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Local Government, Housing and Planning
Committee

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Dear Convener,

Update on enhancing the accessibility, adaptability and usability of Scotland's homes

Within Housing to 2040, we reaffirmed the commitment to review the Housing for Varying Needs design guide. I would like to take this opportunity to update you on this work.

As the Committee will be aware, the guide – which continues to be well-regarded and is still considered to be a good standard – recognises that people's housing needs change through their lifetime and that homes should be flexible as a result. It provides precise technical detail that covers the design of housing to ensure that it is accessible, fit for purpose, adaptable for different needs and, over its lifetime, represents good value for money. Where possible, all new affordable homes delivered through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme are built to Housing for Varying Needs standards.

The guide is complementary to the Building Standards Technical Handbooks, which set minimum requirements for new construction work under The Building (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (as amended). These regulations and supporting standards specifically address the functional performance of buildings and their fabric. The guidance provided in Section 3 'Environment' and Section 4 'Safety' of the Domestic Technical Handbook relating to accessibility is informed by recognised sources of good practice, including the current iteration of Housing for Varying Needs.

The review, which focuses on Part 1 of the design guide, has been a complex and sizeable piece of work. Over the past few months, my officials have continued to work as quickly as possible through the technical detail of proposed updates to the guide – as well as continuing informal engagement with a range of stakeholders.

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As noted in Housing to 2040, it is intended that the review of Housing for Varying Needs will directly inform the development of the Scottish Accessible Homes Standard, which will be implemented through the introduction of updated building standards and guidance from 2025-26. To this end, we have also been considering the scope and intent of the Scottish Accessible Homes Standard and the elements of the proposed Housing for Varying Needs updates which could be mandated through changes to building standards and guidance. I would advise the Committee that we plan to consult on these proposed changes at the same time as we consult on proposed changes to Part 1 of the Housing for Varying Needs design guide.

We are now working through the practical arrangements necessary to launch the consultation on Citizen Space and I will let the Committee know as soon as the consultation launch date is confirmed.

I hope this update is helpful in the meantime.

Yours sincerely,

PAUL MCLENNAN

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