

Public Accounts Committee

Inquiry into Housing Adaptations

Additional evidence from Tai Pawb

Accessibility of Private Rented Sector

Further to the oral evidence session held on 18 June, Tai Pawb have submitted the following written evidence as part of the Committee's inquiry.

Apart from improving the adaptations system in the social housing sector, there is a need to consider how we best make use of private rented sector. Tai Pawb delivers Open Doors Project – a project aimed at increasing the capacity and knowledge of PRS landlords and tenants to deal with issues related to equality and diversity in the private rented sector and to reduce discrimination and disadvantage in that sector. The project currently covers the areas of Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and the Vale of Glamorgan. Our engagement with PRS landlords and tenants from that sector clearly shows the limited use of DFG grants in the PRS. Statswales data shows that between 2013 and 2017 only 370 DFG grants were completed in the private rented sector across Wales compared to 3222 in the owner occupier tenure.

There are clear barriers to the uptake of grants in the private rented sector. Our engagement with landlords shows that many of have low awareness of what constitutes a reasonable adjustment (Open Doors is working with landlords to raise that awareness) and are apprehensive about installing adaptations in their houses due to the risk of tenant leaving and subsequently the landlord not being able to secure a tenant with similar needs leading to having to take the adaptations out, which of course incurs cost and is a waste of public resources. On the other hand, disabled and older people who need adaptations are weary of renting in the private sector (and/or having adaptations installed) due to the lack of tenancy security and the risk linked to this, especially where some level of vulnerability is involved.

In our recent work, we have come across an example of good practice from Carmarthenshire County Council, where the council uses some adapted private rented properties through its social lettings agency – Simple Lettings to enable disabled and older people better access to this sector. This allows the Council to have some control over lettings for an agreed period (usually 5 years), making the tenancy more secure for the landlord and the tenant, and, by working with its accessible housing register, making it more likely that the adaptation will benefit another disabled person in the future and improving access to the private rented sector.

Whilst there are probably more examples of this practice, such examples are few and far between. They require initial time from the landlord, and time and resource from the local authority to coordinate adaptation and matching/allocation work in the private rented sector. However, the above example shows that it would be possible to make better use of private rented sector, providing appropriate investment is made so that resources are allocated to coordinating this work in the future. We understand of course that this may not initially be possible in all areas and resources may be limited. We believe however that as a first step, local authorities and housing associations – especially those that have social lettings agencies – could consider how to make better use of the private rented sector in their work on adaptations and accessible housing registers going forward, exploring barriers and enablers. Tai Pawb is committed to working with our members and the private rented sector to support them in exploring this area of work.

Alicja Zalesinska

Director – Tai Pawb (22 June 2018)