

SMARTER HOMES FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

EXPLORING THE NECESSITIES FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING IN WILTSHIRE



AUGUST 2022

We are the User Engagement Team at Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living. We have facilitated and produced this report for Wiltshire Council under our contract to provide a Wiltshire User Engagement Service.

We work alongside people with lived experience of health and social care services to support, encourage and facilitate them to have their say. We aim to ensure their voices are heard and that they are able to contribute to and influence how services are shaped and developed.

We use creative and interactive ways of engaging with people, co-producing each piece of work uniquely, to value the authentic voice of all service users.

This report has been created from the voices of people in Wiltshire with learning disabilities, mental health issues or who are autistic. Thank you to everyone who attended our knowledge cafés and took the time to share their thoughts, ideas and experiences.



Key Recommendations

Maximising the Disabled Facilities Grant

People are not aware of the potential of the Disabled Facilities Grant, especially when it comes to integrating smart technology into the home. Better guidance on what the grant can be used for and how the application process works in Wiltshire would support individuals to have greater choice, control and independence.

Meeting the minimum accessibility standards

There is a minimum accessibility standard which disabled people in Wiltshire need the local authority to adhere to when new housing is built. These standards should also be reviewed in existing supported housing to ensure disabled people are living in homes that maximise their independence.

Working with Occupational Therapy

There are many technology and aids that can enable people to live more independently. Occupational Therapists have a key role in making people aware of these, but can only do so if they are aware of it themselves.

Tackling Data Poverty

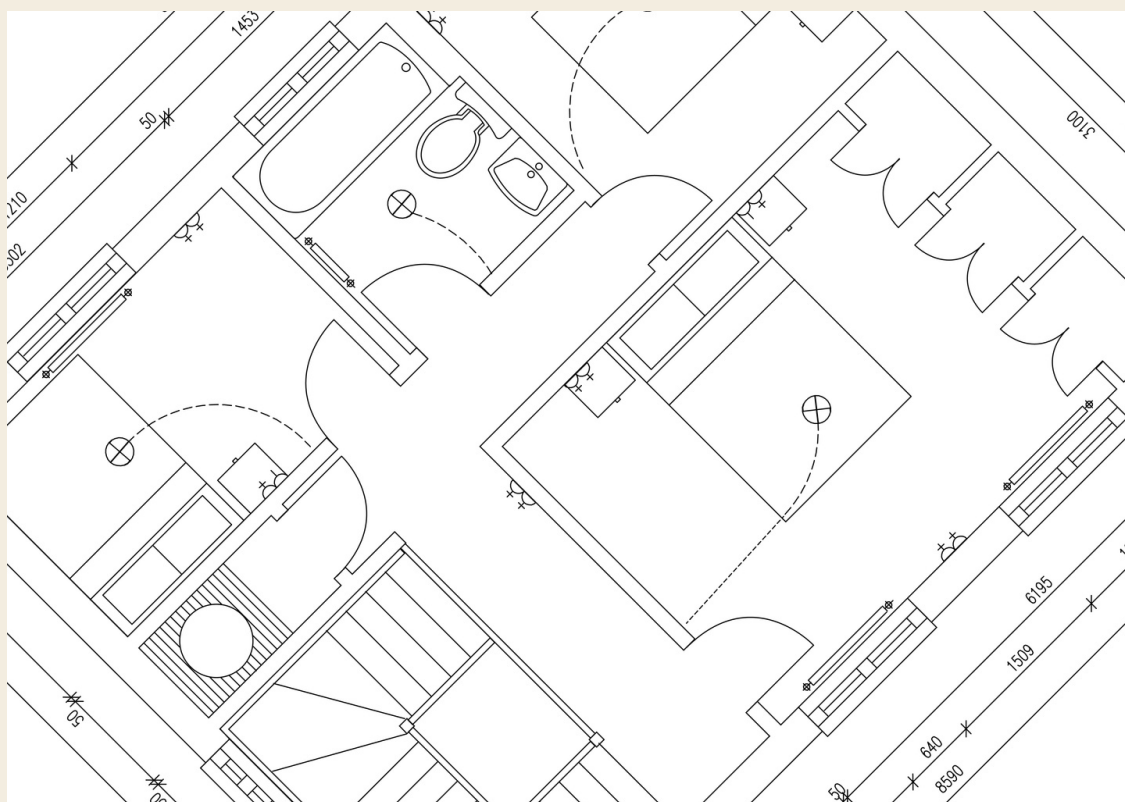
Data poverty (being unable to afford the internet) limits people's access to technology that could benefit them. Support is available, but this is not widely known about. Local authorities and organisations such as WCIL are well placed to raise awareness of this support.

Making space for personalisation

Although there are minimum accessibility standards that should be met, no single house design will meet the needs of every disabled person. Therefore there should always be scope for personalisation and adaption within house design. People are not always aware how they could personalise their home to suit their requirements.

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Introduction

Imagine an accessible home...

Between May and July 2022, we held discussion with Autistic people, people with Learning Disabilities or mental health issues about their physical needs and preferences in creating a home accessible to them. We also talked about how they use technology currently, and the role assistive technologies could play in giving greater choice, control and independence.

Participants were sourced through existing groups; Knowledge cafés and Speak Up Group. We also met with a housing and support provider who shared with us the experiences of the people they work with.

This work was commissioned by Wiltshire Council to help inform the Accommodation Strategy.

AIM

The purpose of this work is to help inform Wiltshire's housing development and standards through understanding what Autistic people, people with Learning Disabilities and mental health issues would need as the minimum standard of housing to give them greater control, choice and independence. This included physical aspects of housing and assistive technologies.



The poster used to advertise each session

Demographics

17 people took part in the knowledge café alongside a housing provider who spoke on behalf of those they support.

12% of participants were aged 16-25 years, with a further 82% aged between 26-54 years. The remaining 6% of participants were aged 55-74 years.

Methodology

We hosted three interactive group sessions for Autistic people, people with learning disabilities and mental health issues. Each session was relaxed and informal and were held in our meeting room or in a community setting. Central to each session was a model home, created to show some of the physical and assistive technological features that people might need in their own homes.



At the start of the session we showed some short films showcasing some of the different assistive technologies and how they enabled users to have greater choice, control and independence in their lives.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTf8Fe6tr3Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtmKpQlhHbQ>

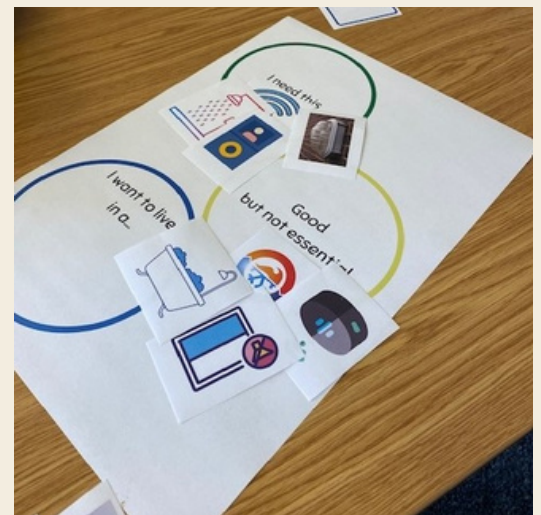


Each participant was given a selection of cards representing different accessibility features and types of assistive technology. We talked through each card, discussing the various benefit or possible challenges each one held. Participants were then asked to rank each feature in one of the following categories:

- I need this**
- Good but not essential**
- I don't need this at all**

The ratings were based on individual circumstances and preferences. We also had blank cards for people to add other features that were important to them.

We also ran this session with a housing and support provider which took place at their office. The format was the same, and we asked the staff to consider the individual needs and circumstances of the people they work with.



OUR FINDINGS

The Physical Home

People had very clear specifications about the physical aspects of homes, and what would meet their needs.

THE ESSENTIALS

Security Lighting

Almost everyone (94%) we engaged with said that **outdoor lighting** was essential, both for practical and security reasons. There were some specific ideas about how outdoor lighting should be.

"Lights that come on by motion rather than being on all the time."

"I have one but it's automatic so I can't use it."

"Automatic lighting is essential. People get nervous, especially in winter."

"Security light so I can get from my car into my wheelchair and into the house safely and securely - it needs to stay on for long enough."

The cost of electricity was a consideration for some.

"Security lights are essential, but I can't afford it on my electric bill, so they need to be solar."

Outdoor Space

Having **outdoor space** with **level access** was also very important to people, with 70% of people saying it was essential.

"It is essential for my emotional wellbeing but it needs to be an appropriate garden that I can manage. My current one is too big so I have to pay someone to help me."

"I want a courtyard with a shed."

Bathrooms

One feature that most people felt essential within the home was a **wet room**, with 65% of people saying this was essential for their needs. There were specific ideas about how a wet room should be designed.

"I want built in raised toilets rather than having a raised frame around the toilet. The raised frame makes me feel embarrassed and it is hard to clean."

"Consider the height and strength of the sink so you can lean on it."

Having enough space in the wet room for aids was also important for many people. Of those who identified a wet room as essential for their independence, 63% also said they would need a seat in the room. This highlights the need for having space for additional features to enable people to be safe and independent.

"I like having a perching stool that helps me get to my shower chair."

OUR FINDINGS

The Physical Home

However in addition to the physical features of a wet room there were aesthetic considerations.

"I don't want a wet room that looks clinical. I want it to look like a normal bathroom not a 'special disabled' one."

Only 2 people said that having a bath was essential for them, although some people expressed that they would like to have a bath and a shower.

Parking and Access

64% said that **parking** was an essential requirement. This was a response from people who do not drive as well as car owners and drivers, with reference to carers and family members being able to park directly outside the home. One person said that *"space for my bike"* was an important requirement.

Level access to the home was also considered essential, with 53% saying this a requirement. One person, who lives in a home with steps to the door told us *"I want a ramp so I can wheel my shopping trolley in safely."*

PREFERRED FEATURES

Safety and Security

Security and feeling safe in the home was an important consideration for many people. 41% said that a **smart doorbell** would be an essential feature and 29% said that this would be good but not essential for them.

"This is essential to me because it is important for my security and safety."

"I can't physically get to the door when I'm on my own so it would help to be able to talk to people through the doorbell."

"I'd like a ring doorbell for security so I could see who is at the door before I open it" (Person with a learning disability living in a group home).

23% of people told us that a **key safe** would be essential for them. This can enable family, friends and carers to access the property, if they have the code for the safe.

Taps

People had different preferences to the style of **taps** they would need in their homes. 29% of people told us they would need to have lever taps, rather than the traditional style twist taps. However 12% said they would need twist taps and one person said they would need automatic taps. This highlights the need for developers to offer different specifications to individuals, rather than a standardised ones.

OUR FINDINGS

The Physical Home

Hoists

There were many physical features we explored through the research that are an individual preference or need. Things such as **ceiling track hoists** were essential to only 2 people who took part, but how a hoist track is fitted can be very important to an individual.

"I want a hoist that goes throughout the house, rather than just in stages."

Soundproofing

Soundproofing was again important to a small number of people, with five people saying it was essential or good but not essential. There were different reasons for this.

"We have a person we support who is Autistic and likes loud music. Better soundproofing would be good for the neighbours, and would prevent conflict."

"I am Autistic and hear noise from my neighbour. It can get annoying if you are sensitive to noise."

Hot Water Dispensers

For two people having a **hot water tap** or **dispenser** was considered essential. This was for safety reasons, due to difficulties using a kettle to pour hot water.

Fire Alarms

One person told us that a **visual fire alarm** would be essential to meet their individual needs - *"have a fire alarm that lights up as well as makes sound."*



OUR FINDINGS

Assistive Technologies

Some people currently used assistive technology in their daily lives, however for many they are not aware of how technology could support their independence.

THE ESSENTIALS

Wi-Fi

Not surprisingly having **Wi-Fi** was considered essential by 76% of people involved in the research. This is something the majority of people do already have and use in multiple ways.

"I have Wi-Fi because I need to use my tablet to communicate. I can also contact people in an emergency."

Much of the assistive technology we discussed during the research relies on having a good Wi-Fi connection. This in itself brings challenges for some people.

"Many of these (assistive technology) would be good for the people we work with but the reality is that only 20% have Wi-Fi, which is needed to enable these, 80% can't afford Wi-Fi and just rely on a mobile phone." - Housing and support provider.

Lighting

Good adjustable lighting was an important feature, with 58% of people saying this was essential or good but not essential. The housing provider told us *"better lighting is needed in general. Most rooms have just one main light and people are at risk of fall/trips."*

"I have a visual impairment and a learning disability. Having good Wi-Fi is important as I use my Alexa to find the weather forecast and for helpful information from the internet."

PREFERRED FEATURES

Door Controls

Automatic door openers (on the main door) were important for some people, which also highlighted how many of the features we talked about are specific to an individual's needs. 35% of people engaged felt that automatic door openers were essential for their independence, with 41% saying this was good but not essential. Reasons for this answer were both for mobility and convenience for example, being unable to physically open the door independently when carrying shopping home. As with all assistive technology, there were some questions raised about the potential risk of misuse.

OUR FINDINGS

Assistive Technology

"This would be specific to individuals. Some people would benefit but some would be put at risk as they would easily lose their key fob. In some communities, it would be easy for people to identify the property and gain access."

Voice Activation

Voice activated devices were deemed essential by 17% of people we engaged with in the research. Whilst not a large percentage, the benefit to those individuals in having greater choice, control and independence is significant. One person told us *"they aid communication"*. However, for others this is not an option *"I am non-verbal so I cannot use them,"* highlighting the need to explore different options for different people.

As part of our conversation on voice activated devices, we also discussed voice/motion lights. 29% said this was an essential feature and 29% that it would be good but not essential. For other people we engage with this was felt not to be relevant.

Some of the participants were familiar with smart home technology and already use it in their daily lives, but for others they were not aware of the potential of assistive technology until they watched the videos at the start of the session.

I didn't know about lots of things that could help me - how would people hear about this?"

For some people an addition to their home of assistive technology would make them feel more comfortable and protect their dignity.

"As a young woman living with epilepsy it would be great to have an automatic window blind. If I have a seizure I need to lie down, but people can see in if they walk past my house. It's not nice that people can see me when I am feeling at my worst."

Overall people we engaged were positive about the benefits that technologies could bring to their lives. However here were some concerns expressed about potential downsides.

"What if there is a virus and the technology stops working properly?"

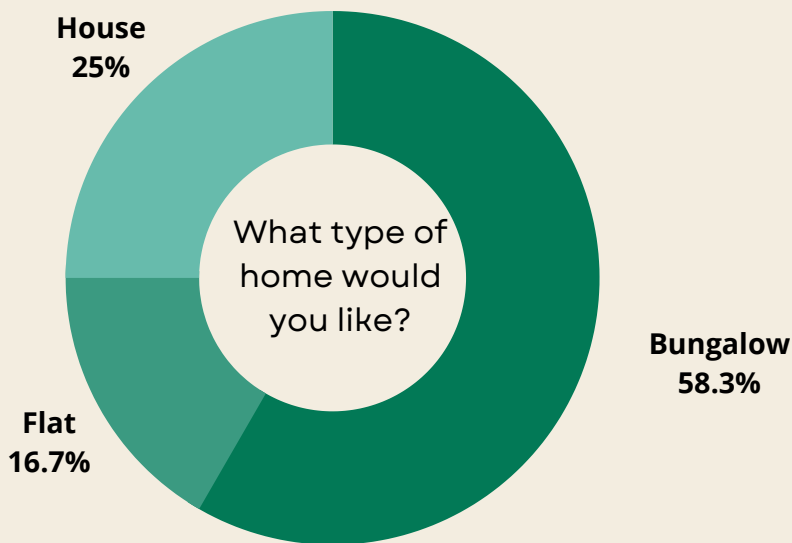
"It worries me that the council could take away my care hours because I have technology, even if I don't feel confident in that."

OUR FINDINGS

Additional Considerations

Ensuring a home is accessible goes beyond the physical features of the building and the integration of technology.

When asked what type of property people would prefer their home to be there was a clear preference for living in a bungalow.



Feeling safe and secure in the home was a factor in people's preferences, as well as the need for a physically accessible home.

"I am worried about the safety of sleeping downstairs so would prefer a house."

"There needs to be safe small windows on bungalows so I can open the windows at night."

"I would prefer to live in a house but would need a lift or stairlift to get up and downstairs. I don't feel safe in a bungalow."

People thought more widely about additions to the property that would make life more affordable and benefit the environment.

"I want to be as environmentally friendly as possible."

"I would make sure any electrics we use are as environmental and efficient on energy as possible."

Family Life

People also talked about the importance of the home being suitable for their families too.

"The house doesn't need to just work for me but for my wife too."

"I need space for my family, my children need a bedroom each. It's not just about me."

Choice and personalisation

Choice is important to people, having the same freedom to personalise their home as anyone else would.

"What I want in my bedroom is different to what I want to have in communal spaces." (Person living in a group home).

Conclusions

The Minimum Standards

The minimum standards that autistic people, people with learning disabilities or mental health issues require in housing are **parking, level access, an outdoor space** and good **security lighting. Automatic doors** are very important to some individuals to be able to access their home independently. The majority of people also need a **wet room**, and prefer something that does not look clinical, but homely. **Wi-Fi** is also a necessity for the majority of disabled people in Wiltshire.

Barriers to assistive technology

There is a huge range of assistive technologies that have the potential to give many individuals greater choice, control and independence. The assistive technology people would like is an individual preference, depending on peoples needs and choices. However, people can only make these choices if they are informed about what technologies there are, the benefits to the individual and how much they may cost. Occupational therapists should be well informed about how technology can support independence and work with individuals to find solutions that work for them.

“There should be a form to show what options are available to people. People can pick what they need and tailor their home to them”

Wi-Fi was considered of great importance to many people, both in enabling disabled people to access the internet but also in allowing the use of smart technology in the home. However, due to data poverty and the rising cost of living, some disabled people are unable to access this. Whilst social tariffs can be a good solution for some people, they are not affordable or accessible to all and therefore cannot be the only support available. At a local level, Wiltshire Council and local organisations should ensure that disabled people are aware of any financial support and scheme available to them, not only for the purpose of tackling data poverty but in bringing homes up to an accessible standard. This includes, but is not limited to, the disabled facilities grant.

Maximising Disabled Facilities Grant

The Disabled Facilities Grant is an underused resource amongst disabled people. Many people are not aware of how the grant could be used or how you apply. There is a particular lack of knowledge around how the grant can be used to purchase smart and assistive technology.

Conclusions

Making space for personalisation

There is no single house design that will suit all disabled people in Wiltshire. People have different accessibility requirements which varies depending on their disability, lifestyle and personal preferences. Although there are some features which most people require; level access, Wi-Fi, parking, security lighting and outside space, housing needs to be designed in a way that makes space for personalisation.

All homes matter

Although this report was commissioned to explore the minimum requirements for new housing developments, the recommendations and conclusions should also be applied pre-existing supported housing. Many disabled people in Wiltshire are living in properties which do not maximise and support their independence. This ranges from not having level access, insufficient parking, a lack of outdoor space and the absence of assistive technology to name a few. Those already living in supported homes must not be forgotten about.

"We should live the same lives as everyone else. It is our right. We just need some extra equipment to do so. "



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