

Annex A – Covering Template for Responses

Please complete the attached cover sheet when sending evidence, indicating the set of questions to which a response is being provided and contact details of the person for any follow-up queries.

Contact details for respondent	
Name	
Job title	Senior Research Fellow
Do you represent an organisation? (if so, name of organisation and type: e.g. voluntary, public body, private company).	
Postal address	Social Policy Research Unit University of York Heslington York YO10 5DD
Telephone number	
Email	

	Which area of the review are you responding to? (please mark X)
Prevention strand	
Review of disabled children	X
Strategy for youth services	
Review of high cost, high harm families	

THE HOUSING NEEDS OF DISABLED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES: SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE TO THE DFES/HM TREASURY JOINT POLICY REVIEW ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

The outcomes and life chances of disabled children (and their families) are, to a greater or lesser extent, affected by the homes they live in. Disabled children spend a far greater time at home than non-disabled children (eg. Mulderij, 1996) and therefore the suitability and quality of the home environment is of even greater importance to this group of children. There is evidence to suggest, however, that disabled children's homes are the most restrictive environments in which they spend time (Brotherson, 1995).

It is clear that any review of disabled children's services needs to include housing. This submission summarises the key findings from three pieces of research¹ into the housing needs of disabled children.

Until the late 1990's very little was known about the housing needs of disabled children. In 1998 a report was published based on qualitative interviews with forty parents, twenty health, social care and housing practitioners and a small number of disabled children and young people (Oldman and Beresford, 1998). Participants in this research described how living in poor or unsuitable housing had a negative impact on; i) the disabled child in terms of their physical and cognitive development, opportunities to enjoy everyday childhood activities, physical health, emotional well-being, and quality of life; ii) parents' physical and emotional well-being and iii) siblings' lives and their ability to lead a 'normal' life. Some parents believed that living in poor and unsuitable housing resulted in them needing to use services they would otherwise not require such as respite care or residential school placements.

This qualitative piece of research was followed up by a national survey of over 2500 parents of severely disabled children (Beresford and Oldman, 2002). This survey provides the best available evidence about the housing needs of families with a disabled child living in the UK. Some of the data was compared to data collected by the 1998/99 Survey of English Housing and the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (Gordon *et al.*, 2000) in order to compare the housing circumstances of families with a disabled children with families with non-disabled children. The main findings from this survey are summarised below.

Housing and families with a disabled child: the national picture

Tenure

- 54% of families were renting their homes and 43% were home-owners.
- Families with disabled children were more likely to be living in social housing than families with non-disabled children with a similar income.

Housing condition

- Four out of ten respondents reported problems with cold, damp or poor repair.
- Families renting housing from their local authority or a private landlord were more likely to report poor housing conditions.
- Families with a disabled child were more likely to be living in poor housing conditions than families with a similar economic profile but with non-disabled children.

¹ These research projects were carried out by the Social Policy Research Unit and the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York, and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Housing unsuitability

- There are a number of ways in which housing can be unsuitable for disabled children and their families. Table 1 shows the proportion of families reporting difficulties with each type of housing problem.

**Table 1:
Proportion of families reporting difficulties with each housing problem area.**

Lack of space to play and for family members to have space apart	55%
Kitchen, bathroom and or toilet difficult to use due to size	42%
Only one toilet and/or bathroom	41%
Lack of space for storage of equipment	38%
Unsafe or unpleasant location	38%
Difficulties with access around and in and out of the home	33%
Lack of downstairs toilet and/or bathing facilities	33%
Poor housing condition	27%
Lack of space to use equipment and/or carry out therapies	21%
Inadequate facilities to meet carer needs (eg. lifting, toileting, bathing)	21%
Safety inside the home	3%

- Three quarters of families reported that their homes were unsuitable in at least two different ways. One in four families said their homes were unsuitable in six or more different ways.
- Even when income levels were accounted for, families with a disabled child were more likely to report difficulties with poor housing conditions and housing suitability compared to families with non-disabled, dependent children.
- Unsuitable housing was experienced across *all* families and *all* types of impairment including physical impairment, learning difficulties, socio-emotional behavioural difficulties and life-limiting health conditions.
- Families living in local authority housing or renting from a private landlord were more likely to report problems with their housing and also to report a greater number of problems.

What has been done to address this issue?

At the beginning of this year the government announced that the means test for the Disabled Facilities Grant for families with a disabled child was to be abolished. This is to be welcomed. However, the benefit of this to families will be limited for four key reasons.

- First, the DFG is a grant for home-owners, yet the majority of families with a disabled child rent their homes.
- Second, there remains a significant lack of funding available to local authorities to award DFGs. Housing and social service professionals report resources for adaptations are grossly inadequate and that the service they provide is “the minimum essential” (Oldman and Beresford, 1998).
- Third, the DFG has a ceiling of (£25,000) and this is insufficient for some adaptations, particularly in certain parts of the country.
- Finally, not all inadequacies or difficulties with housing can be resolved by adapting a property, or some properties cannot accommodate the adaptation required. In many cases, moving is the better (or only) option.

Professionals’ views on how to better meet the housing needs of disabled children have been sought through a series of consultation events held in five different locations in

England and attended by over 110 practitioners working in housing, social care or health services (Beresford and Oldman, 2000). A number of long-, medium- and short-term strategies or solutions were identified (and these are detailed in full in the report of the consultation). They included:

- Providing financial support and information/advice to support families who wish to move to resolve their housing difficulties.
- The accepted model of joint working (and joint funding/pooled budgets) between health, education and social services to be extended to include housing.
- Increasing funding provided to local authorities for adaptations (both the Disabled Facilities Grant and Housing Revenue Account), and that funding for adaptations for disabled children should be ring-fenced *and* based on a sound idea of local need.

References

Beresford, B. and Oldman, C. (2000) *Making Homes Fit for Children: working together to promote change in the lives of disabled children*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

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Brotherson, M.; Cook, C.; Wehmeyer, M. and Cunconanlhr, R. (1995) Policy supporting self-determination in the environments of children with disabilities. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 30, 3-14.

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