



LONDON SOUTH BANK  
UNIVERSITY

# Mind the Step: An estimation of housing need among wheelchair users in England

Habinteg Housing Association and London South Bank University  
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# Executive Summary

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Wheelchair users face particular design and accessibility barriers, both in and around the home and in the wider environment. The majority of homes in England (84%) do not allow someone using a wheelchair to get to and through the front door without difficulty and only 0.5% of homes are reported to be 'accessible and adaptable'. This report presents national and regional estimates of housing need among wheelchair users in England and shows how these figures can be used to produce similar estimates at local authority level.

Many wheelchair users who have difficulties with their housing will need or prefer to have adaptations carried out to their existing property, while others will want to move to a different property – in some cases to set up a new household. There are three solutions, which should be strategically interlinked: development of new wheelchair standard homes for owner-occupiers and tenants; support for home adaptations across tenures; and efficient allocation, in social housing, of accessible and adaptable homes.

There are few references to wheelchair user housing in policy documents on independent living, personalisation of services, economic inclusion and neighbourhood renewal. There have been significant moves in some areas to improve housing choice and mobility but progress is hampered by various factors, such as: lack of information on accessible homes; inefficient use of vacant properties; low priority given to the need for independent living; and inflexible financing of care/support services.

Analysis based on the Survey of English Housing 2007/08 shows that there are around 607,200 wheelchair users in England, living in some 586,700 households (figures updated). This equates to 2.8% of all households. Around 55% of wheelchair user households are owner-occupiers, 39% are social housing tenants and 6% are private tenants.

The estimate of wheelchair user households in England with unmet housing needs is **78,300**, which translates to 240 households in an 'average' local (housing) authority with a total of 68,064 households.

The report recommends that local authorities and their partners should use the estimate of unmet need to set targets for the development of new homes. This involves consideration of the needs of families with children, young adults leaving home, older people, ex-service personnel, people with additional support and health needs and people who wish to move from residential care or a supported setting. They should also look at the balance required between new homes, adaptations and better use of existing properties.

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## Andrew

*“It was a nightmare trying to find somewhere affordable to live in London.”*

Andrew is a 41 year old wheelchair user who has moved home approximately eight times since leaving his foster home at the age of 18. He has lived in a wide variety of private and social rented properties in East Anglia, the Midlands and the South East, with only some of these being designed for wheelchair users.

Having recently taken up employment in London, Andrew has had to relocate from the South East. Initially, he lived in a privately rented property that was not designed for wheelchair users or built to an accessible standard. He was only able to manage with the many challenges of that property with the help of his personal assistant, whilst being on the council housing waiting list.

When he was offered a ground floor flat designed to wheelchair standard, he quickly accepted it as there is little or no choice available to wheelchair users. The new flat met his requirements even though the design of the building, with a sloping front entrance and heavy, non-automated internal fire doors within the communal hallway, prevent him from getting access to his property unassisted. *“The flat is ok but nobody has thought about (wheelchair users) getting in and out of the building.”*

On the whole, Andrew says his housing experience has been positive – whether it was finding suitable accommodation close to employment, city centres and/or amenities. However, his move to London has posed some unique challenges, none more so than affordability. *“It was a nightmare trying to find somewhere affordable to live in London.”*

Andrew thinks that more homes should be built to a basic standard of accessibility but not only in the social sector. *“There are plenty of disabled people earning a decent wage who are looking for private accommodation.”*



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# I. Introduction

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## I.1 Why focus on wheelchair users?

There are around 22,189,000 homes in England and the great majority (84%) do not allow someone using a wheelchair to get to and through the front door without difficulty (CLG, 2009a). Once inside, it gets even more restrictive. The English House Condition Survey 2007 applied a test of accessibility and adaptability to the country's housing stock and found that just 0.5% of homes met the criteria for 'accessible and adaptable', while 3.4% were 'visitable' by someone with mobility problems (CLG, 2009a).

Wheelchair users are a distinct group because they face particular design and accessibility barriers, both in and around the home and in the wider environment. These barriers are not, however, unique to wheelchair users and there are many other people, including parents with small children, frail older people, large families and people with short or longer term illness, who would benefit from features such as wider doorways, level thresholds and a downstairs WC.

In this research, the focus is on the need for homes that are fully wheelchair accessible and, in the case of new-build properties, that meet the requirements laid out in the *Wheelchair Housing Design Guide* 2nd Ed (Thorpe and Habinteg, 2006). This level of accessibility is higher than the Lifetime Homes Standard, which provides for visitability by a wheelchair user and includes features that make the home adaptable for wheelchair use at a later date. Lifetime Homes are ordinary homes incorporating 16 design criteria that can be universally applied to new homes. Each design feature adds to the comfort and convenience of the home and supports the changing needs of individuals and families at different stages of life (Lifetime Homes, 2010).

The research project starts from the principle that wheelchair user housing should, as far as possible, reflect the aims of inclusive design. Inclusive design refers to a broad-spectrum approach leading to buildings, environments and products that are usable and effective for everyone, or as wide a range of people as possible. It recognises the importance of aesthetics as well as functionality, and aims to have a general appeal.

Wheelchair user housing fits with the aspirations of inclusive design in three ways: Firstly, many of the design features in such housing also make life easier for people who are not themselves wheelchair users; secondly, it can readily blend in with the neighbouring properties; and thirdly, it is a practical and effective response to individual circumstances, enabling people to participate in society and pursue other aspects of their lives. Given



the very limited accessibility of existing homes and the consequent lack of choice for many disabled people, it is a necessary element in the development of sustainable communities and the regeneration of neighbourhoods to benefit all local residents.

### **I.2 Relevance to wider policies**

In policy terms, the issue of wheelchair user homes goes beyond housing and communities. Independent living, equality and personalisation of services are themes that have great resonance in this respect, as individuals cannot realise the aims of living independently and exercising choice in their support services if they do not have a well-designed and manageable home. National strategies have so far been disappointingly weak in making these links. For example, the cross-government Independent Living Strategy (ODI, 2008) referred to Lifetime Homes as a way of providing better opportunities and more suitable housing, while making no reference to the existence of, or need for, wheelchair standard housing.

The promotion of individual budgets as the means of personalising social care and support – and potentially health services – is a significant development for many disabled people, including some wheelchair users. In certain cases, they may wish to change their existing services or to take advantage of the opportunity to exercise choice and control by moving into more independent housing and requesting an individual budget. This may apply, for example, to young (and less young) adults living with their parents, or to people who are currently living in a residential care home or long term health unit and want to move to more independent accommodation.

Policy debate about the personalisation of services has so far included little or no discussion of the housing needs of people in these circumstances, or of the likely increase in housing demand that the extension of individual budgets will provoke. There is, however, an acknowledgement that accessible housing is itself a form of personalisation, in that home adaptations are included in the list of services that can (at least notionally) be purchased with an individual budget.

Accessible housing also has a crucial preventative role. People who manage well in their home are less likely to want or need to move. They are likely to experience fewer falls or other accidents in the home and will be more easily able to move back home after a period in hospital. They are also in a better position to receive community health services and care at home, rather than being admitted to hospital for in-patient treatment. The Department of Health's capital fund for extra care housing (which is built to full wheelchair standard) has given important recognition to suitable housing and support, at least in respect of the older age group.

The evidence related to home adaptations and equipment shows that they produce savings to health and social care budgets in four major ways:

- By reducing or removing an existing financial outlay (notably residential care and intensive home care services)
- By avoiding an outlay that would otherwise have occurred (including prevention of accidents and prevention of admission to hospital or residential care)
- By reducing wasteful expenditure (such as home care necessitated by a delay in adapting a property or an ineffective solution)
- By achieving better outcomes for the same expenditure (improved quality of life as well as more specific benefits)

(Heywood and Turner, 2008)

### **I.3 Diversity of 'wheelchair users'**

There are an estimated 607,200 wheelchair users living in private households (including extra care housing) in England (CLG, 2009b updated). While people aged 65 and over are numerically the largest group – comprising some 60% of wheelchair users – the numbers who use their wheelchair both inside and outside the home are proportionally higher for the younger age groups. Appendix 1 of this report presents key data relating to individual wheelchair users and Appendix 2 does the same for households with (a) wheelchair user(s).

In addition to people living in private households, there are wheelchair users living as long term residents in residential care and nursing homes. In 2008, around 9,700 people aged 18-64 years with physical/sensory disabilities and 34,500 people aged 18-64 years with learning disabilities were financially supported by local authorities in such homes. The figure for people aged 65 and over was 182,200 (NHS Information Centre, 2009). These figures do not include those (mainly older residents) who are financially self-supporting.

The number of wheelchair users within these groups living in residential care and nursing homes is not known, but it is likely to be a significant proportion. Given the lack of any information about the number of residents who may wish and be seeking to

## I. Introduction

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move to a housing setting with personal assistance and support, they are not included in the actual estimate of unmet housing need presented in this report. Their housing needs should, however, still be considered.

### I.3.1 Ex-service personnel

There is a specific national commitment to assist ex-service personnel in meeting their housing needs (HM Government, 2009). In respect of seriously injured personnel, a proportion of whom will be wheelchair users, this extends to a statement that they 'should be given *'additional preference' (i.e. high priority for social housing)*' (HM Government, 2008). For seriously disabled service personnel, income from the Arms Forces Compensation Scheme and the War Pensions Scheme is also disregarded in assessing eligibility for an adaptation funded through a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

### I.3.2 Disabled children

UK research into the housing needs of disabled and older people has tended to focus on particular age groups and life stages, with few specific references to wheelchair users.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published an information resource on housing for disabled children and their families (Cavet, 2009). This contains a summary of research evidence derived from an earlier review (Beresford and Rhodes, 2008).

The relevant findings for this study include the following:

- The housing conditions of families with a disabled child were generally worse than those of families with a non-disabled child
- They were also less likely to own their home – and those with severely disabled children were even more likely to be tenants
- They reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with their homes than other families with children
- Families from black and minority ethnic groups with a disabled child reported a greater number of difficulties with their housing than white families
- Disabled children and young people who needed specially adapted accommodation were less likely to be suitably housed than older people who needed such accommodation
- Lack of space was the most frequently reported problem for families with a disabled child. Families with a disabled child were far more likely to report this as a problem than families with a non-disabled child

- After lack of space, deficits regarding suitability of kitchens, toilets and bathrooms were the next most frequently reported problem, followed by unsuitable location and difficulties with access (reported by a third of families with a disabled child)
- Research suggested that disabled children spent more time in their homes than other children and, for some, a lack of control over their environment could lead to feelings of helplessness and dependency
- The minority of families receiving funding for a Disabled Facilities Grant obtained expert advice on their housing needs but this did not generally apply to other families (the majority) with a disabled child
- Parents reported positive outcomes from improvements in their housing situation, including greater confidence and self-reliance

### I.3.3 Young adults

In 2001, John Grooms set up an Inquiry into the needs and welfare of young disabled people, the results of which were published in the report: *Where do you think you're going?* (Ackroyd, 2003). This was followed by a second report entitled: *Young, disabled and forgotten* (Christophides, 2006), which updated the original findings and continued the campaign to '*support disabled people in securing a better deal*'. In 2008, Livability, the successor organisation to John Grooms, published a further campaign report on disabled young people moving towards adulthood (Christophides, 2008).

The findings of the John Grooms and Livability studies include the following:

- Lack of reliable and up-to-date statistical information was a major barrier to strategic planning in relation to the needs of disabled people
- The lack of accessible accommodation was having a disproportionate impact on young people seeking to leave the family home (and who may have had to move back after school, college or university) but who were being regarded as adequately housed by their local authority
- Many disabled young people – and their families – were shocked by the lack of accommodation choices, as they had been encouraged to aspire to greater independence and assumed they would have some positive options beyond the parental home
- With notable exceptions, local authorities did not have an accurate, up-to-date list of the accessible, adapted or adaptable properties in their area. A '*small but increasing*' number of authorities were establishing Accessible Housing Registers to record both accessible properties and housing applicants looking for an accessible home

### I.3.4 Older people

The 2008 government report *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A national strategy for housing in an ageing society* (CLG, 2008a) set out plans and solutions related to the housing needs of the fast growing population of older people. The central concern, and the aim of the strategy, is to ensure *'that there is enough appropriate housing available in future to relieve the forecasted unsustainable pressure on homes, health and social care services'*.

The relevant research findings presented in the 2008 Strategy include the following:

- Many older people live in poor housing, which can exacerbate existing medical conditions
- Older people tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with their housing than younger groups, which may be due, in part, to lower expectations
- The rise in life expectancy has been accompanied by increasing years of ill-health. It is not known how future medical advances and changing lifestyles may affect this trend
- Older people spend more time than younger people in their homes, with over 85s spending 90% of their time there
- 60% of people aged over 85 live alone
- The older population is polarised by housing wealth, with a widening gap between affluent and low income older people
- Each year, 1.25 million falls result in hospital admission and most of the serious injuries from falls are among older people
- The number of older people with learning disabilities is set to increase substantially, with significant implications for housing and support

The report *Time to Adapt – Home adaptations for older people: The increase in need and future of state provision* (Care and Repair England, 2009) noted that trends in home ownership have resulted in there now being as many low income home owners as low income tenants. As these households move into retirement, the affordability of home repairs and adaptations is becoming an increasingly major issue.

Other groups among wheelchair users whose housing needs require attention include:

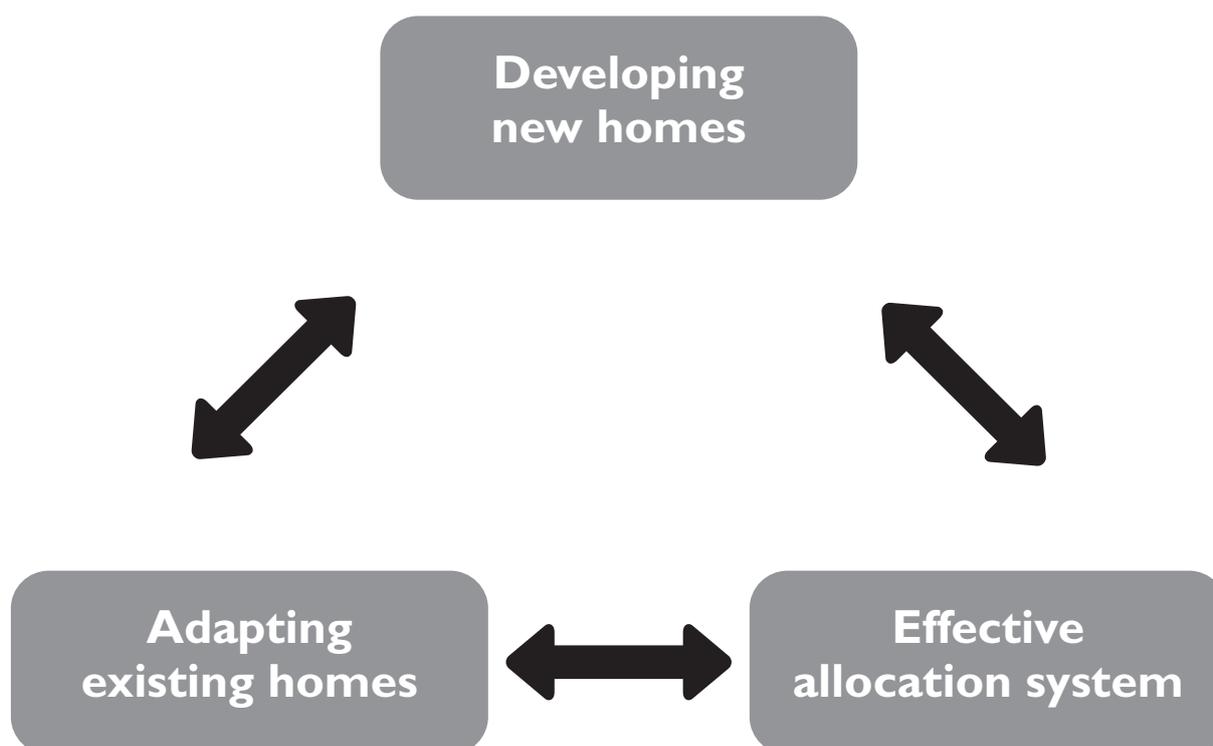
- Young and 'young middle-aged' people, some of whom have a learning disability as well as a mobility impairment, who are living with parents now in their 60s, 70s or 80s

- People who are living in supported housing – either shared housing or self-contained cluster accommodation – and who would like to move to more independent housing
- Disabled parents looking after young children or teenagers
- Adults who acquire a disability, either suddenly or over time, and use a wheelchair as a result of an accident, incident or illness.

As this brief description makes clear, people who use wheelchairs are highly diverse in respect of their life-stages, social circumstances and expectations. Many of those who have significant difficulties with their housing will need or prefer to have adaptations carried out to their existing property, while others will be looking to move to a different property – in some cases to set up a new household. The approach taken in this research is that there should be much greater linkage between the three key solutions: development of new homes designed to wheelchair standard; support for home adaptations across all tenures; and efficient allocation, within social housing, of existing accessible and adaptable homes.

Figure I

### **Three-way approach to tackling unmet need for wheelchair user housing**



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## Jonathan

*“It’s cut and dry – it’s not a case of ‘managing a few steps’.”*

Jonathan is a full time wheelchair user and was an infantry soldier until 1996. He has been living in his one-bedroom flat, owned by an organisation that provides housing for disabled and homeless ex-service personnel, for ten years. The property meets his access requirements, even though a second bedroom would be ideal, enabling friends and family to stay at his flat rather than a hotel. As Jonathan says about using a wheelchair, *“It’s cut and dry – it’s not a case of ‘managing a few steps’.”*

Prior to living in London, Jonathan lived in a two-bedroom terraced house in Yorkshire which was not wheelchair accessible. He got into the property via the back door, as the front door was inaccessible, and had a stair lift to reach the upper floors. He made this arrangement work at the time as the property was his own.

Jonathan’s circumstances changed when he was offered a job in London. He had only three weeks between his final exams at University and his start date in which to find somewhere to live. He says he was not ‘disability aware’, aside from his own experience, and had a house already so was not familiar with any organisations or sources of information to help him find a suitable property. He was however able to obtain suitable accommodation from his current housing provider.

He thinks it would be a good idea for all housing to be ‘lifelong’ housing, to make it accessible to everyone or at least a wider range of people. *“That’s my biggest gripe with hotels. Everybody can use a wet room and no-one can’t use one. So why not just provide wet rooms?”*



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## 2. The Research Project

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### 2.1 Previous research

The Survey of English Housing 2005/06 introduced specific information on the housing circumstances of wheelchair users in England. This has provided a much firmer basis than was previously available for estimating the scale of unmet housing need. In the 1990s, a review study (Harris *et al*, 1997) revealed the wide disparity in the figures arrived at in various previous studies, as well as showing that some estimates were focused on the need for new, purpose-built housing only, while others defined shortfall more widely and included the need for adaptations to existing homes.

Research commissioned by Habinteg and the Papworth Trust in 2000 centred on developing a planning model and method to map supply and demand in respect of wheelchair accessible housing (Papworth Trust *et al*, 2001). The model was then tested out in three local authorities. Use of the planning model required local authorities to carry out further primary data collection, as basic information in this area was very limited, and this proved a barrier to wide take-up of the method.

In 2003, the John Grooms Inquiry reported that there was an estimated shortage (UK-wide) of 'up to 300,000 new or adapted wheelchair accessible homes' (Ackroyd, 2003). The research presented here produces a lower estimate of unmet housing need than that given by the John Grooms Inquiry, in part because the Survey of English Housing relates to England only. It also provides a lower base, in terms of the total number of wheelchair users and wheelchair user households. The method of estimation used here takes account of variation in levels of wheelchair use and the diverse reasons why people may report their current home as unsuitable. Also, due to lack of data, the estimate refers to people living in private households and does not include unmet housing need among long term residents in residential or nursing homes who wish to move.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive published a report in 2006 entitled: *Wheelchair User Housing Study: An evaluation of users' experience and the evolution of design standards* (NIHE, 2006). This research used a qualitative approach to explore the functional, social and financial circumstances of people living in wheelchair standard housing. It looked at levels of satisfaction with the home and surrounding environment and explored the question of whether wheelchair standard housing was meeting the needs of its residents. Among its findings, the study reported that space restrictions, lack of storage and problems with external surroundings were reasons for dissatisfaction among the one third of respondents (10 individuals) who were not satisfied with their wheelchair standard home.

## 2. The Research Project

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### 2.2 Aims of the research

The research presented here relates to wheelchair users in England. The aims are:

- To demonstrate the extent of need for homes that are designed to full wheelchair standard, or can be easily adapted for residents who are wheelchair users
- To set out the legislative and policy context for developing accessible and adaptable homes
- To explore the significance of accessible housing in facilitating national policies and strategic plans e.g. inclusive communities, independent living, preventative services and personalisation
- To produce a national estimate for England of the unmet need for wheelchair user homes, followed by estimates for each of the English regions
- To show how estimates can be produced for individual local authorities and how a local authority can take account of specific local factors (e.g. age and income profile)
- To make recommendations on ways of reducing the unmet need and improving the response to demand for wheelchair user homes





### 2.3 Project design and method

The research is desk-based and does not include collection of primary data. There are six main tasks, all of which involve secondary data analysis or review of existing literature and documents:

- To produce a national estimate of unmet need for wheelchair user homes, based on the data relating to wheelchair users provided by the Survey of English Housing
- To produce up-to-date national figures relating to the supply and availability of wheelchair standard homes, both for the housing stock as a whole and in relation to social housing development and lettings
- To devise a method for arriving at an estimate of unmet housing need and an indicative requirement for new wheelchair user homes at local authority level
- To define and lay out the context of national policy and arrangements for regional and local strategic planning
- To identify the particular groups of people requiring wheelchair standard homes and summarise any relevant recent research
- To consider how local authorities and housing providers can make effective use of existing wheelchair standard homes and increase the supply of accessible properties

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## Virendra

*“I wanted to ...be independent.”*

Virendra lives in a first floor wheelchair designed flat, part of a block of flats designed and developed specifically for wheelchair users. He has lived there since 1988 and his wife, who is not a wheelchair user, joined him in 2002.

Virendra is largely satisfied that his property meets his needs. It is wheelchair accessible and includes both a bathroom that is large enough for his wheelchair and wide enough doors. He would prefer larger bedrooms, as manoeuvring his wheelchair can be difficult, and larger living space to more easily accommodate two people. The windows are large with a nice aspect but a balcony or terrace would have given some valued private outside space, as he does not get much use from the communal garden.

The property was specially adapted to suit his needs. It contains a Chiltern bath, ceiling hoist and mobile hoist which allows him to live more independently and not rely on his wife or staff for everything.

Before moving into his current property, Virendra lived with his brother in private accommodation. At that time he had less need of adaptations but eventually some adaptations work was carried out, including installation of a suitably sized bathroom. As his condition developed, he had to apply for more accessible housing from the council. He said; *“I wanted to stand on my own two feet and be independent”*. He waited on the housing list for a long time before getting his current property.

Virendra is on a working group for mobility transport and is interested in design issues. His advice to wheelchair housing providers is that attention should not only be placed on wheelchair dwellings themselves but the entire building and communal areas – for example, external pathways with even paving slabs or the key fob being at the right height for wheelchair users.



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## 3. Policy Context

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### 3.1 Background

How 'visible' is housing for wheelchair users in strategic documents aimed at public authorities, social landlords and private housing developers; and what policies are available to ensure that wheelchair users can expect a fair and equitable response to their housing requirements? This section draws on a selection of commentators and policies that are either directly concerned with housing for wheelchair users, or have policy relevance to housing specifically developed for the wheelchair user market.

Making the case for wheelchair accessible housing in policy and strategic terms has a history of its own. Brief but significant guidance issued by government and aimed at providing wheelchair accessible housing in the social housing sector was issued by the Housing Corporation in 1991. By this date, the Department of the Environment had provided a definition of 'wheelchair housing' that acknowledged that attributes of the model were *'interpreted differently by local authorities and housing associations and between local authority departments'* (Housing Corporation, 1991). The data collected are therefore not always consistent. The confusion between 'wheelchair housing' and 'mobility housing' became a problem for some practitioners who saw the terms as interchangeable at that time. This mirrors the problem that wheelchair user housing has now, in frequently being confused with Lifetime Homes.

A major focus on wheelchair accessible housing was evident in the argument for extension of the Building Regulations (Part M) to encompass the design criteria for Lifetime Homes. The focus on a lower level of accessibility meant this was of limited relevance to many wheelchair users and it had the effect of shutting down debate around wheelchair standard housing, both in terms of its development and the numbers of homes required. Even when the issue was discussed within the Part M debate (Buildings Regulations, 1999), in a context of equalities and minimising stereotypical assumptions about the needs of disabled people, there was a concern that wheelchair user housing would be pigeon-holed into bespoke or 'one-off' solutions (Wren *et al*, 2000). While there has been some progress, many aspects of these long running discourses still remain in policy and strategy regarding wheelchair standard housing and its users.

## 3. Policy Context

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### 3.2 Independent living

Policy development has two key strands that make up the independent living agenda: physical environments that foster and optimise independence; and financial arrangements that offer personal choice and control.

#### 3.2.1 Inclusive spatial environments

Developed in the 1980s, 'universal design' is based on the notion that design (and here, housing design) has to encompass all of society and should be adjusted accordingly (Duncan, 2007). In addition to purpose-built wheelchair housing, these 'adjustments' apply to property added to the wheelchair accessible stock through the application of Disabled Facilities Grants (Heywood and Mackintosh, 2007).

There is an acknowledgement of the need for further study and understanding of the universal design concept in areas that have considerable resonance with current housing policy – community, work and enterprise, sustainability and the need for partnerships to ensure beneficial outcomes for individuals and society as a whole (Conway, 2008). Universal design includes the element of user involvement, termed 'inclusive design', and it is this term that is now generally used to describe the universal design concept (O'Brien, 2006).

Space standards are the foundation of wheelchair user housing. Having enough space to facilitate manoeuvrability for whole families (including families with more than one wheelchair user) and their visitors requires specific identification of design criteria, understanding of the wider spatial and social issues and a commitment to produce a useable product (Goldsmith, 2000).

For housing providers, especially those who do not specialise in wheelchair user housing, the needs of wheelchair users are largely focused on the immediate dwelling (French and Swain, 2006). As the remit and activities of many social housing providers extend to work and skills programmes and the inclusive neighbourhood envisaged by Sustainable Communities strategies, the requirements of wheelchair users in the broader spatial environment become more pressing.

The *Wheelchair Housing Design Guide*, 2nd Ed (Thorpe and Habinteg, 2006) highlighted the practical issues that had to be confronted in developing housing in unpromising locations, such as multi-storey dwellings, and in complex urban environments, where conversion of existing buildings on brownfield sites is likely to be the emphasis for many developers. Further work commissioned by housing associations to clarify the position on funding of adaptations suggested a model agreement between housing associations and local authorities that should lead to more targeted and streamlined processes for those requiring adaptations (Heywood and Mackintosh, 2008).

### 3.2.2 Personalisation

The emergence of the personalisation agenda is part of the development of a user-centred approach to personal assistance and support in all aspects of health and social care. Housing and support organisations have been central in the development of this approach, including the use of individual budgets. Person-centred care and support is underpinned by what many housing organisations would term 'customer focus', whereby the emphasis is on customers' views on the services they receive. This focus is significant; it links to the social model of disability and provides a new framework of reference for providers – that of customer power through control over the use of individual budgets.

Personalisation policies follow from principles of person-centred care and support (O'Brien and O'Brien, 2000). They also have resonance with policies of active citizenship, localism, independence, responsibility and choice that are features of the overarching national agenda and political debate on the role of the state and the individual.

### 3.2.3 Equalities

While the advent of equalities legislation has enshrined general aspects of access to housing, the inclusion of the category 'wheelchair user housing' is rarely signified.

Historical tensions in housing policy in relation to disability (such as the provision of special needs housing alongside the focus on accessibility in the mainstream) anticipated that existing and emerging guidelines within 'equalities' policy and practice, such as the combined Equalities Commission, could have the effect of dividing groups on the basis of social and health needs, rather than maintaining a position whereby the guiding principle was accessibility for all (Milner, 2005).

Nevertheless, the Equalities Act 2010 is a potential landmark in overarching policy which can affect the quality of life of wheelchair users. Providers of buildings and services in the public and private sector now have a common benchmark under the Act, and prescribed responsibilities. For public bodies, the emergence of statutory Equality Impact Assessments has provided the impetus to look closely at the effect of policy and practice on minority groups, including wheelchair users.

The report for the Office for Disability Issues on the implementation of the Disability Equality Duty in England reminds policy makers that there is a potential gap between attempts to enshrine policy in legislation and the continuing commitment to maintain real and tangible progress on the ground (ODI, 2010a).

## 3. Policy Context

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### 3.2.4 Choice

Within the social housing sector, Choice Based Lettings (CBL) programmes give housing applicants some choice over where they want to live (CLG, 2008b). There have been some difficulties in the application of CBL for people with disabilities, due to incomplete information held at a local level and many local authorities directing wheelchair users away from the main CBL lists for further assessment and allocation via the 'special' (and often hidden) lists of adapted and accessible homes.

To help rectify this situation, consultation with housing practitioners influenced the production of *Fair and Flexible: Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England – Equality Impact Assessment* (CLG, 2009c). Although wheelchair user housing is not referred to directly, the practices governing the letting of social housing to people with disabilities are highlighted as a possible source of discrimination in relation to relocating across local authority boundaries, for example for work opportunities.

Private sector agencies specialising in accessible and adaptable housing for sale or rent are beginning to advertise to people who are searching the internet for a suitable home (Accessible Property, 2010). It is interesting to note that access to information on wheelchair accessible holiday lettings has been available for some years.

The Welfare Reform Act, 2009 gives eligible disabled people a 'right to control' and the right to exercise choice over how to spend the public funding they receive in relation to social care and support. Disabled people were centrally involved in the development of the 'right' in practice. For housing practitioners, the Act is particularly significant as it modifies the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, which provides for Disabled Facilities Grants, to ensure people in receipt of this funding have the 'right to control' (ODI, 2010b).

## 3.3 Localism and strategic planning

Localism has become the underpinning concept for policy affecting strategic planning by local authorities and the provision of local services, as well as an increasingly important focus for deciding where public money will (and will not) be spent. Existing strategic frameworks, if retained, offer the potential to include, specifically, the requirements for wheelchair users.

### 3.3.1 Renewal, regeneration and neighbourhoods

In policy and strategic documents, issues of specific concern to wheelchair users are mainly subsumed into the general category of 'disability'. There is therefore an element of using proxies to find reference to wheelchair users in such documents.

However, housing practitioners and others familiar with the management of wheelchair user housing understand that difficult locations and antisocial behaviour can be particularly stressful for wheelchair users. Government agendas have placed inclusion and accessibility centre stage in housing management practice and local regeneration programmes.

Economic inclusion has become a key focus in regeneration policy, with a specific emphasis on areas of deprivation, to *'provide a clearer link between neighbourhood renewal and wider regeneration and economic interventions'* (CLG, 2009a). This emphasis is linked to residents of areas which experience high levels of deprivation and limited economic opportunity.

Data on the relationship between disability and deprivation do not refer specifically to people who live in wheelchair standard housing, or need such housing, but they do show a general picture of higher levels of disability in deprived areas, relative to the national average. The rationale for focusing on all groups of people with a disability within these frameworks is based on the positive impact of regeneration activities through prioritising the health, economic and general needs of disabled members of already deprived communities. The realisation of the policies is significant for any new provision produced through regeneration programmes; Government agencies already have to ensure that the needs of diverse communities are met on the basis of equalities and community cohesion.

The Homes and Communities Agency's 'Single Conversation' process and its Integrated Performance Framework have aimed to link capital investment for new homes with the wider economic purposes of places. This has offered an opportunity to include wheelchair user housing as part of a number of strategies and indicators for healthy and inclusive communities.

### 3.3.2 Identifying wheelchair user housing within strategies

Local government modernisation has given all 'minority' interests the opportunity to be included in the strategic thinking of service providers and be represented in Local Strategic Partnerships, where representatives from the public and private sector have met to plan for sustainable communities. There are a number of bodies that have a duty to co-operate as statutory agencies listed under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007.

The location of wheelchair user housing, as well as the actual built form, is critical in relation to transport, education, employment and general social inclusion. The emphasis has to be balanced between user-specific personal assistance or support and services accessed by the community as a whole. Wheelchair user housing cannot be a marginal issue within the policy of sustainable communities, as the policy focuses on inclusion and neighbourhoods.

### 3. Policy Context

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The *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods* strategy introduced a package of changes to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), including removal of the requirement for 40% funding from the local authority to add to the funding (60%) from central government (CLG, 2008a). As a grant that is no longer ring-fenced, the DFG budget is now firmly set within the wider context of strategic planning and local agreements. A report by Foundations, the national body for home improvement agencies, argues that '*it is vital to break down the single solution mentality caused by the current domination of the DFG ... This could be achieved by changing local adaptations policies to deliver multiple forms of assistance, using the 40% contribution which previously had to be committed to the DFG pot*' (Ramsay, 2010).

In London, the project to develop an Accessible Housing Register aims to make it easier for disabled housing applicants to use choice-based lettings, as well as to improve the allocation of accessible properties by making it more efficient and effective. Social landlords (and the private sector) are encouraged to participate. The quality of this service is directly related to the quality of information on the accessible housing stock obtained by housing providers (Mayor of London, 2010a). Other local authorities in different parts of the country have also established various types of accessible housing register.

The Housing Strategy for London continues the established policy that all new housing in London will be built to the Lifetime Homes Standard and 10% will be built to wheelchair standard or be easily adaptable for wheelchair use. This applies to both public sector and private housing (Mayor of London, 2010b). A number of other local authorities are now taking a similar approach.

The *Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation* (HAPPI) report looked at the longer term position of older people and their housing in terms of design, quality and availability (CLG/DoH, HCA, 2010). This report set the context with reference to Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods, moving away from notions of dependency and lack of choice to that of a discerning older population who will demand high standards and a range of housing models to choose from. The vision includes the need for new design, environmental and spatial considerations.

The *Wheelchair Housing Design Guide* 2nd Ed (Thorpe and Habinteg, 2006) remains the most comprehensive, cited and authoritative advisory guide covering the concept and technical aspects of creating useable housing for wheelchair users. This publication was endorsed by the Housing Corporation, which saw it as a way of ensuring quality from its continued investment in wheelchair standard housing. The design guide also played an essential part in the inclusion of wheelchair standard housing within the Housing Corporation's *Design and Quality Standards* (Housing Corporation, 2007).

The Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) within the Department of Health has produced useful factsheets and developmental work on Extra Care housing and Lifetime Homes, as well as including private sector providers

and housing developers in the discussion on accessible housing. It has also engaged in sustainability issues, including Eco Homes (Housing LIN, 2010).

The issue of Lifetimes Homes has brought housing and health together around sustainable communities and the development of Local Strategic Partnerships (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2009b). Again, the emphasis is on better design standards and the availability of more housing options to enable '*ongoing activities within their communities*'. This approach towards partnership acknowledges possible health prevention through good housing set within supportive communities and neighbourhoods.

The Department of Health has also introduced personalised care planning for people (including children) with long term limiting illness. The requirements of wheelchair users who choose to use this system of support may be highlighted within the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment conducted by Health and Local Authorities. This and other community based and localised initiatives stem from the 2006 White Paper, *Our health, our care, our say – a new direction for community services* (DoH, 2006), which served to bridge the strategic gap between health and social care. However, wheelchair users are not specifically mentioned within '*support for people with longer term needs*' which illustrates how the generic approach to disability does not capture the enduring and specific housing requirements of wheelchair users and the effect of unsuitable housing on their long term physical and mental health.

Local Development Frameworks were introduced by the LGPIH Act (2007) and set out the 'place shaping' agenda, including the 'duty to involve'. The Government published statutory guidance alongside the LGPIH Act 2007 entitled, '*Creating Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities*' which included the duty to involve and engage communities in delivering priorities for an area.

All planning authorities have had to construct a Local Development Framework (LDF) including a 'Statement of Community Involvement'. Disabled people are among the groups that should be consulted e.g. the perspective on growing needs of children in wheelchairs is central to the successful functioning of families, where housing service providers have to take account of the need for changes in wheelchair size, manoeuvrability and the space to provide room for internally and externally used wheelchairs (Clutton, 2006).

In summary, reference to wheelchair user housing and facilities to enable full accessibility and inclusion are often implicit in policy documents, but explicit in very few. In the housing sphere, design guidance is in place and there have been significant positive moves in some local authority areas to improve housing choice and mobility, but the links with wider local strategic planning are generally weak.

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## Louise

*“Hearing “no, no, no” all the time got very demoralising. It is nice to know that it wasn’t just an automated response.”*

After nine years on a housing waiting list, Louise finally moved from her parents’ house in Manchester to a housing association property in Ilkley, Bradford. She had been desperate for her own home and independence and took the first wheelchair accessible property offered to her.

The property was in a rural location, however, and presented her with a number of challenges. She had a four hour round trip to go to her sports training, a sloping road made it difficult to push her wheelchair up or down it and the roads were not gritted in the winter. As a result, she was mostly housebound and socially isolated.

After a further five year wait, Louise was offered a wheelchair bungalow in Leeds in 2009. Only minor adaptations were needed to the property in order for it to meet her individual needs. In contrast to her previous property, she says the bungalow offers ‘the best of both worlds’ – not right in the city centre, but only a twenty minute bus journey with good transport links and bus stops within pushing distance.

Louise has found it incredibly hard to find suitable housing and thinks that there doesn’t seem to be any (or enough) wheelchair housing. She found the process very frustrating and hopeless because she just got refused repeatedly: *“Hearing “no, no, no” all the time got very demoralising. It is nice to know that: ‘No we don’t have any property’ wasn’t just an automated response and that it wasn’t just me.”*

Louise thinks that councils need to change their attitude towards housing people who use a wheelchair. She also thinks that empty properties should be adapted and that this would be a cheaper, more realistic option than waiting for new homes to be built.



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# 4. Estimate of unmet housing need in England

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## 4.1 Data, definitions and assumptions

This chapter provides an estimate of unmet need for wheelchair user housing in England. For the purposes of the study, 'wheelchair user housing' includes both properties built to wheelchair design standard and housing that has been adapted to enable individual wheelchair users to make full use of their home.

There have been a number of approaches to estimating the need for wheelchair user housing in England, although no research has been carried out recently at a national level (see chapter 2). This study uses data from the Survey of English Housing (SEH) as the basis for the calculation. More specifically, the data used are taken from three questions asked in the Survey of English Housing 2007/08:

- *Do you (or the person with a disability) use a wheelchair?*
- *Does this illness or disability make it necessary to have specially adapted accommodation?*
- *Is your accommodation suitable for the person(s) who has/have this illness or disability?*

The calculation is based on the following broad definitions and assumptions:

- Households that have a wheelchair user, (referred to as 'wheelchair user households'), provide the basis for the calculations. The SEH data show that 4% of wheelchair user households have more than one wheelchair user. This means that the number of 'wheelchair user households' is lower than the number of individual wheelchair users.
- The unmet housing need among 'indoor' wheelchair users is the number of wheelchair users who report that they use their wheelchair indoors, they need specially adapted accommodation and their current accommodation is unsuitable.
- The unmet housing need among 'outdoors only' wheelchair users – those who report that they use their wheelchair outdoors only – is calculated in the same way as for indoor users, except that only a proportion of those who report their accommodation as unsuitable are included in the estimate.

## 4. Estimate of unmet housing need in England

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This proportional figure is arrived at by using previous research findings, which indicated the various reasons (including 'home not designed for wheelchair use') why wheelchair users considered their housing unsuitable (Papworth Trust *et al*, 2001).

In order to adjust the findings to 2009/2010, the percentage growth in the total number of homes in England since 2007 is used to arrive at more up-to-date estimates.

As noted in chapter 1, the needs estimate does not take account of wheelchair users who are living in residential care and nursing homes. It also does not include disabled people who are not wheelchair users but who may benefit greatly from living in accommodation with the space and design features found in a wheelchair standard property e.g. users of a walking frame or frail older people of small stature.

### 4.2 Contextual data

Key data on 1) individual wheelchair users and 2) wheelchair user households are set out in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 respectively. The headline figures are given below to provide some context for the calculation of the estimate.

#### 4.2.1 Data from the Survey of English Housing

- The Survey of English Housing 2007/08 reported that there were about 603,000 wheelchair users in England (1.2% of the general population). Taking into account the rate of population growth (about 0.7%), an adjusted estimate of the number of wheelchair users in 2010 is about 607,200.
- The majority (60%) of wheelchair users are age 65 or over and 66% are female. Males predominate in all age groups up to 45-64, while females predominate in the age groups 65 and over.
- Wheelchair users live in about 2.8% of households in England, which equated to about 582,000 dwellings in 2007/08. Around 4% of these households have more than one wheelchair user and 12% of households that have someone with a disability or serious medical condition are also wheelchair user households.
- The majority of wheelchair user households contain individuals who use wheelchairs 'outdoors only' (74% or 429,000 households), with around a quarter using them indoors (26% or 153,000 households). Taking into account the percentage growth in dwellings since 2007 (about 0.8%), the adjusted estimate of wheelchair households in 2010 is 586,656 – 154,224 with 'indoor' users and 432,432 with 'outdoors only' users.

- A little over half of wheelchair user households (55%) are owner-occupiers, with 39% in social rented housing and about 6% in private rented accommodation. The majority of wheelchair user households (78%) live in either a house or bungalow, with 22% being in either a flat or a maisonette. Around 13% of wheelchair user households are living in sheltered accommodation (including extra care housing).
- In three quarters of wheelchair user households (74%), the medical condition or disability necessitates specially adapted accommodation. Around 79% of the homes occupied by wheelchair user households are reported by the resident respondents to be suitable for the person(s) who has/have a disability, with 21% reported to be unsuitable. In households where individuals use a wheelchair indoors, just over half (51%) find it easy to manoeuvre a wheelchair around their homes, with a similar proportion (49%) finding it difficult.
- In terms of the size and composition of wheelchair user households, 32% are single person households, 45% are two person households and 23% contain three or more people. Around 13% of wheelchair user households have dependent children.

### 4.2.2 Data from the English House Condition Survey

- There are around 22,189,000 households in England. About 70% of them are owner-occupiers, with 18% in social rented housing and 12% in private rented accommodation. With regard to the tenure of households in wheelchair standard properties, the most reliable data source is the English House Condition Survey 2007 (EHCS).
- According to the EHCS 2007, there were an estimated 114,814 (0.5%) homes in England that met all its 11 criteria for an 'accessible and adaptable' property (see Appendix 3). Taking into account wheelchair standard properties added to the housing stock (for rent or low cost home ownership) with funding from the Homes and Communities Agency in the period 2008-10 (15,712 new homes), the estimated number of 'accessible and adaptable' properties in England rises to about 130,526. In these fully accessible properties, the tenure of households is almost equally divided between owner-occupied (49%) and social rented (49%). The remaining 2% of fully accessible homes are privately rented.
- Looking at the age of these dwellings, about 4% (or about 5,500 homes) were built pre-1944 and 12% (or about 15,100 units) were built between 1945 and 1964. The majority of 'accessible and adaptable' units (84%) have been built since 1980. This compares with 20% of the total number of homes in England having been built since 1980.

## 4. Estimate of unmet housing need in England

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- In terms of the location of 'accessible and adaptable' homes, 58% of such homes are in suburban residential areas, 30% are in rural areas and 13% are in cities and other urban centres. This compares with 59% of the total number of homes in England being in suburban areas, 19% in rural areas and 22% in cities and other urban centres.

### 4.2.3 Data on new developments, lettings and allocations

- In 2008/09 there was a net addition of about 166,600 properties to the English housing stock. Three in ten (29% or 48,276 homes) of these were funded at least in part by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).
- Of the new dwellings funded by the HCA in 2008/09, 8,805 were reported to be to wheelchair standard, representing nearly one in five (18%) of all its funded new properties in that year. The majority of the prospective wheelchair standard homes (82%) were reported to be for the social rented sector and 18% were for low cost home ownership. Just under half (47%) were classed as general needs properties, 37% were homes for older people and 16% were supported housing.
- In 2009/10, the HCA funded 6,907 new homes that were reported to be to wheelchair standard. Around 87% of these properties were for the social rented sector and 13% were for low cost home ownership. At 56%, the proportion of general needs properties was higher than in 2008/09, with correspondingly lower proportions for supported housing and homes for older people.
- A specific break down of the number of wheelchair standard properties within the remaining 118,324 new homes (166,600 minus the 48,276 homes funded by the HCA) that were added to the housing stock in 2008/09 is not available.
- The CORE database holds information provided by housing associations and local authorities across England on social housing lettings. The CORE data on general needs tenants (2008/09) report on 7,757 new wheelchair user households and 7,706 lettings of wheelchair standard properties. While the number of wheelchair user households and wheelchair standard properties were closely matched, only 22% of the wheelchair standard properties were actually allocated to wheelchair user households (see Appendix 4a for regional variations).
- With regard to sheltered housing tenants, the CORE data (2008/09) report on 11,331 lettings of wheelchair standard properties and 5,213 wheelchair user households among new tenants. Even with this number of fully accessible properties available, only just over a quarter of wheelchair standard homes (26%) were allocated to wheelchair user households in sheltered housing (see Appendix 4b for regional variations).

### 4.2.4 Data on adaptations through Disabled Facilities Grants

- According to the English House Condition Survey, 0.5% of homes in England are fully accessible and another 4% could be made fully accessible and adaptable for wheelchair users with minor alterations. A minor alteration is defined as changes to a property which need no structural change and cost under £1,000. The types of properties that would be most easily adapted, unsurprisingly, are bungalows (14% requiring only minor alterations) and ground floor flats (7% requiring minor alterations). Around two-thirds of properties are either problematic (32%) or not feasible (34%) to adapt. These are primarily small terraced houses (77%) and homes built pre-1919 (63%).
- The number of housing renewals or adaptations has been on the increase since 1996/97, when there were 20,060 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). The figure for 2008/09 was 41,790. The amount spent on DFGs in that period grew from about £92 million to £285 million.
- In 2007-08, approximately 70% of DFGs were for older people and the average grant was £6,559.

### 4.3 Calculating the unmet housing need

The steps in determining the need for wheelchair user housing in England are set out below. The individual calculations are provided in Table 1.

**Step 1:** Using raw data from the Survey of English Housing, statistical analysis (SPSS) was used to determine the total number of wheelchair user households in England and also the proportions that were 'indoor' wheelchair users and 'outdoors only' users.

**Step 2:** Findings from Step 1 relating to 2007 were then adjusted to take into account the growth in the number of all households in England up to 2008/09.

**Step 3:** Calculation of unmet need for 'indoor' wheelchair users – percentage of 'indoor' wheelchair user households saying that they needed specially adapted accommodation and that their current home was unsuitable.

**Step 4:** Calculation of unmet need for 'outdoors only' wheelchair users – percentage of 'outdoors only' wheelchair user households saying that they needed specially adapted accommodation and their current home was unsuitable – as well as the percentage saying that their homes were unsuitable because they were not designed for wheelchair use.

**Step 5:** Unmet housing need for wheelchair user households overall – the sum of unmet need for 'indoor' and 'outdoors only' wheelchair user households.

## 4. Estimate of unmet housing need in England

Table 1

Steps	Calculations	Results
Step 1	Indoor wheelchair users <i>26% of 582,000 wheelchair user households</i>	<b>153,000</b>
	Outdoors only wheelchair users <i>74% of 582,000 wheelchair user households</i>	<b>429,000</b>
<b>Total wheelchair user households in England (2007/08)</b>		<b>582,000</b>
Step 2	Indoor wheelchair users (adjusted) <i>153,000 x 1.008</i> <i>(growth in dwelling in England 08/09 – 0.8%)</i>	<b>154,224</b>
	Outdoors only wheelchair users (adjusted) <i>429,000 x 1.008</i> <i>(growth in dwellings in England 08/09 – 0.8%)</i>	<b>432,432</b>
<b>Total wheelchair user households in England (2009/10)</b>		<b>586,656</b>
Step 3	Unmet housing need for indoor wheelchair users <i>154,224 x 26%</i> <i>(unsuitable homes and need specially adapted property)</i>	<b>40,100</b>
Step 4	Unmet housing need for outdoors only wheelchair users <i>432,432 x 18%</i> <i>(unsuitable homes and need specially adapted property)</i> and <i>79,567 x 48%</i> <i>(design of homes unsuitable for wheelchair use)</i>	<b>38,200</b>
Step 5	Unmet housing need among wheelchair user households in England	<b>78,300</b>

#### 4.4 Regional data on unmet housing need

Data from the Survey of English Housing 2007/08 reveal the variation in unmet need for wheelchair user housing between the English regions. Nationally, 13% of wheelchair user households have unmet housing needs. This figure increases to 23% in the North West region. The South East region (5%) shows the lowest level of unmet need.

Table 2

<b>1</b> <b>Government Office Regions</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Total number of households</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Number of wheelchair user households</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Number of wheelchair user households with unmet housing need</b>	<b>5</b> <b>% of wheelchair user households with unmet housing need</b>
<b>North West</b>	3,050,000	87,584	20,307	23%
<b>London</b>	3,220,000	68,432	12,517	18%
<b>North East</b>	1,144,000	36,176	6,538	18%
<b>West Midlands</b>	2,309,000	78,512	11,822	15%
<b>Yorkshire and The Humber</b>	2,237,000	58,352	6,674	11%
<b>East Midlands</b>	1,902,000	57,344	5,707	10%
<b>East of England</b>	2,438,000	58,352	5,420	9%
<b>South West</b>	2,317,000	58,352	4,726	8%
<b>South East</b>	3,517,000	83,552	4,590	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,189,000</b>	<b>586,656</b>	<b>78,300</b>	<b>13%</b>



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## 5. Applying the estimate in local planning

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The estimated number of wheelchair user households in England with unmet housing needs is 78,300, as shown in chapter 4. This figure has also been broken down to regional level, again using data from the Survey of English Housing 2007/08. It is not advisable to use the Survey of English Housing data to calculate the unmet housing need at local authority level, due to the small sample sizes for each local authority.

### 5.1 Estimating unmet housing need at local authority level

The simple method for producing an indicative local authority estimate is to take the regional figure for the percentage of all households that are wheelchair user households (Table 3, Column 4) and multiply this by the number of all households in the local authority. This gives an estimate for the number of wheelchair user households. Multiply this by the regional figure for the percentage of wheelchair user households with unmet housing need (Table 3, Column 5).

#### Example 1:

A large local authority area in the North West region has 188,000 households. The approximate unmet need in this area would be:

$188,000 \text{ households} \times 3\% \text{ (column 4)} = 5,640 \text{ wheelchair user households; then}$   
 $5,640 \times 23\% \text{ (column 5)} = \mathbf{1,297}$  wheelchair user households with unmet housing need.

#### Example 2:

A smaller local authority in the South West region has 64,000 households. The approximate unmet need in this area would be:

$64,000 \text{ households} \times 3\% \text{ (column 4)} = 1,920 \text{ wheelchair user households; then}$   
 $1,920 \times 8\% \text{ (column 5)} = \mathbf{154}$  wheelchair user households with unmet housing need.

## 5. Applying the estimate in local planning

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By this method, all local authorities in the region will show the same percentage of wheelchair user households with unmet housing need (Table 3, Column 5). Although it does not account for variation in levels of unmet need between local authorities within a region, the method is based on good regional data and will produce a much more accurate estimate than is likely to have been previously available.

Table 3

<b>1</b> <b>Government Office Regions</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Total number of households</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Number of wheelchair user households</b>	<b>4</b> <b>% of all households that are wheelchair user households</b>	<b>5</b> <b>% of wheelchair user households with unmet housing need</b>
<b>North West</b>	3,025,000	87,584	3%	23%
<b>London</b>	3,220,000	68,432	2%	18%
<b>North East</b>	1,144,000	36,176	3%	18%
<b>West Midlands</b>	2,309,000	78,512	3%	15%
<b>Yorkshire and The Humber</b>	2,237,000	58,352	3%	11%
<b>East Midlands</b>	1,902,000	57,344	3%	10%
<b>East of England</b>	2,438,000	58,352	2%	9%
<b>South West</b>	2,317,000	58,352	3%	8%
<b>South East</b>	3,517,000	83,552	2%	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,189,000</b>	<b>586,656</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>13%</b>

Where a local authority is known or considered to be very different from the regional average, it may be possible to use local secondary data to justify varying the regional percentage figure for that local authority.

- A local authority with a relatively high proportion of older people (age 65+) is likely to have more wheelchair users, although it should be noted that a lower percentage of older people use their wheelchair indoors as well as outdoors (CLG, 2009b)
- Income levels and relative affluence or deprivation are also relevant factors. In general, households containing someone with a disability have a lower household income than other households (DWP, 2010). Some local areas, on the other hand, have a relatively high number of more affluent older people who are in a position to resolve their housing needs through paying to adapt their home or purchasing a suitable new property. The picture is further complicated by data from the Survey of English Housing, which suggest that wheelchair users, overall, are located in more and less deprived areas in much the same proportions as the general population.
- A further factor to consider is the current level of local provision: If there is a relatively good supply of accessible and adapted homes, both in the private and public sector, and if social housing is appropriately allocated, the level of unmet need should clearly be lower.

A local authority may decide to carry out more specific research to investigate the circumstances and housing needs of particular groups of wheelchair users, or to build up a clearer picture of existing housing supply and availability. Among the groups considered in chapter 1, there is often very little information (for planning purposes) on the housing needs of young and 'young middle-aged' adults living with parents, disabled parents with dependent children or people (of any age) living in residential care homes. Key research partners and groups to be included are: Organisations of disabled people, occupational therapists, social care and health commissioners, care managers, housing and lettings managers, specialist schools and colleges, carers' organisations, voluntary agencies offering advice, advocacy or specific services, tenants' and residents' groups and providers of housing and support.

### **5.2 Improving housing supply and availability**

The approach taken in this research is that the unmet housing need can best be tackled through a judicious combination of the following: Developing new homes to wheelchair standard; adapting existing homes; and (in the public sector) allocating vacant accessible and adaptable homes to appropriate households. While these are all well-established approaches, they need to be linked and considered together so that decisions can be made about which aspects require greater focus and attention.

## 5. Applying the estimate in local planning

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With regard to new housing development, a number of authorities have adopted the policy that 10% of all new homes should be built to full wheelchair standard – or to a standard that makes them readily adaptable for wheelchair users. The number of new wheelchair user homes produced in this way will obviously depend on the total number of properties built, which is currently very difficult to predict. Having worked out its estimate of unmet need, a local authority will be able to see what proportion of the unmet housing need will (or would) be met – and over what period of time – by an effective 10% policy. This can then inform decisions about the projected balance between new build, adaptations and allocations. A 10% policy also raises the profile of wheelchair user housing and brings it into mainstream planning for all housing tenures, which is important in promoting wider choice for wheelchair users.

Getting a good balance between types and sizes of new properties is also important. Extra care housing and housing designated for older people can be very popular, especially if well-situated. Other older people may simply wish to move to bungalow or other smaller home with good accessibility. There also needs to be a full range of homes for families, couples and single people, some of whom require an extra bedroom to accommodate a personal assistant. In addition, there should be some provision for fully accessible supported housing, with or without shared facilities.

The data on social housing allocations given in chapter 4 (and see Appendix 4a and 4b) show that the great majority of new lettings of wheelchair user housing are not actually made to wheelchair user households. The reasons for this are not clear but it may be due to a combination of the following:

- Pressure to let vacant properties quickly in order to meet targets
- Prioritisation of other needs, if the property is otherwise suitable for a high priority household
- Low priority given to disabled people who are adequately housed but in high social need (e.g. living with parents)
- Inaccessible, remote or otherwise poor location, so the property is turned down by wheelchair user applicants
- Allocation to a household containing someone who is ill, frail or disabled and not a wheelchair user but who may gain significant benefit from the accessibility features of the home
- Narrow range of property types, so there is mismatch between applicant households and properties that become available
- Problems for disabled people with support needs in moving across local authority boundaries because their care/support services are not portable
- Landlord's desire to avoid customised adaptations for new tenants

Having looked at the CORE data on new lettings for its area, a local authority should consider the scale of such lettings to non-wheelchair user households and the reasons for any apparent mismatch. It should then decide, along with its partner housing providers, if specific changes are required to the way in which accessible and wheelchair user properties are allocated.

With regard to adaptations, it is important to bear in mind that the figure for unmet housing need only relates to wheelchair user households. While wheelchair users will sometimes (but by no means always) need relatively major adaptations if living in an unsuitable home, in numerical terms they comprise only about 12% of disabled people and so there will be many others who also require support through provision of adaptations.





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## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

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The majority of households with a wheelchair user report that their home is suitable for their needs, with just over one in five (21%) saying it is unsuitable. The national estimate of unmet need (78,300 households) translates to an estimated 240 households in an 'average' local (housing) authority (with 68,064 households or a population of 158,000).

The figures are not huge, the solutions are not complicated and most of the mechanisms to increase the supply of suitably designed homes and improve the accessibility of people's existing homes are already in place. The benefits for individuals, for the community and for the public purse are clear. A well-designed and manageable home can be the key factor in enabling younger disabled people to leave the parental home and achieve independent living in an appropriate and timely way. For older people, it can make the difference between staying in their own home or moving into a residential care home, as well as reducing the need for home care and helping to prevent falls and other accidents resulting in hospital admission. And for families with children, it helps to ensure that disabled children can gain confidence and self-reliance through enjoying and having control over their home environment. This in turn helps to lay the groundwork for more independent living in adult life. All of this has consequent benefits for family members and informal carers, as well as facilitating greater involvement in community and social life, education and employment.

As already suggested, a strategic approach to housing for wheelchair users, and accessible housing more generally, involves balancing the need for new-build homes, adaptations to existing homes and effective allocation of rented homes. It is for individual local authorities and their partners to decide how to strike this balance, taking into account:

- the current pattern of housing supply
- the prospects for new build developments – both in private and public sector housing
- demand for (and provision of) home adaptations
- turnover of accessible homes available for renting to new tenants

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

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### Recommendations

1. The Homes and Communities Agency should continue to provide funding approvals for new wheelchair standard homes on the same scale as in 2008/09 and 2009/10 (averaging around 7,850 new homes per year). These homes should include a range of types and sizes of properties to suit wheelchair users of all ages. Data should be made available on the number of wheelchair standard homes completed with HCA funding each year.
2. Local authorities should require the inclusion of wheelchair standard homes in all new developments that are suitably located and provide reasonable access to local amenities. The type, size and market for such homes should be carefully considered at the planning stage, to avoid stereotyping of wheelchair user households and their needs.
3. With reference to recommendations 1 and 2 above, local authorities and their partners should use the estimate of unmet need to set targets for the development of new wheelchair standard homes over a period of five years. This should include consideration of types of homes required (including general needs, extra care and supported housing) and priorities in relation to local policy (e.g. personalisation and individual budgets).
4. Adaptations and effective social housing allocations are integral to the achievement of equality in housing – ensuring that disabled people can make choices and live alongside others in their own homes. Local authorities and their partners should review the current position and decide how they intend to use adaptations and housing allocations in extending choice and meeting unmet needs.
5. Government departments should recognise the importance of housing adaptations to a number of national policy objectives, especially with regard to planning for an ageing population, prevention strategies in health and social care, promotion of independent living and fostering of stable, safe and sustainable communities. A holistic approach to planning and provision of adaptations is also needed at local level.
6. Local authorities and housing providers should address the barriers facing disabled people who are looking for a home, including specific barriers relating to the allocation of social housing (see chapter 5). Some of these barriers run counter to wider strategic plans, such as the promotion of independent living and economic inclusion.

7. Local authorities should consider setting up an Accessible Housing Register (AHR), which holds information on accessible properties and details of housing applicants requiring such properties. The aims of an AHR are to make better use of accessible housing, to increase choice for disabled people and to inform strategic thinking about patterns and trends in need and demand for accessible homes.
8. The hidden needs of people who are not listed on a housing register (and whose needs are not reflected in the national estimate of unmet needs) should be investigated and taken into account in local planning. This includes people living in residential care homes (in or out of area) and adults living in the parental home who want to live independently.
9. Estate agents and home lettings agencies should follow the example of travel companies and work to 'mainstream' accessibility as a selling point in the advertising of homes for sale or rent. Private landlords should be encouraged to take part in local planning groups representing the range of interests in local housing development and use of the existing stock.



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# Appendices

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## Appendix I – Key data on individual wheelchair users

This appendix gives a general description of individual wheelchair users in England. The findings are from further analysis of the Survey of English Housing 2007/08.

### Characteristics of wheelchair users

The majority (60%) of wheelchair users are age 65 or over. 25% are age 45-64 years and 6% are under 25 years.

Age of wheelchair users		
	Per cent	Total (thousands)
Under 25 years	6%	38
25-44 years	9%	56
45-64 years	25%	151
65-74 years	21%	124
75-84 years	25%	151
85+ years	14%	83
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>603</b>

## Appendices

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The majority of wheelchair users are female (66%). Note: Males predominate in all age groups up to 45-64 years, while females predominate in the 65 and over age group.

<b>Sex of wheelchair users</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b>Male</b>	34%	208
<b>Female</b>	66%	396
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>603</b>

91% of wheelchair users are reported to be White and 5% are reported to be from a black and ethnic minority (BME) group.

<b>Ethnicity of wheelchair users</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b>White</b>	91%	547
<b>BME</b>	5%	32
<b>Unknown</b>	4%	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>603</b>

The majority are either married or widowed (52% and 24% respectively).

<b>Marital status of wheelchair users</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b>Single</b>	10%	59
<b>Married</b>	52%	313
<b>Divorced</b>	10%	63
<b>Widowed</b>	24%	142
<b>Unknown</b>	4%	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>603</b>

Reflecting the age profile, the majority of wheelchair users are retired (61%). Among people of working age (16-64), 15% are employed full/part-time.

<b>Economic status of wheelchair users (Wheelchair users of working age: 16-64 years)</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b>Employed (full/part-time)</b>	15%	33
<b>Retired</b>	18%	39
<b>Sick or disabled</b>	62%	137
<b>Student</b>	2%	5
<b>Other inactive</b>	3%	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>220</b>

## Appendix 2 – Key data on wheelchair user households

The following appendix gives a general description of wheelchair user households in England. The findings are from further analysis of the Survey of English Housing.

### Characteristics of wheelchair user households

Just over half of wheelchair user households (55%) are owner-occupiers, with two fifths (39%) living in social rented accommodation and about one in twenty (6%) living in private rented accommodation.

Tenure of wheelchair user households		
	Per cent	Total (thousands)
Owner-occupied	55%	323
Social rented	39%	226
Private rented	6%	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>582</b>

The majority of homes lived in by wheelchair users (78%) are either a house or bungalow, with 22% being a flat or maisonette.

Type of accommodation		
	Per cent	Total (thousands)
A house or bungalow	78%	452
A flat or maisonette	22%	128
Other	*	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>582</b>

\* Denotes a figure less than 0.5%

<b>Number of bedrooms</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b>One</b>	17%	102
<b>Two</b>	27%	158
<b>Three</b>	44%	256
<b>Four or more</b>	12%	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>582</b>

Three quarters of wheelchair user households (74%) say that illness or disability makes it necessary to have specially adapted accommodation.

<b>Needs specially adapted accommodation</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b>Specially adapted accommodation needed</b>	74%	431
<b>Specially adapted accommodation not needed</b>	26%	150
<b>Don't know</b>	*	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>582</b>

\* Denotes a figure less than 0.5%

Eight in ten (79%) of households that need specially adapted accommodation indicate that their current accommodation is suitable for the person(s) who has/have a disability.

### Suitability of accommodation (Asked only of households needing specially adapted property)

	Per cent	Total (thousands)
<b>Accommodation suitable</b>	79%	342
<b>Accommodation unsuitable</b>	21%	89
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>431</b>

Among households where individuals use a wheelchair indoors, just over half (51%) find it easy to manoeuvre a wheelchair around their home, with a similar proportion (49%) finding it difficult.

### Manoeuvrability of wheelchairs (Asked to households with indoor wheelchair users)

	Per cent	Total (thousands)
<b>Easy to manoeuvre around</b>	51%	74
<b>Difficult to manoeuvre around</b>	49%	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>144</b>

In three quarters of wheelchair user households (74%), wheelchairs are used outdoors only. Less than one in five households (17%) have individuals who use wheelchairs all the time.

<b>When wheelchairs are used</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b>All the time, indoors and outdoors</b>	17%	97
<b>Occasionally indoors</b>	9%	56
<b>Outdoors only</b>	74%	429
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>582</b>

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A third (32%) of wheelchair user households are single person households, with over two fifths (44%) two persons and around a quarter (23%) three or more. One in eight (13%) wheelchair user households contain a dependent child or children.

<b>Household composition</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b><i>Number of people in the household</i></b>		
<b>One</b>	32%	188
<b>Two</b>	45%	259
<b>Three or more</b>	23%	136
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>582</b>
<b><i>Dependent children in the household</i></b>		
<b>Yes</b>	13%	74
<b>No</b>	87%	508
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>582</b>

One in seven wheelchair user households (14%) live in the most deprived 10% of local areas in England, compared to 6% who live in the least deprived 10% of local areas. This pattern is similar to the general population.

<b>Deprivation</b>		
	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Total (thousands)</b>
<b>In the most deprived 10% of local areas</b>	14%	84
<b>In middle 80%</b>	80%	464
<b>In least deprived 10% of local areas</b>	6%	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>582</b>

### **Appendix 3 – Visitable, accessible and adaptable homes: Criteria used in the English House Condition Survey 2007**

These criteria were specifically selected for the English House Condition Survey. They include some but not all of the Lifetime Homes design features. The Lifetime Homes Standard has 16 design criteria – see [www.lifetimehomes.org.uk](http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk)



**Visitable** – this covers access into the dwelling and use by a disabled visitor. It roughly equates with the requirements of part M of the Building Regulations.

**Accessible and adaptable** – this covers all of the above and also requires the dwelling to have some, but not all, additional features specified by Lifetime Homes.

- |                                 |   |  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Accessible and adaptable</b> | <b>Visitable</b>  | <p><b>1. Level access to main entrance</b> – there are no steps between the pavement (or any gate) and the entrance door.</p>  |
|                                 |   | <p><b>2. Flush threshold to main entrance</b> – the threshold to the main entrance door has no obstruction greater than 15mm. This prevents the threshold from being a trip hazard and allows a wheelchair user to easily enter through the main door.</p> |
|                                 |   | <p><b>3. Width of internal doorways and circulation space conforms to Part M</b> – complies with requirements of Building Regulations</p>  |
|                                 |   | <p><b>4. WC at entrance level</b> – this is any WC at entrance level as EHCS does not indicate whether it is wheelchair accessible.</p>  |
|                                 | <p><b>5. Car parking – size and proximity to dwelling</b> – There must be adequate street parking or a sufficiently sized parking area on the plot of the property to accommodate a family sized car. This slope of the plot must not be greater than 1 in 12 (Lifetime Homes specifies 1 in 20).</p> |  |
|                                 | <p><b>6. Living room at ground floor or entrance level or space to provide one</b> – there is a living room or space to provide one at entrance level.</p>  |  |
|                                 | <p><b>7. Bedroom at ground floor or entrance level or space to provide one</b> – there is a bedroom or space to provide one at entrance level. The area must be sufficient to accommodate a single bed, bedside cabinet and space to manoeuvre a wheelchair.</p>                                      |  |
|                                 | <p><b>8. Space for turning wheelchairs in kitchens, dining areas and living rooms</b> – these rooms must have minimum dimensions which take the presence of furniture and fittings into account.</p>  |  |
|                                 | <p><b>9. Bath/shower at entrance level</b> (with 3 or more bedrooms only) – this is a bath or shower at entrance level as EHCS does not indicate whether it is wheelchair accessible.</p>   |  |
|                                 | <p><b>10. Main entrance illuminated</b> – there is an external light at the entrance door. The presence of street lighting is not taken into account.</p>   |  |
|                                 | <p><b>11. Main entrance covered</b> – there is a porch or canopy that affords sufficient space for a wheelchair user to shelter.</p>  |  |

**Appendix 4a – Allocation of wheelchair standard properties to general needs tenants by region**

Using Core data, this table shows the extent to which housing association and local authority wheelchair standard properties are allocated to wheelchair user households. The proportion of wheelchair standard properties allocated to these households ranges from 35% in London to 14% in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber (data from 2009/10).

Government Office Regions	Total allocations	Wheelchair standard properties allocated	Wheelchair user households (new tenants)	Wheelchair standard properties allocated to wheelchair user households	% of wheelchair standard properties allocated to wheelchair user households
London	23,068	847	780	270	35%
South West	18,741	940	594	185	31%
East Midlands	20,275	749	611	175	29%
South East	25,639	977	896	246	28%
East of England	21,349	813	617	166	27%
West Midlands	29,122	1,139	614	158	26%
North East	17,612	429	592	90	15%
North West	40,564	1,097	1,848	262	14%
Yorkshire and The Humber	29,448	715	1,205	172	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>225,826</b>	<b>7,706</b>	<b>7,757</b>	<b>1,724</b>	<b>22%</b>

### Appendix 4b – Allocation of wheelchair standard properties to sheltered housing tenants by region

This table shows the extent to which housing association and local authority wheelchair standard properties in sheltered housing are allocated to wheelchair user households. The proportion of wheelchair standard properties allocated to these households ranges from 45% in London to 12% in the East Midlands (data from 2009/10).

Government Office Regions	Total allocations	Wheelchair standard properties allocated	Wheelchair user households (new tenants)	Wheelchair standard properties allocated to wheelchair user households	% of wheelchair standard properties allocated to wheelchair user households
London	15,595	1,694	555	248	45%
East of England	11,061	1,156	707	305	43%
South East	15,331	2,835	585	147	25%
North East	6,354	739	420	101	24%
Yorkshire and The Humber	12,161	901	662	148	22%
West Midlands	10,237	767	457	98	21%
South West	11,439	753	476	93	20%
North West	16,921	1,595	881	141	16%
East Midlands	10,143	888	459	53	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>109,350</b>	<b>11,331</b>	<b>5,213</b>	<b>1,337</b>	<b>26%</b>



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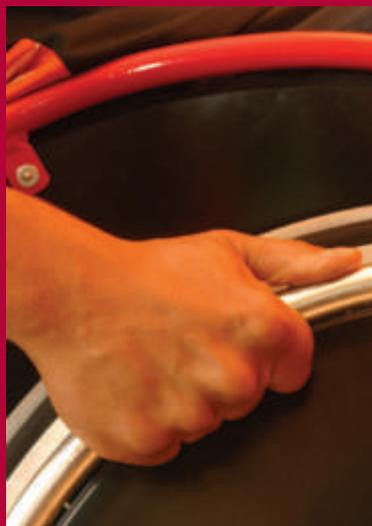
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