptable housing fulfilled disabled people's rights to independent living as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The principles underlying the Convention recognise that disabled people are the experts in their own lives, and are best placed to identify and determine the housing and support they require. As part of this inquiry, Satsangi et al. (2018) gathered qualitative data from disabled people about their housing experiences. Key factors for successful independent living included: accessibility features such as adapted kitchens and bathrooms; a feeling of safety and security; being in a good location with access to shops, transport and public services; support from friends and family; good neighbours; and freedom from harassment. Interviewees reported that obtaining appropriate, accessible housing helped positively transform their lives, including improved health and wellbeing, and enhanced prospects for employment and study. Conversely, living in unsuitable housing situations increased the risk of accidents, led to stress and ill health and imposed costs on health services. Participants reported having falls due to their housing conditions and living in run-down housing conditions. Lack of social support, financial constraints and anti-social behaviour from neighbours were also reported as harmful to participants' sense of wellbeing.

The 2018 report of the EHRC Housing Inquiry uncovered four overarching challenges surrounding disabled peoples' access to suitable adapted/accessible homes: 1) disabled people feel demoralised and frustrated with the housing system; 2) there is a chronic shortage of accessible/adapted housing; 3) installing home adaptations involves unacceptable bureaucracy delays; and 4) there is insufficient support for disabled people to access independent living (EHRC, 2018), The EHRC Inquiry for the future provision of accessible/adapted housing called for:

- Local authorities and Registered Providers of Social Housing/Registered Social Landlords to embed independent living principles into assessment and allocations policies for social housing, to ensure real choice and control.

- Local authorities to significantly increase their knowledge of existing accessible social housing stock and develop specialist support and information services to facilitate suitable matching.

- Local authorities to apply best practices on the use of accessible housing registers, with the longer term aim of the use of a standard methodology across all local authorities.

- Local authorities to work with the NHS to ensure people living in institutional and residential care are supported to live independently.

- Governments to publish standards and monitor and review the effectiveness of Accessible Housing Registers."

(Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018: p.14)

Fitzpatrick et al (2018) offer a framework through which many of the EHRC recommendations above could be addressed in Scotland. This study reviewed the national legislative and policy context for developing accessible and adaptable homes and the implications for local strategies and plans. The research examined the proportion of new housing built to wheelchair user standard over the previous 10 years, and estimated current and future housing needs among wheelchair users in Scotland. The report stressed the continuing need for a three-pronged approach toward meeting the housing needs of disabled people: the development of new wheelchair standard homes; support for home adaptations; and efficient allocations of accessible and adaptable homes in affordable and social rented sectors. Fitzpatrick et al's (2018) recommendations concur closely with those of the ILIS (2017) report and the 2018 EHRC Housing Inquiry.

Peer research and the social model of disability

As well as the policy context for disabled people's access to housing, the involvement of disabled people in conducting research and wider developments in peer research were also important background to this study. Peer research stems from the traditions of 'participatory', 'action' and 'empowerment' research and involves those with lived experience of the research topic in designing and conducting research. This can include helping to conduct data collection, for example by interviewing their peers about personal experiences. Peer research adopts the standpoint of those who are experts by experience. Peer research lends itself particularly well to the qualitative research methods used in this study and can empower marginalised groups by involving them in researching issues which affect their lives. McCartan et al (2012) note that although peer researchers have insights into lived experiences and shared interpretations of a topic, they may require skills training for a research role. Nonetheless, participatory research can highlight hidden voices (often of vulnerable groups overlooked by policy makers), provide historical awareness of an issue, generate theory or concepts, test hypotheses, and create reflexivity among participants that can lead to individual or collective empowerment.

Embracing an emancipatory perspective is a key foundation for conducting research in the field of disability (Barnes and Sheldon, 2007). Six core principles that characterise emancipatory research centre on: the role of the social model of disability, the question of objectivity, accountability, the place of experience in the research process, choice of methodology, and research outcomes (Stone and Priestley, 1996). In the social model, disability is viewed as socially constructed, rather than simplistically caused by having an impairment. For example, the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS), a collective of disabled activists distinguished between impairment as:

> "lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body',
>
> whilst, disability denotes
>
> 'the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social

> organisation which takes no or little account of people who have… impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities".
>
> (UPIAS 1976, p. 3-4).

That is to say, people with impairments are disabled by the social structures and physical environments around them which constrain their ability to lead their lives independently. Barnes and Sheldon (2007) argue that objectivity is not necessarily the goal of disability research. Rather, researchers should state their subjective investment in the future alleviation of disabled peoples' oppression at macro (national policy) and micro (individual agency) levels of society. Further, the accountability of a research project relies upon disabled people being involved with a study at every stage of the research process (Barnes and Sheldon, 2007). This includes the embedding of feedback from peers and taking into consideration the physical and communicational access needs of every participant. Focusing on the lived experiences of disability means disabled people are accepted as experts on what must change to improve access to independent living. Chapter Four outlines the ways in which disabled people were involved in this study.

The European Core Learning Outcomes for the Integration of Support and Housing (ELOSH) developed a training pack that encourages organisations to examine to what extent their policies and practices are inclusive from a disability perspective (Pleace and Mitchell, 2015). For instance, they suggest consideration of the following questions as part of developing an equalities policy:

> Does your organisation actively encourage a flexible approach to participation that takes account of the support needs of service-users and type of service provided?
>
> Does your organisation actively promote the formation of service-user groups and then support them in practical ways such as offering financial help or offering a venue to meet in?
>
> Does your organisation have formal arrangements with its service-users and service-user groups that give them an influence in decision making?

ELOSH also suggest that that service user involvement should be present at three organisational levels (Pleace and Mitchell, 2015): individual (such as complaints procedures); groups (working groups or management boards); and target populations (e.g. surveys to measure experiences/opinions).

A Big Lottery funded initiative, Shaping Our Lives, produced a guide written by disabled people, that outlines key considerations for becoming a service user representative (Meakin and Matthews, 2017). Essential elements that created positive experiences for service user representatives were: equality, mutual respect, ownership, structure, commitment and feedback (Meakin and Matthews, 2017, p.6). The guide contains checklists for induction and lays out four essential steps for the involvement of service user representatives: profile the service users you currently work with, and build better connections with them; set out 30-day goals to improve the involvement of service user representatives; include a call for service user representatives in any communications to the service user community; and always provide follow up and feedback (Meakin and Matthews, 2017, p.12). A list of useful resources for improving accessibility, inclusiveness of service user involvement processes

and environmental accessibility are available on the Shaping Our Lives website (Shaping Our Lives, 2019).

Summary

The context for this study was shaped by the very significant body of law and policy influencing disabled people's rights, including the right to appropriate, accessible housing (Table 1). The raft of recent literature is indicative of the continuing influence of the Independent Living Movement in Scotland. Third-sector and equality monitoring bodies have highlighted the, often negative, impact of unsuitable housing on the lives of disabled people. There remains a need for a strong voice for further improvement to national policies and local procedures to improve disabled peoples' access to suitable homes.

The Match Me research was also informed by developments in co-production research, including the involvement of peer researchers. The Independent Living Movement, for instance, has supported peer research as part of a broader emancipatory model for disabled people and for research in general. However, there remains a lack of peer research studies in housing which involve self-identifying disabled researchers and we hope that Match Me contributes in this area. Co-production is referred to in many national policies in Scotland but there remains scope for further development of practical guidance and implementation frameworks. As well as involving disabled researchers, the Match Me research in three local authority case study areas explored to what extent co-production featured as part of housing providers' commitment to service user involvement.

3 Research Method

Research Aims

The overall aim of this study was to examine the practices, policies and systems that enable effective allocation of adapted and accessible social housing. In seeking to understand 'what works' in rehousing disabled people, the study addressed four key research questions:

1. How can social landlords achieve more, better and faster routes to independent living for disabled people?
2. What improvements to allocations policies and practices will deliver equal housing opportunity for disabled people?
3. What support do disabled house seekers require in the social housing application and lettings processes?
4. How can adapted and adaptable housing better enhance independent living?

This research aimed to track the experiences of disabled house seekers and examine social housing application and lettings processes to provide robust evidence for improved policy and practice, in order to:

- Examine different stages of social housing allocations processes and landlord practice in letting adapted/accessible properties.
- Inform housing providers of the lived experience of disabled housing applicants using their systems; providing sufficiently robust data to inform review of social landlord practices.
- Develop action research to assess practice change among participating landlords during the study period, communicating findings as the project progresses and supporting beneficial change.
- Ensure disabled people co-produce the research and recommendations, demonstrating what works in accessing appropriate adapted housing.

The study further developed the co-production approach designed and tested in the prior pilot project (Anderson et al. 2017). The co-production approach for the Match Me study adopted a participatory research framework in which the project partners, research team, Project Advisory Group, peer researchers, local authority housing providers and local organisations/individuals with involvement in this area could contribute to the research design, field work and reporting.

Research Methods

The study adopted qualitative research methods with the aim of better understanding the processes and experiences behind the statistics on disabled people's access to housing (Fitzpatrick et al, 2018 and EHRC, 2019).

The research compared landlord practice and applicant/tenant experiences in three local authority areas in Scotland, to provide new evidence on disabled house seekers' needs, experiences and outcomes over time in different housing allocation processes. The experiences of, and outcomes for, disabled social housing applicants seeking a suitable home, were examined over a one year time period enabling 'real time' experiences to be captured.

Within each case study local authority area, the following research methods were adopted:

1. Contextual research on local lettings policy and practice.
2. Semi-structured interviews tracking the experiences of a cohort of disabled house seekers/new tenants (first interview, interim reflective follow up, second interview).
3. Observations and discussions of lettings practice in the three local authority areas (focused group discussions).
4. Feedback sessions in the three local authority areas to triangulate findings from disabled participants and housing providers, and to develop study conclusions and recommendations.

The research received ethical approval from the General University Ethics Panel at the University of Stirling. Data collection was carried out in three local authority areas. Two of these were located in the central belt of Scotland and the third in the North of Scotland. They were chosen to provide a mix of urban and rural geographical areas and contrasting population sizes. All three local authorities managed their own social housing stock and worked in partnership with housing associations in their areas.

The study was conducted through a three way co-production partnership involving Housing Options Scotland (a leading housing advice agency for disabled people), Horizon Housing Association (a leading provider of housing for disabled people) and the University of Stirling research team which included a disabled project researcher and disabled peer researchers. Co-production mechanisms ensured the voices of disabled housing applicants were the core focus of the research. The co-production approach applied throughout this study involved a Project Advisory Group (PAG), peer researchers and participatory feedback sessions with the three local authorities which took part in the study.

Project Advisory Group (PAG). In collaboration with project partners, the project recruited a disabled-led group of 12 participants to form an advisory group. Most members self-identified as disabled people who had lived experiences of the social housing allocation system. Others, while not disabled, had particular expertise in the area of research or practice. The PAG members met three times during the project and were invited to consider the proposed research design, preliminary findings, participate as facilitators during local authority feedback sessions, and contribute to recommendations as well as be involved in the dissemination strategy.

Peer Researchers. Three self-identifying disabled Peer Researchers were successfully recruited to assist with interviewing the disabled applicants/tenants in the case study areas. Each Peer Researcher completed a training session that covered issues, such as field work safety protocols, how to gain informed consent on behalf of the research team and practicing interview skills. Two of the Peer Researchers took part as volunteers and the third received payment in line with Permitted Work under the rules of Disability Living Allowance benefit. Practical support was provided by members of the research team or through the Peer Researchers existing Personal Assistance funded through the UK government Access to Work scheme. All Peer Researchers underwent a Protection of Vulnerable Groups Disclosure Scotland check before the commencement on fieldwork (as did the University research team).

Twenty-six out of the forty-three semi-structured interviews (over two waves of fieldwork) were conducted by the Peer Researchers. The original field work strategy involved the University Researcher shadowing the first interview carried out by each Peer Researcher. However, in the cases of those new to the Peer Researcher role, shadowing tended to cover more interviews, to ensure confidence in interviewing was achieved. The field work plan also aimed for all interviews to take place in participants' homes. In several situations, however, the inaccessibility of homes for peer researchers meant that sometimes the University

Researcher carried out the interview or, the interviewee agreed to meet the Peer Researcher at a local accessible, public location (e.g. a library or cafe).

Local Authority Feedback Sessions. These were held after data collection and initial analysis to share emerging findings and offer an opportunity for housing and service providers to respond to issues and recommendations from the study. A total of 60 participants attended these feedback sessions across the three local authority areas. The sessions included participants who had assisted with earlier phases of the research plus a range of interested stakeholders from the housing and related sectors (e.g. occupational therapists). All gave their informed consent to participate. Initial consent from potential attendees was obtained through the key contacts within each case study area. The case study area key contact then negotiated participation of other staff at strategic and operational levels. Following a presentation on the initial research findings, facilitators (members of the research team and Project Advisory Group) took notes throughout break-out discussion groups where key research themes were explored.

Literature Review

Reported in Chapter Two (and throughout this report) the team reviewed recent research and policy and practice evidence, in order to set the study in the context of housing and disability, the letting of social housing designed for wheelchair users, and participative/co-production research approaches.

Tracking Experiences of Disabled Housing Applicants and Tenants

The study adopted a longitudinal approach to following the experiences of disabled people applying for social housing or who had recently moved into social housing. These experiences were captured through qualitative semi-structured interviews and interim telephone/email contact. The aim of collecting and analysing qualitative data is to understand participant perspectives in order to infer trends and patterns, not to generalise findings (Creswell, 2009). The question of what constitutes an adequate sample for qualitative research is a complex combination of ensuring reasonable depth and breadth in data within resources available. It is a more complex decision than merely experiencing the saturation of themes (Dey, 1999). The target for this study of recruiting up to ten participants in each area (28 achieved in total) was considered sufficient to provide depth of comparative analysis and to better understand experiences of lettings systems.

The local partners (local authorities/housing providers) identified potential disabled housing applicants and tenants from their housing waiting lists and records of recent allocations of adapted/accessible properties. They then approached these disabled housing applicants/tenants to ask if they would like to take part in the study. Contact details for those who expressed an interest in taking part were passed to the project researcher who then made direct contact with them to provide additional information about the study. Disabled applicants/tenants who agreed to take part were interviewed up to two times over a one-year period and were invited to keep a reflective account of their housing experience in between interviews.

Wave One Interviews

Twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were carried out with disabled social housing applicants/new tenants on their lived experiences of trying to find a suitable home in the social rented sector. These interviews involved twenty households currently looking to move to an adapted or fully accessible property, and eight disabled new tenants, across the three case study areas. Tables 2 to 6 show the key characteristics of participants and their housing tenure at the time of applying for housing. The majority of interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Meeting participants face-to-face was preferred where possible, in order to build a rapport between the researcher and the interviewee. It was recognised that interviews with disabled households may touch upon stressful housing situations. The focus of the project was upon the process of matching applicants and available accessible housing, but discussions explored the wider processes of applying for housing, waiting for an offer, and accepting a tenancy for households including one or more disabled person(s).

Table 2: Number of Households by Tenure Type

Tenure	Number of Households
Home Owner	4
Private renting	5
Housing association	2
Local Authority Housing	14
Tied Accommodation	2
Staying with family	1
Total	28

Table 3: Participant Gender

Gender ('Lead' applicant/ tenant)	Number
Female	15
Male	13
Total	28

Table 4: Number of Households by participant Local Authority

LA1	8
LA2	10
LA3	10
Total	28

Table 5: Participants Interviewed Together (9 households)

Vikki	Vick
Pippa	Pedro
Hilda	Harry
Trish	Tim
Emma	Eddy
Angela	Andrew
Gayle	George
Irene	Ian
Steph	Darla

Table 6: Participants Interviewed Alone (19 Participants)

Rachel	Lori	Alex
Brenda	Jess	Adam
Carrie	Tina	Tom
Christine	Kim	Dougie
Nina	Kay	Ben
Heather	Anna	Bert
Alice		

As noted above participant recruitment was mediated through housing providers in the three case study areas. It was anticipated that landlords would be able to identify applicants and tenants who required an adapted/accessible property from their social housing waiting list and records of recently allocated adapted/accessible properties. In practice this proved a complex and lengthy process. Potential research participants were contacted by letter or directly by local contacts. Thereafter, the social landlords negotiated initial consent for the research participants to be contacted by the research team, continuing to seek participants until recruitment targets were reached or the pool of potential participants was exhausted.

Interim reflective accounts

The research design sought to encourage wave one participants to maintain reflective diaries of any significant changes in their housing situation between interviews. Participants were invited to record these accounts verbally or in writing (email, text or paper). However, it became clear that interviewees were reluctant to keep reflective accounts because they were in stressful situations with a lot of activities to track and/or doubted that they would remember. Therefore, it was agreed that the project researcher would telephone participants two to three months after their wave one interviews for an update on their housing situation. During these phone calls the Researcher explored whether participants had pursued contact with housing and/or support providers identified in the wave one interview, had investigated new sources of assistance or were considering alternative housing solutions. In practice, this proactive approach to soliciting information between interviews by telephone had the benefit of maintaining contact with participants and helping assess optimum timing for a second interview. Twenty-two out of the twenty-eight interviewees (79%) took part in reflective account phone calls. Six interviewees did not respond to an invitation by phone or a follow up letter.

Wave Two Interviews

The wave two semi-structured interviews succeeded in revisiting fifteen of the housing applicants and one new tenant who had taken part in wave one of the study. The reasons why five housing applicants were not re-interviewed included withdrawal because of health reasons and lack of response to follow up contact. With the latter, the research team tried to establish contact by phone, followed by a letter inviting participants to take part in the wave two interview. One tenant was revisited since they had only lived in their adapted property for two weeks at the time of the wave one interview and they were still waiting on some adaptations to be made to the property. Therefore, a follow up interview was arranged to update the research team on progress with home adaptations and the tenant's feelings about their home. Follow up interviews were not appropriate for the other wave one tenant participants who had already given accounts of all stages of the application, waiting and moving in processes.

Observations/Discussions of Lettings Practice

The research design included arranging meetings to observe and discuss lettings practice in the three case study areas. This was important to ensure the research team accurately understood local allocations policy and lettings practice in respect of vacant adapted/accessible properties from the perspective of the three local authorities and their partner providers. The observations/discussions of letting procedures were arranged by the key

contacts in the three local authority areas at the convenience of the staff and informed consent was sought from and agreed with each participant prior to taking part. Five observation/discussion sessions took place (two in each of two local authority areas and one in the third). Four observation/discussion sessions were conducted as focus groups that explored the allocations process relating to the day to day operation of allocation systems, examination of the decision-making process behind an offer of housing, and the ways that multiple suitable housing applicants were prioritised. Each focus group contained between 2 and 9 people. These group discussions took place in private meeting rooms and included housing professionals, occupational therapists and specialist support staff involved with the allocation of adapted/accessible properties. Focus groups lasted between 90 and 120 minutes in total. One observation/discussion took place as a one to one meeting whereby the matching process for allocating a property was demonstrated on the housing management system (without identifying any applicants to the researcher).

All observations/discussions were audio-recorded. Each participant was allocated an identifier code to ensure anonymity. This code was based on their local authority area and participant number allocated to them. Hence, LA1, P2 refers to local authority 1, participant 2 while LA3, P4, refers to local authority 3, participant 4. Data collection also included an examination of each local authorities' procedures for letting adapted social housing, e.g. allocation policies and lettings plans. As noted above, staff who took part in these observation/discussion meetings were also invited to subsequent feedback sessions which considered the findings from the applicant/tenant interviews along with the local provider perspectives.

Summary

The co-production approach to the study is considered to have been effective in achieving the following outcomes:

1. Review of local housing context and strategy to inform fieldwork.

2. Recruitment of self-identifying disabled Peer Researchers (two with mobility impairments and one with a visual impairment) and development of a supportive approach enabling them to contribute significantly to data collection for the study.

3. Recruitment of twenty-eight disabled social housing applicant/new tenant households which included at least one person who had limited mobility. These interviewees were willing to participate in face-to-face semi-structured interviews about their housing application experience. Interviewees were invited to take part in two interviews over the course of a year and between these interviews, to participate in a reflective account of any changes in their situation.

4. Observations of lettings practices in each of the three case study local authority areas. These sessions involved a combination of one-to-one semi-structured interviews and focus groups with staff involved with the allocation processes of adapted/accessible social housing. Participants included representatives from housing and social work/occupational therapy staff.

5. Local authority feedback sessions in each case study area with a total of 60 participants. These participants included peer researchers, service providers, tenant

group representatives and local organisations/individuals involved with disabled peoples' housing issues.

For reporting, all data was analysed thematically to address the study research questions and triangulated across data sets (context/prior evidence, disabled home-seekers, housing providers). The action research approach enabled discussion of emerging findings with the Project Advisory Group and through the local feedback sessions, in order ensure the maximum degree of co-production of research findings and recommendations.

The following chapter goes on to present reflections from the research team, Project Advisory Group members and peer researchers on the co-production approach used throughout this study.

4 Co-production and Peer Research

This section reflects on the experience of putting a co-production research approach into practice in this project. There were two main co-production mechanisms – the Project Advisory Group and the involvement of Peer Researchers. We draw on available literature and evidence on co-production research to evaluate the experiences of co-production participants, including some practical challenges they faced. The chapter closes with some recommendations for future co-production research.

The Co-Production Participants

There were two main methods through which disabled participants were involved in co-producing the research. Firstly, twelve individuals were invited to participate in a Project Advisory Group (PAG). PAG members were chosen based upon their lived experiences of allocation systems for accessible/adapted social rented housing and/or, their professional role in the sector. PAG members were invited to review project instruments, preliminary findings, the draft project report and the dissemination strategy.

During a reflection on their involvement with the project, a PAG member provided the following account of their overall experience on the project:

> "I have really enjoyed being part of the PAG group. It has given me a greater insight into the situation that many people with a disability face when trying to find the right home for themselves and/or their families during, often, very difficult circumstances. Having participated in one of the Local Authority feedback sessions and now read the draft findings it is apparent that the system is patchy across the country and like many services is something of a post code lottery. One of the other things that struck me was also the potential for misunderstanding that exists within the language of the housing sector. Like most specialities it has a "shorthand" or perceived common understanding within teams/departments/authorities that may not transfer well outside its normal area of usage. Terms like Common Housing Register, Housing Options and even the word Disability itself are often interpreted in a variety of ways across the three Authorities from the study."
>
> (PAG Member Reflection)
>
> "I found being a member of the PAG a hugely interesting and informative process. Although I've had issues around my own housing needs…..I had little understanding or knowledge about the wider picture around accessible social housing. It was valuable to see the research process and its thoroughness. I hope I was able to contribute in a worthwhile way".
>
> (PAG Member Reflection)

Secondly, the project involved three self-identifying disabled peer researchers who conducted interviews with disabled housing applicants/tenants. Two have chosen to remain anonymous (referred to as Zack and Zander), while the third (Martin) chose to be identifiable. Two peer researchers had locomotional impairments and the third a sensory impairment. Their ages ranged from early thirties to early sixties and they came from different backgrounds in terms of educational, employment and volunteering experiences.

In seeking their reflections, peer researchers were asked; “what attracted you to the role of peer researcher?”

> “The role was attractive to me because it enabled me to work with disabled persons and trying to seek out the problems they may be experiencing in finding suitable adapted accommodation. This was relevant as I had a poor experience of housing issues when I became classed as disabled.”
>
> (Zack, peer researcher)

> “I had just completed training as a peer support worker and thought this would be a great experience for me and also to meet new people.”
>
> (Martin, peer researcher)

> “The co-production aspect of the research and the opportunity to improve my knowledge of the housing sector in relation to disabled people.”
>
> (Zander, peer researcher)

Peer researchers were also asked; “how would you describe your overall experience of the project?”

> ‘My experience of the Match Me project was I met some inspirational people both as interviewees and people in the project itself.’
>
> (Zack, peer researcher)

> “It was great to meet new people and hear their views, it really opens your eyes and broadens your horizons.”
>
> (Martin, peer researcher)

> “I found it very insightful and I also found it upsetting to see some of the desperate situations that so many people are having to live in. Unfortunately, too many people that I interviewed were prisoners in their own homes, their only crime was being disabled. It is clearly apparent that there are not anywhere near enough adapted properties to meet peoples’ housing needs. The Scottish government should be commended for the 35000 social rented housing over the next 5 years. I firmly believe that the Scottish government missed a golden opportunity to address the severe lack of wheelchair accessible homes by failing to implement at least a 10% quota on these new homes.”
>
> (Zander, peer researcher)

Experiences of the Project Advisory Group

The Advisory Group met three times over the course of the 18 month project. The purpose of the first meeting was to introduce the research and PAG members, offer some induction as to the PAG member role, and discuss the research design and time-line. The second meeting canvassed feedback on preliminary findings from the interviews with disabled

housing applicants and tenants; and discussed planning for the local authority feedback sessions. The third meeting considered the main research findings, devised a dissemination strategy and agreed arrangements for commenting on the draft report (by email circulation and feedback).

PAG meetings took place in Stirling where there were good public transport connections with the central belt of Scotland and from the North of Scotland. The venue used had fully accessible rooms available for those requiring to stay overnight. A PAG member remarked that they felt supported during their participation at and between meetings, saying;

> "The project was a pleasure to be part of because of the people involved, the setting for the meetings and the excellent support afforded by the Housing Options Scotland representative[2] who made it run smoothly."
>
> (PAG Member Reflection).

The costs associated with the PAG meetings were higher than planned as the venue was changed to more fully ensure inclusive and accessible facilities. The research team identified and agreed the significant benefits of using a more fully accessible venue with accessible overnight accommodation and sufficient adjacent parking, as well as conference room facilities.

Some challenges were experienced in relation to communication of the research process, attrition in participation and level of feedback received. For example, the data collection phase of the research felt lengthy to PAG members, while the research team were more accustomed to encountering and managing delays resulting from events in the world of practice. When the second PAG meeting, had to be rescheduled it was challenging to communicate or evidence to the PAG the level of effort being carried out behind the scenes by the research team and local authority contacts in pursuing data collection in the field. This was partly resolved by the PAG requesting (and the research team delivering) monthly email updates between meetings.

Additional feedback was also sought from the PAG by email through one of the project partners as a conduit. This project partner would circulate email communications to all PAG members and coordinate responses for the research team (for example, on project research instruments or the draft report). There was some variation in the depth of feedback from different PAG members, although a core group provided very consistent and constructive engagement throughout the study. Lessons learned included the benefits of verifying the advisory group role and expectations for project participation on an ongoing basis. Consideration could also be given to enhancing alternative methods of communication and participation where participants are unable to travel to meetings (e.g. smartphone App or social media private group for members).

Peer Research

Peer research is a rapidly developing area of social science, where members of the public carry out research rather than simply being objects of research. This includes for example, Patient or Public Participation and Involvement (PPI) in health research (NHS INVOLVE, 2019). However, variations in interpretations of, and approaches to peer research have been identified (Staniszewska et al, 2017), suggesting scope for more consistency, clarity and rigor in implementing peer research. An important feature of peer research is peer support, defined by Deneva and Bolling (2016) as:

[2] Research Partner, Housing Options Scotland, co-ordinated and provided administrative support to the Advisory Group.

> "people with a common experience supporting each other on an equal basis. This involves the provision of information and practical, emotional, social or physical support through listening, education, mentoring, mediation, (self-) advocacy and other. Peer support can be provided one-to-one or in groups and can take place in different settings (for example, people's own home, peer-run organisations such as Centres for Independent Living or self-advocacy groups, schools, work places, and social or health services), as well as by phone or online (e.g. social media, websites, forums, email, etc.)."
>
> (2016, 4-5)

Deneva and Bolling (2016) also voiced concerns that although a significant number of European countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), these nations still fail to ensure adequate access to peer support for disabled people. Their survey for the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) obtained information about disabled people's access to peer support in Europe, and ways in which peer support is provided. They sought to map the differences between countries, and to identify gaps in order to formulate an action plan for Europe. The research contributed towards peer support training, as well as increasing awareness of peer support among ENIL members, other disabled people's organisations, service providers and the European Commission. A limitation of the survey is that the twenty-six respondents across different countries each tended to be involved with one specific area of independent living. Therefore, the survey results may not have captured a full picture of peer support in each nation. Nevertheless, the survey results led to the following recommendations for national, regional and local governments:

- *Adopt legislation on peer support, which is compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and reflects the philosophy of the Independent Living Movement.*

- *Ensure that peer support is supported at the national level, with funding allocated to the individual, to ensure equal access throughout the country.*

- *Ensure that peer support services are in line with the social and the human rights model of disability, and not carried out using a medical approach.*

- *Improve data collection about the availability of peer support, to enable the development of adequate legislation and policy in this area.*

- *Support local Centres for Independent Living (CILs) to improve their capacity for delivering and promoting peer support.*

- *Ensure de-institutionalisation strategies or programmes include peer support services.*

(Deneva and Bolling, 2016 p.10).

Lessons from Previous Peer Research Studies

Previous studies using peer research provide valuable insights into potential challenges or issues. A review by Viswanathan et al. (2004) found that well-conducted peer research enhanced competencies and capacities of the community, improved research quality, led to

more effective and efficient interventions, and resulted in better health outcomes.

Kilpatrick et al. (2007) described the use of a peer research method in Northern Ireland to explore disaffected young people's views on alternative education. The role of the peer researcher addressed potential power imbalances with interviewees and enabled the use of a shared language that enhanced data collection, understanding during analysis and meaningful dissemination. Over two days of training, peer researchers discussed their job descriptions, paid contracts, carried out criminal record checks and received skills training on research ethics and interviewing techniques. Several lessons were learned from the project. Peer researchers benefited from supervision, participated in monthly meetings and were supported to follow a schedule of deadlines. They were found to participate primarily for personal development rather than for financial gain. Kilpatrick et al. (2007) noted in hindsight that the peer researcher approach had been worthwhile, but needed additional time and resources.

In contrast, other researchers have raised concerns surrounding effectiveness and impact of consumer involvement in research and there are indications that the benefits of peer research are not apparent across all areas or, require considerable financial investment. Van Staa et al (2009) offer a cautionary perspective of peer research from their evaluation of a participatory research project involving chronically ill adolescents as co-researchers. Their '*On Your Own Feet'* peer research project explored how hospital services could be adjusted to meet the needs of patients. The study aimed to set up a social event for patients and conduct interviews with participants in a public cafe area, but:

> "The peer-research attracted few participants, the interviews lacked depth and did not yield substantial new insights. Maintaining a high level of participation of the chronically ill co-researchers also proved difficult."
>
> (Van Staa et al., 2009, p. 95)

The peer researchers in the Van Staa et al study were paid, and were invited to participate in the analysis of the data, but most did not, or simply commented that everything looked fine. There were also concerns around the quality of data collected since there was limited training and some co-researchers postponed involvement due to illness. Van Staa et al (2009) concluded that their peer research project required double the amount of time and resources budgeted for, and that delays or disruptions resulted in outcomes not being delivered, impacting on research quality.

Peer researcher involvement in the Match Me study was informed by experiences of the prior pilot (Anderson, et al, 2017) which helped to ensure appropriate resourcing and support for the peer research role. On balance, the approach was considered effective in delivering an empathetic approach for disabled interviewees and valuable research experience for the peer researchers.

The Social Model of Disability and Peer Research

Kilpatrick et al. (2007) note that peer research has increased in popularity in line with ideologies of the active citizen that emphasise participation. In order to fully understand peer research, the underlying values and assumptions that may influence personal reactions and responses should also be examined. The behaviours of researchers are shaped by a research paradigm, a framework of personal assumptions and beliefs in which they work (Wahyuni, 2012). The social model of disability recognises the important role that peer researchers play in drawing upon their own lived experiences of disability to develop empathetic relationships with research participants (Barnes and Sheldon, 2007). This is sometimes referred to as a shared frame of reference and involving peer researchers can help overcome issues of legitimacy and accuracy in less inclusive research approaches (National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), 2017). The co-production nature of the 'Match Me' study meant that members of the research team self-identified as disabled. Peer researcher Zack remarked that for him, the presence of this shared frame of reference enhanced his participation on the project,

> "The main factor was that I was disabled myself – as were some of the people involved in setting up and running the project. Technology was also essential to allow me to participate."
>
> (Zack, peer researcher).

All Match Me peer researchers had lived experience of being disabled, including facing challenges in achieving independent living. They could therefore positively influence research design and delivery. Peer researchers were well placed to ensure interview situations supported empowerment through a shared frame of reference between peers and interviewees. The peer researchers could impart personal experiences that enabled fieldwork to be conducted in a sensitive and informed manner, enhancing the quality of data collected. The study also sought to support the peer researchers to gain valuable skills training and personal development.

Peer Researcher Training and Employment

In order to foster a supportive environment for peer support, two out of the three peer researchers for the Match Me study were trained together, in a four-hour session. The first part covered an overview of the project, the peer researcher role, ethical issues such as gaining informed consent, Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) checks and practicalities such as expenses. The second part of the training session focused on research protocols, field work safety procedures, listening and interview skills, the interview topic guide and undertaking a mock interview. Of the three peer researchers, Zack and Martin were new to the role whereas Zander had participated in a similar role in the past.

The peer researcher training programme took into account the key considerations for effective peer research outlined by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). These key considerations include adequate time and resources, a clear research brief, peer researcher training and ongoing support throughout the research period. The NCCPE was established in 2008 as part of the Beacons for Public Engagement Initiative. Funded by major UK research funders, the NCCPE supports universities to engage with the public (NCCPE, 2017) and its website can be utilised as a learning tool.

Training and continuing support are essential for peer researchers to ensure the collection of quality data (McCartan et al, 2012). For instance, peer researchers need to develop the

interview skills required to know when to probe for additional information or to clarify specific points (Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Van Staa et al., 2010; Lushey and Munroe, 2015). McCartan et al, (2012) note that the role of continual support is also critical to ensure that peer researchers are coping with any potential emotional impact of field work when participants share sensitive issues. Ongoing contact with the main research team also provides informal reminders of schedules and helps maintain motivation throughout the study.

The Match Me research team provided continual support and mentorship to the peer researchers. The project researcher shadowed the first interview of each peer researcher to provide re-assurance that the necessary consent forms and ethical protocols were completed and to provide feedback on the quality of good listening skills throughout the interview. This mentorship adopted a person-centred approach especially in the cases of the two new peer researchers where shadowing continued until it was mutually agreed that peer researchers were ready to work on their own. Typical feedback on interviewing included issues of timing; presentation of ethics protocols (including information and consent sheet, equality monitoring form and debriefing information); conducting the interview (e.g. not sharing too much about personal experiences); keeping language neutral without personal bias; and identification of common areas where peer researchers could probe for deeper discussion. Zander, peer researcher, reflected that the shadowing and mentorship was valuable for instilling confidence in his interviewing skills:

> ‘I wasn’t sure what to expect but it was a pleasure to meet new people. I was a bit wary at first, but the more I done it the easier it became and I had great support from the research team. The training was appropriate, it was thorough and prepared me for the role. I felt enabled to carry out the role effectively. I felt re-assured when I had the opportunity for my first couple of interviews to be shadowed by the research assistant and this helped to build my confidence.’
>
> (Zander, peer researcher).

An important part of any interview is the debrief or ending. Spall (1998) discusses the nature of the debrief as a form of continual support, enhancing data credibility and trustworthiness. Team debriefing sessions should address preliminary findings, initial analysis and the progress of further inquiry. Debriefings can uncover occurrences of ethical, legal and interpretation bias. When the Match Me peer researchers conducted interviews unaccompanied, the field work safety protocol stated that they call the project researcher within an hour of finishing. This not only provided assurance that they had left the interview venue safely, but also gave peer researchers the chance to raise any concerns or observations. Interviewees were recounting often stressful and emotionally sensitive personal circumstances of participants. One interviewee withdrew after 15 minutes; for another a tea-break helped when they became visibly upset. Reflecting on his involvement as a peer researcher, Zander highlighted the impact of experiencing first-hand the emotional consequences of unsuitable housing on some interviewees:

> “There was a stark contrast between interviewees who had moved in to an accessible property and were experiencing major positive impacts upon their wellbeing; compared to the other interviewees who were still awaiting a suitable offer of adapted/accessible housing and who experienced massive negative impacts on their, as well as their families, quality of life.”
>
> (Zander, peer researcher)

The project researcher acted as a conduit between peer researchers and interviewees, as well as providing practical support by organising fieldwork. This included setting up interview dates, times and accessible venues – and helping ensure access to suitable transport. Providing this support ensured that any difficulties arising, (such as reschedules due to illness or adverse weather conditions) were dealt with by the project researcher and prevented stress being placed on the peer researchers. Reflecting on his overall experience as a peer researcher, Martin highlighted that he felt supported throughout, "*the support and organisation from the university and staff made participating very easy*".

Often, a disabled housing applicant's current property was inaccessible. The project researcher tried, if practical, for any peer researchers with locomotional impairments to meet housing applicants in alternative accessible venues, such as local libraries, which offered enough privacy and comfort for the housing applicant. As a wheelchair user, peer researcher Martin commented that sometimes even in an accessible property, space could be limited, "*I had a few problems getting into a couple of participants' homes and when I did get access there was little room for two wheelchairs as we couldn't really move*" (Martin, peer researcher).

The research team also worked with peer researchers to ensure that they had access to suitable transport arrangements. Zander drove an adapted van that needed ample parking space to allow the use of a ramped exit at the back for his wheelchair. Zack predominantly used his Disabled Persons Travel Pass to access free travel on local bus and train services. However, taxi journeys were required in order for Zack to reach rural locations or areas with poor public transport links. As Zack describes, he found access to public transport one of the main challenges for the role of peer researcher:

> "The main challenges in my area is it consists of very remote areas. Even when public transport is usable, such as trains can cause problems when engineering work is undertaken, as the main station is unable to accommodate relief bus services by the entrance to the station. This involves a very long walk away from the station and unfortunately there is no passenger assistance either to or from the replacement service. Local bus services are limited, as well as not reliable. Fortunately, the Match Me Project was very accommodating over Travel Expenses which enabled the Peer Researcher to fulfil their role."
>
> (Zack, peer researcher)

Similarly, Martin planned to travel by train using his Disabled Persons Travel Pass. Researcher checks of unstaffed train stations revealed that some that were designated as accessible still contained potential access barriers such as gates, with no handles, which could not be opened by a wheelchair user. Wheelchair accessible taxis were therefore booked instead, although the advance booking system could be unsuited to unforeseen changes in schedules and there was a lack of choice concerning accessible taxi service provision.

It is recognised that payment for peer research work acknowledges the core value and expectations of the role, but that participation in a research project should also enhance the CV and future employment prospects of peer researchers (McCartan et al, 2012). Peer researcher Zack shared that his expectations of participation were to develop skills for future advocacy related jobs:

> "I had hoped that this role would help me understand disabled issues even

though I have been disabled for 9 years. I was also looking at the possibility of becoming an Advocate for Disabled Groups. I thought it would inform me of the questions to be asked and the counter arguments that could be put forward."

(Zack, peer researcher)

The Match Me budget allowed for payment for peer researchers and all were offered independent welfare advice before taking on the role. Taking account of their individual situations, only Martin chose to pursue paid participation. Peer researcher participation requires to be managed within social security regulations which pose challenges for taking up work or volunteer opportunities which might help disabled people develop their knowledge, skills and employability.

Improvements for Future Co-Production Research

Project Advisory Group members and peer researchers were asked what improvements might enhance these roles in the future. A PAG member and peer researcher Zander both hoped that the findings would help to inform the Scottish housing sector, and the general public, of the significant effects that living in inaccessible housing had on disabled peoples' lives.

"Overall as I said it was a great project to be part of and it has revealed to me how complicated the whole thing can be. My housing application experience was relatively simple but the project has identified, within the case studies and personal reflections, the extent to which not being able to access a decent and appropriate home can detrimentally affect individuals and families.

I hope the findings will be read by the appropriate people and acted upon accordingly but in these difficult times nothing is certain even if it is obvious."

(PAG Member Reflection)

Zander echoed this sentiment by stating that,

"Having an accessible home that fully meets your needs is fundamental for disabled people to fully participate and contribute in society as equal citizens and to live independently in communities of their choice. Without which it becomes so much harder, almost impossible, to access work, education and recreational opportunities, to lead an ordinary life and do the everyday things that non-disabled people take for granted. That so many people are living in unsuitable and inaccessible houses is a badge of shame for 21st Century Scotland."

(Zander, peer researcher).

Zack and Martin, peer researchers, gave practical suggestions for future co-production research relating to the core research methods and data collection.

"The only recommendation I could make is that a longer period is required……. before the reassessment of part 2 begins[3]. Also rely on the local personnel

[3] Referring to the second wave of interviews in the Match Me study.

taking part as to where areas are in relation to each other to help keep costs to a minimum. I would finally add that the whole experience was astounding and would definitely get involved in another project with the team."

(Zack, peer researcher)

"Making sure of access to the participants' homes especially when you have to travel a long distance."

(Martin, peer researcher)

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the co-production approach adopted for the Match Me project drawing on prior literature and reflections from the research and co-production participants on their experiences of involvement. There was broad consensus on the benefits of a co-production approach. Namely, that research design, execution, analysis and dissemination are informed by lived experiences and create meaningful contributions towards an empirical evidence base. At an individual level, participants reported increased knowledge, self-confidence, and skills which contributed to their personal development. A number of challenges for effective co-production research were also identified. Issues of ensuring enough time and resources for effective participation concur with messages from prior literature. Some participants may need support to maintain motivation throughout a lengthy project period. Practical challenges included the inaccessibility and lack of public transport, as well as the inaccessibility of interviewees' homes. For those in receipt of benefits, the social security system does not easily enable short-term involvement of disabled people in peer researcher activities. Constructive feedback on the role of the Project Advisory Group suggests that there could have been more initial input in explaining the complexities of the research process, especially challenges of data collection in the field and the implications for overall project management. Budgets could allow for enhanced communication between Advisory Group Meetings, using mechanisms which meet with member preferences, to help sustain participation throughout the project lifetime. Nonetheless, the overriding conclusion remains that the passion and commitment demonstrated by many of the Match Me co-production participants made a huge contribution to the study and adds to learning for future research design.

5 The Housing Application Process

"An allocation policy is a rationing tool of a scarce resource."

(LA3, P1)

This chapter explores the processes for disabled people to apply for social rented housing in our three case study local authority areas. The areas selected were of different size, urban/rural classification and had different approaches to delivering social housing. Each local authority had developed their own rules (allocation policy) for deciding how to prioritise applications made to their housing list.

Background

In Scotland, there are over 162,000 applicants on local authority housing waiting lists and a freedom of information request reported in 2018 indicated that, of this, there may be up to 10,000 disabled applicants[4] (6.17%) (Green, 2018). The design features of most social housing do not meet the needs of disabled people or older people, whose health may be declining leading to impairments. There is a resulting significant pressure on social housing waiting lists for accessible/adapted properties. Current demand in Scotland is in excess of supply, with only 3,581 (1.14%) of the 314,482 local authority homes across Scotland adapted for wheelchair use (Independent Living in Scotland, 2017). A recent inquiry by the EHRC (2018) found the average waiting time for an accessible home was over two years (25 months), with many disabled housing applicants housed in unsuitable homes in the meantime (Adams et al., 2018). People who are disabled are less likely to be working or may be in low paid employment. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JFF) Analysis Unit (2017) reported that disability was strongly linked to poverty with 30% of disabled households living in poverty compared with 19% of households where no one is disabled.

Social rented accommodation owned by councils and housing associations is more affordable than the private rented sector. In Scotland in 2016/17, local authority average rents were £69.20 per week, 14% lower than the average housing association rent of £80.28 per week and 36% lower than the average of £108 per week in the private rented sector (Scottish Government, 2018b). Therefore, it is unsurprising that 13% of households in the social rented sector have one or more adults who are permanently sick or disabled compared to 2% in private rented households, 1% of homeowners with a mortgage and 2% of homeowners who own their home outright (Scottish Government, 2018c).

Disabled Applicants Reasons for Moving

Twenty of the disabled social housing applicants interviewed in wave one were awaiting a match to a suitable adapted/accessible property. Applicants were living in a range of tenures, including renting from the Council or a Housing Association, private renting and home ownership. The most common reason for all applicants seeking to move to a new house was because of steps, for example an internal staircase and/or more than three external steps to access their home.

[4] The Scottish Government (2018a) highlight that there may be problems with the data used from housing waiting lists, namely, these figures may include double-counting of people who apply to more than one local authority, some applicants may no longer need social housing but have not removed their name from the housing list and some local authorities had not released their waiting list data.

Pedro and Pippa

Pedro and Pippa own a 3-bedroom semi-detached property and have lived there for 15 years. Pedro became a wheelchair user and is now unable to access upstairs. He currently lives in the living room and a downstairs bedroom. The layout of Pedro and Pippa's property has made it difficult to make adaptions. A temporary ramp has been installed to provide wheelchair access to the front door. However, Pippa pointed out that:

"I need to guide him, it's a bit steep so he's a bit nervous."

(Pippa, Wife of Housing Applicant)

The main reasons for disabled applicants wanting to move into social rented accommodation was the security and affordability of a social tenancy and an increased confidence that property repairs would be carried out. Additional reasons given by applicants included: to move away from harassment, to alleviate overcrowding and to improve quality of care and individual well-being. Tina's narrative highlighted most of these additional aspects.

Tina

Tina stays in a 3-bedroom semi-detached house with her two sons, aged in their twenties, who have autism. They have lived in a private rental property for seven years. However, Tina requires wheelchair accessible accommodation and is struggling to use the stairlift currently installed. Her youngest son has experienced anti-social behaviour in the area and Tina feels that a social tenancy would provide greater security and stronger rights for any repairs to be carried out since their current private rented property has dampness, and other safety issues that require attention. As Tina explained:

"I'd feel more secure in a Housing Association or Council house because you don't want the phone to go and our landlord wants his house back. And all of a sudden you become homeless and there's a rush to move. The anxiety of having perhaps 2 months to move, I'd feel more secure."

(Tina, Housing Applicant)

Profile of the Case Study Local Authorities

Table 7, below provides an overview of the characteristics of the participating Local Authorities. The number of properties available and the total number of applicants waiting to be allocated a new property have been generalised to maintain anonymity. It should be also be noted that some participants commented that the Scottish Housing Regulator data on applicants may duplicate or overlook demand.

Table 7: Anonymised Profile of the Three Local Authority Areas

	Local Authority Area 1	Local Authority Area 2	Local Authority Area 3
Identifier	LA1	LA2	LA3
Council Owned Properties	10,000-20,000	<10,000	>20,000
Housing Association Properties	5,000-10,000	<5,000	5,000-10,000
Total on Local Authority Waiting List	5,000-10,000	<5,000	>10,000
Number of Disabled People on Waiting List	500-1,000 (13.56%)	<500 (4.03%)	500-1,000 (7.03%)
Number of Existing Tenants	10,000-20,000	<10,000	>20,000
Disabled Tenants as proportion of all tenants	10.94%	13.85%	7.37%
Application Method	Common Housing Register	Single Housing Register	Common Housing Register

Source: Scottish Housing Regulator, Charter data – all social landlords' complete dataset 2017-18 (anonymised).

LA1 is a rural local authority area and has a fast growing population, predicted to increase by 22% in the next 25 years (LA1 Local Housing Strategy, 2018). Furthermore, by 2035 the number of people over the age of 65 years is predicted to account for 25% of the total population in LA1.

LA2 is a mixed urban and rural area. Nearly two thirds of housing in the area is owner-occupied. Average earnings are higher than that of Scotland and the UK, although income inequality is also widely evident (LA2, Local Housing Strategy, 2018). The number of people aged over 65 is forecast to grow by 72% between 2012 and 2037 (LA2 Partnership, 2016). LA2 has a high projected population increase, and by 2039 is projected to have one of the highest proportions of households containing children, at around 27% of all households (LA2 Local Housing Strategy, 2018).

LA3 is a large urban Council landlord with a high proportion of all housing in the area owned by the Council. Although the projected population in LA3 is expected to remain relatively static, it is anticipated that there will be a 10% rise in the number of households between 2012 – 2037, due to household size decreasing. This is a result of the population ageing and a rise in one-person households. It is expected that by 2037 the older population in LA3 will have increased by 68.4% from 2012. The implications of this will be an increasing need for suitable accessible accommodation and associated support services (LA3 Local Housing Strategy, 2016).

Housing Registers

To be considered for social rented housing, an application should be made directly to the Local Authority or to a Housing Association/Registered Social Landlord (RSL) with properties in the area. Applications for housing are assessed under the allocation scheme of the local authority or RSL (Craigforth 2007, see Table 8).

Table 8: Allocation Systems used in Scotland

Allocation System	Description
Points Only Systems	Points only systems, in which applicants' circumstances are awarded points, usually in relation to housing need, and are placed in a single queue in points order.
Group Plus Points	Group plus points, in which applicants are awarded points and are placed in different queues (groups). These systems usually also use quotas of lets so that different groups will receive a set proportion of the vacancies which arise. For example, 50% to homeless applicants; 30% to transfer applicants and 20% to applicants with medical priority.
Date Order Only	Date order only, in which applicants are placed in a single queue in order of the date of application (or sometimes for transfer applicants the date at which their tenancy commenced)
Group Plus Date Order	Group plus date order, where applicants are placed in groups in order of the date of their application.
Choice Based Lettings	Choice based lettings, in which landlords advertise vacancies and applicants may 'bid'. Applicants are grouped in different levels of priority, usually quite broad, and where there is more than one bid made, the applicant with higher priority is offered the property. These have only recently been used in Scotland but appear to be gaining in popularity.

Adapted from: Craigforth (2007) Tensions between Allocations Policy and Practice. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government. pp. 15-16.

Landlords will review the information that the applicant has provided and may request supporting evidence, e.g. an Occupational Therapist report. Once all the information required has been gathered the landlord will assess the application and notify the applicant of the number of points or banding that they have been awarded. An allocation system sets out the rules that are followed in order to prioritise applicants on the Housing Register into a queue that reflects, for example, the type of accommodation required or the circumstances of the applicant, including being disabled. Table 7 sets out the main types of allocation systems.

Applicants in two of the Local Authority areas (LA1 and LA3) apply to register on a Common Housing Register, a joint waiting list for the Council and local Housing Associations. However, not all Housing Associations in a Local Authority area may choose to be part of a Common Housing Register and instead will hold their own lists or be part of an alternative scheme, such as a Choice Based Lettings system. Applicants in LA2 apply to a single Housing Register for Council stock. If they wish to be considered by Registered Social Landlords in the area they need to complete a separate housing application form. In most cases, Housing Associations also seek nominations from the Local Authority for around 50% of their vacancies.

Common Housing Registers

A Common Housing Register was used to maintain the waiting list for social rented housing in two of the Council areas (LA1 and LA3). Applicants only needed to fill in one application form to apply to the Council and the participating partner landlords. Applicants can apply to as many participating landlords as they wish, to be considered for as many areas as they choose. Once the application form has been completed, applicants are 'passive' in the process until they are offered a property and make a decision on whether to accept or reject a housing offer.

Within LA1, 94.8% of lets are via the points based Common Housing Register. However, there is no common allocation policy within LA1, so the council and housing associations have their own rules for allocations from the common register. The remaining 5.2% of lets are made via a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme to which the other local housing associations subscribe (Scottish Housing Best Value Network[5], 2012). Applicants in LA1 can be registered on both the Common Housing Register and the Choice Based Lettings system.

> *"You should be on absolutely everything that you can be. You can be on the waiting list for as many local authorities as you want to be as well so we have a number of folk who are on for LA1 but would also be for [adjacent LA] because there is a lot of cross borders […] You can be on the list of as many providers as you can and we would always encourage folk to do that to try and access housing."*
>
> *(LA, 1P2)*

Within LA3, the Council and a large number of Housing Associations and Co-operatives in the area allocate housing from a Common Housing Register. Four partner landlords use the same housing allocation policy as the Council in LA3. At the present time Choice Based Letting is not operational within this area (Scottish Housing Best Value Network, 2012).

Choice Based Lettings

Choice Based Lettings (CBL) is an alternative to a passive points based approach to allocations and may be operated by any social landlord if this is their policy. Applicants who are on a Local Authority Common Housing Register or other Local Authority waiting list can also register with providers who are partners in a Choice Based system. Applicants who register for CBL will be notified of their relative priority in the system. For example, this may be awarded on three levels: *Gold, Silver or Bronze* priority. Participating landlords advertise their properties within the CBL website, through the local press, on their own websites and on other dedicated/national websites. Applicants can then bid to indicate their interest on these advertised properties and of these bids made, the property will be allocated by the landlord to the bidder who is in most need.

[5]Now Scotland's Housing Network.

Angela

Angela noted that the number of adapted/accessible housing vacancies on Choice Based Lettings was very low. The local housing department had contacted her to question why she was not bidding regularly online for allocations. Angela had to point out that even with a gold pass (priority for adapted/accessible houses), there was no suitable accommodation. Angela explained that:

> *"They keep telling you to apply for housing on it but if there's nothing suitable and they're coming up with maybe say one 4-bed property but there's perhaps 100 people applying. It really is hard going."*
>
> *(Angela, Housing Applicant).*

Heather (tenant) also used the Choice Based Letting system: *"Well personally I think it's a really strange way of allocating houses."* Heather felt that the priority passes were confusing to navigate and found it challenging to work out whether an advertised property belonged to a housing provider she had registered with. Heather summed her experience of using the online bidding process as:

> *"Well basically it was a case of you see a house and say, I liked that and bid for it. There were categories such as disabilities, medical category … it was difficult to work your way around it." (Heather, Tenant).*

Jess

Jess (housing applicant) also experienced challenges using the Choice Based Lettings system. She outlined that:

> *"I don't have internet access and they wanted me to bid online each week."*
>
> *(Jess, Housing Applicant)*

Jess has autism which also made following instructions and remembering passwords difficult. The housing department had not found a way around enabling Jess to bid online with support. In addition, her Social Worker had said that they were unable to bid on her behalf.

Applying for Social Housing

The housing allocations policies of each Local Authority and Housing Association in an area sets out who can apply to join their respective housing registers, or if they are part of a Common Housing Register or CBL scheme. Applicants must complete a housing application form in order to be placed on the housing register. Information and guidance is available through all three Local Authorities' websites and the websites of Housing Associations active in these areas. The latter generally also set out arrangements for taking nominations from the Local Authority list.

Paper Application

Two of the local authority areas (LA2 and LA3) use a paper-based application form which can be downloaded from their website. Alternatively, applicants can request a copy of the application form to be sent to them by post or collect it from one of the local housing offices.

Online Application

LA1 operate a web based Common Housing Register. This allows applicants to apply online to the Council as well as five partner landlords in one application. Previously there had been more RSL partners involved in the Common Housing Register. However, these withdrew because they went on to operate Choice Based Lettings.

The discussion/observation groups held in the three areas revealed the differing degrees to which Local Authority allocation systems make use of new or existing technologies. LA3 voiced plans to develop IT systems in the long-term that should allow housing applicants 'real time' access to their application. This would provide the ability for housing applicants and tenants to edit/update their circumstances. At the moment, better and clearer information was needed on their websites. All agreed that accessible online application systems provide the potential for making adapted housing databases more visible to applicants so they can see for themselves what may be possible or highly unlikely options. The larger group discussion at the Local Authority feedback session with LA1 explored how this kind of data analysis would also be useful for Strategic Housing Investment Plans and Local Housing Strategy purposes. However, this same group discussion raised caution in relation to over-reliance upon online methods since in some rural areas internet connections can be unreliable. It was also recognised that some applicants may not be able easily to make an online application and continue to prefer a paper-based approach.

Disabled Applicants Accessible Housing Requirements

Applicant participants highlighted several critical requirements for the adapted/accessible housing they required. Most commonly, accommodation needed to be wheelchair accessible with a wet floor shower and located on the ground floor. For all, level access was essential, even for non-wheelchair users.

Lori

Housing applicant, Lori, is awaiting a move into an adapted ground-floor property. She currently stays in a 3-bedroom, mid-terrace private let with her 17-year-old daughter who has multiple severe impairments and 14-year-old son who has Asperger's syndrome. Lori's daughter in particular is unable to use the stairs without a lot of assistance and Lori remarked that:

"Because it's a private rental, we're restricted to what we can do."

(Lori, Housing Applicant)

Lori reflected upon the fact that although nobody in her household uses a wheelchair, a ground-floor level access adapted property will suit their housing needs. There will be space for the children to have their own accessible private bedrooms, direct access into the garden and widened doors to enable the storage/manoeuvring of Lori's daughter's mobility buggy.

Participants highlighted that the location of an adapted/accessible property was an important factor. As well as requiring an accessible home, participants also needed the surrounding area to be accessible, for example to local amenities and services. Many participants commented that they wished to remain with their current GP practice/doctor, where they had formed a strong relationship. This would save them needing to register with a new GP and repeat complex personal circumstances. Tom (housing applicant) discussed the importance of securing housing close to where he currently lived because he wished to continue to attend his local mental health service provider and transgender clinic. He was concerned that if he moved to a smaller town or village, it was unlikely that they would run a transgender clinic or have the peer support networks that he was able to access locally at the moment.

Can Existing Properties be Adapted?

Applicants typically had explored whether adaptations could be made to their existing property. For some applicants' adaptations were not possible or, for example, a private landlord did not support these adaptations to be carried out. Further, where only some of the required adaptations could be made to a property there was a worry that this would reduce the applicant's priority on the waiting list even where this still left the applicant with a housing need. For example, Alex (housing applicant), Tina (housing applicant) and Emma and Eddy (housing applicants) all shared their experiences of carrying out adaptations to their unsuitable homes to achieve a degree of improved access to independent living. Alex had his shower lowered and handrails fitted to the staircase. Tina had a wet-floor shower installed, chicken wire laid on the decking outside to improve the grip of her wheelchair and a stairlift fitted. Emma and Eddy had a wet-floor shower installed and a stairlift fitted. They each voiced the dilemma faced when having these adaptations installed in case they experienced a reduction in their priority for re-housing. In fact, Tina and Emma, and Eddy did receive notification that they had dropped down the priority category for re-housing.

Kim

For Kim (housing applicant) her status as a housing applicant affected her eligibility to get adaptations installed into her current property because she was waiting for re-housing. Kim is housebound and only has access to her living room which is very cramped because within this space she has a manual hoist, her bed and a commode. Approval was granted for an electronic tracking hoist to be installed and this would allow Kim to independently move between her bed, chair and commode without relying on carers. The Local Authority had started to install the electronic tracking hoist, but the workers stopped when she mentioned she was on the social housing waiting list. This means that Kim still relies upon two carers to help move her between bed and commode, or into her chair. Kim also expressed concerns about her safety in the event of a fire because her wheelchair is too wide for the door frame that exits her living room and due to the structure of the property this door cannot be made any wider.

For many participants, adaptations had made little difference to overall levels of access to independent living. Vikki (daughter of a wheelchair user housing applicant, Rachel) explained that a stairlift had been installed to allow access to the upstairs of the house (where the bathroom and bedroom are located). However, as the only toilet in the property

is upstairs this means that in order to go to the toilet her mum needs to make eight transfers for each visit (a transfer is moving from one site to another, such as a bed to a wheelchair). The transfers that Rachel makes for each visit to the toilet are:

1. from her chair to wheelchair
2. wheelchair to stairlift
3. stairlift to upstairs wheelchair
4. upstairs wheelchair to toilet
5. then from toilet back into upstairs wheelchair
6. upstairs wheelchair to stairlift
7. stairlift into wheelchair
8. and then from the wheelchair back into her chair.

Rachel had complex health conditions and carrying out so many transfers each day slowed the healing process of her treatment. Her fatigue worsened when she used the stairlift to access the toilet and she often required a lie down afterwards to recover.

Dougie (wheelchair use, housing applicant) revealed that external stairs to his property prevent him from venturing outside and it is not possible to install a ramp to enable access. He relies on friends and family to help him participate in activities, such as going to football matches. External stairs also meant that Jess (housing applicant) struggled to leave her current property. She explained she had been unable to organise assistance to help her leave the house to attend physiotherapy. When she missed three appointments, she was removed from the service without a discussion on how to support her to reach the venue. Jess highlighted that as a young person, her current inaccessible property was negatively impacting upon her sense of identity and ability to participate in society:

> *"I've lost a bit of my identity … I used to like going to church, used to enjoy pub quizzes and things."*
>
> *(Jess, Housing Applicant)*

Jess also shared her experience of using places outside of the home to maintain personal hygiene. She was unable to use her bath at home safely and once had to call the emergency services to break down the door and help her out. Jess commented that:

> *"I won't go in the bath now … I go down to the local swimming pool to take a shower."*
>
> *(Jess, Housing Applicant)*

Jess's account was not unique. Nina (tenant) reported that she had been unable to use the internal stairs in her previous property and would often carry out personal hygiene tasks in her downstairs sink or use the washing facilities in friends' houses. She found this situation very upsetting.

Applying for Accessible/Adapted Housing

Although each local authority required an additional form to be completed by disabled applicants whose current home was unsuitable, the process varied across the three areas.

LA1: Housing Needs Assessment

In LA1 disabled applicants complete a Housing Needs Assessment alongside their application for social housing. LA1 does not use the term 'health' or 'medical' in the title of this form. This was to move away from prior reference to medical conditions, which did not always affect housing need. The Housing Needs Assessment focuses on a person's ability to function in their current home, such as any walking difficulties, use of a wheelchair or other aids, and whether an applicant can get in and out of the bath. The assessment aims to establish if an applicant's functional ability is being affected by where they live, and how this could be improved by moving to a more suitable property (for example, if the current property had stairs that the applicant was no longer able to use). This approach recognises a move away from a medical model of disability towards a more social model as outlined earlier in this report.

Award of Banding

Applicants are placed into a banding based on their housing need and drawing on recommendations of an Occupational Therapist (OT). Bandings are A-D, where A is that there is an emergency for re-housing and D is there is very little need. The Local Authority checks the Housing Need Assessments at monthly meetings involving the housing officer and the housing OT, to quality assure for consistency in banding. Applicants have the right to request a review of the decision on their Housing Need Assessment, where a housing OT will advise on whether they feel that it would be appropriate to increase the applicants banding.

Band A Applicants

Applicants who have been given a band A award are recognised to have a real and urgent need for re-housing. This can be for any housing need, not just for health grounds. The council try to house applicants awarded a band A within 12 months of their application. This is not always possible, for example, because there is a low stock turnover in the areas selected or the size of house needed.

During the Local Authority feedback session in LA1, housing personnel noted concerns about unintended consequences of new requirements in relation to prioritising allocations to homeless people and impacts on allocations to other Band A and Band B priority groups. A key recommendation of the Homeless and Sleeping Rough Action Group (HARSAG, 2018) set up by the Scottish Government is for each Local Authority to develop a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) by December 2018. This is a five-year initiative which aims to address homelessness more proactively by focussing on prevention, moving people into permanent housing more quickly and improving support through better joint working between health, housing and social care. While there were concerns about the resource implications, there was also a discussion about opportunities to apply or adapt the policies and practices being put in place in relation to addressing homelessness to support the experience of disabled home-seekers. However, a straight application of RRTP was not

being promoted. For example, there was concern amongst participants that the downside of the RRTPs in rural areas was that the applicant was not given much choice in relation to an allocation and could have to accept a property some distance from where they actually want to be, and where transport links may be poor.

Named Housing Officer

In general, applicants in LA1, including disabled applicants, on the waiting list do not have a named housing or allocations officer. This is unless an applicant applies as homeless, whereby the housing officer who initially took their application would be allocated to the applicant. However, at the point of a house being offered to an applicant, they will normally then deal with the housing officer who allocated the property to them. Then once an applicant has been housed in a property there would be consistency with the housing officer dealing with them.

A common suggestion to improve communication between housing applicants and providers was to assign a named contact to oversee an applicant. Indeed this suggestion had also emerged in the pilot study (Anderson et al, 2017). Many applicants found repeating their complex and deeply personal situation to different housing assistants each time they made contact to be extremely stressful. However, it should be noted that it can be difficult to balance equality for staff (e.g. part-time and flexible working) and being able to provide applicants with a named housing officer contact who can be readily available. A possible option to resolve this issue would be to offer choice to applicants to work with a named contact during their agreed working hours.

Nina

Nina (tenant) highlighted that talking to strangers can be embarrassing when somebody's housing condition is affected by toileting needs. If a named contact is assigned, they should have an awareness of gender sensitivity. Nina compared her experience of communication with housing providers to that of going to the doctor:

> *"It's like going to a different Doctor who hasn't read your notes, doesn't know anything about your condition."*
>
> *(Nina, Tenant)*

LA2: Health and Housing Application Priority Form

In LA2, as soon as the need for adapted housing is identified at point of application, a lead contact person (named housing officer) is identified. The applicant is contacted by telephone and /or visit in order to go through their application and talk them through the housing allocation process. At this point it would be determined if there was a need to apply for health and housing priority points. The lead contact from the local area office will discuss with the applicant how to apply and what evidence is needed to support their application, such as letters from their GP, physiotherapist or an OT assessment. An application for a health and housing priority award will only be considered if an applicant's current property has an impact on their health condition and once any possible adaptations to their current home have been considered.

The application and supporting evidence is submitted to the health and housing panel for a decision. The panel consists of staff from social care and housing services. Based on the information provided, applicants are awarded one of three categories, A-C, whereby:

- Category A = 80 points
- Category B = 50 points
- Category C = 6 points

The panel will also make a recommendation about what house type is required. For example, a ground floor property.

The lead housing officer works closely with the housing and social work OT and, for the matching process, with the technical officer, to consider the feasibility of adaptations to potential properties. However, participants commented that often applicants are not necessarily advised who the lead person is, and the involvement of housing management staff, one or two OTs and technical people can sometimes be confusing. To applicants, it can come over as several people working in isolation although this is not in fact the case and the processes for ensuring this doesn't happen are, behind the scenes, very strong.

Households with more than one applicant with health and housing needs

Households who have more than one applicant with health and housing need will only be awarded points for one person. Typically, this will be the applicant with the condition that will receive the highest award. The household member assessed for health and housing priority points does not need to be the main applicant, for example, it could be a child with a disability.

Appealing a Decision – Health and Housing Priority

If an applicant disagrees with the decision about the category awarded by the health and housing panel then an appeal can be made and the award can be re-examined at the next health and housing panel. Typically, it would be expected that an appeal would contain some additional information that had not been available at the original hearing:

> *"If nothing has changed then it is highly unlikely that the appeal would be upheld but they can also appeal that … but if somebody is given a cat C it is often, for want of a better word, because of a minor type of medical priority [for example] being closer to family for support or isolation or a mild mental health issue."*
>
> *(LA2, P2)*

> *"And what you may also find is that they are already in an adapted property that meets their needs and they want to move to be nearer support so they would only get a cat C."*
>
> *(LA2, P3)*

However, if an applicant has been unsuccessful with an appeal to the health and housing panel, applicants have further avenues where they can make an appeal.

Rehousing Panel

In 2003, LA2 set up a rehousing panel as a more transparent and accountable process for awarding priority in exceptional cases (LA2, 2004). The rehousing panel sits for cases where the allocations policy in itself may not satisfy the needs of an applicant. For example:

> *"If you have got 6 points [awarded by the health and housing panel] and you are in an adapted house and you want to move to another area, there is may be other reasons why you need to move that could be equally as complex but don't fit into our health and housing process and in those circumstances if the evidence is there it could go to the re-housing panel."*
>
> *(LA2, P1)*

There are three categories, namely: management moves, extreme medical and extreme overcrowding. However, cases referred to the re-housing panel need to be:

> *"… quite specific, unique and extreme but it is a catch all thing that ensures that nothing should slip through the net."*
>
> *(LA2, P3)*

Applicants who have been to the health and housing panel can then go to the re-housing panel under the criteria of extreme medical need. Typically, this would be applicants awarded a category A or B. However, despite having maximum points, the area chosen, house type and size may influence the amount of time that an applicant is required to wait.

Lori

Lori (housing applicant) shared her experience of being on the social housing waiting list for 6 years. Although her current private let property could be adapted to meet her households' needs, the landlord would not agree to the adaptations. A neighbouring property became available as a social let and Lori got in touch with the local housing department to see if her family could be allocated the property. However, Lori discovered that although her social housing application had been given the maximum number of points, there were additional points available if she had approached the rehousing panel. Unfortunately, this took time and Lori lost the opportunity to be rehoused in her neighbourhood. Lori commented that more information should be made available to housing applicants about how they can be sure that they have been allocated their maximum number of points.

Practice Example

A family staying in a private let, two storey house had a child who had an assessed need for an adapted property. The mum had been carrying the child up and down the stairs but as the child was getting older (9 years old) this was becoming more difficult. The family were awarded medical priority (80 points) for a three-bed bungalow in their locality where there was a family support network. However, there were only two three-bedroom bungalows in this area and it was unlikely that one would become vacant in the near future. The family had also been to the rehousing panel and been awarded an additional 300 points. However, they remained on the list for a further two years despite these extra points. Therefore, while the family were top of the list for that house type, because there was very limited stock in their area of choice, they could not be re-housed.

A solution was found when a two-bedroom bungalow came up for re-let and was allocated to them with the agreement that the council would build an extension in order to make the property a three-bed home. The bungalow was already adapted with a wet floor shower.

> *"it is about knowing who is on the list and who is in the most need and then thinking how could we help…It is about thinking outside the box and we are reliant upon housing officers doing that."*
>
> *(LA2, P1)*

LA3: Health and Housing Need

In LA3 applicants who have an illness or disability complete a Health and Housing Need form

Health and Housing Priority Points

The Health and Housing Need application is assessed by staff from housing services. Therefore, applicants do not need to provide evidence with their application form. However, if more information is required, housing officers may request help from social work and health professionals (e.g. an applicant's GP or consultant). Applicants are awarded points (90, 40 or 10 points) to reflect how urgently they need to be rehoused.

The maximum number of health and housing points that can be awarded to an applicant is 90:

> *"Although an award of 90 points indicates an emergency you can't house them quickly if you don't have stock and you can also have problems because you have more than one person with 90 points and everybody has their own individual needs."*
>
> *(LA3, P3)*

Points for health and housing priority will only apply for a house type that will improve an applicant's current situation. In LA3 applicants awarded health and housing priority will only be allocated to a ground floor property. However, in LA2:

> *"It's not only single storey properties. It could be an adapted double storey house. As long as it has got a bathroom and a bedroom on the ground floor."*
>
> *(LA2, P6)*

However, the group agreed that two storey properties within LA2 were more likely to be

larger properties, such as four-bedroomed homes and there was low availability of two storey adapted properties.

The following table (Table 9) provides a summary of the different assessment procedures and policies in each participant local authority area.

Table 9: Process for Assessing Health and Housing Needs in the Three Local Authority Areas

	LA1	LA2	LA3
System	Priority Banding, A-D, awarded to each element of housing need.	Group Plus Points (Transfer; General Need; Specialist/Adapted Property; Sustainable Communities).	Group Plus Points (Homeless, Transfer, Aspirational transfer or General group).
Application for Health and Housing Need	Applicants completing their housing application online who indicate a Health and Housing Need on their application are automatically directed to complete an additional Health and Housing Needs form as part of the overall application process. Applicants who do not use the Internet can complete these forms over the phone or by appointment at one of the local housing offices.	First applicants complete and submit a paper housing application form; this can be downloaded from the Council website or requested from the 6 local housing offices. If a Health and Housing Need is indicated on the housing application, a named housing officer is assigned to that applicant to discuss if they should complete an application for Health and Housing Priority, and if so, have a discussion about how to complete the form and what additional evidence should be gathered by the applicant (e.g. OT assessment, GP letter).	A paper Health and Housing Needs application is submitted at the same time as the housing application form. Only the housing application form can be downloaded from the Council website; however, the Health and Housing Needs application can be requested through the Council website. Alternatively, both forms can be requested from one of the 10 local offices.
Assessment of Health and Housing Need	Housing staff only (as considered to be a housing assessment and not a medical assessment).	Completed Health and Housing Priority forms with supporting evidence are sent to the Health and Housing panel, which includes OT, SW, Housing staff.	Housing services staff, and, if required, will ask for assistance from Social Work and health professionals.
Outcome of Health and Housing Need Assessment	Priority banding, A-D. Band A (urgent need for re-housing) only awarded if disability affected by current housing situation.	Awarded category A, B or C. Translates to 80, 50 or 6 points. Points added to other category points awarded.	Award of 90, 40 or 10 points. Added to points awarded from other categories.

Applicants Experience of Applying for Accessible/Adapted Housing

Christine (tenant) commented that challenging decisions concerning points allocations required a lot of energy, especially if someone was already experiencing significant health conditions.

> *"When your confidence is down with everything going you, you don't feel able to challenge and you need to push and push and push for things."*
>
> *(Christine, Tenant).*

Other applicant participants experienced challenges where systems only took account of the housing needs of a main applicant, not the entire household. Heather (tenant) explained that in 2015 when she first applied for social housing, she was not granted full points. This was despite having two disabled people in the household; Heather has MS and her husband has multiple health conditions. Heather commented that the allocation process had focused too much on trying to determine which member of their household was 'more' disabled and that instead the process should have taken into consideration the needs of all household members.

Pippa and Pedro

Pippa and Pedro (housing applicants) remarked that not all circumstances fit neatly into the social housing application process.

Pippa is the carer for her husband Pedro, and he requires a wheelchair accessible two-bedroom property. However, Pippa commented that the social housing application process should recognise that an accessible property will also be a huge benefit for family members who are acting as carers. Pippa highlighted that both she and her husband should be recognised in the application process as having need:

> *"To give Pedro a life and to also give me a life too as it is restricting caring all the time."*
>
> *(Pippa, Housing Applicant)*

Steph and Darla

Steph and Darla (housing applicants) echoed Pedro and Pippa's experience. Their social housing application was focused upon Steph's housing needs. Steph requires a wheelchair accessible property with a wet floor shower. However, Darla remarked that:

> *"I've got an invisible disability and it feels like people stick their middle finger up at me."*
>
> *(Darla, Housing Applicant)*

Darla felt her health condition and housing needs were not considered as important during the application process. Steph and Darla argued that the allocation assessment should recognise the household needs as a whole.

Housing Options: Empowering Applicants

Housing Options is a housing advice process whereby social landlords offer housing applicants a 'housing options' interview to discuss their housing need and support issues in order to signpost, make referrals and provide guidance that will empower the applicant to be able to make informed choices. The Housing Options approach has been strongly encouraged by Scottish Government, notably as part of its strategy to prevent homelessness. In 2014, the Scottish Housing Regulator carried out a report to establish how Housing Options was being delivered by Local Authorities across Scotland (Scottish Housing Regulator, 2014). The report included a number of recommendations, such as the need for the Scottish Government to develop enhanced guidance for Local Authorities on the delivery of Housing Options. In 2016, the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) published guidance on the implementation of Housing Options (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2016). However, this guidance is not mandatory and, if adopted, Local Authorities can choose how Housing Options are delivered, to reflect local circumstances. A Housing Options Training Toolkit is also being developed as part of taking forward the guidance.

> *"We do not want [applicants] to be entirely dependent upon us being able to help them… We do encourage applicants to look at every option they can because Council housing is in such short supply."*
>
> *(LA,1P2)*

In LA1 this includes making sure applicants have applied to all the Housing Associations in the area as well as looking into accessing the private sector. The Council has a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme which means that instead of tenants having to pay the deposit for a private flat, if the landlord is agreeable, the Council will guarantee the deposit.

> *"Realistically some people will never be housed. If you are on the waiting list with a band D and a lot of band C people as well will never ever be housed from our waiting list but we are very clear about that and don't give people false expectations. Because that is really what we are managing is people's expectations and we are very realistic so lots of people on our waiting list will never be rehoused."*
>
> *"And sometimes there is very good reason for that because they don't really have much of an assessed need and that is why they need to be looking at other things if they want to be re-housed or maybe looking at where they are staying."*
>
> *(LA1, P2)*

LA1 has Housing Options officers within all its local areas. Within each of these areas a housing officer within the Housing Options team will assess the application, award the bandings and have a dialogue with the applicant, looking at other options with them and updating them on their application. The housing officers also allocate the properties in each individual area.

However, at the point of application and acceptance to the Common Housing Register in LA1, the majority of applicants are not assigned a named housing officer. This is because the Local Authority does not have the resources to provide this.

"We can't work with every single applicant. There are almost 7,000 applicants on the Council waiting list so we're not actively working with all of them…Those that are in Band A, we will try to explore different options with them but we can't always guarantee the same housing officer. That's really for lots of reasons, [such as] a lot of staff don't work full time."

(LA, 1P2)

In LA2, Housing Options interviews were considered to be the forum to explore alternative options to making a social housing application for some disabled applicants. However, participants felt that Housing Options staff required further training to be able to deliver a comprehensive service, given the range options available and the perceived complexity in accessing these alternative Housing Options. There was a view that alternative affordable housing options to social housing existed, but staff did not have a comprehensive knowledge of these options. There was some excitement around the Housing Options Training Toolkit which was in development during the study period[6]. Staff hoped that the Housing Options Training Toolkit would provide wider training in alternative affordable housing options (for example, midmarket rent, LIFT (a shared equity scheme) and improved knowledge around housing aids, adaptations and assistive technology which could enable applicants to remain within their own home through making it more accessible.

Participants from LA1 outlined the valuable role of a local Disabled Persons Housing Service for guiding people through all the housing options and some felt that referrals from OTs to this organisation for options advice did already happen but was not an embedded procedure within the allocations process. Additionally, a group member noted that in their local authority area there are a team of four people providing a "named person for anyone who applies with a medical need". However, a centralised approach such as this does not meet the needs of disabled housing applicants living in more rural locations.

All lettings practice discussion groups addressed how often information should be provided during the allocations process. Participants in LA2, talked about the need to make sure that general information is available for people considering their Housing Options after receiving adaptations to their current home, or for those considering down-sizing. The latter would include those home owners who may be very anxious about moving from their family home that is no longer fit for purpose. There was a recognition that this may involve family who might have a vested interest in maintaining the house within their estate. There was also discussion around the current difference in Council rent between a three bedroomed and a one bedroomed property. It may be if the rent were to be set at a considerably lower level for the one bedroomed property this would form a greater incentive to move. It was made clear that the motivation for these suggestions was to ensure a more appropriate home for the housing applicant and not to exert inappropriate pressure on someone to down-size in order to maximise best use of housing stock.

Applicants Experience of Helpful Individuals and Organisations

The Occupational Therapist was identified as the most helpful person to provide specific advice for disabled applicants. Trish (tenant) shared that her OT had written a letter to the Local Authority explaining her need to move before she had officially applied for housing; while Carrie (daughter of tenant) praised the OT's capacity to suggest different types of aids or equipment for her mother to try, including arranging trial periods. Other useful sources of support (in order of most frequently mentioned) were Housing Officers/Tenancy Support Officers, local Councillors, family members, Doctors, local advice organisations (mainstream

[6] The Housing Options Training Toolkit was being developed as a national resource, across all 32 Scottish local authorities.

and impairment-specific in nature), Social Workers and a local school.

Some interviewees mentioned that they received advocacy support from their local Councillor. For Ian (housing applicant), chasing housing providers for updates had been tiring and he appreciated the persistent efforts made by his local Councillor to find out news. Ian stated that:

"I just feel that if we didn't know the councillor, we wouldn't have gotten anywhere" (Ian, Housing Applicant).

Lori

Lori (housing applicant) received a significant amount of support from her daughter's specialist school unit. The school run information days, one of which was focussed on housing. However, Lori highlighted that information sessions held during the school day can be difficult for some parents, like herself, to attend because they need to take time off work to attend. Lori also found her OT to be helpful and has accessed aids to assist within the home. Additionally, the OT has recommended a company to provide an adaptation for Lori's daughter's bedroom in the new home. The company provide custom-made rooms that are built to fit inside a room and are safe and padded to reduce the risk of injury. However, Lori will need to wait until they have been offered suitable accessible accommodation for this adaption to be installed.

Good Practice Example

LA2's early identification of disabled housing applicants provides an example of how good practice can result in greater flexibility, and a greater chance of a positive result for disabled applicants.

At the application stage multi-disciplinary discussions start from the outset. Applicants do not submit their Housing Needs Assessment form at the same time as their housing application but instead tick that they have a health and housing need on the application form. This triggers allocation of a housing officer who will contact them to discuss what information they need to gather in order to support their health and housing needs application.

> *"It all boils down to how it is evidenced [referring to the application form]. When [the application form] is being processed, most often by the housing assistant they would pick up if there was anything on the application that would indicate health and housing or extreme overcrowding or whatever. So it is about picking up and sometimes that comes through the housing officer, going out to visit or having some form of dialogue back and forward … so it is about probing and finding out what is the best form of priority to go for and then the catch all thing which panel would best serve the person."*
>
> *(LA2P1)*

Summary

The following summary identifies the common themes and key issues relating to the application process for accessible or adapted social housing:

1. **Named Housing Contact:** There was evidence from two local authority areas that a named Housing Officer or allocations contact, identified at the point of application, provided benefits for the landlord and the applicant but one local authority thought this approach might be too resource intensive.

2. **Shifts Towards a Social Model of Housing Needs Assessment:** The Health and Housing assessment process in the three local authority areas demonstrate a shift towards the adoption of a social model of housing needs assessment, which better corresponds with disability rights frameworks. For instance, each local authority had some means of gathering and assessing supplementary information about health and housing needs that could lead to higher priority for housing. These assessments may be carried out solely by housing staff; led by housing staff, but then seeking advice from other professionals; or through a multi-disciplinary approach involving housing, social care and occupational therapy staff. Two of the local authorities actively engaged with Occupational Therapists in the assessment process and none of the local authorities involved referred applications to an independent medical advisor.

3. **The Value of Housing Professional's Local Knowledge:** Each local authority demonstrated considerable reliance on Occupational Therapists' and Housing Officers' knowledge of the needs of applicants, and of property types, to generate creative responses and appropriate housing offers. In particular, Occupational Therapists may have knowledge of people who are in need but not currently on the housing register, and this may avoid returning a hard to let accessible property to general housing stock.

4. **Homelessness Targets:** All participants discussed, at some level, the impact of homelessness targets and the requirement to prioritise allocations to homeless people. These targets may impact on the housing availability for other priority groups, including disabled people, depending on demands for specific property types.

5. **Housing Options:** Each local authority, to different degrees, identified the potential of the Housing Options approach to improve advice and solutions offered to disabled applicants.

6. **Households where more than one applicant had housing needs:** Such situations require further consideration within allocations systems to fully reflect the overall needs of the household.

7. **Managing Applicant's Expectations:** Not all properties that become available for re-let can be adapted to meet the needs of disabled applicants. It is vital that disabled housing applicants are rehoused in a property that improves their current housing situation. Therefore, applicants may need to widen their choices of location, especially in higher demand areas.

6 Allocations – Matching Up Applicants and Vacancies

This chapter discusses the process of matching up applicants to suitable properties when properties become vacant and when letting properties in new build developments.

Allocation Systems

Banding System

In LA1 the Council allocates housing based on five assessed elements of housing need, namely, housing needs assessment, unsuitable accommodation (e.g. overcrowding, insecure housing, social/welfare need and unsatisfactory accommodation. These are assessed using a priority banding matrix set out in the allocations policy. For each element, applicants are awarded one of four bands, A-D, where Band A indicates priority need for that element of housing need. An applicant can have more than one band A attached to their application depending upon what their need is on the matrix. Alternatively, an applicant may have a band A for one area of need and a B or C for other need factors. All of these factors are added together in the 'back system' (that the applicants do not see). The applicant is awarded points for each element of housing need and this gives a total number of points. If two people have an equal number of points, then the person who has been on the register for the longest amount of time will be offered an available property. However, there can be reasons why the person who is top of the list might not be offered a property (for example, owing a debt to the Council from a current tenancy).

Points Based System

LA2 operate a Group Plus Points allocation system with four categories: Transfer; General Need; Specialist/Adapted Property; Sustainable Communities. The specialist/adapted property category is an umbrella term for three specific property types: adapted housing, sheltered housing and amenity housing (social rented accommodation designated for older people with particular design features, for example, no inside stairs). With regards to sheltered housing and amenity housing anyone can be considered for these provided they meet the criteria for age.

If an applicant has an assessed need for an adapted property (and this has been agreed by the health and housing panel) then they will be placed on the specialist/adapted property waiting list. If an adapted property becomes available for re-let then, at the point of matching, the specialist/adapted property waiting list is filtered to show only those applicants who require an adapted property.

LA3 also operate a Group Plus Points system. Housing applications are placed in one of four groups:

1. *Statutory Homeless* - Homeless applicants who qualify under the relevant legislation;

2. *General Needs* - Owner occupiers or tenants of private landlords and tenants of any other council seeking to move to LA3

3. *Transfer* - Tenants of LA3 or any other social landlord;

4. *Aspirational transfers* - The allocation policy changed a few years ago for aspirational housing needs. This allows long term tenants to be given acknowledgment when they apply for re-housing for the length of tenancy they have held with the council.

There are targets set each year for the proportion of allocations made to each of these four groupings and these targets vary between locality offices based on housing list demand. The Operations Manager reviews and sets the local targets.

The lettings system will automatically designate the group that a property that becomes available for re-let should be allocated to. An exception to this policy is for properties that are or can be adapted. If an applicant in the group the property has been designated to has health and housing priority, they will be offered the property. However, if nobody in that group has health and housing priority, the property can be offered to a suitable applicant, with health and housing priority, in a different group.

Applicants Experiences of the Points-Based Approach

A number of interviewees spoke about the points-based allocation system in terms of confusion. Tina (housing applicant) shared that apart from annual renewal of her application, she did not have any other form of communication with the local authority housing department:

> *"I think the whole thing is a mine-field, I find it very confusing … It's nice to know that your name is on the list somewhere."*
>
> *(Tina, Housing Applicant).*

Good Practice Example

Databases and Matching Up

'Needs Database' for Applicants with Complex Needs

LA1 have a 'Needs Database' holding the needs of applicants from their Housing Needs Assessment online form. Therefore, when an adapted property becomes available for re-let this allows for those applicants to be filtered to only show those who have indicated a need for that type of adaptation. For example, if a property has wheelchair access then the applicant list can be filtered to only show wheelchair users. In addition, to this the IT system can further filter the applications that match, for example, to the size and type of property available.

In addition, LA1 also hold a database of applicants on their waiting list who require adaptations to meet specific needs that are in addition to the more general barrier free housing requirements. These applicants' housing requirements are difficult to fulfil by making adaptations to general housing stock, and therefore, may only be met by a purpose-built house. These applicants' details are highlighted to the strategy colleagues when new build housing developments are planned.

Housing Stock Database

LA1 also have a system which holds good information about the stock held by the council, including what the particular features of that property are.

Re-letting Processes and Matching Up

Re-letting adapted properties: Using a 'Needs Database'

LA1 aim to re-let adapted properties to applicants on their needs database. In addition, there is an aim to match the adaptation type, especially where this is a major adaptation, to applicants that need that type of adaptation. Where this is not possible applicants with a partial need for this type of adaptation will be considered. The housing officers will also make contact with social care staff, e.g. OTs, to check if they are aware of anyone who may have a need for that type of adapted property but had, for example, not yet applied to join the housing list. There is a commitment to avoid adapted properties being allocated to general needs:

> *"We would only be allocating it [an adapted property] to somebody able bodied if we had exhausted everything else."*
>
> *(LA1, P1)*

This process is further facilitated by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 which allows use of a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy to temporarily let an adapted house to a non-disabled person until it is required by someone whose needs better match the adaptations in the property.

Re-letting Properties: Using Void Survey

In LA2, the Voids Officer inspects every property that becomes available for re-let. The void survey includes the property type (e.g. whether it's a ground floor property, a block of four (and if it is a ground floor property within that) or a two-storey property). It also looks at what adaptations, if any, are present (e.g. a wet floor shower or ground floor bedroom) and the property's suitability for adaptation for both wheelchair users and ambulant disabled people. For example, if a property has up to three steps to the front door then depending on the gradient, an assessment will include if a ramp can be installed to improve access.

The results of the void survey are entered onto the housing management system. Typically, if a property has a ground floor bedroom and bathroom and has three steps or less up to the front door of the property it would then be classified as: already having adaptations, suitable for adaptation or suitable for somebody who is ambulant disabled. The council does not automatically adapt all ground floor properties that become available for re-let. For example, if a ground floor property becomes available for re-let but it was in a block of 4 houses that has steps or other access problems.

The housing officers will then use the information to match the property to a suitable disabled applicant on the waiting list. Once an applicant has been identified, it will usually be passed to one of the OTs to carry out a suitability report. The OTs reflected that previously they would only assess the suitability of properties for people who were wheelchair dependent, but current practice is to look at properties for applicants who are ambulant at the moment but could potentially become wheelchair users. This can avoid a 'double move' if a property is assessed to meet an applicant's longer-term needs. Occasionally an applicant may need to be housed in a property that only meets their housing needs at the moment because that is the only property that is available. However, there will be a recognition that further down the line they will need re-housed and this was the best available move for them at the moment. For example, the needs of a disabled child will change as they become a disabled adult.

Delegated Authority - OT Suitability Report Not Required

Delegated authority is a system whereby applicants for social housing are given pre-approval for adaptations to be made to a property when they are matched to a property that has not already been adapted or the pre-existing adaptations need to be replaced. It is the responsibility of LA2 Social Work team (Adult Wellbeing) to carry out assessments and approve equipment and adaptations for daily living. In order to reduce the amount of approvals, and associated time required, at the point of allocation, LA2 aim to have applicants with housing need assessed and pre-approved for adaptations and have this recorded this as part of their health and housing needs assessment. For example, if an applicant is assessed as needing a wet floor shower then at the point of allocation; if there is not a wet floor shower already in the property the housing manager will see that delegated authority is in place for a wet floor shower and can request the housing OT's to progress it, without needing to get any further approval from Social Work. The procedure holds, even if the initial assessment was several years old, provided approval had been granted. However, if pre-approval for adaptations was not in place, at the point of allocation, a referral would need to be made to Social Work to carry out an assessment on the applicant before any adaptations can be made to the property.

Re-letting Ground Floor Properties

For every ground floor property that becomes available for re-let in LA3, if there is a possibility that it could be adapted, then an OT will visit the property for a more formal assessment of its suitability. If identified as adapted or suitable for adaption, it should be advertised as being adapted on the lettings IT system. Thereby, the housing officers can know straightaway that they should look at matching the property to a disabled applicant on the Common Housing Register who requires an adapted property.

The lettings system should also have been given information about what adaptations have been made to the property. Preference is given to matching adapted properties on the list to disabled applicants, and ideally to those who have accessible housing needs that match or are similar to the adaptations already in place within the vacant property.

However, there are a number of factors that may inhibit a suitable match being made with a disabled applicant:

> *"The problem that we sometimes have got is that we have a fully adapted house, but nobody wants to live there. It depends on the area. We've had a situation where five or six people on our waiting list has been offered a property – the house is suitable for all their needs, but it is not in the area that they want. Sometimes we do end up letting adapted houses to somebody who does not need one because we have to get the house allocated."*
>
> *(LA3, P4)*

Finding a match for difficult to let adapted property

Good communication is key when trying to re-let lower demand properties. An example of good practice was shared regarding a recently allocated housing association property in LA1. This housing association property was a four-bedroom bungalow that had wheelchair access that they had not been able to re-let. The housing association made contact with the housing officers in the relevant LA1 locality office who also did not have any suitable applicants. That locality office then contacted all the other locality offices within LA1, and an applicant was identified and matched to the property.

LA2 outlined what would happen if an adapted property became available in one of their local areas but there was no-one on the list with a housing need for that type of property. An email would be circulated to the other local housing offices to find out if there was anyone who was in need of that house type and would consider moving area. Therefore, the housing officers in the other local areas have the onus on them to look at their lists and hold conversations with applicants who have requested that property type to determine if they would like to be considered for that property type in a different area. If the applicant agrees, then their application is amended so that they would be identified in a search of the housing waiting list for that area.

> "We're quite lucky because we still work a points-based system, so it is quite easy for somebody else to go and pull up a mock list for another area to have a look to see if there is anybody with medical points waiting so if the housing officer was off that day there are ways around having a look."
>
> (LA2, P1)

Areas with Higher Demand

In each local authority area, the main towns and settlements had the most housing demand. One local authority area discussed the steep rise in the cost of public transport beyond the more populated areas:

> *"It is extortionate to get a bus." (LA2, P1)*

In addition to this, isolation was considered to be a factor for living in more rural communities. For example, if you are older or have a disability and need to attend hospital regularly:

> *"It's common sense really. If there are good transport links, good health centre, shops, schools and all the amenities that folk want… We have some rural areas that really have very little [facilities] so clearly they are ones that are in lower demand. [But] Usually we can come up with something and we are quite good at coming up with things".*
>
> *(LA1, P2)*

Recovery of Possession of Adapted Homes not Occupied by a Person Requiring the Adaptations

Local Authorities can implement changes introduced in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 to help improve use of housing stock. One situation is where a joint tenancy exists for an adapted property and the person who has required the adaptation dies.

Practice Example

LA2 gave an example whereby two semi-detached bungalows had become void at the same time. At that time there was no-one on the housing list who could be matched to these two-bedroom bungalows. However, there was a demand for ground floor four-bedroom properties. Joint working with Social Work identified two families with complex needs that had waited a long time for housing. It was agreed to extend both bungalows from two bedroom to four-bedroom homes with wetrooms and hoists and other adaptations to meet the 24-hour care needs of these families.

Bungalow 1:

Sadly, the two children with care needs in bungalow 1 passed away and at the point when the second child passed away the parents were now living in a fully adapted house that could be re-let to someone who needed an adapted property. Therefore, working with the parents the housing officer took them to the rehousing panel to request maximum priority points for a move and evidenced that the quicker the tenants could be moved, the faster the Council would be able to have this accessible property back. A move was secured for the parents and the bungalow was let in conjunction with Social Work to three adults who now live in there with a 24-hour care package.

Bungalow 2:

The Council were in dialogue with the tenants of the other bungalow (a mother and a disabled son) with a joint tenancy. The mother approached the Council to say that she no longer wanted to live with her son who was now young adult with an established care package in place. She requested they be granted two houses in exchange for the bungalow. The LA2 lettings discussion group reflected how they faced something of a balancing act – would the rehousing panel award maximum priority for a move that may involve additional costs to re-house the adult son? There might not be an existing property that would meet his needs, and any new property would require to be adapted. However, rehousing both the mother and son would release a four-bedroom bungalow back to the Council.

Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 Local Authorities can request a Court order to end the tenancy of an adapted property which is no longer being occupied by a person who needs the adaptation. An approach used in LA2 was to put forward the non-disabled tenant to the rehousing panel to request maximum priority points. However, in these circumstances the housing officers need to satisfy the rehousing panel that the tenant should be given maximum priority (for example, because the property is required for someone who would benefit from the adaptations).

Nominations

Another allocations role that housing officers have is to provide nominations to housing associations, and this can be for new build or existing properties. These nominations are provided in the same way as the local authority would allocate from their waiting list. This means that those with the highest need are looked at first and these would be put forward to the housing association. The housing association would then allocate based on their own allocation policy which may not be the same as the local authority allocation policy.

Nominations may help to find an adapted property for an applicant in their area of choice where Council stock is limited. Housing Associations also have their own allocations policies and may be part of a Common Housing Register or Choice Based Lettings Scheme. RSLs operate with varying degrees of partnership with local authorities where they have housing stock.

New Build Social Housing in Scotland

In 2015, the Scottish Government set a five-year target to build at least 50,000 new affordable homes between 2016-2021, including 35,000 for social rent. This target represents a 67% increase in the previously met five-year target of 30,000 new affordable homes, including 20,000 for social rent. Most new housebuilding is in the housing association sector. Despite the building of some new council housing there has been a continuous yearly downward trend in total local authority housing stock in Scotland. The most recent figures from the Annual Return of Local Authority Housing Stock in 2018 shows there are currently 314,482 local authority homes in Scotland, a decrease of 0.1% from 314,816 in 2017 (Scottish Government, 2018a). Over the ten-year period from 2007-2017, the local authority housing stock in Scotland decreased by almost 1 in 10 (9.4%) from 345,744 to 314,816. There has been an increase in new build social housing developments in the past 5 years, but the supply of new housing still falls short of the level of need.

Applicants with Complex Needs

LA1 holds a database of applicants on their waiting list who require adaptations to meet specific needs that are in addition to the more general barrier free housing requirements. These applicants' housing requirements are difficult to fulfil by making adaptations to general housing stock, and therefore, may only be met by a purpose-built house. Applicants' details are highlighted to strategy colleagues when new build housing developments are planned. This approach is clearly constructive, although development timescales can be two years or longer.

In LA3, some local offices held regular meetings with OT staff to look at who had a need for an adapted property in the local area. These meetings examined what could be done for any disabled people in the local area whose current home was no longer accessible, including examining whether that current home could be adapted, or a move was the best solution. In the discussion group, one of the housing officers from a locality that did not have these regular meetings felt they would be beneficial:

> *"I don't attend regular meetings with the OT although that would probably be useful. I do contact the OT if I am looking at a disabled applicant for a ground floor property."*
>
> *(LA3, P2)*

Matching Applicants to New Build Housing

New build social housing developments allow more flexibility in meeting the needs of applicants with more specialised accessibility needs. The case study Local Authorities had taken different approaches to developing and allocating new build social housing in their areas.

Developing Targets for Accessible Homes

LA1 set a target for 15% of council housing within new developments to accommodate applicants with particular needs. However, in a recent development, of the 24 homes planned, five (20.8%) were allocated to families who were identified as requiring specialised housing from the needs database. In this approach, demand can drive the percentage of accessible housing within a new development. In order to build these homes with the adaptations required, the council had to apply for an amendment to existing planning permissions for the site because there was a change of house types for particular needs. While this involved an additional cost, the council were able to meet the needs of applicants with complex needs who were unlikely to be housed within existing council stock.

Predicting Need

It can be hard to predict need and demand for adapted or purpose-built accessible homes, when a developer is at the stage of putting in very early stage planning permission.

> *"The particular needs database gives an indication of the needs that there may be. Obviously, that might change and someone else might come on that has a higher need."*
>
> *(LA1, P1)*

> *"Because we are dealing with people and people's situations may change it is difficult to predict need."*
>
> *(LA1, P2)*

Pre-allocating at the design stage

Within LA1, new build council homes are often pre-allocated at the design stage of the building process. When a new build housing development is planned the needs database is checked for applicants who have selected that area, and these are highlighted to strategy colleagues.

The pre-allocation of homes within the new build programme in LA1 allows the development of bespoke properties that meet the needs of a specific applicant and helps to avoid a change of plans being submitted for a property that is under construction. At the design stage the OTs work with the developers to discuss and advise on the particular adaptations required. For example, a recently completed home was designed to meet the needs of a severely autistic applicant. The property included a sensory room, a built-in music system, rounded window sills and reinforced walls. Another applicant who had been pre-allocated a new build home at the design stage was able to have patio doors put in the bedroom instead of a window so that the applicant would be able to look out onto the view of the hills.

However, in LA2:

> *"The new build team do come to us [OT's] and ask for advice on, not just the wheelchair units, but the general design to try and make all the new build properties as accessible as we possibly can so we will make suggestions and recommendations but that is rarely, if at all with a specific person in mind.*

(LA2, P5)

The timescale for new build development from start to completion can be approximately two years. In addition, there can be unforeseen delays during the building phase, and therefore, there is a need for regular communication with applicants who have been pre-allocated properties. The allocations process could set out who would have the responsibility of maintaining communication, for instance the OT rather than the Housing Officer.

There is a possible risk that applicants who have a terminal illness could pass away before a new build is complete. Alternatively, an applicant may find an alternative house within this time period. Another risk is that once the property has been completed the applicant could refuse the property. However, one council reported that these risks were rare. If the situation arose then the council would go back to their needs database and waiting lists to search for an applicant who had a need, or at least a partial need for that property. Housing staff would also contact OTs to ask if they were aware of anybody who may not yet have applied to the housing list. The property would only be allocated to a non-disabled applicant if all avenues to identifying a tenant had been exhausted. As noted above, with implementation of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, such lettings could be made on an interim basis as Short Scottish Secure Tenancies (SSSTs) with the agreement that alternative housing would be provided to the tenant if the property was later needed for someone who required the accessible design features.

Who builds New Builds?

LA1 reported that it had two different methods for procuring new build properties: new builds designed by the local authority and built under contract; and new builds procured from a developer through a design and build contract. A design and build contract arrangement is where a house builder builds the properties and the council buys them from the developer. Experience with new properties built under a Design and Build arrangement was that the specifications were not as high as for properties designed by the local authority.

> *"We have a certain say in the specification but it will never be as high as the council specification."*
>
> *(LA1, P1)*

Although the Design and Build properties meet the building standards, they do not offer the level of adaptation that is possible within Local Authority led developments. For example, the space standards are generally less generous than for local authority designed properties, restricting their capacity for adaptation.

> *"With a design and build contract we cannot do the same level of adaptations to it. For example, a lower level kitchen or a hoist running from the bathroom to the bedroom."*
>
> *(LA1, P1)*

Therefore, a larger number of accessible and adaptable homes were built within new build developments designed by the local authorities.

Locations for Building New Properties

LA1 reported that it was more common for new housing developments to be built in areas with the highest demand. In more rural locations, sites may only accommodate a small

number of houses (around four or five), making it less financially viable to build. Therefore, new build properties tended to be located in areas where there was guaranteed demand and sites were larger.

Practice Example

In LA2, two double storey new build houses were identified at the design stage of a new development as being suitable for a family that were unlikely to be housed in existing Council stock. The two double storey properties were knocked into one making a seven-bedroom house - the biggest house that the Council now have in their stock.

The property was designed for a family with five children, including adult twins who had complex needs (severe autism and other factors) that meant that they needed their own bedrooms. They also had a younger son who was four who had not been given any diagnosis, but the mother was quite an expert and believed that this child also showed signs of having additional needs. The twin boys required major adaptations in their bedrooms, including the floors being reinforced, no door handles on the cupboards or light switches or light fittings, integrated blinds inside the windows, specially ordered windows for their bedrooms and padded walls. Additional adaptation made to the home included a wetroom upstairs to make it easier for the mum to wash her children

Fundamentally, the house was designed in such a way that if the needs changed in the future the house could be returned back into two houses.

> *"This was quite an extreme case and there were lots of professionals involved saying what was required to meet this family's needs and I think we had looked for years to try to find suitable housing for them and had not come up with anything."*
>
> *(LA2, P4)*

Summary

The following summary identifies the common themes and key issues relating to the allocation of accessible or adapted social housing:

1. **Full Audit of Existing Housing Stock:** For Local Authorities and Housing Associations to be able to make better use of existing housing stock they should carry out a full audit and assessment of existing housing stock to determine what properties have adaptations (and what these are) and what properties have the potential to be adapted. This information could be collected during routine visits to the properties, rather than waiting for properties become vacant. This would better inform future planning of the pool of potentially accessible housing.

2. **Procurement of New Build Properties:** Different methods of procurement appear to result in different standards of specification and therefore of adaptability, and in turn accessibility to, suitable homes for disabled people in those areas of new housing. This could be addressed as an equalities issue by Local Authorities, Housing Associations and Scottish Government in commissioning procedures.

3. **Vacant accessible/adaptable homes:** Local authorities discussed the housing management conflict between minimal rent lost on vacant properties, and acknowledging the extra time needed to successfully match vacant properties to disabled applicants. One local authority discussed the usefulness of their pre-approval of adaptions required to make a home accessible to disabled applicants. This removed some of the factors that can lead to a delay in re-letting an adaptable home (arranging for an assessment for adaptations and the associated bureaucracy at the point of a property becoming available for re-let).

4. **Information Management:** The local authorities all discussed the potential effectiveness of new technologies in facilitating holding of up to date information on tenants' needs and the property characteristics in order to achieve effective matches.

7 Offers and Viewings

Viewing and Accepting an Offer of Housing

This chapter discusses viewing and acceptance of suitable offers of accessible/adapted social housing from applicant and landlord perspectives. However, Table 10 below shows that during the study period, eight participants received one offer of unsuitable accommodation and a further five received two such offers. In all, six out of the 20 housing applicants and two of the eight tenant participants had been offered at least one adapted/ accessible social housing property that did not meet their needs. Further, Table 11 illustrates the overall low number of participants who were offered and accepted a suitable property during the course of the tracking study.

Table 10: Frequency of Unsuitable Offers of Housing

Unsuitable Offers of Housing	Number of Households
Never Offered Unsuitable Housing	15
Offered 1 Unsuitable Housing Option	8
Offered 2 Unsuitable Housing Options	5

Table 11: Frequency of Suitable Offers of Housing

Local Authority Area	Number of Households	Number of Households Accepted Suitable Offer
LA1	5	0
LA2	6	2
LA3	8	0

Four housing applicants and one tenant received two offers of adapted/accessible properties unsuited to their needs. When discussing their experiences of an offer of housing, interviewees highlighted several themes. These included: unsuitable access for wheelchair users; the importance of garden access for positive emotional and mental health; offers in unsuitable locations; issues relating to offers of sheltered housing; improving practice for viewing properties; the impact upon emotional and mental wellbeing of not receiving an offer; and experiences of swapping homes.

Most interviewees who had turned down an offer or offers of housing reported that the allocated property failed to meet their needs as wheelchair users. This was often due to external and/or internal stairs, and insufficient internal space for wheelchair circulation. In the local authority feedback sessions, two groups discussed how effective joint working between OTs, social workers and housing staff early in the allocation process should minimise unsuitable offers of housing to applicants.

All three local authorities relied on OT assessments of potential properties before making an offer to an applicant. LA3 faced a major challenge with the lack of information on property

types, floor plans or room dimensions - no system was in place to accurately record such data. If this level of detail could be made available, there would be a saving in resources, including time of OTs. In LA2, participants described they might consider an applicant for, say, three properties over a year, but decide that none was suitable. This avoids making unsuitable offers, but the applicant would not be aware of this work and could think had been forgotten or received no consideration.

Good Practice Example

Participants from LA2 went on to explore a good practice example that illustrated the cross-tenure impact, flexible working and application of a Human Rights approach through using the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 provisions to meet the needs of a disabled household. The case study involved home owners Mr & Mrs X and their 2 children. Mrs X became hospitalized, resulting in the need to use a wheelchair and when ready for discharge from hospital, realized that her own home was not suitable for adaptions. Mrs X moved in with her parents who had a more suitable home but this split the family and created tension. The local authority adapted a Council home with temporary adaptations in order that the family could live together using a Short Assured Tenancy. This enabled the family to take the necessary time to sell their inaccessible home and buy an accessible new place to stay.

In the local authority feedback sessions, some participants argued for active management of priority applicants at both operational and strategic levels, as part of allocations policy reviews. Active management would involve regular application reviews (for example after six to eight months where no offer of a suitable property had been made), to check for any changes or errors in application information and to highlight alternative housing options or ways to expand housing application preferences. Such an approach would help reduce the likelihood that applicants were offered unsuitable properties. In LA2, participants appreciated the impact that traumatic circumstances could have on applicants who may not be able to provide full information at first application. The active management of priority housing applicants would provide an opportunity for housing professionals to revisit information with applicants a later date.

Some interviewees discussed the importance of access to a garden, and related benefits for mental health and emotional wellbeing. However, garden access did not seem to be accepted as part of housing need in any of the case study areas. Being offered housing in an unsuitable location was also a common reason for declining a property. Some participants wanted to stay near their existing Doctor or local support networks to ensure continuity and avoid the repetition of complex personal circumstances. Accessibility of public transport links was an important feature of location preferences. For example, when discussing an unsuitable offer from a Housing Association, Angela (housing applicant) for explained that: *“There was one that came up and she said we’ll put your name forward. I said, well that’s no use as we’re not able to drive and we’d be stranded.”* Proximity to neighbours was also important - several interviewees did not want to have neighbours below or above them (as in blocks of flats). This was to minimise possible experience of antisocial behaviour, illustrating how disabled applicants felt particularly vulnerable. Some disabled people were likely to be at home for long periods of time, making them more sensitive to noise or other disturbance.

Heather

Heather (Tenant) shared her experience of refusing two offers of wheelchair accessible properties due to garden access issues before eventually being housed somewhere suitable. Heather explained that garden access was important to her for emotional and mental wellbeing especially when her health condition meant that she was unable to leave the house. Garden access would also benefit her dog who Heather had for companionship since being unable to leave home often led to feelings of social isolation. With the first offer, Heather recounted, she asked if a backdoor could be created to provide direct access into the garden. The social housing provider declined to carry out the work and instead offered a second accessible property without any garden. In response to Heather turning down both offers of accessible accommodation, the housing provider suspended her from the housing waiting list for a year. This ban, Heather remarked, must not have been taken seriously though as she was offered her current suitable property within that time period.

Three participants discussed the suitability of sheltered housing. Kim (applicant) was offered sheltered housing but some communal features of the accommodation did not fit with her personal preferences. Contrastingly Carrie's mum (tenant) accepted an offer of sheltered housing from an RSL. Carrie described the way that her mum overcame preconceived assumptions in order to realise the suitability of Sheltered Housing for her needs:

> *"Mum is 64 years and she doesn't feel like a pensioner. She feels like she's still young. She wasn't too impressed, to be honest. She was like - that's where old people live. I said, no it's not it's for all ages, which it is. We told her it would be good for her own independence, it's her own little place. She doesn't need to have people visiting, she can kick them out and she can have her own time. Once we put the carpets in and took her belongings around she was like, oh this is nice I'll like it here."*
>
> *Carrie (Tenants Daughter)*

Adam (Applicant) had a strong preference for sheltered housing. His support needs had increased while living in an adapted 3-bedroom social rented property. However, his local housing providers regarded him as ten years too young to apply for sheltered housing. After living twenty-four years in his adapted property, Adam decided to remove himself from the social housing waiting list, because he felt frustrated with an offer of unsuitable housing. Adam was unable to access the offered bungalow with his wheelchair as it had steps outside and the OT assessed the inside as unsuitable for a wheelchair user.

George and Gayle

When George (tenant) came to view his current adapted bungalow, he was unable to get inside with his wheelchair since there was a step at the front door. He had to look through windows and discuss what adaptations were necessary for him to be able to move in. George and Gayle thought they would receive the keys in a couple of weeks. They accepted the keys with a list of adaptations still required, including widening doorways, cooker installation, an accessible bathroom and an accessible front path. George and Gail experienced a lack of coordination during the installation of these adaptations.

Additionally, George and Gayle plan to make a pathway around the side of the property so that George can enjoy wheelchair access to the back garden. This was not deemed as a housing need though by the housing provider and not included on their list of home adaptations.

The couple explained that they felt pressurized to carry out redecorating without assistance. They were informed that someone would be arriving to inspect the redecoration work in a few months to check on what the redecoration allowance had been spent on. George pointed out to them that they would need longer because he was a wheelchair user and required outside assistance to complete the various painting tasks around the property.

Thinking about improving future practice concerning the viewing process, participants from LA3 highlighted the potential of new technologies, where applicants may not be physically able to view offers of housing. Digital technologies could provide opportunities for applicants to remotely view properties (e.g. video technology that can remotely show them the house before they make a decision about accepting it). Technology may also convey a property specification in terms of room sizes, turning spaces and external access points that might reduce the number of unsuitable offers. Kim (housing applicant) was unable to physically leave her current property in order to view an offer. Her friend attended the viewing on her behalf and used a tablet to enable Kim to have a virtual reality experience of seeing the allocated property.

Some research participants had experienced challenges in pursuing housing through a home swap scheme. Hilda and Harry discovered a lack of interest in their current three bedroom, four-in-a-block style property - compounded by the majority of available adapted/ accessible homes having just two bedrooms. Similarly, Steph and Darla (housing applicants) struggled to get households from larger properties interested in their 1-bedroom bungalow. Emma and Eddy had experienced five people interested in a property swap between their first and second interviews. However, the most recent three-way exchange fell through at short notice when one of the parties decided to withdraw. Nevertheless, Emma commented that staff at the local housing office could not have been nicer when she got upset with the situation.

Wave Two Interviewees' Experiences

Wave two interviewees who were yet to receive a suitable offer showed a growing sense of frustration, and some deterioration in their personal circumstances. The sense of frustration took different forms. In some cases applicants were frustrated at the lack of suitable properties, or with receiving unsuitable offers, and the impact of a long wait while living in inappropriate housing. There was also a notable deterioration in the mental health and emotional wellbeing of several households.

Kay reported feeling frustration at the allocations process. Since her first interview Kay had experienced a bad fall and approached her local authority to try to increase her priority. This was unsuccessful but Kay struggled to understand why another housing provider in the area awarded her top priority in their allocation system. Kay's narrative demonstrates that for some housing applicants, different definitions of housing priority need across multiple social housing providers can be confusing. Kay's family were expecting to be decanted in the near future in order for internal refurbishment to their current property. However, Kay felt anxious as there had been no information on the accessibility of the temporary accommodation.

Tom and Alice felt that their lives were on hold while awaiting a match to a suitable accessible property. Tom's housing situation remained unchanged but he had reconfigured the layout to try to cope with limited space. Tom's bed was now in the living room where he could use a hoist. Alice felt unable to make decisions concerning potential home adaptions that may cost her money because of the uncertainty about when she might be matched to a house. Alice would like a ramped entrance at the backdoor so that she could enjoy the garden, and a summerhouse, but this would not be paid for by the council as it was not deemed a necessity.

Pedro was one participant whose emotional wellbeing deteriorated to the point that continuing to live in unsuitable housing conditions had led to depression and suicidal feelings. As wife Pippa explained their circumstances were, "*A nightmare, as time goes on it's getting harder and harder*.' More than a year had passed without an offer of a suitable place to live and Pippa reflected that she experienced less 'self' time due to her caring responsibilities. A five months struggle to get their points reviewed and increased had not helped their emotional wellbeing, but the intervention of their local councillor had resulted in an award of maximum points.

Tina voiced concerns that her mental health had deteriorated since her first interview due to the stress of their current private rental situation. The property required repairs to the roof, decking and front door lock, but their private landlord was unpredictable and slow to respond. Tina felt continually anxious that the private landlord may wish to sell at any point and that the family may face homelessness. Her two sons, aged twenty-two and nineteen, have autism and would find sudden change very stressful.

Some local authority participants commented that allocations processes needed to recognise connections with wider agendas and priorities. For instance, LA1 pointed out that housing is pivotal to many other services and if a person is not living in a property that is right for them, this could negatively impact on other areas of life. LA2 participants called for more consideration of the time it takes to explore accommodation options for people who have complex needs. These applicants may also need to be supported by an appropriate professional in order to examine housing alternatives, such as cluster housing or shared tenancies.

The group from LA2 felt that councils needed to improve their allocation nomination processes so that they actively approach other RSLs in the area in order to identify a potential match to an accessible/adapted void. This approach would help share information across separate housing waiting lists operating in the same locality. Group participants also called for a shift from the Scottish Housing Regulator in the way in which it seeks information and assesses void performance/standards. There is understandable pressure to minimise void time and rental loss but separate reporting could be permitted for properties that are being held with plans for allocation or adaptations to meet particular needs in order ensure effective and sustainable lettings.

Summary

This chapter has presented findings on disabled peoples' experiences of, and organisational practices for, property offers and viewings. Nine main themes were discussed by participants.

1. **Up-to-date Property Information**

   Participants highlighted that having up-to-date property information helps to minimise the number of unsuitable offers of adapted/accessible social housing. This not only reduces the use of scarce resources for housing providers but prevents causing unnecessary frustration for disabled housing applicants.

2. **Assessment of Adapted/Accessible Property Suitability**

   There was evidence indicating that the assessment of the suitability of an adapted/ accessible property should not only consider the accessibility levels of the building, but also include the level of accessibility related to the external environment and the opportunities for the applicant to maintain local support networks.

3. **Allocation Systems and Garden Access**

   Interviewees' argued strongly that access to a garden should be recognised by allocation systems as a facilitator for emotional and mental wellbeing.

4. **Housing Needs of Entire Households**

   Interviewees' argued that in order to tailor suitable offers, the needs of the entire household should be taken in to consideration by allocation systems, not solely those of the main applicant.

5. **Active Management of Housing Applications**

   Participants highlighted the need for processes that actively manage housing applications. This may take the form of shorter review periods especially where has been no offer of suitable housing for 6-8 months. Active management of housing applications would enhance the accuracy of information held on housing applicants' needs.

6. **Use of New Technology for Property Viewings**

   A potential area for future good practice was outlined in relation to the use of new technologies to provide virtual property viewings for disabled housing applicants who are unable to leave their current unsuitable accommodation or unable to attend due to health or accessibility reasons.

7. **Support for Home Swappers**

   There was some evidence that additional support would help disabled housing applicants

navigate the schemes to arrange a home swap, possibly by improving coordination between multiple households to avoid withdrawals at a late stage in the process.

8. Emotional Impacts for Disabled Housing Applicants

Evidence indicates that disabled applicants who remain without an offer of a suitable accessible/adapted social house over a significant period may experience negative or adverse emotional and mental distress.

9. Nomination Procedures

As well as nominating disabled applicants to suitable RSL properties, local authorities could develop more effective mechanisms to seek nominations for adapted/accessible vacancies from other housing providers, hospital discharge units and relevant third-sector organisations (including from outside of their area if there is no suitable applicant on their register).

8 Moving In and Making a Home

This chapter explores participants' experiences of moving into a new property. Insights are primarily drawn from interviews with disabled tenants, whose experience of applying for housing was closely linked to that of moving into a property and making it a home. That issues emerged beyond this study's main focus on lettings practice, suggests a further gap between the policies of housing providers and the experiences of disabled tenants. This chapter blends the experiences of tenants with discussions captured at local authority feedback sessions, to identify potential avenues for improvement in policy and practice.

In discussing the moving-in process and participants' experience of settling into their new tenancy, some consensus emerged on the challenges encountered by both disabled housing applicants/tenants and housing professionals. Difficulties disabled tenants faced in sustaining their tenancy included challenges associated with precisely adapting existing and newly built properties to fully meet their needs. Some disabled tenants required support to successfully prepare for and undertake a move to a new home. However, participants also emphasised the many social and emotional benefits they gained from moving to a suitable accessible/adapted property. The LA1 local feedback session captured the different support that might be needed in different circumstances:

- Where the tenant wants to move but cannot afford the removal costs, a budget for front line staff could help with removal arrangements.

- Where the tenant can't access core furniture items, a similar budget could mirror the approach already used for homelessness services to help new tenants furnish their homes.

- Where the tenant has funds available for moving properties but lacks the knowledge or health to organise and manage removal services, practical help could be provided by front line staff.

In discussing such scenarios, local authority participants often focused on the need for systems that could be both flexible in meeting tenants needs, and respond to any changes in circumstance. In particular, they noted the need for a budget that could be accessed quickly by front line workers to support the moving n process. Effective support would require improved communication pathways between organisations and professionals to ensure efficient use of funds. Ideally, assets held by one organisation could be drawn upon by another, say, allowing frontline workers to request furniture from colleagues in social work rather than purchasing new items outright.

Applicant and tenant participants discussed similar issues in their accounts of moving into a suitable property and making the new tenancy into a home. To begin with, interviewees discussed the need for assistance to prepare for and make their move. Manu relied on family members to assist with packing and removals. This was often stressful, and it was felt that their housing provider could improve their experience by putting support in place for moving. For example, Jess (Mover) described her experience of accepting an offer of a suitable adapted house after leaving an abusive relationship. She felt uncomfortable with the thought of being alone with male workers packing her belongings. Although Jess tried to coordinate the appointment with the removal firm for a time when her personal assistant was present, the process was not flexible enough to pin-point a specific time. Jess also felt that she needed support to sort out practical housing matters, such as refuse collection or filling out

forms for council tax. However, she found that support was only offered once mistakes were made, rather than being preventative to avoid difficulties with settling in to a new tenancy.

Two local authority feedback groups outlined benefits of improved multi-agency working between housing providers and third-sector organisations as a mechanism to support disabled applicants to move home and settle in to a new tenancy. For example, advocacy or voluntary groups might be able to assist with the moving process. Discussants from LA3 proposed that applicants/tenants who are in receipt of Self-directed Support may be able to use some of their budget towards supporting them during a house move. This may include paying a carer to help with the extra support needed for moving. Care & Repair services were also mentioned as possible sources of support for settling into a new tenancy through some expansion of their role.

Participants who moved into newly built properties generally encountered fewer challenges than those who moved into existing adapted stock. However, participants discussed the need for planners to consult more effectively with disabled people to ensure an accessibly designed property could be personalised to meet the specific needs of an individual. Bert (Tenant), explained that a house may be wheelchair accessible, but require further adjustments for larger models of wheelchairs, such as electrically powered wheelchairs. The design of houses, Bert commented, needs flexibility in order to enable disabled people to tailor the property to their housing needs. For example, if Bert had been able to bring to the attention of the developer that the sockets should be lowered and repositioned, this would have saved time before Bert moved in and discovered the required adjustments.

Similarly, Sam (Mover) was allocated a two-bed semi-detached accessible bungalow with two toilets, a wet floor shower and a bath. The only impediment was that there were no grip rails in the toilets. Luckily, Sam's daughter was able to assist, while her social worker put in the request for grip rails to be installed.

Tenant, Christine, and other residents of a new development were asked whether they would like to form a local tenant group to provide feedback on their properties. Christine agreed, but there was no activity during her participation in this study. She felt that feedback would be useful for the developer of a neighbouring development due to be finished in the next year. For example it was reported that that there was a consensus among new tenants that wet floor showers should be installed as standard in all new build accessible properties. Christine and her other neighbours had apparently requested that baths be removed from their bungalows and the wet floor showers installed. Providing feedback for a subsequent development could save time and money if implemented at an early stage for planned new developments.

All three local authority case studies outlined approaches towards user involvement, but LA3 had various mechanisms in place to hear the voices of disabled applicants and tenants in decision-making processes. These included a co-production group, tenant participation groups, and feedback from individual cases. These mechanisms of user involvement spanned the three levels identified by the ELOSH training pack for involvement in the provision of high-quality housing and support for disabled people (Pleace and Mitchell, 2015): individual cases, management group governance and target population (analysing for lived experiences of services). Feedback session discussants believed that effective user involvement created a useful opportunity for disabled people to understand about housing availability and build knowledge to understand the issues housing providers faced, including the need to prioritise among applicants.

Good Practice Example

A co-production group provides a supportive environment where housing provider policies are reviewed, the housing waiting list is analysed and wider planning is fostered. For example, group members reflected that the perspective of wheelchair user needs tended to dominate policy and practice. Going forward, they would like to encourage involvement of new participants' who have lived experience of sensory and/or cognitive impairments. The co-production group can also promote challenging conversations, for instance about people's future health and housing needs.

Disabled applicants' voices were felt to be listened to throughout allocations practice. For example, group members recommended that for disabled people being discharged from hospital, joint working across health and housing could provide support with completing application forms, housing need assessment visits and providing information on properties. Another suggestion was to standardize the regular meetings between housing staff and OTs across all local offices, since these meetings provided an opportunity to share ideas concerning housing solutions as well as review individual cases. The group also recommended that disabled housing applicants' social networks and local public transport needs should be recognised in the process of matching them to suitable properties and areas.

LA3's approach towards disabled user involvement touches upon some aspects of the four essential steps highlighted in the Shaping Our Lives guide (Meakin and Matthews, 2017, p. 12)): profile your service users; set out 30-day goals to improve involvement; call for service user representatives in communications to the service user community; and provide follow up feedback. Further developing clear stepping-stone goals and a formal co-production strategy may help to consolidate LA3's commitment to good practice in this area. Although co-production is enshrined in the Scottish policy landscape, the degree to which localities implement a co-production approach varies considerably and is not subject to monitoring by any independent body.

Local authority feedback discussions recognised the significant contribution to the social housing stock from newly built accessible or easy-to-adapt properties. In contrast, the design constraints of the older housing stock meant that tenants often needed to compromise their use of their home. Examples included where a ramp could only be installed at a back door, or whether structures were strong enough to bear hoists. There was a consensus across all local authority feedback groups that newly built dwellings should provide opportunities to increase the availability of adaptable/accessible properties and that features, such as wider doorways, should be implemented as standard. Such ideals raised challenges of resource constraints, including in relation to other priorities for housing capital investment.

The three movers who accepted offers of housing in adapted existing stock experienced challenges in relation to delays with home adaptions. Trish was informed that she would likely wait a year before shallow steps at the front door could be ramped. Dougie had received no confirmed installation date for a wet floor shower at the time of his wave two interview, Jess's walk-in shower and toilet were not working when she moved in. All movers had experienced some financial difficulties during the moving process. Trish was offered no money towards moving or decorating, whilst Jess and Sam received small amounts towards a decoration allowance. In contrast, Dougie received £3000 for down-sizing (paid on the eighth week of his new tenancy) and over £100 towards redecorating

Two out of the eight tenants interviewed had moved into an adapted existing property and

in both cases, home adaptions post move-in were still not completed. One of these tenants, Brenda, had worked with her OT to gain access to property plans prior to moving in so that she could shape adaptations to meet her individual needs. The bungalow was not a fully accessible property. Changes included taking down a bathroom wall to create an en suite with space for a wheelchair and replacing a bath with a wet-floor shower. Brenda was still awaiting access to be improved to the back garden and for kitchen cupboards to be lowered and asserted: “What is the point of giving me an accessible property when I can’t reach anything”. The lived experiences of these movers suggested that social landlords needed to take more time to prepare adapted properties before disabled tenants move in. This would need to be recognised by the Scottish Housing Regulator, for instance by identifying that adapted properties are exempt from standard letting period targets.

Movers and tenants outlined the emotional and social benefits of moving to an adapted/ accessible property. Among the Movers, Dougie was happy to be next door to a good friend who provided financial guardianship and social support. Sam declared that, “I can do the dishes now’ and was looking forward to cooking, moving unaided around the house - and enjoying rediscovering her relationship with her husband as stress reduced and he had fewer caring tasks. Jess was enjoying a sense of community since she is able to get out, meet neighbours and participate in local activities. The main challenges at the time of interview were people parking in her ‘accessible’ parking space and the potential inaccessibility of local bus services. But she felt more confident to go shopping, including finding out that supermarkets provide disabled people with assistance with their shopping.

Carrie’s account, in particular, gives an insight in to the ways that access to an accessible home can positively transform family relationships. Carrie’s 64-year-old mother had returned from France to live in Scotland. She had MS and dementia, so she predominantly stayed with Carrie or her sister. However, both family care-givers had stairs in their houses and found that they were struggling with the necessary intensive care. The situation negatively affected Carrie’s relationship with her mother at the time:

> *“it was like caring for 2 children because I’ve already got a young son and I was beginning to get a bit resentful. I was starting to get frustrated … but now she’s moved it’s gone back to a normal relationship that we used to have.”*
>
> *(Carrie, Daughter of Tenant)*

After six months on the social housing register, Carrie’s mother accepted an offer of RSL sheltered accommodation with support. She has now lived there three years. Carrie described how her mother, who has limited mobility, benefited from a suitable adapted bungalow. The property provided space to have a wet floor shower room with a shower-chair and adjustable kitchen units to assist her mother make drinks or meals. Additionally, the warden call system provided reassurance for Carrie and for her mother that people were nearby who could help in emergency situations, once she got used to wearing an alarm pendant:

> *“She does wear one now, she never used to. She fell during the night in her room and she was on the floor all night. The carer had gone in the next morning and said, yes this why you need to wear it. I went round and gave her a lecture so now we check that she always wears it.”*
>
> *(Carrie, Daughter of Tenant)*

Some Movers and Tenants needed support to settle into their new tenancy and for longer term tenancy sustainment. Christine shared several experiences upon moving in to a newly

built accessible bungalow where she had lived for two years. Christine was in her 40s and felt that she missed out on support services that she needed but were only available to older residents. For example, the local Care and Repair service only applies to those over 65 years or home owners and Christine missed out on help with jobs around the house. Some neighbours in their 80s were more able to get out and about, while Christine (in her 40s) remained in the house most of the time due to fatigue and health issues. She felt an annual review with a Housing Officer would help address the challenges she faced.

Similarly, Bert commented that new disabled tenants should be better informed about procedures for property maintenance. He discovered, for example, that the council were able to fix a broken outside light within 2 days as he was as a disabled tenant. However, he had a different experience when requesting the installation of a sand box to help with wheelchair access in adverse weather conditions – as this was denied. Fortunately, close proximity to a school meant that the main roadway was gritted. Bert found that to make a complaint involved a lengthy process including stating the hazards or personal risk as a tenant of wheelchair accessible housing.

Summary

This chapter has presented findings concerning the moving-in process, settling in and sustaining a tenancy. Five main themes emerged:

1. **Access to Resources and Finance**

   Improved communication and better joint working could lead to more effective use of scarce resources.

2. **Bespoke Accessibility**

   Interviewees' highlighted that construction of newly built accessible and adaptable properties provides significantly greater scope to meet individual housing needs, compared to older housing stock.

3. **Co-production**

   Although co-production is enshrined in national policy, in practice co-production remains under-developed. However, good practice was identified involving disabled people and housing professionals, enhancing service user feedback mechanisms and strategic approaches to the provision of accessible/adapted social housing and accessible communities.

4. **Emotional Impacts of Accessing Suitable Housing**

   Disabled tenants and movers involved with this study, enjoyed significant social and emotional benefits from living in a suitable accessible/adapted social house.

5. Tenancy Sustainment

There was evidence that some disabled tenants would benefit from support to move-in, settle-in and sustain their tenancies. Social housing providers should review their tenancy sustainment strategies to ensure they are inclusive of disabled housing applicants, and that they are empowered to make a new tenancy into a sustainable home.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

Housing provides for some of our most fundamental needs. It gives us a material base from which to build a livelihood and take part in the life of the community. A number of key messages emerge from this research on disabled people's access to housing. The study has shown that while housing providers are proactive in reviewing policy and practice to better meet the housing needs of disabled people, there remains some 'distance' between landlord goals and applicant experiences. Disabled people's extended lived experience of inappropriate housing, while waiting for a more accessible home, clearly causes considerable physical and mental harm. Improved understanding of the challenges and solutions comes from hearing the voices of disabled people through co-production approaches in both research and in development of good policy and practice.

Allocations policies and choice based lettings schemes remain complex and often difficult for disabled people to understand. Depending on their impairments, disabled people may need support with the application, viewing and moving-in processes. The complexity of disabled people's housing needs means that the matching process for suitable adapted or accessible housing is also complex. What works for one household or property may not work for another – so there is often a need for quite individualised solutions.

Potential practice improvements to speed up access to housing include making better use of technology to improve quality of data held on accessible/adapted properties and on the specific needs of applicants; flexibility in lettings practice to facilitate a good match; and flexibility in interpretation of disabled people's housing needs (for example to recognise the needs of all household members and the importance of the external environment as well as housing design). Adaptations can make some of our older housing stock more liveable for some disabled people, but newly built accessible housing offers much more potential to appropriately meet complex mobility and other impairment related housing needs.

We hope the evidence presented here will support change in national and local policy and practice to deliver improvements and innovation in housing practice which supports participation of disabled people, to better meet their housing needs. The research has identified solutions to optimise the matching of adapted/accessible social housing to disabled applicants in ways which maximise choice and control and enable more disabled people to access suitable homes and live independently, while also delivering more cost effective lettings.

Our research findings support disabled people's requirements for:

- A commitment from Scottish Government for a national strategy to improve provision of accessible homes in Scotland.
- Clear guidance for robust local target setting for the delivery of accessible homes across tenures; this should extend beyond wheelchair accessible housing to meet the needs of disabled people with a wide range of impairments.
- A recognition that current design standards need updating and a consideration of the potential to create a new cross tenure design and space standards that incorporate universal design and full wheelchair access within mainstream housing.

Disabled people and their families should have equal housing opportunities and the right to an accessible home in the community that ensures and protects their human rights. Housing

accessibility should be a national goal - recognising that “accessibility” is different for different people in different circumstances. Adoption of universal/inclusive design standards across tenures would deliver huge progress towards achieving the goal of accessibility, including accessible and sustainable neighbourhoods, as well as accessible and liveable housing.

Recommendations below are addressed to Housing Providers and their partner agencies, Government and the Housing Regulator. Policy and practice going forward needs to prioritise the urgency of tackling the housing stress and exclusion faced by disabled people. A starting point will be the setting of local targets for expanding the supply of accessible housing in line with Scottish Government (2019) Guidance and the evidence from this research will inform future lettings practice. We believe that the Scottish Government’s approach to housing supply beyond 2021 gives us a real opportunity to make poor housing experiences of disabled people in Scotland a thing of the past.

Recommendations

Local Authorities and RSLs

1. Establish co-production groups across all 32 local authorities in Scotland involving disabled people across housing tenures, in order to inform decisions on housing and its interconnections with independent living.

2. Consider canvasing widely across partner organisations for nominations where a property cannot be matched to any disabled applicants on the housing list, including local disability organisations and housing providers beyond the local area.

3. Explore the use of new technology to improve intelligence on adapted/accessible properties and to enable remote viewing for applicants who are unable to visit in person.

4. Develop standardised methods for classifying the accessibility of properties.

5. Consider developing a peer support network whereby, upon request, disabled housing applicants can be matched to an existing disabled tenant who has experienced the social housing application process.

6. Recognise that housing needs assessment for disabled people should include, for example, access to a garden for emotional well-being, access to local accessible public transport links and ability to maintain local connections, such as remaining with the same GP.

7. Review organisational policies or procedures that require a tenant, upon leaving, to revert the property to its original state (for example, changes made could be useful to a future disabled tenant).

8. Review allocations systems to ensure that applicants who can make some ‘liveability’ improvements to their homes while waiting for an accessible property are not disadvantaged in allocations or lettings priority schemes.

Scottish Government

9. Review operational support for the National Accessible Housing Register (which was

rarely mentioned by participants in this study) as part of a national strategy to support the best use of accessible/adapted housing.

10. Utilise the model outlined in Still Minding the Step (Fitzpatrick et al, 2018) for the standardisation of approaches towards local housing need calculations, as part of strategy to increase the pool of accessible housing.

11. Continue to encourage local housing need assessments to produce local targets that are proportional in relation to the amount of new built accessible/adapted housing required across tenures.

12. Develop minimum accessibility standards for new build social housing so that it is more economical and easier to adapt in the future.

Scottish Housing Regulator

13. Recognise that void periods for accessible/adapted social housing may require additional time to allocate and carry out necessary adaptations before an applicant is able to move in. These properties could receive a classification that gives them exemption from standard targets for re-let times.

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