

Call for Evidence Response submitted by
Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI)
JULY 2021

Housing Supply Strategy

ARC NI supports 45 cross-sector learning disability providers across Northern Ireland who lend support to people with a learning disability in all aspects of their lives. ARC's Vision is to achieve real change that puts people with a learning disability at the centre of decision-making, and in the heart of their communities.

This response was developed in partnership with, and on the behalf of, the membership.

Vision

ARC NI welcomes the proposed vision within the strategy, which recognises the importance of accessibility, sustainability, quality and security of tenure. We would however question the word 'household' in the vision and suggest that this assumes an individual has a house as a starting point and also suggests a unit which may include multiple people. To promote and recognise human rights, individuality, preference and choice we believe the vision needs to speak singularly and hence should refer to each and every person.

ARC NI would propose the word 'household' be changed to 'person' within the vision.

ARC NI also welcomes the proposed objectives.

The learning disability population

Learning disability is a life-long condition that affects cognitive and social functioning resulting in the need for ongoing support and supervision for many persons throughout their life. In Northern Ireland, many people live with family carers often into their old age. They too require support.

Whilst there is no accurate data set confirming the learning disability population in Northern Ireland, the 2011 NI Census recorded a total of 40,177 (2.2%) usual residents as having a "learning difficulty, an intellectual difficulty, or a social or behavioural difficulty"¹.

People with a learning disability suffer from health inequalities. The NHS Clinical guidance issued to support the management of patients with a learning disability during the coronavirus pandemic underscored their vulnerability: "People with a learning disability have higher rates of morbidity and mortality than the general population and die prematurely. At least 41% of them die from respiratory conditions. They have a higher prevalence of asthma and diabetes, and of being obese or underweight in people;" (p.2)².

Evidence suggests that 40% of this population experience additional mental health issues³.

¹ http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/employment_learning/5014.pdf

² <https://www.nice.org.uk/Media/Default/About/COVID-19/Specialty-guides/learning-disability-autism-during-pandemic.pdf>

³ <https://www.assemblyresearchmatters.org/2017/08/22/learning-disability-northern-ireland-now/>

They also experience poor educational attainment, loneliness and social isolation and can live in poverty⁴.

The current NI policy framework for learning disability

The Equal Lives Review (2005)⁵ set out a compelling vision for developing services for all people with a learning disability. The report identified 74 recommendations required to improve the lives of people with a learning disability across six themes, one of which was accommodation. Ten recommendations were identified in relation to accommodation as follows:

- By June 2011, all people with a learning disability living in a hospital should be relocated to the community. Funds need to be provided to ensure that on average 80 people will be resettled per annum over the 5-year period from 2006 to 2011.
- With immediate effect, all commissioners should ensure that they have resourced and implemented arrangements to provide emergency support and accommodation for persons with a learning disability. Hospitals will not provide this service from 1st January 2008.
- With immediate effect, all new housing with support provision for people with a learning disability should be for no more than 5 individuals with a learning disability - preferably less - within the same household.
- By 1 January 2013 all accommodation for people with a learning disability under 60 years of age should be for no more than 5 people.
- An additional 100 supported living places per annum for the next 15 years should be developed to enable people to move from family care without having to be placed in inappropriate settings.
- Department for Social Development and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should develop clear assessments of future housing needs for people with a learning disability including those who currently live with their families and agree a continuous 3-year funding strategy to resource housing and support arrangements.
- Housing planners should accumulate and disseminate detailed knowledge on the range of assistive technology that is available to enrich the capacity of people with a learning disability to lead more independent lives in the community.
- A strategy should be developed by the Department for Social Development to increase opportunities for people with a learning disability to own their own homes where this is a safe and appropriate option.
- Procedures and criteria for applying for Disabled Facilities Grants should be revised to tackle inconsistencies, reduce bureaucracy and reduce the hidden costs to carers.
- Department for Social Development and the NI Housing Executive should establish mechanisms to ensure the increased use of floating support linked to an individual's needs rather than overly relying on accommodation-based schemes.

In 2015-16, the Department of Health completed a review of Equal Lives which remains unpublished due to the collapse of the Executive. However, a presentation delivered by the Department at an ARC NI conference confirmed the findings in relation to accommodation for people with a learning disability were as follows:

- Housing supply was largely focused on the resettlement agenda and the results proved that individuals had little choice about where they live and with whom.
- People were experiencing isolation and loneliness, with some reports that life was not better in the community, especially for those with more complex needs.

⁴ https://arcuk.org.uk/northernireland/files/2018/06/2018-050-APGLD-report_Final-May-2018.pdf

⁵ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/Equal%20Lives%20Report.pdf>

- For those not in hospital, many lived in the family home with older carers and there was a lack of suitable accommodation close to individuals' local support networks.

ARC NI proposes all ten recommendations outlined in Equal Lives continue to be relevant today in 2021 and should be taken into consideration as evidence for a future Housing Supply Strategy.

Planning for the housing needs of the learning disability population

A recent report 'From Institution to Community Living'⁶ identified a framework of activities and work that if implemented may offer the closure of institutions for people with a learning disability.

The five case studies collected span fifty years of work and the voices of people who moved to community-based support, evidence clearly what it means to them. It also highlights for the local community and wider society how the closure has changed, and continues to change, people's attitudes and appreciation of being more welcoming and inclusive.

Eight elements were required for successful deinstitutionalisation namely:

- Housing.
- finance (including financial plans and budgeting).
- workforce development (including transition, recruitment and training).
- community support care planning.
- co-production and people with a learning disability and their families' involvement in decision making.
- community inclusion and participation.
- assistive and person-centred technology provision in new services.
- safety and safeguarding.

ARC NI welcomes the 'whole system approach' proposed to address a new Housing Supply Strategy in Northern Ireland.

Regardless of whether a person who is living in a hospital, or at home with aging carers, the process to have a suitable home, requires adequate planning. This is also true for a number of other people with different support needs.

The 'From Institution to Community Living' report based on five international case studies confirms action that enables people with a learning disability to secure and retain a suitable home (page 50-51). In summary they acknowledge the need for:

- a clear vision backed by policy and leadership
- cross-departmental collaboration to ensure housing meets the holistic needs of a person
- person-centred planning to offer individual choice and preference
- adequate levels of, and flexible use of resource

In Northern Ireland the real experience of people with a learning disability continues to flag certain challenges including:

- A range of housing types not being readily available and adapted to meet individual need

⁶ https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/Publications2020/eas_004-21_report_on_mogp_collecting_v4.pdf

- A lack of choice in who an individual lives with and how many people may be part of the household
- A heavy-handed risk assessment process which sets an expectation that a home is for life, rather than an approach of 'a right to move'
- Insufficient supply of housing options in rural locations with a heavy reliance on private landlords
- Lack of flexibility in how funding is used to better meet individual need
- Since 2008/09 funding from SP has been frozen, in fact providers have also faced a 5% actual reduction in SP funding on top of this. The floating support model, i.e., time limited to support individuals to either set up or maintain a tenancy, simply does not meet the needs of most people with a learning disability as they, because of the long-term nature of this condition, invariably require ongoing support to maintain the tenancy. Peripatetic housing support services also have limited application to people with a learning disability as there are relatively small numbers i.e., only the most able people, actually have a tenancy – most live at home with family. What is required is the true application of the principles of supported living in practice, where people have access to accommodation based, peripatetic and floating support services which are flexible in order to meet peoples changing needs. This is an area that could be prioritised to more appropriately meet the needs of people living with a lifelong condition such as a learning disability.

ARC NI proposes the framework in full, as outlined on page 50-51⁷ needs to be addressed to negate any barriers in achieving the objectives of a future Housing Supply Strategy.

This will require cross departmental working and should be linked to Programme for Government.

⁷ https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/Publications2020/eas_004-21_report_on_mogp_collecting_v4.pdf