



**Improving the Life Chances of Disabled  
People – January 2005.**

**Response from:  
Habinteg Housing Association**

**21<sup>st</sup> March 2005**

Submitted by post to:

Strategy Unit Disability Team  
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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Habinteg Housing Association welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People'. Following the consultation on the Interim Analytical Report to which we submitted a response, we were glad to see that housing has now been mentioned specifically in the report and includes recommendations on the details required to meet the independent living needs of disabled people.

## **2. Background Information on Habinteg Housing Association**

- 2.1 Habinteg Housing Association is a Registered Social Landlord. Established in 1970, Habinteg provides integrated, accessible housing and support services by promoting the principle of universal housing solutions. We have been at the forefront of developing Lifetime Homes and wheelchair housing, ensuring that our accommodation meets a diverse range of needs. Our schemes are built to 75% Lifetime Homes standard and 25% wheelchair housing. Our mission statement summarises our approach and states:

*"Habinteg is the leading national provider of affordable accessible homes. We champion inclusion by building Lifetime Homes and wheelchair standard properties, together creating sustainable neighbourhoods for disabled and non-disabled people to share and enjoy. Our thoughtful designs and on-site support services make a real difference to people's independence. We use our expertise to challenge negative social attitudes, promote the rights of disabled people and improve accessibility standards within housing."*

- 2.2 We are committed to addressing negative attitudes to disability through our campaigning and lobbying activities. Most recently we worked closely with the GLA in developing an inclusive housing policy for the recently announced London Plan and we are currently working with them on the development of a London-wide accessible housing register.

## **3. The Need for Accessible Housing.**

- 3.1 We welcome the inclusion of guidance on Lifetime Homes and the cost-benefits which you cite to building them. 42% of housing association tenants have a disability or long-term illness (MORI/Housing Corporation 2001), therefore it is important to put the emphasis on social landlords to build their homes to Lifetime Homes standard.
- 3.2 The cost savings of adapting a Lifetime Home are considerable and we support the figure of £39 million savings annually on major adaptations. Due to the carefully thought-out design of Lifetime Homes, adaptations can be easily and

cheaply installed in order to meet the needs of the occupants now and in the future.

- 3.3 The 'Life Chances' report discusses the review of the building regulations regarding Lifetime Homes (pg 83). Part M of the building regulations is currently under review. This is considering the feasibility of incorporating Lifetime Homes standards into Part M and is currently underway by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC)
- 3.4 We welcome the inclusion of recommendation 4.10 as it is imperative that investment in housing initiatives takes into account the needs of disabled people from inception and ensures equity in the provision of housing. Disabled people should be involved throughout the consultation of new housing initiatives to ensure their housing needs are equally met along with others groups.
- 3.5 As stated on page 68, there is a need to ensure adapted and purpose built accessible housing is not 'lost' due to poor record keeping. An accessible housing register can be cost effective, and reduce the time disabled people wait for appropriate housing. The strategy should make a direct recommendation for a commitment towards implementing accessible housing registers across boroughs.
- 3.6 Habinteg have been working with the GLA in their study of the feasibility of a London-wide accessible housing register and in November last year, The Mayor of London published the report: *Accessible Living London, A Feasibility Study for an Accessible Housing Register for London*. This proposes that a web-based accessible housing register be established on a London-wide basis. 'Life Chances' should follow a similar model when recommending accessible housing registers.

#### **4. Reforming the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).**

- 4.1 We welcome recommendation 5.7 (relating to 4.9) that a review of the eligibility criteria of the DFG funding be undertaken. As your report cites, a study showed that a third of families needing housing adaptations were unable to meet the contributory costs required which resulted in the adaptation not being carried out. This needs reform as an un-adapted home may not only present health and safety dangers but also have implications on a child's development through learning and play in the home.
- 4.2 Lifetime homes can ensure the limited DFG resources are more effectively spent as major adaptations can be more cheaply installed, and as you state, the upper limit for DFG funding can lead to ineffective cheaper options being the only option.

#### **5. The experiences of BME disabled people.**

- 5.1 On page 29 of 'Life Chances', the experiences of BME disabled people is discussed and that evidence suggests they are more likely to experience disadvantage in seeking employment. There is however no mention of how these experiences relate to accessing appropriate housing.
- 5.2 Habinteg commissioned REU to research and develop a good practice guide on meeting the housing needs of BME disabled and D/deaf people and their families, and this was launched in March this year. The findings of the research in 'Different Paths' bring fresh evidence about how BME disabled and D/deaf people experience the choice-based lettings system as well as bringing new insights into how BME disabled people and D/deaf people experience discrimination in housing.
- 5.3 'Life Chances' should make reference to 'Different Paths' and its findings which show that BME disabled and D/deaf people have particular cultural and communication needs which mean that they need to be treated as a distinct group in their own right if they are to access appropriate housing. The two reports are enclosed for your information.

#### **References:**

Brewton & Darton (1997) *Designing Lifetime Homes*, Joseph Rountree Foundation

Butt, J. & Dhaliwal, S. (2005) *Different Paths: Challenging Services*, REU/Habinteg/ASRA.  
**[Enclosed]**

Mayor of London/Pathways Research (2004) *Accessible Living London: A Feasibility Study for an Accessible Housing Register for London*

MORI/The Housing Corporation (2001). *Source 42 – Registered Social Landlord Tenants 1999/2000*.