

# **Enhancing the accessibility, adaptability, and usability of Scotland's homes:**

**consultation summary**

**June 2023**

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## Overview

'Housing to 2040' is a plan produced by the Scottish Government that sets out what we think is important for Scotland's homes over the next 20 years.

Part of the plan includes improving guidance and standards on the accessibility of homes. A home is accessible if it is easy for people to enter and move around all parts of it.

Housing for Varying Needs is a guide used by house designers to make homes as suitable as possible for people with different abilities.

The guide is split into two parts. Part 1 covers the design of self-contained houses and flats to suit people's different and changing needs over their lifetime. Part 2 covers housing with integral support. This could be in the form of communal facilities associated with self-contained houses or flats, or in grouped housing with some shared space and facilities, and with support from resident or peripatetic carers.

Affordable housing providers can get funding from the Scottish Government if they use Part 1 of the guide when designing and building their homes.

We want to review the guide for a number of reasons. For example, it is over 25 years old and some of the information is now out of date. Also, people are living longer and what they need from a home has changed.

We also want to introduce a 'Scottish Accessible Homes Standard' so that all new homes are designed and built to be more accessible and adaptable. We think the best way to do this is to bring some of the updated design criteria from Housing for Varying Needs into building regulations.

This consultation sets out the changes we propose to make to Part 1 of the Housing for Varying Needs design guide and to building standards and guidance. We would like to hear your thoughts on these changes. We know that not everyone will wish or feel able to answer all of the questions in this consultation. You are encouraged to answer the questions you'd like to respond to, but you don't have to respond to all of them.

We will also be holding some online events to discuss our ideas and you are invited to sign up for the ones you are interested in.

## Part 1 of the Housing for Vary Needs design guide

The design guide is split into a number of sections that provide information on different parts of a home, such as the entrance, kitchen, and corridors.

The guide provides information for different groups of need and abilities, which are:

- General needs: the needs of the general population, where housing is not purpose built for a particular group.
- Older people: those aged 65 or over.
- Ambulant disabled people: people with a range of mobility or dexterity impairments, but whose disability permits them to walk with or without the use of walking aids and some may occasionally use a wheelchair.
- Wheelchair users: people who use a wheelchair for most or all of the time.

[A copy of the guide is available here.](#)

The updated guide would be used by people building new affordable homes with the help of grant funding from the Scottish Government.

## Sections 1 to 5 of the guide

Sections 1 to 5 provide information on:

- people's different needs
- the space and equipment people need
- the location of new homes
- the design of space around homes
- the layout of homes

We feel that:

- the updated guide should focus on the technical elements of designing a home
- the information in these sections is now available within other publications

We therefore think that it is no longer necessary to include these sections in the updated guide.

We would however continue to provide information and guidance that is for particular needs groups, such as wheelchair users.

## Section 6 of the guide – The overall plan of the dwelling

Section 6 provides information on the overall plan of homes, such as how easy it is to move around in and where rooms are positioned.

We are not proposing any major updates to this section of the guide. We are suggesting that some of the design criteria can be removed as, for example, they are now a building standards requirement.

## Section 7 of the guide – Access to dwellings and provision for vehicles

Section 7 provides information about the area outside a home, such as paths and areas for parking.

We are suggesting a few changes to this section:

- There should not be a step or anything that may cause someone to trip at any entrance door to a new home or block of flats. At the moment, the guide does not say that all entrance doors have to be like this.
- If the door opens outwards, there should be a bigger level area at entrances to blocks of flats. This would be especially helpful for people using a walking aid or wheelchair, or for families with a buggy.

## Section 8 of the guide – Communal access areas, stairs and lifts to flats

Section 8 provides information about the shared areas inside blocks of flats. We are suggesting a few changes to this section:

- Entrance doors to new blocks of flats should have an increased clear opening width of at least 850 mm, with an accessible threshold. This will be helpful for everyone, especially for wheelchair users and people with prams and buggies.
- Entrance doors to new blocks of flats should open and close automatically. Again, this will be helpful for everyone, especially for wheelchair users and people with prams and buggies.
- Internal doors in corridors of new blocks of flats should have a clear width of at least 850 mm.
- The walls of each floor in all new blocks of flats should be painted a different colour. There should also be signs to say what floor you are on. This would be useful for people with dementia. It could help them recognise which floor they live on for example.

## Section 9 of the guide – Entrance doors to individual housing or flats

Section 9 provides information about entrance doors to new homes. We are suggesting a few changes to this section:

- Entrance doors to new homes should have an increased clear opening width of at least 850 mm, with an accessible threshold. This will be helpful for everyone, especially for wheelchair users and people with prams and buggies.
- The entrance doors to each home can be painted a different colour to neighbouring homes. This would be useful for people with dementia. It could help them recognise where they live.
- Entrance doors should open into an area like a corridor and not a room. The space behind the door should be big enough for people to move around, for example, with a walking stick or frame. There should also be space for a wheelchair, pram or buggy clear of the door.
- There is separate information for homes built especially for wheelchair users, where more space is needed. We think the space inside the door in these cases should be increased to at least 1800 mm by 1800 mm to allow larger chairs to move around.

## Section 10 of the guide – Circulation spaces and internal doors

Section 10 provides information about corridors and doorways in homes. We are suggesting a few changes to this section:

- The minimum width of corridors in all new homes should be at least 1200mm. We think this would make it easier for a person in a wheelchair to move around the home. It would help people with a temporary injury. Also, it would help with some practical things like moving furniture.
- New homes built for wheelchair users are usually built on one level. This could be a bungalow or a flat for example. If a new home is built for a wheelchair user that has more than one living level, there should be a lift installed. This would allow the wheelchair user to get to all parts of the home.
- Internal doors in all new homes should have an increased clear width of at least 850 mm and there should not be a threshold plate at each door as this can cause someone to trip. This will be helpful for everyone, especially for wheelchair users and people with prams and buggies, and would reduce the number of adaptations required in future.

## Section 11 of the guide – Living and sleeping areas

Section 11 provides information about the living room and bedrooms in homes. We are suggesting a few changes to this section:

- There should be an increased clear space of at least 1800 mm by 1800 mm in the living room and bedrooms of new homes built for wheelchair users. This will allow a wheelchair user to turn around more easily.
- All new homes should have space for a desk or work space with a chair. The current guide only asks for this in larger family homes.

## Section 12 of the design guide – Storage

Section 12 gives information about storage in homes. We are not suggesting any major updates to this section. There might be small changes to the wording.

## Section 13 of the current guide – Kitchens

Section 13 provides information about kitchens in homes. We are suggesting a few changes to this section:

- There should be pelmet lighting underneath wall units in the kitchen of all new homes. This would help people to see when preparing and cooking food, especially those with a visual impairment.
- There should be an increased space of at least 1800 mm in front of all kitchen units in new homes built for wheelchair users. This should allow a wheelchair user to turn around more easily.

## Section 14 of the guide – Bathrooms and WC compartments

Section 14 provides information about bathrooms. We are suggesting a few changes to this section:

- It should be easy to adapt the bathroom into a wet floor shower room, unless the home already has one.
- Where a new home is built with the main bathroom upstairs, there should be a separate WC compartment on the ground floor, which is easy to adapt into a wet floor shower room.
- In the bathroom of new homes built for wheelchair users, there should be a wet floor shower area, a wash-hand basin and a WC with space allowed for moving around. There should also be a bath, or at least the space to allow for a bath to be fitted in the future. The current guide asks for a bath to be fitted as standard.

- In the bathroom of new homes built for wheelchair users, there should be an increased space of at least 1800 mm by 1800 mm that allows a wheelchair user to turn around more easily.
- There should be an electricity supply safely fitted near the WCs in all new homes. This is so the WC can be changed to one with washing and drying facilities more easily in the future.

## Section 15 of the guide – Interior finishes

Section 15 gives information about walls and floors in homes. We are not proposing any major updates to this section. There might be small changes to the wording.

## Section 16 of the guide – Windows

Section 16 provides information about windows in homes. We are suggesting adding some new information in this section:

- The living room of a new home should have windows that amount to 1/8th of the floor area of the room to allow natural light to enter the room. This is generally beneficial for everyone's health and wellbeing but would also help people with a visual impairment or with dementia in particular.

## Section 17 of the guide – Heating, ventilating and water services

Section 17 gives information about heating, ventilation, and water in homes. We are not proposing any major updates to this section.

## Section 18 of the guide – Power and communications

Section 18 of the guide has information about power and communications in the homes, such as door entry systems and alarm call systems. We are suggesting one key change to this section:

- The minimum number of power sockets should be increased from what is described in the current guide.

## Section 19 of the guide – External facilities

Section 19 of the guide has information about areas outside the home, such as the garden. We are suggesting one key change to this section:

- All new homes should have a private or shared garden to allow people access to secure outdoor space . If this is not possible, there should be a private balcony to allow people to sit outside.

## Section 20 of the guide – Refurbishment and adaptations

Section 20 of the current guide contains information on refurbishment and adaptations.

We feel that the updated guide should be about new homes and making sure they are flexible in design. We therefore think that this section should not be included in the updated guide.

## Any other proposed changes to Part 1 of the guide

We would like to hear any other feedback or ideas you have to update the guide.

## Format of the updated guide

We do not think the format of the guide should change too much. We would like to get your feedback and ideas on this though.

## The Scottish Accessible Homes Standard

In Housing to 2040 we committed to introducing a new Scottish Accessible Homes Standard which all new homes across all tenures in Scotland must achieve. The introduction of the Scottish Accessible Homes Standard will mainstream a high standard of accessibility and adaptability across new homes through changes to building standards and guidance.

We think that the review of Housing for Varying Needs should help create a Scottish Accessible Homes Standard. This would be a standard of accessibility for all new homes, not just those built with the help of funding through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.

We think the best way to do this is to bring the general needs design criteria from the updated Housing for Varying Needs guide into the Building Standards Technical Handbooks, except where:

- It is already contained within the Handbooks.
- It is not related to regulated building works,
- It is about a particular need, such as for wheelchair users.

## Impact assessments

When asking for views on important things like this, we carry out 'impact assessments' to consider what the ideas we have would potentially mean to different people.

The Equality Act 2010 protects certain characteristics including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. We want to make sure the ideas we are consulting on are fair to everyone.



The Island Communities Impact Assessment is about considering the different effect our ideas might have on island communities compared to mainland communities.

The Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment is about considering how the decisions we make about future policy can help to reduce the challenges that people can face as a result of 'socio-economic disadvantage'. A socio-economic disadvantage can be things such as having a low income, not having access to basic goods or services, or having a background which gives fewer advantages.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that children's rights, as described by the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child, are recognised, respected and promoted. A Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment therefore helps to ensure that our policies and measures protect and promote the human rights and wellbeing of children and young people.

A Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment looks at the potential costs and benefits to businesses of any policy changes. It uses evidence to identify the ideas that best achieve the policy objectives at a reasonable cost.



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