

# Royal Institute of British Architects

## Department of Health and Social Care: Older People's Housing Taskforce - call for evidence September 2023

The Royal Institute of British Architects is a global professional membership body driving excellence in architecture. We serve our members and society in order to deliver better buildings and places, stronger communities and a sustainable environment. Being inclusive, ethical, environmentally aware and collaborative underpins all that we do.

### **People**

#### **What are the most important issues the taskforce should seek to address?**

The Taskforce should address issues of accessibility, sustainability and safety.

The reality is that millions of people, including many older people, live in homes that do not meet their daily needs, and which do not facilitate independence and a high quality of living. England's existing housing stock is not suitable for the diverse and changing needs of our population, and often the new homes we build do not meet high standards of accessibility. As such, addressing the lack of age-friendly housing must be a priority for the Taskforce.

Improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock is key to delivering warm, healthy and cost-efficient homes. Ensuring homes for older people meet these requirements should be a priority for the Taskforce.

All homes must be safe – but this is especially important in settings where older and vulnerable people live. The Taskforce must look at how both new and existing homes can be as safe as possible for older people.

The Taskforce must be equipped with the resource and cross-department focus needed to make substantive improvements to both the existing housing stock and any planned new developments.



Royal Institute of  
British Architects  
66 Portland Place  
London, W1B 1AD, UK

Phoebe MacDonald  
Head of Policy and Public Affairs  
[phoebe.macdonald@riba.org](mailto:phoebe.macdonald@riba.org)

### **Do you have specific recommendations for the taskforce to consider?**

We were pleased with the Government announcement in July 2022 that all new homes must be compliant with Part M4(2) of the Building Regulations. This is welcome progress towards ensuring that everyone can access a home that meets their needs. However, we now need the release of the long-awaited consultation on the implementation of M4(2) to raise accessibility standards for new homes.

Given that there will likely also be a transition period, we are concerned that further delays will unacceptably impact the length of time during which older people will continue to have inadequate access to suitable homes – and that in the meantime, homes that are in the process of being built will not meet accessibility standards. The Taskforce should work with the Government to publish the consultation without delay.

We also suggest that the Taskforce works with the Government and relevant sectors to examine how to better facilitate home adaptations for a) older housing stock and b) older people who live in private rented accommodation.

To improve the energy efficiency of our existing housing stock, we urge the Taskforce to work with Government to deliver a National Retrofit Strategy – a long-term plan and investment programme for upgrading the energy efficiency of our housing stock.

Finally, to ensure that all homes are safe as possible, we recommend the Taskforce works with the Government and sector to ensure that sprinklers are standard in all settings where vulnerable people are living.

### **Products**

#### **What are the most important issues the taskforce should seek to address?**

With 91% of homes not providing even the four basic access features for the lowest level of accessibility – a home that is ‘visitabile’ – there is a lot of work to be done in this space. The Taskforce must look at how we can accelerate the delivery of high-quality and accessible housing.

The current lack of qualified design expertise in planning departments is concerning, and as the role of architects in the delivery of mass-market housing has declined, it is not just design standards that have suffered: we have also seen growing challenges around the sustainability, safety and quality of new homes. How to embed qualified design expertise in planning departments and new developments should be a priority for the Taskforce.

### **Do you have specific recommendations for the taskforce to consider?**

Architects have a key role to play in ensuring that homes are designed to be accessible to all. To help RIBA members design with accessibility and inclusion in mind from the outset of a project, we developed the [Inclusive Design Overlay](#), which equips built environment professionals with the knowledge to embed inclusive design into project delivery. The Taskforce should recommend

architects are involved in new developments to ensure age-friendly, inclusive design is embedded from the start.

Local planning authorities must be equipped with proficient design expertise to effectively identify and advocate for age-friendly housing solutions. We recommend that dwellings granted exceptions for step-free access retain compliance with other M4(2) features. We urge the Government to establish robust monitoring mechanisms to oversee exceptions granted under M4(2) criteria and encourage the Government to consult on the proportion of new homes which must comply with M4(3). The Taskforce should echo these recommendations.

The UK has the oldest housing stock in Europe, and 80% of the buildings we will use in 2050 have already been built. It is therefore vital to take steps to make it easier for homes to be adapted to meet the needs of residents. One option to make adaptations more accessible is bringing in industry to develop a training offering. This is part of a 'whole home' approach, incorporating both adaptation and retrofit skills. This would benefit positively impacting access to home adaptations, but also help deliver the skills we need to decarbonise our homes.

## **Places**

### **What are the most important issues the taskforce should seek to address?**

Resolving the need for more, including new, accessible housing requires investment in the planning system and a greater role for design expertise in the development of new housing. This will help deliver new, high-quality, accessible homes of all tenures, in places people want to live.

### **Do you have specific recommendations for the taskforce to consider?**

We must focus on ensuring that local authorities have qualified design expertise to recognise and promote housing which is suitable for the needs of older people. The Government has a clear role to play here through comprehensively resourcing planning departments, thus ensuring that they can recruit and retain the necessary expertise.

To address this issue in a holistic way which includes accessibility and quality of life, we must not only build new homes, but consider elements such as quality and location. This means working to design homes and places to the highest standards – including embedding new homes in the wider community, with public transport and amenities nearby; and promoting meaningful inclusion and accessibility. We recommend the Taskforce works with the Government to ensure that quality, accessibility and sustainability are at the heart of new developments.

The Taskforce should also examine what more can be undertaken to incentivise developers to prioritise sufficient provision of accessible homes.