# Evaluation Report Visibly Better Cymru - Draft

## Introduction

Visibly Better Cymru supports organisations to develop and maintain accessible environments so that people can feel more confident in getting in and around the places they visit, work or live. Having accessible environments means that people with sensory loss such as sight loss, can also benefit from inclusive design as well as people with physical disabilities.

### Design Principles of Visibly Better Cymru

The design principles support Visibly Betters partners and members to meet best practice, which include fundamental considerations to help prevent falls and promote confidence and independence. The principles also help partners and members meet their legislative obligations under The Equality Act 2010; BS8300; Part M; Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS); Development Quality Requirements (DQR) and Lifetime Homes.

### Visibly Better Standards

To support members and partners adopt the Visibly Better principles the project has introduced a standard for accessible environments. The standard consists of 6 key elements, which partners and members can achieve:

* Policy and Practice
* Promote Clear Print
* Built Environment Inside
* Built Environment Outside
* Eye Health Promotion
* Empowering Tenants

Visibly Better provides a range of activities which support members to achieve and maintain these standards. Key activities include:

* training and workshops
* consultancy
* audits and action plans

Visibly Better members and partners include:

* Supported living and general needs housing providers
* Hospital Wards, GP surgeries and clinics
* Community buildings

## Key Outcomes

**Outcome 1.**

Due to the adoption of Visibly Better principles, residents and patients feel safer and are more confident and independent moving around health and social care settings.

**Outcome 2.**

Visibly Better members and partners have increased awareness of the impact of sight loss on daily life and are able to provide appropriate support.

**Outcome 3.**

Visibly Better members and partners have increased understanding of how to adapt and enhance the built environment to promote independence and reduce the risks of trips or accidental injury.

## Key evaluation questions

* What are the strengths and weaknesses of Visibly Better Cymru and what could be done to improve this service for members.
* What lessons can we learn and what should key RNIB stakeholders consider when scaling up Visibly Better across the rest of the UK.
* To what extent has the project been successful in achieving its intended outcomes for partners / members and beneficiaries with sight loss.

## Methodology

To evaluate the service a range of both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools were used.

* Reviewed secondary data – examining the current literature relating to the built environment and policy context.
* Monitoring – Quantitative data collection via Visibly Better team
* Surveys – Quantitative surveys carried out with tenants and with partner / member staff
* Qualitative – In-depth interviews with tenants, partner and project staff.

## What the literature told us?

### Built environment design

* Better design can prevent falls, improve quality of life and increase overall independence amongst people with sight loss.
* Simple adaptations in the built environment such as colour contrasting and installing appropriate lighting and fixtures are particularly beneficial with older adults with sight loss, who may also have other comorbidities such as dementia or mobility problems.

#### Inaccessible living spaces and falls

* Inaccessible living spaces can increase risk of falls, particularly amongst elderly adults with physical impairments. Simple adaptations in the built environment, such as painting step edges or improving lighting can reduce or minimise this risk.
* Research suggests that falls are the most common cause of hospitalisation for people aged over 65 and the leading cause of death from injury among people aged over 75. Risk factors include: increasing age, previous history of falling, gait and balance problems, mobility limitations, fear of falling, multiple medications, environmental/home hazards and visual impairment. [1]
* Moreover, older people with sight loss are much more prone to falls than their sighted peers. According to Legood (2002), for instance, the rate of falls in older people with visual impairment is 1.7 times higher, and hip fractures are 1.3 to 1.9 times higher than in age-matched visually normal populations. [2]

#### Impact of accessible living spaces

* Research suggests that a majority of older adults wish to continue independent living in their own home. However, they are often forced to move into institutional settings due to lack of accessibility to their home environments. Such institutional settings are associated with higher economic costs to both the individual and society in general. [3]
* Overall, people with functional limitations, such as sight loss, mobility problems or cognitive impairments living in accessible home environments have been found to have better health, wellbeing and activities of daily living than those living in conventional or inaccessible home environments. [3]
* The most important modifications in the home environment for people with sight loss include the installation of hand rails, non-slip matting, colour contrasting, slip resistant flooring, lift chairs and motion sensors to activate pathway lighting. [4]

#### Low lighting

* Studies suggest that a significant number of older people accept poor sight as a consequence of the ageing process and do little about it. Many people do not realise the extent of assistance that can be provided by illumination. The degree of knowledge about lighting options among health and social care workers is also variable. [6]
* Overall, it is well known that increasing the level of illuminance improves visual function in persons with normal and with low vision. [7]
* Good lighting can make the most of people’s capabilities and help to compensate for poor eyesight; it can assist people in finding their way around both new and familiar spaces and help them to undertake specific tasks.[5]
* Another study found that well positioned artificial light can compensate for poor levels of natural light in the kitchen, a room where there is an obvious potential for accidents (as outlined above). According to this research, such improvements to domestic lighting, as well as use of colour to maximise light and provide colour contrast, made a big difference to participants safety and enjoyment of the home environment. [8]

## A Wales Model

The policy context within Wales is particularly favourable to an initiative such as Visibly Better. To maximise this, it might be worthwhile for RNIB to consider expanding the current offer in Wales to take full advantage of this time limited opportunity.

The Welsh Government requires all publicly funded developments to be built to the Development Quality Requirements (2005): to achieve this, homes are built to the Lifetime Homes Standards [9].

In addition to this, the Welsh Government requires all social landlords to ensure that all their existing stock meets the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by December 2020. Not only do the standards refer to existing as well as new builds, a deadline is also provided by which standards should be implemented.

The policies, standards or requirements in Wales and the governments expectation for housing providers to meet those means that Visibly Better Cymru can effectively market their design principles as supporting “our partners to meet best practice and legislative obligations that include The Equality Act 2010; BS8300, Part M; Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS); Development Quality Requirements (DQR) and Lifetime Homes” [10]. This makes the initiative attractive to any provider undertaking a new build development or who have current housing stock which does not currently meet these.

Furthermore, the Welsh Assembly Government expects the social landlord to consult with and show its tenants how it has arrived at its draft programme; the choices made; and, how the views and priorities of their tenants have influenced the agreed final programme [11]. This particularly supports Visibly Better Cymru and its tenant participation offer.

**What the numbers tell us**

There are currently 10 active Visibly Better Memberships. These are all housing providers, and most have schemes in multiple locations.

During 2018, there were 29 development meetings with consultancy provided by the RNIB Visibly Better Coordinator. As a result of these, there have been 23 audits and action plans provided.

In addition to this, 19 Visual Awareness Training Workshops were delivered with 257 staff trained.

18 tenant assessors have received training to work with Visibly Better on behalf of Linc Cymru, Newydd and Trivallis housing providers. Following the training, Trivallis and Newydd tenant assessors have taken part in 5 audits and meetings.

## What members said about RNIB Visibly Better

Members really valued being a member of Visibly Better, the simplicity of the standards and principles to implement, the specialist knowledge provided, and the flexibility of the managers approach were cited as key strengths.

Using colour contrasting and making adaptations to lighting were the most common changes made throughout schemes.

As a result of implementing adaptations recommended by Visibly Better, members’ housing schemes were considerably enhanced, delivering key outcomes for their tenants, helping them to feel safer and more confident and become more independent moving around.

Furthermore, as a result of being a Visibly Better member, participants have increased knowledge and awareness of the impact of sight loss on daily life and use this to identify people who may have sight loss and to provide them with appropriate support.

Members believe that Visibly Better is versatile enough to be implemented into any public setting, especially health and social care. Outcomes for tenants, the quality Visibly Better brings and the schemes value for money were seen as key selling points.

Six member organisations were interviewed as part of the evaluation of Visibly Better. Three were Housing Associations and one a Local Authority.

All members interviewed had worked with Visibly Better for over three years and had achieved or were working towards achieving the Visibly Better platinum award.

**Motivation**

At the time of engaging with Visibly Better all members were considering renovating their independent living, sheltered housing or older people’s schemes. Each participant had between 5 – 15 schemes, which they wanted to include.

Members were motivated to become involved with Visibly Better for several key reasons:

**Providing the best quality housing possible** – all members were driven to engage Visibly Better as a way of improving their accommodation for older tenants and achieving the standard was a clear sign of quality of the housing they provide.

‘We have aging demographic and sight loss is more prevalent in older people… it makes sense that our accommodation is the best it can be for people with sight loss…if a person hasn’t got sight loss when they move in that doesn’t mean that they won’t…in fact there is a good chance they will…so it’s about thinking about the solutions before they are needed… Visibly Better has helped us to achieve our aim to enable people to stay living independently in their own home for longer.’ Visibly Better Member.

**It’s not just about housing** – members recognised their role as a landlord was so much more than simply providing housing. Members described their tenants being at risk of loneliness, physical and sensory limitations and dementia and felt they had a role in alleviating these factors which could impact negatively on tenant’s lives. The practical solutions offered via Visibly Better were highly attractive to members, especially in supporting independent living and potential for improving tenant’s health and wellbeing.

‘We know providing accommodation especially for older residents is more than just providing someone with a place to live…it’s about meeting individual’s needs… We know that a good internal and external environment can reduce the barriers that prevent people from living independently…this is where Visibly Better has really helped…’ Visibly Better Member.

**The small things matter** – All members could see quite early on that introducing some small changes could have a big impact on their tenants’ lives and the potential for quick wins was particularly appealing.

‘The Visibly Better principles are so simple and easy to implement and doesn’t cost anything extra as part of a refurbishment project – why on earth would providers not do this…it’s the small things that matter like good lighting and contrast.’ Visibly Better member.

‘The various visual impairments and the impact they can have for people and their ability to access an environment…crucially it can be the smallest of things that can make a massive difference and ultimately improve people’s lives.’ Visibly Better Member.

‘I had no idea about the difference that lighting and contrast can make…or the impact of the different eye conditions have on people…huge eye opener.’ Visibly Better Member.

**Specialist knowledge** – RNIB is viewed by all members as the specialist in sight loss and gaining this expertise was also a prime motivator for members to join Visibly Better.

‘Had we just done the Wales Housing Quality Standards, we would have missed out on all of those simple things…changes that make all of the difference to older people…the RNIB standard brought that insight…we know sight loss comes with age, so we are putting the solutions in place not just for our visually impaired tenants but for those who may become blind or partially sighted in the future’.  Visibly Better member.

**Empowering for tenants** – several members felt that the empowering process adopted by Visibly Better for engaging and involving tenants in the refurbishments of their homes was something they wanted to implement as part of their scheme’s development process.

‘The draw for us at the beginning…how empowering the process was for tenants…the knowledge and skills they could develop was a big draw for us… it was a great project, upskilling and empowering tenants to identify where the changes were needed and then them auditing the results.’ Visibly Better Member.

‘We wanted tenants to be involved in the process…so we started by asking them…they identified things like trip hazards (rugs), difficulty identifying light switches or just difficulties reading. So, we made those small initial changes…painting a contrasting strip around a light switch…it’s amazing the difference the smallest change can make…bringing in task lighting can help someone read…’ Visibly Better Member.

**How did members work with Visibly Better?**

All members followed a similar pathway in working towards and achieving the Visibly Better standard and adopting the principles.

**Training** - All members and key personnel participated in Visibly Better visual awareness training. This included learning about different eye conditions, impact of sight loss and practical solutions that can be applied.

‘I have also participated in visual awareness training, which was brilliant…eye opening actually, we used the simulation spec’s, brought it home how sight loss can impact on someone’s ability to move around and undertake daily tasks…we also looked at the types of things that can be done to improve the environment to support someone with a visual impairment…the importance of contrast, lighting and design…we are all due for a refresher soon...’  Visibly Better Member.

‘Staff training…we have expanded on this, this year to include a wider range of staff…usually we save the training or those who work directly with tenants…For example painters have been trained, and resulted in one of them highlighting that pillars needed special treatment depending on which way they are approached may need a different colour on each side….this was something that had not been picked up before…. Pillars are now painted different colours on all sides and now all of our painters have had the training’. Visibly Better Member.

**Tenant participation** – All members engaged tenants in a consultation process throughout the various stages of their scheme’s refurbishment.  With the support of Visibly Better some members recruited Tenant Assessors who helped to assess schemes before and after the refurbishment had taken place.

‘Consultations supported by Visibly Better has helped us to identify volunteers with sight loss to become Assessors. Our assessors have been a great help…they have participated in training, but the fact that they have the experience of sight loss themselves…they can easily highlight things we could have never thought of…especially were lighting is needed….something might look fine for us but for some sight loss conditions lighting is so important, for example those that are night blind…it was our assessors who asked us to rethink where our fire extinguishers were placed. They were actually a trip hazard…obviously not if you can see…but it was these small points that assessors helped identify…’ Visibly Better Member.

**Assessment, action plan and recommendations** – Visibly Better staff supported members to undertake an assessment of schemes and produced a detailed action plan with recommendations for them to implement. Visibly Better also assessed schemes during and after refurbishment to provide advice and guidance on implementing the action plan and meeting the standards.

‘As I have mentioned we have audited all of our sheltered housing schemes…so have accompanied Dave and involved tenants through regular meetings.’ Visibly Better Member.

‘We developed a work plan for maintenance, which outlined the recommendations from Visibly Better audits on what we needed to change to meet the standard.’ Visibly Better Member.

**Implementation** of Visibly Better standards – All members talked about building the Visibly Better action plan into their day to day meetings with their developers, contractors and tenants.

‘I represent the accessibility side of things at development meetings and Visibly Better is always on the agenda…so I can raise the standards and principles with our developers and contractor’s.’ Visibly Better Member.

‘Visibly Better helped us throughout all of the implementation stages…consultation with tenants, types of fixtures and fittings (lights), what we needed to think about during developments, types of tiles / flooring and nose edging for stairs and then finally design of interiors colours and contrasting. Visibly Better helped in a proactive, flexible way throughout the whole development…whatever we needed…’ Visibly Better Member.

**Interior design** – Most members utilised Visibly Better to advise on how to design the interior once the building work / refurbishment were finished.

‘When it came to the final stages we needed to implement the internal design and contrasting principles… I talked to Visibly Better, and Dave gave us the confidence to undertake the design ourselves…I undertook some additional training around colour contrast and accessible design (mood boards and LRV range, etc.) … so I could do the internal design. I went to the organisation with a plan for the design and they let me undertake one of the designs myself and then the organisation gave me the rest to do’ Visibly Better Member.

**Tenant events and activities** – some members utilised the Visibly Better package to build their tenant participation. Members told us that they had built a range of activities and events, with the aim of bringing people together and improving health and wellbeing of tenants.

‘We engaged tenants in coffee mornings provided by staff and supported by Visibly Better…this can help tenants understand how sight loss effects their neighbours it’s always a really engaging session…at the Coffee morning tenants also receive information about eye health and information about equipment that’s available and how it can help, that sort of thing…to help them live more independently… we also have information like this kept in common areas. It’s part of the standard.’ Visibly Better Member.

**Communication and meetings** – Visibly Better communicated regularly with members and offered flexible and ongoing guidance. For example, Visibly Better helped produce a resource pack which outlined specifications for schemes bathrooms and kitchens.

‘We have regular meetings within the association about how we can meet the recommendations of the Visibly Better action plan…look at how we can make adaptions. I have obviously worked with Dave to audit our accommodation and develop the action plan…’ Visibly Better Member.

**Key strengths of the partnership**

The manager’s approach was regularly praised by members, as was his passion and commitment.  His willingness to visit schemes and offer support when they needed it was cited by members as a strength of Visibly Better.

 ‘I have always come back to Dave…he has always been there for advice…’  Visibly Better Member

‘I went to Dave and asked for advice, he was so encouraging and supportive…advice over the phone, he came to look at the scheme and he provide great advice… I couldn’t have done it without him.’ Visibly Better member.

‘Exciting journey, but Dave for me is just fantastic…he is so good at his job and really passionate about what he does…it’s easier to work with someone who I connect with and is as passionate as I am.  We have never regretted doing this…and I hope we always have this support available. A credit to RNIB.’ Visibly Better Member.

Members praised the simplicity of the Visibly Better standards and principles and felt the process for implementing them were logical and flexible enough to meet their individual needs.

‘It has become embedded within our organisational culture…its eye opening…knowing that just introducing a few simple things can impact on someone’s independence…everyone should do this.’ Visibly Better Member.

Several members stated that Visibly Better offered them the potential for making an immediate impact, which they felt kept tenants engaged in the process.

‘Small recommendations from tenants that could be implemented immediately were good at keeping people engaged…they could see that we were listening…and could feel the immediate impact…for example bump ons on light switches, changes in décor, introduction of task lighting… small things we could do before the larger scale changes were implemented.’ Visibly Better Member.

Networking opportunities were praised by members and more opportunities to do this would be useful for some.

**Challenges**

One member felt embedding Visibly Better standards within their organisation was slow and engaging wider departments outside of their sheltered housing schemes was a challenge.

‘I think the biggest challenge for me is to get the rest of the organisation on board…other Visibly Better Members appear to be further on than us with this…at the moment. Visibly Better exists in the older people schemes and communicating the importance of the standards to other departments has been slow…we have adopted the standards which is great…but it would be great see a more of a cultural shift so that everyone had the training…developers, builders and people working with our other tenants.’ Visibly Better Member.

**Adaptations made**

Although the refurbishment of schemes managed by Visibly Better members varied in size and scope, key adaptations introduced were similar. Enhancing both the internal and external environment to promote independence and reduce the risk of trips and accidental injury.

New contrasting colour schemes was the most common adaptation members made:

* **Internal** – Good colour contrast was introduced throughout schemes. Coloured strips were added to steps and stairs, on the edging of doors, skirting boards and light switches making them much more visible, easier and safer to use. Contrasting colours schemes were also introduced as part of interior design between, furniture, walls, fixtures and fittings, reducing the risk of trips and collisions. In schemes with more than one floor, colours of walls were changed on each floor to aid way finding.
* **External** – Contrasting strips were introduced to steps, curb edging and handrails making them more visible, easier and safer to use. Colours of things like planters, benches or raised beds were changed to contrast against paths and garden areas. Members felt this made them less of a trip hazard and was a good technique to aid wayfinding. Contrasting colours were also introduced between buildings and pathways.

‘After the refurbishment…we have put in place a feature wall which lets people know when a corner is coming up,…so they don’t walk into the wall ahead…we have improved lighting to sensor lighting so people do not have to find switches…we have put contrasting strips on steps…we have introduced contrasting colours between floors and walls so people can get around more easily…safer’ Visibly Better Member

Improved lighting was the next common adaptation made:

* **Internal** - Lighting was enhanced throughout schemes with censored lighting introduced in corridors and task lighting included in common areas. Members felt that this helped to make schemes brighter, easier and safer for tenants to move around on their own.
* **External** – lighting was enhanced around entrances and on pathways to support wayfinding, which members felt encouraged tenants to go out more.

‘After the refurbishment…we have improved lighting to sensor lighting, so people do not have to find switches…we have put contrasting strips on steps…we have introduced contrasting colours between floors and walls so people can get around more easily and changed – things to help wayfinding such as signage’ Visibly Better Member.

‘We have looked at removing steps were possible outside with a big focus on lighting and contrasting. So we want outside areas to be bright, easy to use, with good contrast so people can easily find their way around and use the outdoor space….it all contributes to reducing falls.’ Visibly Better Member

Other common adaptations included:

* Non-reflective tiles included in kitchens and bathrooms and reflective materials on widows to reduce glare.
* Handrails added were needed in common areas, corridors and externally outside scheme entrances.
* Signage introduced both internally and externally support wayfinding (large print, braille, placed at appropriate heights and in contrasting colours).
* Lifts upgraded to include better lighting, contrasting control panels
* Repositioning of fire extinguishers and emergency evacuation information
* Level paving introduced to paths and entrances

Members agreed that they would not have introduced the above changes as part of scheme refurbishment had it not been for their take up of Visibly Better standards and principles.

‘No, we wouldn’t have known what we needed to change or even think about sight loss as a major thing to consider.’ Visibly Better Member.

‘we needed that specialism to support us achieve what we wanted to…we just didn’t know what changes would help…Dave is really proactive so it’s about thinking about things that will help without someone saying they need them… that is why we are building the principles into everything we do,’ Visibly Better Member.

‘No, these were all aspects of meeting the standard…we might have done some of the things, but the standard has made sure we look at the things only a specialist would know…’ Visibly Better Member

**Information**

As well as making changes to their internal and external environments, members used the Visibly Better standards to improve the type and format of information they provided.

‘by adopting the principles and from guidance from Dave we have changed the way we provide information to tenants…we send a lot of information to tenants…we have changed the way that info looks, the fonts we use and have now an offer to provide information in different formats…Dave has helped to make our info more accessible.’ Visibly Better Member.

**Outcomes for members**

All participants have increased knowledge and awareness of the impact that sight loss has on people’s daily life, as a result of being part of Visibly Better, and use this increased knowledge to provide appropriate support. Evidence also suggests that Visibly Better has drove members strategy to future proof their schemes, and positively impacted on their organisational culture and reputation.

**Increased knowledge and awareness**

Survey responses show that all members awareness of the problems people with sight loss face moving around safely has increased as a result of being a Visibly Better member, especially of the different eye conditions and effects of sight loss.

Furthermore, three quarters of members (77 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they had a greater understanding of the solutions which can help people with sight loss move around safely**.**

The contribution of Tennant Assessors was also recognised by members and the insights that their lived experience of sight loss brought.

‘Great learning for me…Just having the awareness of how many different sight loss conditions and how prevalent sight loss is amongst older people…’ Visibly Better Member.

‘the training has been so useful, knowledge gained about sight loss and then the more practical side…. contrast, lighting standards and how this can help… crucially it can be the smallest of things that can make massive difference and ultimately improve people’s lives.’ Visibly Better Member.

‘I had no idea about the difference that lighting, and contrast can make…or the impact of the different eye conditions have on people…huge!!’ Visibly Better Member.

‘I didn’t know anything prior to being involved with Visibly Better – I have developed all of this knowledge…the different conditions, the impact of this on different people and the more technical side of things for example types of lighting, contrast levels and accessible design…the list is endless really.’ Visibly Better Member.

‘One assessor helped us change the way we provided information inside the lift in one of the schemes, actually the lift was un-useable for someone with no sight…so made changes to that…we actually put in a handle rather than having a push button to open the lift from the inside…’  Visibly Better Member.

Because of this increased knowledge, members felt more able to

* give advice to colleges and tenants about the practical solutions, such as enhanced lighting and utilising contrasting colours.

‘people may not be aware of the changes that can be made so you have to almost suggest things that may help…I can do that more effectively.  Also, people I work with come and ask for advice or I can offer advice when needed…it has made what we do better…improved the quality of what we do add another dimension.’ Visibly Better Member.

‘I am more able to give advice when it is needed…for example I had a lift maintenance guy last week so I asked him to improve the lighting at the same time…simple things when we can…it had just infiltrated and influences everything I do now.’ Anthony Visibly Better Member.

* Identify and support tenants who may be experiencing issues with sight loss.

‘our residents are not always able to articulate their needs to us in a way that might make us thing about sight loss…they may say something like I don’t like going out at night or I can’t manage the stairs…for someone without the training you may just feel that they are old and looing confidence, sight loss wouldn’t be the first thing you think of.  Now it is a consideration I make.’ Visibly Better member.

‘We are able to identify people who may have difficulties and think about sight loss as an issue…but also know what equipment available independent living teams…’ Visibly Better Member.

**Future proofed**

All members felt they were making significant progress towards futureproofing their properties as a result of their engagement with Visibly Better.  This means that more of their tenants are living in accommodation that are equipped to meet future as well as current needs.

‘When we build, develop or change we can factor in the Visibly Better principles and standards, which help future proof accommodation for our tenants.  We have aging demographic and sight loss is more prevalent in older people it makes sense that our accommodation is the best it can be for people with sight loss…if a person hasn’t got sight loss when they move in that doesn’t mean that they won’t…in fact there is a good chance they will…so it’s about thinking about the solutions before they are needed…it all helps in our aim to help people stay living independent in their own home for longer.’ Visibly Better Member

**Culture change**

Some members felt that Visibly Better had been a catalyst for change within their organisation.  Talk about the standards and principles being embedded within their organisational culture.  Members agreed that this had been achieved through the process of implementing the Visibly Better standards and adopting the principles, regular cross departmental communications and training and the positive response from tenants as a result of the changes.

‘It’s better if all staff are aware of the standards as an organisation…we have definitely taken the principles fully…and over time the standards have become embedded in our organisational culture…from managers to painters…its best is everyone is aware, so they can observe and identify a solution…’ Visibly Better Member

**Improved reputation as a quality provider**

All members believed that the results of applying the Visibly Better standards had made them better landlords and improved their reputation locally.

 ‘For us as an organisation…Local Authorities are often have the reputation of not been good housing providers…I think this is helping to dispel this myth…being a Visibly Better member helps us to show we are listening to our tenants and what to improve our housing for all of our residents…we want out tenants to be proud of where they live…we want their homes to be suitable fot their needs…what they may be in the future’ Visibly Better Member

‘The impact of the changes made and our increased knowledge via Visibly Better…makes us better landlords…we want to be the landlord of choice and Visibility Better has helped us achieve this…interest in our properties / accommodation has gone up. We promote the standards we have achieved to prospective tenants and our overall aim is to support people for as long as possible to live independently in their home…having the standards makes us stand out from other landlords.’ Visibly Better Member

## What did Tenants tell us?

### Awareness of changes to the internal environment

The majority of tenants who completed a survey (84 per cent), stated that they were aware of the changes and adaptations made to the internal environment where they lived.

Colour contrast and lighting were mentioned most frequently by tenants as a significant improvement and enabler.

Fewer tenants (36 per cent), were aware of changes to the external environment, however, for those that had noted changes, new paths and better lighting where responsible for more people going outside.

### Outcomes for tenants

#### Increased safety leads to more confidence and independence.

Evidence strongly suggests that by adopting Visibly Better principles members have increased safety across their schemes. Furthermore, members agreed that this had a positive impact on tenants’ feelings of confidence and behaviour (moving around more).  Moreover, there is some evidence which shows that as a result of feeling safer and more confident, tenants are more independent.

Responses to the survey clearly show that adaptations to their home have helped tenants feel safer and more confident. Tenant responses to the survey indicated that:

* lighting in the scheme overall helps tenants to get about more and makes them feel safer (91 per cent).
* tenants feel more confident to safely walk or move around communal areas (90 per cent).
* Of those that responded to the question (9 people), all felt more confident to safely move around external areas of the scheme (e.g. garden, car park, entrances for tenants, etc.)

‘Everything we have done is to help people feel safe…it makes sense doesn’t it… if you make a stairwell better lit and make the steps easier to identify there is a reduced risk of someone falling down them…people will be more confident using them’. Visibly Better Member

‘Poor lighting, poor contrast on things like railings and step edges can impact on people’s feelings of being safe and as a result people may not come out of their home…and then lose confidence to even try…we have tried to combat this through Visibly Better’ Visibly Better Member

‘We obviously have strategies in place around health and safety and making sure we have a limited number of falls is within this…we absolutely want people to be and feel safe this leads to increased confidence to move around…which then impacts on the health and wellbeing…especially for those who couldn’t or wouldn’t come out we are seeing more people moving around…this is what we want…’  Visibly Better Member

Also, tenants have noticed a shift in the levels of clutter in communal areas, which they feel has helped reduced the risk of falling.

‘They don’t like you keeping anything in the corridors…You are not allowed to put your own pictures on the walls (in the corridors), ornaments on shelves, no mat outside the flat doors, all tables and chairs put so people can go around them…not any clutter. In the past all the chairs were around the walls with a massive space in middle.’  Tenant

##### Ability to move around easier and complete tasks.

As a result of adopting Visibly Better principles, tenants found internal and external environments much easier to move around (90 per cent) and, felt more able to move around and complete tasks in their own flat or bungalow (particularly in the kitchen and bathroom).

‘Bottom of the stairs is a yellow wall and top is a blue. There is 3 steps to a landing and 10 steps to a landing and the blue wall comes to me and I know I am about there then.’ Tenant

Evidence from member interviews strongly supports this, with many stating that they have seen an increase in the use of common areas by tenants; people coming together more and participation in scheme events and activities going up.  Members felt that was because of adaptations made to schemes internal environments which have made it much easier to get around and use the space provided.

‘Providing task lighting in communal areas…I have seen more people using the areas where we have put it…so more of the communal space is being used…I have seen people sitting together more in these areas…one group of ladies use one of the quieter rooms with the task lighting to knit or read…it’s so good to see people using the full space and coming together more…several haven’t done this before.’ Visibly Better Member

‘Our corridors were dark and dingy and since then everyone keeps saying have you made the corridors wider…It’s just so much lighter and better…this has made it easier for people to get around’ Visibly Better Member

##### Increased Independence

In some cases, members believe that the adaptations have helped tenants feel more confident and are supporting people to be more independent.

‘I have seen people grow in confidence…for example in their flats and it’s the simple things like…being able to see things on the work tops…one lady told me about being able to see the tablets she dropped on the counter on the kitchen or being able to see when things have been dropped on the floor…being able to see things like plates and cups more easily…so they can do a cup of tea and put food on the plate…’ Visibly Better Member

‘Generally in our bathrooms there isn’t any natural light…I had one chap say he was having difficulty getting a wash and shave…we looked at increasing the lumins and the feedback was amazing… it had changed the way he used the bathroom…but this is what I mean…without this support we may have thought that the tenant was becoming less able to support himself independently…we might have picked up that he wasn’t shaving as much and we may have come to the assumption that he wasn’t able to care for himself as well…lighting was such a simple solution...’ Visibly Better Member

‘In some outside areas we have removed the steps all together and increased lighted…people have told us that this has made a huge difference in getting out and about on their own when it is dark…makes getting in and out of taxis easier…so simple and just hasn’t cost us anything extra at all…’ Visibly Better Member

‘Suzanne keeps us up to date regularly – events going on – comes around and puts notices through our doors – quite big writing – she knows there are a few people with impaired sight who she will take and read it to.’ Tenant

#### Reduced isolation

There is significant evidence which suggests that a combination of better information about social opportunities, safer environments and increased confidence has helped tenants to socialise more.

Responses to the survey show that, 86 per cent of tenants who completed the survey feel more able to take part in social activities at the scheme.

‘Take up of the events have been good and this is steadily growing …an indicator that people are willing to come out more…whether it’s because of the environment or the information…we have really good engagement in the newly refurbished schemes.  Visibly Better Member

‘People have told me that the schemes are just easier to use…lighting in corridors has helped people move around more easily and I have noticed more people using the communal areas than they did before…’ Visibly Better Member

Furthermore, members have noticed communal areas have been used more and new friendship groups and networks are forming.

‘It’s made the communal area more homely…just a nicer place to live…it’s safer, well lit, people can get around…I have noticed that tenants are doing more and getting more involved…more of the common areas are being used and more tenants are coming down unaided…no longer relying on others…you see not everyone has someone to help…so if we can get people feeling safer, growing in confidence…they can join in on their own terms.’  Visibly Better Member

‘I’ve noticed that some tenants have made friends and developed their own social networks… people now know each other from Visibly Better and have become ambassadors of the schemes…so they are the go to people for advice and support.’ Visibly Better Member

#### More informed

Visibly Better has influenced the way that schemes provide tenants with information and as a result some feel more informed about eye health and the support services available.

Tenant responses to the survey indicated that some tenants:

* understand how to maintain good eye health (40 per cent)
* are aware of information and support available to help live with sight loss (28 per cent)

Almost half of tenants told us that they found the booklets and leaflets useful and talks from RNIB during coffee mornings were mentioned by several people. Having said this, some mentioned that RNIB materials were sometimes difficult to get hold of, for example the RNIB catalogue.

Other tenants felt they were kept well informed by their housing provider and noted that effort was made to make it accessible for people with sight difficulties.

‘What we’ve got now is a staff bulletin board – information that the scheme manager wants to share…There is a tenant’s board which gives us information on trips and activities that are going on. There are tenant meetings once a month. All the minutes are put into the tenant’s letter boxes so that everyone knows what is going on. The minutes are put through their letter box as well as on the board. Yes, this is all in 16 point.’ Tenant.

‘Can’t fault any info we have had so far – comes through the warden to us all.’ Tenant

Nevertheless, some tenants felt more could be done in regard to accessibility of information. One tenant said:

‘They don’t justify things on the paper and they use about 16 point. The paper is matt, not shiny. They want tenant information to be on big paper or yellow paper. Everyone is used to information on white paper. They write not all in capitals and use black text. We are kept informed.’ Tenant

‘The only other thing I’ve got is the notice board. The warden pins something on the notice board and he won’t tell me. It only takes him a minute to tell me. I can read text with my magnifying glass, but the notice board is cluttered. No, it is not posted through our doors.’ Tenant

#### Improvement in staff awareness

Overall, Tenants praised their scheme managers and felt staff understood their needs:

* 67 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that staff understand the problems they faced getting around safely

‘The scheme coordinator is arranging an eye test to be carried out in the complex for me, and if I match the criteria which she thinks I will, I can have extra white lights and possible other aids to help with daily tasks.’ Tenant

Tenants also stated that “staff provide valid information and advice” as well as “contact details for RNIB”.

‘The scheme manager is very good. They have all attended the courses. They will have an opinion as they have been on the course.’ Tenant

**‘**Yes, I can go to the scheme manager and she is very confident, and she treats everybody the same.’ Tenant

**‘**Now they are training the workforce to understand Visibly Better standards…getting them involved in the courses…understanding visual impairment…making them aware of this. They know to add a contrasting seat on the toilet for example.’ Tenant

As a consequence of receiving information within their scheme, some tenants went on to access new services.

‘Tenants have gained access to local services such as opticians because of Visibly Better…we have asked services highlighted to come in a talk to residents about what they offer.’ Visibly Better Member

## Outcomes for - Tenant Assessors

In some schemes Visibly Better has upskilled tenants to be Visibly Better assessors (Tennant Assessors) who have helped to support members to adopt its principles and standards.

‘Tenant assessors have taken on board the learning …. confidence improved…share learning tips about what works.’ Visibly Better Member

## Scaling Visibly Better

### Applicable anywhere

Overall members felt that the Visibly Better standards and principles were appropriate and could be applied easily to all public buildings, especially health and social care settings. Some felt that the Visibly Better standards could be marketed towards designers, developers and contractors, enabling them to promote themselves as RNIB compliant.

 ‘Other than I think everyone should do this – the Visibly Better principles and standards can be applied anywhere where people go and should be best practice for any provider of services or accommodation of older people…it can fit in doctors surgeries, hospitals, leisure facilities it is so easy and as I have said just doesn’t cost anything extra as part of a development…’  Visibly Better Member

‘You could even sell this to interior designers, developers and architects and ask them to be Visibly Better compliant, so they can help Visibly Better achieve the standards they want…Contractors, who go for a job to refurb a doctors surgery or community centre could promote themselves as RNIB contractors especially on lighting and contrast. It’s about having the knowledge’. Visibly Better Member.

**Value for money**

All members agreed that Visibly Better was value for money; the flexibility of the package and access to ongoing advice and support at no additional cost were the things which members contributed to their judgements on Visibly Better value.

‘Yes…value the support and advice comes with the package…no hidden fees…far more comprehensive and personal approach…response is immediate…’ Visibly Better Member

‘Every year we pay for and renew the contract – so far it’s reduced year on year – we have free access to Dave / telephone line…we negotiate each year on what we think we need. We may say we want more of this (coffee mornings and advice for tenants) and reduce something else… Definitely value for money… always negotiable, flexible and fair so we can have more of one thing some time and less of another.’ Visibly Better Member

‘Yes, definitely value for money…especially the ongoing advice and information…Dave will advise on things outside of the package if it’s quick and easy – for example checking a colour board…like I said it about the drive to make positive change.’  Visibly Better Member

In addition, most members revealed that the cost of adopting the Visibly Better principles and standards hadn’t cost them any more than what they had originally budgeted to spend on their refurbishment.

## References

[1] Martin, M., 2013. Falls in Older People With Sight Loss: A Review of Emerging Research and key Action Points. London: Thomas Pocklington Trust.

[2] Legood R, Scuffham P, Cryer C. 2002. Are we blind to injuries in the visually impaired? A review of the literature. Injury Prevention; 8(2):155–60.

[3] Cho, H., MacLachlan, M., Clarke, M. and Mannan, H., 2016. Accessible home environments for people with functional limitations: a systematic review. International journal of environmental research and public health, 13(8), p.826.

[4] Riazi, A., Ying Boon, M., Bridge, C. and Dain, S.J., 2012. Home modification guidelines as recommended by visually impaired people. Journal of Assistive Technologies, 6(4), pp.270-284.

[5] Smith, J. 2014. Homes and living spaces for people with sight loss: A guide for interior designers. Pocklington For Professionals. London: Thomas Pocklington Trust.

[6] O’Neill, L., Cook, G. and Hill, S., 2003. Lighting the homes of people with sight loss. Thomas Pocklington Trust Occasional Paper, 4, pp.1-39.

[7] Haymes, S.A. and Lee, J., 2006. Effects of task lighting on visual function in age‐related macular degeneration. Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics, 26(2), pp.169-179.

[8] Percival, J., & Hanson, J. (2007). ‘I don’t want to live for the day any more’: Visually impaired people’s access to support, housing and independence. British Journal of Visual Impairment, 25(1), 51-67.

[9]Equality and Human Rights Commission, Published May 2018 - Housing and Disabled People – Britain’s Hidden Crisis

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/housing-and-disabled-people-britains-hidden-crisis-main-report.pdf>

[10]RNIBVisibly Better Cymru

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/wales-cymru-how-we-can-help/designing-accessible-housing-and-buildings>

[11]Welsh Government Assembly, The Welsh Housing Quality Standard, July 2008

<https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/141030-whqs-guide-for-social-landlords-en.pdf>

# 