
WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE HOUSING TARGET

Report by the Executive Director – Corporate Improvement and Economy.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

17 November 2020

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report proposes that the Council sets an all tenure annual wheelchair accessible housing delivery target of 20 homes.**
- 1.2 Revised Scottish Government Guidance required Councils to set all tenure wheelchair accessible housing targets by end of April 2020. However the Covid pandemic has adversely impacted on this being done as intended. Scottish Government indicates that the Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2021-26 should include further update and timescales for implementation.
- 1.3 The Council has commissioned Consultants to carry out research regarding the need for wheelchair accessible housing in the Scottish Borders, which was completed in January 2020. The Consultants were supported by a working group consisting of Council officers, and representatives from other related communities of interest including service users and carers, voluntary sector service providers and the Registered Social Landlord sector. The final report recommended 20 additional wheelchair accessible homes as an annual all tenure wheelchair accessible housing target, and also provided a proposed action plan. It is proposed that the action plan be consolidated into the actions developed to implement the Council's Local Housing Strategy 2017-22

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Executive Committee**
 - (a) **Approves 20 new wheelchair accessible houses as an annual delivery target, with Registered Social Landlords to deliver 15 of these each year.**
 - (b) **Remits the Executive Director to consolidate the research final report actions into the Local Housing Strategy 2017-22 action plans, and monitor and report progress via Local Housing Strategy related processes,**
 - (c) **Remits the Executive Director to bring forward a review report after 31 March 2026 to report on the delivery of the wheelchair accessible annual target.**

3 THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT.

3.1 Over the last 5 years there has been increasing policy interest in the provision of affordable and adaptable housing for household which contain a wheelchair user. In 2016 the Scottish Government launched "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Delivery Plan 2016-21". In 2018 the Equalities and Human Rights Commission's 18-month enquiry in housing for disabled people, concluded that that the chronic shortage of accessible homes was a breach of disabled people's rights and was a hidden housing crisis. Most recently Scottish Government has issued Guidance in March and August 2019 which requires Councils to set targets for the delivery of wheelchair accessible homes across all tenures by end December 2019. Councils have a close working relationship with Registered Social Landlord sector through the Strategic Housing Investment Plan [SHIP] processes, but on the other hand, Scottish Councils have expressed their concerns regarding their ability to set and enforce targets for the private sector.

3.2 Against this backdrop, the Council commissioned consultants to investigate and research –

The numbers, profile and views of wheelchair users and other people with substantial mobility issues that are likely to require wheelchair or other forms of accessible housing.

The current stock of housing suitable for wheelchair users, particularly in the social rented sector.

The challenges wheelchair users and their families experience in securing a suitable home and the factors that have contributed to this.

Current and potential future shortfalls in the provision of wheelchair accessible homes, with particular reference to affordable housing provision.

A major limitation of both local and national data is that disability is usually recorded as a single category and does not distinguish between different forms of disability and the distinctive issues that people with different types of disability face. Overall the Consultants estimated that in 2017 around 23,500 individuals in Scottish Borders were living with a disability, which approximates 25% of local residents of all ages. This is consistent with Scotland-wide trends.

Consultants estimated that around 2000 households [3.5%] contain a wheelchair user. Of which a minimum of 600 households contain someone who has to use a wheelchair to move around their home. This includes around 80 families with a child confined to a wheelchair, who are likely to require a highly specific and customised built or adapted home.

In addition it is estimated that a further 2000-2500, mostly older households, contain one or more persons that do not use a wheelchair but who experience substantial difficulties moving around their home. There appears to be marked differences in the tenure of working age and retired wheelchair users in Scottish Borders. The majority of older users live in the owner occupied sector, whereas most working age users live in the social rented sector.

It is understood that all the limited stock of wheelchair accessible housing is owned by Registered Social Landlords. The Consultants estimate that a minimum of 220 wheelchair user households currently live in a house that is wholly unsuitable for their needs, and a further 450 households require additional housing adaptations to ensure their current home is suitable for their changing needs.

4 PROPOSAL

- 4.1. There is broad support within the Working Group for a numerical target of 20 homes per annum for the supply of new wheelchair accessible housing that covers all tenures, although there were differing views on whether and how effectively this could be applied to the private sector. It is proposed that delivery of the 20 homes be proportioned as 15 from the Registered Social Landlords and the balance from private sector providers. Stakeholders recognise that the large majority of new wheelchair accessible homes will continue to be delivered by the affordable housing sector. The current SHIP 2020-25 identified a number of proposed developments which will deliver wheelchair accessible affordable housing, these have been rolled forward and additional provision proposed through the development of the new SHIP 2021-26. It is envisaged that additional emphasis and resources will have to be directed towards delivering on this proposed new target.
- 4.2. However it will not be possible to simply build new homes in sufficient numbers to address this challenge. The Consultants have also identified a range of other challenges and actions in order to make best use of available wheelchair accessible and adapted housing stock across all tenures. The proposed actions cover major adaptations of existing homes, personal needs assessments, information and advice, RSL allocations, processes, development of a better evidence base in order to inform future investment and policy and practice development. It is proposed that these actions will be consolidated within the LHS 2017-22 action plan, and will be reported annually to Council as part of the existing LHS monitoring, implementation, and reporting process.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

- (a) Ensuring the SHIP's effective implementation and delivery as a strategic housing authority is dependent on SBC's continuous provision of core services, financial resource allocations from the Scottish Government, partner agencies, private developers and individuals.
- (b) The new SHIP 2021-26 is based on a number of known and assumed funding resources that the Council and its development partners will draw upon. These include known Resource Planning Allocation of £16.972m Affordable Housing Supply Programme grant for 2020-2021, plus Resource Planning Assumption of £78m grant for 2021-2026. The SHIP also assumes use of up to £2.25m Second Homes Council Tax funding from the Council and of up to £83m estimated private borrowing by the Registered Social Landlords over the period 2021-2026.
- (c) In addition, the Council may also assist project delivery through use of limited available Affordable Housing Policy Developer Contributions.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

- (a) Delivery of the SHIP is largely dependent upon a number of variables not least of which relate to resource and other political and organisation decision making processes, most of which are beyond the control of the Council. A current major uncertainty and cause of some concern is the level of Scottish Government funding which the next Scottish Parliament will allocate to assist affordable housing delivery after the forthcoming election in May 2021.

- (b) Delivery of the SHIP is also dependent upon ownership of land by the RSLs and the recent delivery of a number of projects has depleted their limited land bank. Officers will continue to work with partner RSLs to ensure that there is a strategic approach to land-banking for affordable housing. In particular this collaboration has identified a number of Council-owned sites which could potentially be developed to provide Extra Care Housing in key Borders settlements.
- (c) The Council constantly reviews its Corporate Property Strategic Asset Management Plans for the management of the Council's property assets in order to maximise their contribution to the Council's corporate and service goals and objectives as economically, efficiently and effectively as possible; providing the right space, at the right time, in the right location at the right cost. Therefore a strategic approach to the development of affordable housing across the Borders will aim to make the most effective use of land and/or property wherever possible, taking advantage of the Council's property and asset rationalisation process through collaborative working opportunities will be created where practical for affordable housing development.

5.3 Integrated Impact Assessments

- (a) In line with both Council policy and legislative requirement, the SHIP 2020-2025 and 2021-26 have both been subjected to Integrated Impact Assessments. Neither Assessment identified any concerns about the way the delivery of the SHIP is likely to adversely impact on any of the equalities groupings. It is considered that the setting of an annual Wheelchair Accessible Housing target will provide further stimulus toward increasing the supply of such homes throughout Scottish Borders.
- (b) Houses produced by Registered Social Landlords will be allocated according to their individual allocations policy and procedures. As a consequence of being an RSL, they are subject to the weight of Statutory scrutiny via external Regulation and Inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

5.4 Acting Sustainably

- (a) In accordance with Section 7 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 pre-screening assessment of the SHIP 2020-2025 and 2021-2026 were undertaken using the criteria specified in Schedule 2 of the Act. The pre-screening assessments identified no or minimal effects in relation to the environment hence the SHIP is exempt from SEA requirements under Section 7 (1) of the Act.
- (b) By seeking to provide more new affordable houses including wheelchair accessible housing, the SHIP will promote sustainable communities and help to address many of the housing supply challenges identified in the Local Housing Strategy 2017-2022.
- (c) There are no adverse economic or social effects resulting from SHIP delivery, and potential environmental effects from new build housing will be addressed through the Planning Process and National policies and standards, and will be consistent with meeting the housing requirements and standards as set out by Scottish Government.

- (d) The objectives of the SHIP are consistent with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, and 13 Climate Action. Specifically the SHIP responds to the ambition of SDG 11 by promoting access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing by ensuring integrated inclusive and sustainable settlements and by strengthening regional development planning. With respect to SDG 13, development will be at least consistent with Scottish Building Standards and the national objective of net zero greenhouse gases by 2045.

5.5 Carbon Management

- (a) It is considered that there are no direct effects on the Council's carbon emissions arising from the report recommendations.
- (b) New Build housing will have a general effect on the region's carbon footprint however these are addressed within the Council's Planning and Building Standards processes, and will be consistent with meeting the housing requirements and current applicable standards as set out by the Scottish Government.
- (c) It is anticipated that RSL affordable housing proposed in the SHIP 2020-2025 and 2021-2026 will be built to meet Scottish Government's "Silver Standard". In the event that this cannot be reached, new houses will be built to comply with current Scottish Building Standards, thereby seeking to maximise the opportunity for energy efficiency and reduction of fuel poverty.
- (d) It should be noted that at its meeting of 25 September 2020, the Council committed to setting a target as soon as possible for achieving a reduction in the Council's carbon emissions which is at least consistent with the Scottish Government target of net zero by 2045, and the intermediate targets set out in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. The Council's Planning and Building Standards will reflect the developing public policy positions both nationally and locally.

5.6 Rural Proofing

- (a) Rural proofing applies to all areas of Scottish Borders classified by Scottish Government as 'remote rural' or 'accessible rural'. This applies to all areas of Scottish Borders out with the towns of Galashiels/Tweedbank, Hawick, Peebles, Innerleithen, Selkirk, Eyemouth, Jedburgh and Kelso.
- (b) The SHIP project working group carried out a Rural Proofing exercise as part of the preparation of the SHIP in August 2020. It was considered that the delivery of this SHIP will have no unforeseen negative impact on the rural area, and is more likely to have positive effects by increasing the supply of affordable housing, and that the needs of rural areas have been properly taken into account.

5.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to be made to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation as a result of this report.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Wheelchair Study Working Group is supportive of the proposed all tenure annual 20 wheelchair accessible homes target.
- 6.2 The SHIP Working Group has been consulted and contributed to this report.
- 6.3 The Chief Financial Officer, Monitoring Officer, Chief Legal Officer, Chief Officer Audit and Risk, Clerk to the Council, and Chief Officer HR will be consulted and their comments will be incorporated in the final report.

Approved by

Rob Dickson
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Signature

Author(s)

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Background Papers: SHIP 2020-25 Document Executive Committee 19th November 2019.

“Space to live – Wheelchair accessible housing in the Scottish Borders”, by Gillian Young, Tony Donohoe and Jill Cronin.

Previous Minute Reference:

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Jacqueline Whitelaw can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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