

Supplementary information from Citizens Advice Scotland

June 2024

Summary

- Citizens Advice Scotland was pleased to participate in the LGHP committee’s evidence session on the Housing Bill. This briefing provides supplementary information to questions that arose and areas where there was not sufficient time to explore fully.
- For context, housing is one of the main advice areas that the Citizens Advice network in Scotland provides (around 5% of all advice given or over 58,000 individual pieces of advice in 2023/24) and is often sought in tandem with other issues such as social security, debt and utilities.

Advice on adaptations

- CAS advised the committee that we would provide information on advice given about adaptations by the network of bureaux in Scotland. We collect information about adaptations across all tenure types (private rented sector, owner occupier, local authority and registered social landlord).
- The below table details the volume of adaptations queries the network has advised on over the most recent four quarters, as well as the proportion change between Q4 of 2022/23 and Q4 of 2023/24. We caution that these are small numbers but do indicate that the majority of adaptations advice is sought by tenants in the social rented sector.
- We also caution that treating adaptations as personalisation risks undermining their importance and necessity for people to live safely in their homes. We recommend that they are not treated as part of this Bill but rather better access to local Schemes of Assistance for tenants and landlords is needed.

	2023/24 Q1		2023/24 Q2		2023/24 Q3		2023/24 Q4		CHANGE Q4 22/23 - Q4 23/24
	N	% of parent code	N	% of parent code	N	% of parent code	N	% of parent code	
Local Authority housing									
Adaptations for disabled	99	4%	114	5%	90	3%	84	3%	7%
Owner occupier property									
Adaptations for disabled	65	4%	67	4%	60	3%	79	4%	39% (small numbers)
Private sector rented property									
Adaptations for disabled	17	1%	14	0%	14	0%	16	0%	-14%
Registered social landlord property									
Adaptations for disabled	37	3%	32	3%	38	3%	46	3%	53% (small numbers)

Demographic changes

We also wish to highlight trends and changes we have witnessed in the demographic groups seeking housing advice from the network for the committee to include in its consideration of the Bill:

- Our evidence suggests that housing advice is mainly being sought by single non-pensioner households, indicating that they are experiencing significant harm and are most in need of advice and support. With the Scottish Government indicating that eradicating child poverty is its number one priority and the pressure on homelessness services, we are concerned that this group will fall through the gaps and their needs will be overlooked.
- We are also seeing increased demand for housing advice from the following groups between Q4 22/23 and Q4 23/24:
 - households who have a disabled child, particularly about homelessness (+113%) and access to accommodation (+21%).
 - single pensioners, particularly about accessing accommodation (+34%), private renting (+61%) and homelessness (+73%).

Support for landlords

During the session, we stated that in the process of this Bill and its implementation, landlords must be included and supported. In this vein, we make three main recommendations:

- Better training and support for landlords, as well as access to high quality advice provision so that they understand legislation and are confident in their rights and responsibilities as a landlord.
- Better monitoring and enforcement against poor practice.
- Better mortgage support for landlords whose costs have increased at a higher rate than what they can reasonably charge in rent.