

# Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 1 December 2022

## Accessible Housing Study

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee:
  - 1.1.1 Notes the key findings, recommendations and next steps from the Accessible Housing Study; and
  - 1.1.2 Notes the joint work between housing, health and social care and Housing Association partners which is contributing to increased provision of homes that support independent living, including wheelchair accessible homes.

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# Report

## Accessible Housing Study

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 The Housing Service commissioned a study into accessible housing to increase understanding of accessible and wheelchair housing currently available in the city and future need, to inform strategic planning across Housing, Homelessness and Health and Social Care, including informing a cross tenure wheelchair housing target. A report summarising the findings of the study is included as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The study demonstrates there is a continuing need and demand for accessible housing overall and outlines the challenges in meeting this need in the context of Edinburgh's housing stock profile and market pressures. It includes the importance of the location of homes in terms of access to support, amenities and workplace as well as the accessibility features and safety of the external environment. It also highlights some of the difficulties in obtaining robust data in this area of work.
- 2.3 The report also sets out the good work already underway to build more accessible housing in the city by our affordable housing partners. However, new build housing only accounts for a small proportion of overall stock in the city so making best use of existing stock is also important in enabling people to live in a home that meets their needs, with the provision of services such as adaptations playing an important role.
- 2.4 The primary research, service user and stakeholder engagement carried out for this study have provided useful insights and will be used to inform further work, as will recommendations on improving data collection.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 Edinburgh has the oldest housing in Scotland, with almost half (48%) of homes built before 1945. Over 60% of homes in Edinburgh are flats, compared to the Scottish average of 36%. Both factors bring challenges in relation to adapting and upgrading homes and in meeting accessible housing needs from existing stock.
- 3.2 Private sector and affordable new build homes developed over recent years are generally more accessible, but form a small part of the overall housing stock in the city.

- 3.3 Housing need and demand is also high, with only 16% of Edinburgh's housing stock being social rent, compared to the Scottish average of 24%. Around 70% of Council homes and 50% of Registered Social Landlord (RSL) homes are allocated to homeless households.
- 3.4 As part of the homeless assessment, households with potential mobility needs are referred to the Council's Home Accessibility Referral Team (HART) who can award Gold priority if the household has a need for accessible or ground floor accommodation to meet their needs.
- 3.5 There are around 45-50 households per year assessed as homeless who are awarded a Gold priority due to their mobility needs. In the six months from April to September 2022, 12% of lets from Choice landlords went to Gold priority households.
- 3.6 Scottish Government Guidance published in 2019 set a requirement to define wheelchair accessible housing targets across tenure to "*recognise the role appropriate housing can play in supporting disabled people to live full and independent lives, to work, to play, and to be active members of our communities.*"
- 3.7 The purpose of setting a target is to provide a greater focus and commitment to the delivery of wheelchair accessible housing across all tenures, which can be evidenced through annual reporting.
- 3.8 To inform the setting of a cross tenure, wheelchair accessible housing target and to inform strategic planning across Housing, Homelessness and Health and Social Care, the Housing Service commissioned an Accessible Housing Study.
- 3.9 The study was carried out by Arneil Johnston consultancy between June 2021 and July 2022 and involved secondary data collection, primary research survey work, service user interviews and engagement with wider stakeholders.
- 3.10 There are widely recognised challenges in assessing current provision and unmet needs for accessible, specialist and wheelchair housing in Scotland including:
  - 3.10.1 No universally agreed standards or definitions of what is meant by accessible housing;
  - 3.10.2 Limited availability of hard data particularly on the extent and nature of provision and unmet housing need across a range of disabilities and health conditions;
  - 3.10.3 The tool developed by Scottish Government for carrying out Housing Need and Demand Assessment does not enable information to be collected on detailed requirements for accessible or wheelchair housing; and
  - 3.10.4 Fragmented data across partners and professionals with limited insight on housing need, demand and supply in the private housing sector.

## 4. Main report

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### Accessible Housing Study

- 4.1 The study demonstrates there is a continuing need and demand for accessible housing overall, as well as for homes which are not specially designed but which provide support through a Core and Cluster model, for example.
- 4.2 It highlights the importance of location of homes in terms of access to support, amenities and workplace as well as the accessibility features and safety of the external environment.
- 4.3 The study also outlines the challenges in meeting this need in the context of Edinburgh's housing stock profile and market pressures, as well as the difficulties in obtaining robust data in this area of work.
- 4.4 The primary research was undertaken via a household survey delivered by Research Resource (a professional market research agency) and was focused on better understanding the profile of existing homes which meet accessible housing standards and needs of households across tenures in the city.
- 4.5 A total of 400 telephone interviews were carried out alongside an online survey which returned 266 valid responses.
- 4.6 The primary research found that 92% of survey respondents were very or fairly satisfied with their home and how it meets their needs, with other issues such as repairs/maintenance and affordability also playing a part in satisfaction.
- 4.7 83% said their home was suitable or very suitable for meeting the needs of the household now, compared to a figure of 89% saying their home was suitable or very suitable for meeting the household needs when they first moved into their home.
- 4.8 Evidence from the survey suggests that 44% of households in Edinburgh contain a household member with a long-term health condition or disability (although not all long-term health conditions or disabilities directly affect physical mobility). 58% of this cohort believe their home meets their needs well but 53% said they have trouble managing stairs at home.
- 4.9 Of the 44% of households in Edinburgh which contain a household member with a long-term health condition or disability, 34% require adaptations but do not have them.
- 4.10 Only 8% of respondents stated that they need to move from their existing home into a new property within the next two years, with 13% saying they would like to move. In both instances, the need or preference to move to a level access or accessible home was a factor for some households.
- 4.11 Research findings suggests that just 27% of homes across the city could be accessible to a person using a wheelchair, offering access from street level and movement around the property without difficulty.

- 4.12 Edinburgh's housing stock profile is particularly limiting from a housing accessibility perspective due to the age of dwellings, the high proportion of flats and the low number of level access options.
- 4.13 Feedback from survey respondents, service users and stakeholders also identified a need for more information and support to be provided to enable people to search for suitable properties to rent or buy and to get advice on adaptations.
- 4.14 This could include the provision of more information on accessibility of homes that are advertised as well as information to help applicants assess the likelihood of being successful in securing a home in their preferred location.
- 4.15 Providing information on accessibility of homes and supporting applicants to bid is an area of work that will continue to be prioritised through EdIndex and with colleagues in the Home Accessibility Referral Team.
- 4.16 Further work on influencing how accessibility is featured in advertising homes for market rent and sale can be considered as part of the next steps, given that this is where the majority of people in the city find a home.
- 4.17 The research study has reached a number of conclusions that will help assess the extent and nature of existing specialist housing provision, unmet need and requirements across the City. It has provided:
  - 4.17.1 Proposed standard definitions of what is meant by wheelchair and accessible housing that partners can implement and use going forward;
  - 4.17.2 Analysis of the extent of data to determine existing provision and highlighted gaps that could be addressed to improve this insight;
  - 4.17.3 An opportunity to strengthen and/or build partnership working across services, organisations and sectors and the sharing of data and casework to improve outcomes for people with specialist housing needs;
  - 4.17.4 Insight on unmet needs through the primary research element of the project;
  - 4.17.5 An opportunity for services users to influence research outcomes and resulting strategic interventions; and
  - 4.17.6 A framework to assess the requirements for wheelchair and accessible housing and allow the Council to work up targets for wheelchair housing.
- 4.18 Adopting standard definitions across partners is challenging and it would be helpful if this was addressed nationally. The Scottish Government is currently reviewing the Housing for Varying Needs standard and has committed to introducing new building standards from 2025/26 to underpin a Scottish Accessible Homes Standard which all new homes must achieve, providing opportunities to establish common definitions around accessible housing.

- 4.19 The primary research, service user and stakeholder engagement has provided useful insights and will be used to inform further work, as will the recommendations on improving data collection.
- 4.20 In this sense, the Study can be seen as a good starting point on which to build on recommendations and actions with partners. Some of the key areas for future development include:
- 4.20.1 Enhance the provision of wheelchair and accessible homes in the city across tenures, engaging with key partners to set achievable targets, taking into account factors such as property size and location;
  - 4.20.2 Build on the insight needed to better understand existing provision and improve capture of information on accessibility across tenures;
  - 4.20.3 Consider the role of regulation and engagement with private developers to enhance the contribution to wheelchair and accessible housing supply;
  - 4.20.4 Develop mechanisms to support the gathering of newly forming needs, including working with health and social care partners to improve data sharing and analysis, contributing to early planning and commissioning for accessible housing and housing and support models that support independent living;
  - 4.20.5 Consider the role of in-situ solutions given the prevalence of existing supply;
  - 4.20.6 Explore ways of improving data sharing and monitoring between partners;
  - 4.20.7 Work with partners to explore feasibility of dedicated role to act as a conduit between health, social care and housing to improve data sharing and analysis and planning joint work to deliver in situ and new build solutions to meet accessible needs and wider needs for specialist housing; and
  - 4.20.8 Ensure planning policy and a placemaking approach to development contributes to improved accessibility of the wider environment and infrastructure, as well as provision of homes in locations across the city.
- 4.21 An indicative cross tenure wheelchair housing target is included in the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) 2023/24-2027/28. The methodology used to arrive at this target is set out in section 9 in Appendix 1. The target has been set at 7% of all completions annually.
- 4.22 In practice, the current target of 10% for affordable housing will be retained as this is well understood by partners and reflects the fact that the affordable sector currently delivers more wheelchair housing than the private sector.
- 4.23 The current SHIP forecasts that around 8% of grant funded homes for completion will be wheelchair designed. It is anticipated that this will increase to 10% as projects are progressed to detailed design stage. The 10% target will be subject to

review following more detailed discussions with partners and stakeholders and as data collection is improved.

- 4.24 The challenges in implementing and monitoring delivery of a target for private sector housing have been raised by local authorities since the Scottish Government introduced guidance on cross tenure target setting.
- 4.25 These include difficulties in holding private developers to a target without specific planning mechanisms being in place and in monitoring details of private sector developments.
- 4.26 Further discussions with Planning colleagues will determine whether there are policies or upcoming changes from National Planning Framework (NPF) 4 that could support increased delivery.
- 4.27 However, engaging with the private sector to encourage delivery of wheelchair housing and accessible housing overall, discussing any barriers to delivery, is the approach being taken more generally.
- 4.28 The proposed introduction of a new Scottish Accessible Homes Standard, as noted earlier, should provide an opportunity to enhance accessibility standards across all tenures.
- 4.29 Challenges in delivering affordable housing at scale, with additional costs relating to wheelchair or specialist housing, need to be taken into account in terms of overall deliverability.

#### **Delivery of new accessible homes**

- 4.30 Much has been achieved already in delivering and planning for new accessible homes and homes that support people to live independently. In the last three years, relationships have strengthened between colleagues in the Council's housebuilding team and health and social care colleagues, including Occupational Therapists.
- 4.31 Regular discussions now take place at an early stage in the design and planning of new affordable housing to maximise opportunities to provide accessible homes and homes that meet other specified needs, including core and cluster accommodation, identified as a need by health and social care partners.
- 4.32 Examples of new homes being provided through the Council's affordable housebuilding programme include those at North Sighthill, a mixed tenure development that includes 96 homes for social rent and 88 mid-market rent homes. 10% of all social rented homes delivered are purpose-built homes for wheelchair users and their families.
- 4.33 Seven new-build flats have been delivered for Health and Social Care partners in a core and cluster model, providing accommodation for people with learning disabilities. The project completed in November 2022.

- 4.34 Phases 1 (completed in November 2019) and 2 (due to complete in February 2023) in Dumbryden Gardens in Wester Hailes will see the development of almost 100 new affordable homes.
- 4.35 These homes are a mix of social rent and mid-market rent and include a number of purpose-built fully accessible homes for wheelchair users and their families. In recent months, work has also been ongoing to progress designs for eight new-build affordable homes intended for tenants with learning disabilities and forensic care and risk management needs.
- 4.36 All are either currently hospital in-patients, or within the custodial system. A bespoke specification for these homes has been prepared by colleagues in Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership (EHSCP), and this has formed the basis of the architect's designs.
- 4.37 Proposals for a new intergenerational development at Powderhall comprise a new 128 space early year's centre on the ground floor and accessible housing for independent living above.
- 4.38 The housing comprises 19 fully wheelchair adapted homes and eight designed to amenity standard. The intergenerational project is pioneering, being among the first of its kind in Scotland in the co-location of nursery and older persons housing and will offer health and well-being benefits for the older residents and new learning and social opportunities for children attending the nursery.
- 4.39 A former Council depot site at Cowan's Close in Edinburgh's Southside will include proposals for a block of wheelchair accessible homes; in total 19 accessible flats of a range of sizes including family accommodation.
- 4.40 The development will also comprise a landscaped, wheelchair accessible garden offering amenity and growing space for residents. The garden also proposes a 'story corner' for the nursery opposite the site allowing, as with Powderhall, opportunities for interaction between residents and the children attending the nursery.
- 4.41 The Council's housebuilding team are also in discussions with Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners about the provision of accessible homes on upcoming Council sites, building on the ongoing provision of accessible and wheelchair homes by RSL partners through their development programmes.
- 4.42 The Silverlea site in North West Edinburgh is currently in design development and secured planning consent in summer 2022. The site will comprise of 72 homes for social rent by the Council and 19 homes for social rent by Blackwood, an RSL partner.
- 4.43 The 19 social rented homes that will be owned and managed by Blackwood will be specially adapted for wheelchair users and have been developed to their bespoke design standards. Four of the Council homes will be leased to Health & Social Care



to help meet the needs of people with complex needs who require housing & support.

### **Existing homes**

- 4.44 One of the points raised by partners attending the study Stakeholder event was that new build housing only accounts for a small proportion of overall stock in the city so making best use of existing stock is also important in enabling people to live in a home that meets their needs.
- 4.45 As highlighted in the study, this can be challenging in Edinburgh given the age of the housing and the high proportion of flatted accommodation.
- 4.46 Making good use of an existing building is demonstrated in the refurbishment of a former Council owned housing block in Niddrie Mains Road that had been used for many years as office accommodation.
- 4.47 The property was vacated several years ago and required complete renovation to bring it back into use. The property was sold to LAR Housing Trust, who completed the extensive renovation of the six flats in June 2021.
- 4.48 The flats provide much needed accommodation for adults with learning disabilities and autism. Three of the first tenants to move in were relocated from hospital settings, which was very much welcomed by the EHSCP as a lack of suitably robust and accessible housing can lead to people living in inappropriate placements or in hospital long-term.
- 4.49 Since the Council's Acquisitions and Disposals programme began the Council has sold 20 ground floor properties in blocks where the Council was a minority owner. However, over the same period the Council has purchased 24 ground floor homes in blocks where it already owns at least 50% of the homes and has also purchased 13 main door houses.
- 4.50 Overall, the programme is increasing the Council's supply of affordable and accessible homes. It is important to note that not all ground floor properties are necessarily fully accessible and may have steps leading into the property.
- 4.51 Adaptations are important in supporting independent living and preventing falls and hospital admissions for example and it is important that adaptations are adequately resourced, delivered effectively and sit well alongside other services supporting independent living, including care and support, advice and information services.

## **5. Next Steps**

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- 5.1 It is proposed that a Working Group bringing together Housing, Health and Social Care and Planning colleagues alongside other stakeholders will be set up to consider how to take forward the proposed actions set out at 4.11.
- 5.2 Discussions are required with internal and external partners on the make of the Working Group and how best to align the work of the group with existing groups that

are in place to support the work of Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB). The Working Group will need to consider the resources needed to take forward proposed actions; included a dedicated resources that would require additional funding.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 New affordable homes are part funded through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme. The amount of grant funding made available for each affordable home increased in 2021.
- 6.2 However, the increase in construction costs has meant that it has had a limited impact on viability as it still only represents around 35% of the cost of an affordable home. Wheelchair units are, on average, around 25% larger than those for general needs and have higher specification for things like kitchens and bathrooms.
- 6.3 The additional costs associated with developing wheelchair units, and other specialist housing, was a key point raised by stakeholders at the Accessible Housing Study event, particularly at the current time where overall costs have increased significantly.
- 6.4 Adaptations to Council homes are funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), with funding provided to RSLs through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme. The Council has set a budget of £1m each year for private sector adaptation grants.
- 6.5 Since 2013/14 the Council has invested £6.3 million on adapting 1,433 Council Homes. The Council's Scheme of Assistance also assists private owners with adaptations to their homes and in the last five years the Council have funded £6.9million of property adaptations.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 Primary research survey work was a key part of the accessible housing study, as well as service user interviews and stakeholder engagement activity, all of which have informed the recommendations.
- 7.2 It is proposed that a working group will be set up to take forward recommendations and activity relating to joint housing and health and social care work. As part of this, further engagement with service users and relevant stakeholders will be considered.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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- 8.1 [Wheelchair accessible housing target: guidance note.](#)

## **9. Appendices**

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- 9.1 Appendix 1 - Accessible Housing Study Report.

# City of Edinburgh Council

# Accessible Housing Study

# Final Report

October 2022

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## 1 Purpose of the Study

The outcomes of this study provide detailed analysis and insight into the extent and nature of accessible, specialist and wheelchair homes across Edinburgh and improve understanding of the proportion of homes suitable for and required by specialist needs groups. It will also help inform an understanding of the implications of meeting the need for wheelchair and accessible housing within the Council's wider commitments to address housing need and implement the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP).

Scottish Government Guidance published in 2019 set a requirement to define wheelchair accessible housing targets across tenure as part of the Local Housing Strategy framework to *"recognise the role appropriate housing can play in supporting disabled people to live full and independent lives, to work, to play, and to be active members of our communities."* The purpose of setting a target is to provide a greater focus and commitment to the delivery of wheelchair accessible housing across all tenures, which can be evidenced through annual reporting.

There are recognised challenges in assessing current provision and unmet needs for accessible, specialist and wheelchair housing including:

- No universally agreed standards or definitions of what is meant by accessible housing
- Limited availability of hard data particularly on the extent and nature of provision and unmet housing need across a range of disabilities and health conditions
- Fragmented data across partners and professionals with limited insight on housing need, demand and supply in the private housing sector.

In order to overcome these challenges and provide robust evidence to inform strategic planning, this study was commissioned by City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) to carry out an Accessible Housing Study in June 2021.

## 2 Current context

Edinburgh's population is projected to grow by 13% over the next 25 years. This population growth is significantly higher than in Scotland (2.5%). The rate of growth for older people is significant at 75% for the 75+ age group. The growth expected in the older person cohort will have a major impact on the demand for housing, health and care interventions.

The need for accessible homes competes with the need for more homes generally. The Council's Annual Update on Progress against the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan in August 2022 noted:

- 2,403 households were assessed as homeless, or threatened with homelessness in 2021/22, an increase of 23% on the previous year
- As at March 2022 there were 5,315 cases where the Council has a duty to provide settled housing – an increase of 28.5% from the previous year.
- The average time taken in 2021/22 to close applications assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness stood at 618 days, an increase of 21% from the previous year.
- There has been a steady increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation since 2015/16 where the number of households in temporary accommodation was 1,205 compared to a figure of 2,753 in 2021/22. The average length of stay in temporary accommodation for the year to March 2022 was 317 days.

The challenges of meeting both the needs of the RRTP objectives and accessible housing are amplified by the following facts:

- Edinburgh has one of the lowest proportions of social housing Scotland with only 16% of homes in social rent compared to the national average of 24%.
- Annual lets are typically 2,200 per annum across the common housing register so including lets of both the Council and partner RSLs. This number is less than the number of households assessed as homeless or threatened by homelessness for the last financial year.
- Circa 70% of Council homes and 50% of Registered Social Landlord (RSL) homes are allocated to homeless households through the silver priority and there is a commitment to maintain these levels.
- The Choice Based Letting process sees on average 150 bids for available homes and there are 21,200 households currently registered on the Common Housing Register – EdIndex.

### Accessible social housing stock:

- 16% of homes in Edinburgh are in the social rented sector, 8% lower than the average for Scotland overall.
- 84% of social housing is general needs, of the 16% that is specialist, over half of this is sheltered housing.
- Since 2004/05 the number of older or ambulant property completions in the social rent sector averages at 37 per year and wheelchair completions have averaged at 21 per year.
- 53% of social housing stock in Edinburgh is tenemental which may make adaptations more challenging.

### Accessible private sector stock:

- Of the 948 properties listed for sale on ESPC Website, October 2021, 219 (23%) had some accessible features, mostly lifts.

- The Edinburgh Access Panel advises on how to improve accessibility for people with disabilities in the built environment.
- Since 2011 there have been 411 building warrant applications for alterations improving accessibility in private dwellings and 22 planning applications have been received for private housing with specialist needs.

#### **Accessible private rented sector stock:**

- 23% of Edinburgh's households are in the Private Rented Sector which is significantly higher than the average for Scotland (13%).
- 15% of private rented sector households contain one or more Long-Term Sick or Disabled (LTSD) person in Edinburgh which is less than half the average for Scotland (32%).
- 9% of private rented sector homes are adapted; below the average for Scotland (15%).
- There is a lack of information available on the accessibility of the stock in the PRS despite it accounting for a quarter of the housing market.
- As Edinburgh's private rent stock profile is older, this is likely to make property adaptations more challenging even if landlords allow them.
- 51% and 95% of stock in owner occupation and private rented sector respectively is flatted accommodation in Edinburgh which may make adaptations more challenging.

#### **Adapted housing stock profile:**

- In the nine years to 2021, CEC has spent £6.3M on adapting 1,433 properties, with wet floor showers accounting for 72% of all adaptations.
- On average, 11% of all RSL Edinburgh based properties have been adapted, but this figure varies from 0% to 100% depending on the social landlord.
- Bathroom adapted stock accounts for 63% of all adapted units in the RSL sector.
- The Council's Scheme of Assistance also assists private owners with adaptations to their homes.

#### **Expressed demand for wheelchair and accessible housing:**

- 21,213 applicants were on the common social housing register, EdIndex, as at May 2021.
- 1,423 (7%) of applicants would not like a general needs property.
- 4,561 (22%) considered themselves or someone on the application to be disabled, albeit this is their self-assessment of their disability needs and is unvalidated.
- 439 applicants said they need to use a wheelchair, with 305 (70%) not currently in wheelchair adapted property.
- Average wait times for wheelchair applicants is higher and for those waiting over a year it ranges from 590 days for a 1 bed property to 1,048 days for a 3 or 4 bed property.
- The average time to get a home in Edinburgh with gold priority is around 300 days.
- 9% of all EdIndex properties were allocated to Gold Priority applicants in 2021/22

### 3 Methodology to Research Study

The study was undertaken using four key strands to pull together information on wheelchair and accessible housing and provide insights from households across the city, service users and key partners/stakeholders through:

- **Primary Research** - The primary research was undertaken via a household survey delivered by Research Resource (a professional market research agency) and was focused on better understanding the profile of existing homes which meet accessible housing standards. A total of 400 telephone interviews were carried out alongside an online survey which returned 266 valid responses.
- **Service User Consultation** - Arneil Johnston worked with partners delivering health, social care and housing services to encourage participation in the research, as well as third sector disability support and advocacy groups. In total nine service users were interviewed over weeks beginning 28 February and 7 March 2022. In advance of the interviews a short video was issued to participants to explain the background to the project and the aims and objectives of the study.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** – An analysis of stakeholder consultation feedback enabled a number of key themes to emerge, which should influence and guide CEC partnership work to finalise wheelchair housing estimates as the basis for setting targets. It may also allow partners to consider opportunities for developing and improving services and offerings in relation to wheelchair and accessible housing.
- **Desk based analysis** - A range of data capture tools were assembled to enable us to work with partners to audit and map existing information sources across the Council, RSL partners, Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership (EHSCP) and the third sector. This information was supplemented with a range of nationally available datasets on the demographic, economic, health, care and housing profile of households across the city.

A multi-agency Project Steering Group was used to validate the outcomes of the secondary analysis and to scope out the range of interventions that should be considered as part of the strategic response to addressing unmet need for accessible, wheelchair and specialist housing.

A conference event was held on 11 May 2022 for partners and stakeholders to examine perspectives on the range of strategic responses and interventions needed to meet wheelchair and accessible housing estimates, including:

- Partner services from across CEC including Housing, Homelessness, Planning, Building Control, Community Safety
- Housing Market Partnership representatives including RSLs, private developers, private landlords, letting agents, estate agents, Care & Repair etc
- Health & Social Care partnership representatives from planning, commissioning and delivery teams
- Third sector disability support and advocacy groups such as Edinburgh Disability Forum, ECAS, Disability Equality Scotland, Enable, Inclusion Scotland and Housing Options Scotland.

The involvement and engagement of stakeholders who provide access to, manage, develop or commission accessible, specialist and wheelchair housing is an important element of understanding the range of potential options and interventions to meet need; as well as testing how the partnerships could be further developed or supported to enhance delivery.



## 4 Data Gaps

In developing the desk-based analysis and gathering and assembling data across partners, it became very apparent that there are clear gaps in insight and intelligence around the current supply of and unmet need for wheelchair and accessible specialist housing. In particular, there are gaps in intelligence in relation to:

- Reliable data on adapted/accessible attributes for council stock. Information on adaptations to Council homes is collated and gathered for advertising void properties on Edindex and ARC reporting but is not fed into the main housing management information system.
- Accessible and adapted stock in the owner occupied sector. There is information collected in relation to grant funding for adaptations but this is not shared or used elsewhere. It also means that information from privately funded adaptations is unknown other than where held by planning/building control.
- Information on accessible features in the private rented sector stock as the landlord registration process does not collect this.
- Demand for accessible housing out with the social rented sector. While the primary research will have addressed this to some degree there is potential to make better use of information held by social care caseworkers, on the individual circumstances of households requiring specialist housing, to assist with planning and commissioning accessible homes.

Furthermore, available data is fragmental across housing, planning, social care, health and voluntary sector partners with no processes or systems in place to gather or share existing information across planners, commissioners and service providers.

## 5 Key findings: Telephone and Online Survey

A total of 400 telephone interviews were carried out alongside an online survey which returned 266 valid responses. The telephone survey mirrored the online survey but provided an opportunity to carry out more detailed questioning and data collection. This provided a statistically robust sample across with City offering data confidence to +/-3.8%. The results from the surveys then were weighted by tenure, age and household composition to provide representative outcomes.

92% of survey respondents were very or fairly satisfied with their home and how it meets their needs, with other issues such as repairs/maintenance and affordability also playing a part in satisfaction. In a different question, 83% said their home was suitable or very suitable for meeting the needs of the household now, compared to a figure of 89% saying their home was suitable or very suitable for meeting the household needs when they first moved into their home.

8% of respondents stated that they need to move from their existing home into a new property within the next 2 years, with 13% saying they would like to move. In both instances, the need or preference to move to a level access or accessible home was a factor for some households but other factors such as moving to a bigger or smaller home were a factor for some respondents.

Analysis of Edinburgh's housing stock profile reveals that it is predominately flatted, older in age and less adaptable than the wider housing stock profile in Scotland. The high proportion of households living at height and without access to a lift, further exacerbates the accessibility of homes.

Crucially, research findings suggests that **just 27% of homes across the City could be accessible to a person using a wheelchair** offering access from street levels and movement around the property without difficulty. Applying these findings to the housing stock profile across the City reveals the extent of homes that would not offer housing accessibility to those with health conditions or disabilities, including:

- 73% which are NOT accessible to someone in a wheelchair including:
  - 59% of all homes (149,000) which have internal stairs (both low rise and flatted dwellings)
  - 46% of flatted homes (117,500) on the first floor or above
  - 39% of homes at height (100,000) without access to a lift.

By triangulating these findings, the research suggests that roughly one third of the City's housing stock could offer accessible options to households with a health condition or disability, with the majority of dwellings (two thirds) not offering accessibility. Other considerations that can affect accessibility will of course include the local environment e.g. if there are steep hills, accessible parking and good transport links.

It can be concluded that Edinburgh's housing stock profile is particularly limiting from a housing accessibility perspective; with the age of dwellings, the proportion of flats and the low number of level access options driving the barriers faced by households who require wheelchair or accessible housing.

Primary research evidence suggests that 44% of households in Edinburgh contain a household member with a long term health condition or disability (although not all long term health conditions or disabilities directly affect physical mobility). Whilst this incidence is similar to the rate for Scotland at 44% (Scottish House Condition Survey 2017-19), there is evidence of notable levels of housing unsuitability experienced by this population. 42% of households with a health condition or disability state that their current home does not need meet needs of the household. Furthermore, 53% of households with a health condition or disability have trouble managing stairs at home.

At least a third of households with a health condition or disability currently need adaptations, based on their own self-assessment, to make their home more suitable for the needs of the households, suggesting a key role for in-situ solutions in improving the accessibility of the City's housing stock. 31% of households with a health condition or disability already have adaptations in their home and 39% of those with a disability have equipment/aids to help, the majority being in the 75+ age group.

Up to a third of households with a health condition or disability (29%) suggest that their needs cannot be met in their current home and that they would require to move to special forms of housing to meet their housing need (it should be noted that special forms of housing in this context includes accommodation without stairs/level access housing).

Unmet need for special forms of housing is dominated by households who self-assess a requirement for ground floor or level access housing. This is significantly higher than those who specify wheelchair housing, specialist housing for older people or specialist supported housing but may be influenced by preferences for ground floor accommodation. This evidences that there is a need (and potentially a preference) for more generally accessible housing in the City.

These research outcomes offer a unique insight into accessible housing provision across the City, as well as unmet need for accessible housing solutions, suggesting that housing accessibility in Edinburgh is particularly challenging given:

- The proportion of homes across the City which are not accessible and are potentially difficult to adapt (estimated to be around two thirds of all dwellings)
- The proportion of households with a long term health condition or disability who do not feel their current home meet the needs of household members (over 40%), although this could include households who do not require accessible housing but feel their home (or location/wider environment) does not meet their needs for other reasons.

## 6 Key Findings: Service User Consultation

Evidence of households with lived experience was essential to the research study to ensure it influences the strategic interventions developed by partners. In total nine service users were interviewed over weeks beginning 28 February and 7 March 2022. Key findings from the lived experience research are summarised as follows:

- the need for more accessible homes in the City across tenures as well as homes which are not specially designed but which provide support through Core and Cluster model for example
- the need for information and support where necessary to be provided to enable people to search for suitable properties and get advice on adaptations
- the importance of location of homes in terms of access to support, amenities and workplace as well as the accessibility features and safety of the external environment
- provision of information to help people better understand the allocations policy and priorities and the information needed to support applications and to manage expectations in terms of the limited number of homes available in some areas.
- consider the feasibility of automated bidding to assist Gold Priority applicants (social housing)
- how practical solutions in design can help independent living
- how residents can access information on homes that are accessible or could be made accessible including homes that are not in the social rented sector as some people have aspirations and means to buy.
- better/more accurate information provided in terms of accessibility features.
- that private developers have a role in meeting accessible housing need through practical design and building standards

Being able to find what houses that were suitable for their needs and if the properties were fully accessible, especially for wheelchair users, was a real challenge identified by some participants. Often information on properties would suggest they were accessible e.g. ground floor but on viewing it they would find there were still stairs at the access. This applied to private housing as well and while it was felt that information has improved on some estate agents' sites, there is still a gap in information on the actual accessibility features.

When asked what changes could be made to their current home that would make it easier to live in now and in the future there was a variety of responses. These ranged from minor equipment e.g. smaller toilet frame to avoid trip hazard for visually impaired person to major equipment such as a tracking hoist in the bedroom for a wheelchair user. A couple of participants expressed frustration that their landlord had refused to allow them to adapt their home.

When asked to describe their ideal home of the future location, in relation to family/social networks, amenities and proximity to workplace, was ranked highly as a factor for almost all participants. The idea of remaining in their existing community was important to those who relied on family support or whose needs would be better served in familiar surroundings. Some were happy to compromise on property type (flat/house) and size/number of bedrooms if they could get a property in the right place.

Location was also a factor in the frustration for some around how long it takes to find a suitable accessible home in the social rented sector with one participant noting *"My main frustration is the lack of suitable accessible houses advertised to bid on each week especially in the areas I would consider living in."*

External environment and safety also featured in the participants ideal home of the future with some commenting on the challenges they faced with pavements/streets and crossings.

The importance of good quality care and support as well as appropriate accommodation was also stressed by many of the participants.

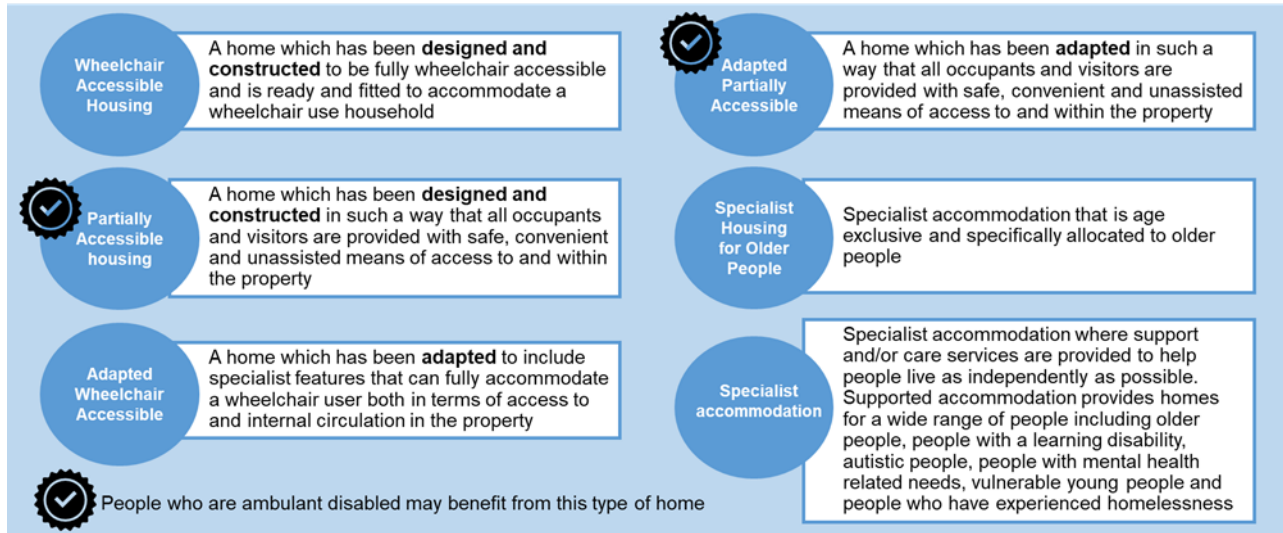
## 7 Key Findings: Accessible Housing Stakeholder Conference

Key findings are summarised below:

- There is developer support for consistent design specifications aligned to definitions around wheelchair and accessible housing agreed by this study. Whilst the Housing for Varying Needs Review should address this issue at a national level, significant work has been progressed locally to agree terminology and definitions as the basis of developing design specifications
- Successful delivery needs to be supported by regulation and/or guidance as market encouragement alone will not be effective
- Development viability and costs are substantial barriers to delivering any proposed targets for wheelchair and accessible housing. Current construction inflation aligned to increasing costs for specifically designed homes with grant levels remaining static, mean a realistic approach to setting targets that are deliverable will be required and need to consider adaptability of new build homes in broader sense
- Delivery of wheelchair and accessible housing needs to be wider than new supply in order to meet the scale of requirements identified, particularly as new build only accounts for small proportion of overall stock. Understanding existing stock, infrastructure requirements and how properties could be adapted and contribute to the supply requirements is essential
- The information on wheelchair and accessible housing within the private sector is limited, this should be considered when defining the overall need for this specialist type of housing and a flexible approach in policy decision making around requirements considered
- Working in collaboration with Health and Social Care Partnership to understand service user requirements from their perspective along with sharing of data and findings to align future requirements will improve and enhance the evidence base
- Continuation of household survey work on an annual basis could be beneficial, particularly in assessing the scale of unmet newly forming need for those with wheelchair and accessible housing needs
- Ensuring accessibility of services, particularly around the ability to make housing applications and bid for homes will be essential. Digital inclusion and equality of opportunity will be important factors for consideration to ensure those with identified need have the ability to access suitable housing now and, in the future
- There is a need to be imaginative on future housing delivery planning for wheelchair and accessible housing. The adaptation and or reuse or change of use of existing built assets should be considered
- The role of market housing and Mid Market Rent in contributing to wheelchair and accessible housing should be carefully considered, particularly in relation to ensuring accessible homes are located throughout different areas in the city.
- Housing affordability for wheelchair and accessible housing across all tenures is a concern for those requiring this specialist type of housing
- It is essential that there is a placemaking focus on the provision of wheelchair and accessible housing to avoid over delivery in specific areas, to ensure appropriate infrastructure investment and a strategic focus beyond numbers to ensure wellbeing and community are at the heart of the homes being provided.
- The importance of joined up approach to provision of support to help people live independently.

## 8 Common definitions

Given one of the major challenges was the lack of universally agreed standards or definitions of what is meant by accessible housing, the partnership launch event was also used to co-produce a common set of definitions for wheelchair and accessible housing. Partners and stakeholders developed the following range of common definitions for accessible and wheelchair housing to ensure clear and consistent language use is achieved by all partners.



These definitions provide a sound basis to improve multi-agency collaboration and partnership working on data collection, needs assessment, planning and commissioning

## 9 Wheelchair Housing Requirements

Primary and secondary research outcomes have been synthesized to develop a baseline calculation on the scale of housing estimates for wheelchair homes. The estimates can be used as the basis of setting all tenure wheelchair targets as required by Scottish Government, considering relevant factors that could affect the pace and scale of future delivery.

Research evidence has enabled the delivery of a baseline housing needs calculation which sets out housing estimates for wheelchair housing in Edinburgh.

The estimate of current need for wheelchair housing:

- **Step 1:** takes into account EdIndex register information, the Accessible Housing Survey Results (self-assessed methods to determine requirements) and the Mind the Step Calculation for Edinburgh.
- **Step 2:** this is then split over the five-year delivery period to give an annual backlog.
- **Step 3:** an estimate of new annual need is applied.
- **Step 4:** this is then added to the backlog to give an estimate of total annual need.

### 9.1 Current Need for Wheelchair Housing

A number of estimates were used to derive a measure of current need for wheelchair housing requirements including the outcomes of the 2022 accessible housing survey, local measures of demand for wheelchair housing derived from EdIndex Register information and a calculation reflecting the Mind the Step methodology applied in an Edinburgh context. The EdIndex register may include applicants who are suitably housed in terms of their housing need but have a preference to move e.g. to another area, to downsize etc.

The 2022 Accessible Survey reveals that of the 44% of households in Edinburgh who have a household member with a long term health condition or disability, 28.6% currently have an unmet need for a specialist housing solution i.e. their needs cannot be met in their existing home.

Information from applicants on the EdIndex Housing Register, in terms of households who self-identified as requiring wheelchair housing, and households who expressed need for accessible housing was also taken into account.

Finally, the 'Mind the Step' Methodology was applied to create estimates for Edinburgh. 'Still Minding the Step' was published by CIH Scotland and Horizon Housing Association in 2018 and offers a nationally recognised methodology for calculating the number of wheelchair users in housing need, estimating the number of wheelchair homes required to meet unmet need in Scotland. Using the results of the Scottish Household Survey, the Mind the Step Calculation estimates the number of indoor wheelchair users in housing need and the number of outdoor wheelchair users in housing need to calculate how many wheelchair homes are required. Future estimates are then calculated using household growth projections.

Using all of the evidence available, the various data sources were triangulated to provide estimates of **current** need for wheelchair housing.

	Wheelchair housing
Estimate of <b>current</b> backlog need	<b>761</b>

## 9.2 Newly Arising Need for Wheelchair Housing

Estimating new annual need is calculated by considering the annual growth rates in wheelchair users derived from the Mind the Step calculation methodology. Applying the same logic, the calculation applies a 7% annual increase to each backlog need scenario, producing an average annual estimate of new need for wheelchair housing as follows:

	Wheelchair housing
Average annual estimate	54

## 9.3 Wheelchair Housing requirements estimate

Estimates of current and newly arising need for wheelchair housing are then adjusted to take into account the number of existing homes available each year to meet unmet need. As there is no available data on the turnover or development of wheelchair homes in the private housing sector, statistics on the projected number of available social housing units are utilised. The existing annual supply of wheelchair housing in the social housing sector is estimated as follows:

	Wheelchair housing
Annual Stock Turnover: CEC & RSLs	48

Adjusting total annual need for wheelchair housing with current annual housing turnover creates the following housing estimate using an average scenario for backlog need:

Average scenario	Wheelchair housing
Annual estimate of need	158
5 year estimate of need	791

### Annual and 5-year estimates of unmet need for wheelchair housing

Total annual estimates for all tenure wheelchair housing is therefore around **158** homes per annum. When benchmarked against average annual completions in Edinburgh (2,425 homes) this accounts for 7% of all annual housing completions. A baseline measure of wheelchair housing requirements by tenure over a 5 year projection period was established, using the Steady Growth assumption from the Council's recent Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) calculation in terms of overall housing estimates by tenure.



## 10 Summary and Recommendations

### 10.1 Accessible Housing Study Conclusions

This research study has delivered a number of benefits that will help assess the extent and nature of existing specialist housing provision, unmet need and requirements across the City. It has provided:

- Standard definitions of what is meant by wheelchair and accessible housing that partners can implement and use going forward
- Analysis of the extent of data to determine existing provision and highlighted gaps that could be addressed to improve this insight
- An opportunity to strengthen and/or build partnership working across services, organisations and sectors and the sharing of data and casework to improve outcomes for people with specialist housing needs
- Insight on unmet needs through the primary research element of the project
- An opportunity for services users to influence research outcomes and resulting strategic interventions
- A framework to assess the requirements for wheelchair and accessible housing and allow the Council to work up targets for wheelchair housing.

### 10.2 Accessible Housing Study Recommendations

Throughout the course of this study a number of areas for improvements and recommendations have been assembled that the Council may wish to consider and take forward with partners to:

- enhance the provision of wheelchair and accessible homes in the city across tenures, engaging with key partners to set achievable targets, taking into account factors such as property size and location
- build on the insight needed to better understand existing provision and improve capture of information on accessibility across tenures
- consider the role of regulation and engagement with private developers to enhance the contribution to wheelchair and accessible housing supply
- develop mechanisms to support the gathering of newly forming needs, including working with health and social care partners to improve data sharing and analysis, contributing to early planning and commissioning
- consider the role of in-situ solutions given the prevalence of existing supply
- explore ways of improving data sharing and monitoring between partners
- Work with partners to explore feasibility of dedicated role to act as a conduit between health, social care and housing to improve data sharing and analysis and planning joint work to deliver in situ and new build solutions to meet accessible needs and wider needs for specialist housing.
- Ensure planning policy and a placemaking approach to development contributes to improved accessibility of the wider environment and infrastructure, as well as provision of homes in locations across the city.

It is recommended that the Council's Steering Group for this project also reviews the detailed primary research results, service user consultation feedback and stakeholder feedback, to draw up a delivery plan for the recommendations and further work based on customer and stakeholder insights.

## 11 Acknowledgements

Arneil Johnston would like to express their gratitude to the:

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- Stakeholders and partners who willingly gave up their time to attend the launch and conference events and provided invaluable contributions as well as data
- Residents of Edinburgh who took the time and effort to complete the online and telephone surveys
- The service users who were able to offer their lived experience and spoke so openly about this.