

## People with a learning disability as home owners

*Ansley Workman, Chief Executive of First Choice Housing Association, explains the work going on in Wales to provide home ownership options for people with learning disabilities.*

For many years, a programme of low cost home ownership called 'HomeBuy' has been available to people in Wales. The primary target is young people and couples setting up home for the first time and others who cannot afford outright purchase of a property but still wish to become home owners. However, this scheme has not been made available to disabled people. The scheme is currently suspended and under review.

The majority of housing stock, about three in four properties, is in the owner occupied sector and surveys of the general population repeatedly tell us the vast majority aspire to own their own home.

Where and how you live undoubtedly affects an individual's quality of life and for a disabled person the same aspirations apply, maybe even more so. Some of the gains observed from ownership by disabled people are more subtle and it is frequently



observed that owning your own home can positively affect a person's self-esteem, how they think about themselves, but also how others view them and treat them.

### **Benefits**

Shared home ownership can provide people with learning disabilities with a new way of accessing housing for those who want to live more independently, in line with the general policy to allow and enable disabled people

to have as ordinary a life as possible.

Shared home ownership will help break the reliance on a limited number of options available to disabled people, such as the shared living model, where the individual may have limited or no choice in location, property or who they live with.

This model may not be suitable for everyone and each individual's circumstances would need to be assessed.

# Llais

The main benefits can be seen as:

## ● **Choice now and in the future**

Nearly three quarters of the housing stock is in the ownership occupied sector – the largest market to choose from

- Location, type and size of property
- The individual can sell and move if they wish

## ● **Security**

- It is the most secure form of tenure
- The individual does not have to move if their support needs change
- Secure way for families to make long term provision for relatives

## ● **Independence and control**

- Choice over who you live with, if anyone
- Can decide own lifestyle and how to live
- Can take own decisions about the physical environment you live in e.g. decoration, adaptations

## ● **High quality accommodation**

- The Association will ensure that accommodation meets the Welsh Housing Quality Standards, its own design specification and any adaptations required by the shared owner

## ● **Self esteem and social value**

### **Benefits for commissioners**

Shared home ownership will also benefit Local Authority commissioners as it will not only meet the accommodation needs of people with a learning disability and reduce support costs for some individuals but also meet

Government and Local Authority agendas.

This would include the Welsh Assembly Government's Section 7 guidance 'Service Principles and Responses' paper. This not only recognises the need for services to be increasingly person-centred and take full account of the individual's expressed preferences but also states that individuals with complex needs should have the option to live in ordinary housing. The Welsh Assembly Government's Statement on Policy and Practice for Adults with a Learning Disability also supports a range of housing options which will allow adults to live independently within their local communities in the way that they and their families choose. Shared home ownership will also meet the strategic priorities set out in 'Making the Connections' which looks to provide more flexibility in services for vulnerable people in accessing housing.

### **Pilot**

The Welsh Assembly Government has funded a pilot project to develop a shared home ownership scheme for people with learning disabilities, called "Assisted Homebuy".

The pilot is being taken forward by Coastal Housing Group Ltd (Formerly Swansea and Dewi Sant Housing Associations), Community Lives Consortium, Neath and Port Talbot CBC and First Choice Housing Association, alongside learning disabilities consultancy Housing Options and parent carer representatives.

The pilot is nearing completion

and three people with learning disabilities will be moving into their own homes in Neath and Port Talbot. However, although the pilot has been successful in providing three people with the opportunity to own their own homes, there has been no commitment by the Welsh Assembly Government for future capital funding, in the form of Social Housing Grant, for further schemes.

A grant bid has therefore been submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government to review the pilot and develop proposals for future funding options, including alternatives that do not require Social Housing Grant, to ensure that shared ownership by adults with a learning disability becomes a definite option in the field of accommodation.

If grant funding is received a comprehensive practitioner's pack will also be developed based on real experiences gained from delivering the pilot schemes.

Pennaf Housing Group in North Wales are also exploring a model of shared ownership for people with learning disabilities and have joined the working party to progress the shared ownership model for people with learning disabilities.

### **New model**

First Choice Housing Association, in partnership with Shared Ownership Homes (SOH), is introducing a model of shared home ownership in Wales which does not rely on Social Housing Grant. The model, which is already well-established in England, means that the

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Association can take forward shared home ownership now and respond to demand. The model is based on a six flats in the same building but can accommodate more or less individuals.

## How it works

The Association aims to respond to demand and buy or build suitable properties, ensuring that they meet both the Association's high standards and the individual's needs.

For a disabled person if they are entitled to income support and in need of alternative accommodation more suitable for their individual needs, in principle they are eligible to borrow up to £100,000 from a mortgage lender. This figure will increase to £175,000 from April 2009. To repay the interest on the mortgage each month the applicant can claim Income Support Mortgage Interest (ISMI) and a specialist mortgage broker can provide help and advice. The Association would own the remainder of the property. In this model the individual could not "staircase" i.e the individual would not be allowed to buy or lease a further stake in the property.

Once the property has been purchased the individual will rent the remainder of the property that has been retained by the Association. As long as the individual is eligible for housing benefit they will meet the rental charge. The individual would also have piece of mind regarding future maintenance of the property as issues of capacity to contract for maintenance are avoided.



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All fees and charges relating to the purchase of a property are paid by the Association and local authority responsible for the disabled person, with their agreement. The individual or their families make no financial contribution. This covers the applicant's legal fees, mortgage application fees, valuation fees etc and the assistance provided by a Shared Ownership Homes case worker. This includes:

- providing a named case worker to oversee the application

process from first contact to completion

- an introduction to the broker who arranges the mortgage with the lending partner
- an introduction to a specialist solicitor to do the conveyance
- co-ordination of the purchase process
- co-ordination of benefit applications
- liaison between the Association, applicant and support provider

As the Association will be taking all the financial risk the Association would benefit from any equity in the property.

For a small number of people legal capacity may be an issue. However, if shared ownership is in the best interests of the individual then legal capacity should not prevent this option. The recent Mental Capacity Act confirms the doctrine of 'best interests' and provides protection for those supporting decisions. If the individual does not have legal capacity to enter into a mortgage agreement they would need to apply to the Court of Protection to appoint a Deputy to act on their behalf.

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## CASE STUDY

Jim French (age 43) had been living in a residential care home in Surrey for ten years. He has a moderate learning disability and is partially sighted. Jim does some voluntary work but has little prospect of ever obtaining a salaried job. He has no savings. He wanted to move from the care home he had been living in to gain more independence, but did not want to move too far away. He had got to know his way around the neighbourhood over the years and had good friends in the area.

Jim did not qualify for help from the local Council to find a home. Private rented accommodation in the area was expensive and he could only afford to rent a poor quality flat.

Jim applied to Shared Ownership Homes to help him acquire his own home. They contacted a

local housing association who agreed to join the scheme. Shared Ownership Homes and the housing association worked out how much Jim could afford to pay for his new home and told him his budget.

Jim, with the support of one of the care staff from his residential care home, found a one bed flat close to his care home. Jim applied for a mortgage of £100,000 with the scheme's lending partner to buy 65% of his flat. The housing association bought the remaining 35% share.

The scheme's solicitor looked after Jim's interests during the transaction and he was supported through the process by a dedicated Shared Ownership Homes case officer. The Department of Work and Pensions pays Jim's mortgage interest each month and Housing Benefit pay the rent he is charged by the housing association for their retained share.

The housing association involved in the purchase installed a new kitchen and bathroom in the flat to make life a bit easier for Jim.

Jim's name appears on the Title Deed of his flat and he can now live there for as long as he likes.

When Jim lived in his care home, the social care authority paying his fees were charged £53,000 p.a. by the care home owner. Jim receives a support service from the same care home owner now he lives in his own flat, but his social care authority is now only charged £26,000 p.a. The housing association is also responsible for insuring and maintaining the property, leaving Jim completely free of these worries.

The housing association that helped Jim with the purchase is very happy with their investment.

Jim recently told the AGM of the charity that provides his care and support that he is very happy in his new home.

## Contacts

*If you would like to discuss the Shared Ownership Model with First Choice Housing Association Ltd, please contact Richard Lloyd on 02920 703757 or [richard.lloyd@firstchoicehousing.co.uk](mailto:richard.lloyd@firstchoicehousing.co.uk)*



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