

Appendix A - Section 9: Emerging themes and recommendations from *A Qualitative Assessment of the Needs and Aspirations of Older People in Leicestershire*.

This study has highlighted a number of pertinent issues which impact on the housing aspirations of older people. First, older people have little knowledge about their housing options and what they do know about supported sheltered housing tends to be negative. Second, older people's housing aspirations are intrinsically linked to their knowledge of current housing options. Third, older people tend not to plan or choose to move to more appropriate accommodation, they move in response to a life crisis. Fourth, older people generally want to remain where they are, irrespective of how suitable their housing is either now or in the future.

While a range of older people took part in the study in terms of their ethnic or cultural background and current living arrangements, a number of common issues are evident from the findings which provide some guidelines/basic principles for providing housing for older people in the future:

- Older people want to retain as much of their independence as possible but to have access to 24 hour support when required;
- Suitable housing needs to include the provision of catering for family or friends who may wish to stay overnight when visiting;
- Housing provision should be integrated into the local community with access to local services (i.e. not a retirement ghetto on the edge of towns);
- Housing provision should cater for older people from a range ethnic and cultural backgrounds and lifestyles, supporting community integration rather than segregation; and
- The role of family members and friends in the provision of informal support and input into decisions regarding suitable housing needs to be recognized.

More specifically, the research has highlighted a number of important themes:

Few older people have a detailed appreciation of models of supported housing provision leading to confusion about the types of housing available and the level of support provided. For many, supported housing was synonymous with either residential nursing homes or sheltered housing, both of which were perceived negatively. This influenced their willingness to consider their own future housing needs in a positive way. They tended to adopt a fatalist approach to later life, seeing their eventual move to some form of supported housing as inevitable and associated with a loss of independence and poor quality of life.

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There is a general desire to remain living in their own home, often due to sentimental attachment, familiarity with the area or the availability of a range of social networks, irrespective of the extent to which their home no-longer meets their housing or support needs. There was a lack of appreciation of the type of support that could be provided to enable them to remain independently within their property. Their desire for 'staying put' in their own home was also influenced by their lack of awareness of alternative provision, coupled with stereotypical negative views of supported housing and especially sheltered housing – in some cases this was seen as 'a last resort.'

With the right 'package' of support, those currently under-occupying their home would be prepared to downsize. The nature of the support package would need varying according to whether they were current home owners or social renters. The former group may need some form of financial subsidy to enable them to purchase their preferred type of property, while those in the social rented sector would need financial assistance to help them with the costs of moving home. The type of practical support required, such as help with the process of moving house was related to their individual circumstances rather than tenure. This latter point is particularly worth noting as the process of moving home and the associated activities such as securing alternative accommodation and packing up their belongings was seen as very daunting and stressful. Those without family networks would need the most support to enable them to downsize. This group of under-occupiers would generally require a minimum of a 2 bedroom property (with the spare room being used for visitors to stay overnight) and either a bungalow or flat. Tenure was less important than the issue of affordability, and tenure switching for the current home owners to rented accommodation was something that would be considered.

Perceptions of supported housing among older people were very variable. Those currently residing in such schemes were generally positive about their experience both in terms of their accommodation and the support available. The negative views among current residents related primarily to the older-style provision with minimal private space and a range of communal facilities. Those who had no direct experience of supported housing had more negative perceptions, equating such models of provision with a loss of independence and a reduced quality of life. In this way, supported housing was seen as a necessity for older people who experienced the onset of a range of health problems and as such did not constitute a 'choice.' There was a general lack of understanding of the range of models of supported housing available and reliance on generalist, stereotypical views.

Those currently receiving some form of support from personal care services were generally complimentary about it. The importance of the older person (or their advocate) deciding on the type and level of support provided was seen as essential. Importantly, those within supported housing schemes, while not receiving the full range of services, felt re-assured that these services could be provided 'in-situ' at a latter date if they were required. The role of the warden was seen as pivotal in this respect.

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Where older people did express their aspirations for supported housing, they tended to have clear views on what form this should take. The commonly proposed features were:

- Catering for mixed resident groups (both in terms of age, ethnicity and sexuality but with the provision of appropriately sensitive support);
- Small sized scheme (maximum 40 units);
- Self-contained flats (either integral or dispersed) with separate sleeping and living quarters and cooking and bathing facilities;
- Communal areas which encourage resident participation;
- Culturally appropriate facilities;
- The provision of a range of social activities;
- Located within existing community areas with close access to local services and amenities and local transport networks;
- Incorporating a range of design features appropriate to the range of assistive-technology where possible.

Only a minority were aware of the Retirement Village model and among those who were, this was often based on word of mouth rather than direct experience. Concern was expressed about the size of such schemes and their location. However, at the same time, there was some interest in such provision and the notion of the provision of a range of health and social care and leisure activities were seen as being attractive, as was the potential for such schemes to provide a range of tenure opportunities.

While one of the aims of the study was to investigate the potential migration of older people and the possible reasons for moving to different areas, this was difficult to examine in any great detail. The majority of those consulted expressed a degree of reluctance to move to 'unfamiliar' areas, away from family and social support networks and neighbourhoods where they felt settled. This suggests that these issues are generally perceived by older people as a higher priority than the type of housing provision available. This was particularly the case among the BME older people and the Gypsy and Traveller community as well as those who had lived in the same neighbourhood for a relatively long period of time. The exception were those older people who did not feel particularly attached to their immediate area or had little or no family in close proximity. For this group, the meeting of their housing and support need was seen as more influential than the location and they would generally be prepared to move to different areas.

Similarly, in terms of whether older people would prefer to live in the more urban or rural parts of the County, location tended not be seen by the older people in this way but rather on the basis of the closeness of services and facilities, familiarity with the length (and associated length of residency) and the availability of family and friendship networks. Hence, it is very unlikely that the majority of older people would be prepared to move any greater distance from where they currently live, irrespective of whether they live within a rural or urban environment.

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Finally, the housing aspirations of the older members of the Gypsy and Traveller community need to be treated separately. A lack of experience of living in 'bricks and mortar' accommodation and strong family ties among this community, means that there is little likelihood of these older people moving into the more traditional supported housing provision. The development of appropriate housing and support will need to be considered in terms of the current site provision rather than something separate.

On the basis of the findings of the research, it is possible to make a number of recommendations regarding the housing aspirations of older people in Leicestershire under the following headings: promotion of models of supported housing; mainstream versus specialist provision; location of supported housing; supported housing standards; responding to under-occupation; the role of Retirement Villages; and Staying Put. In addition, specific recommendations are highlighted in relation to older Gypsies and Travellers and economic migrant workers.

There is no current definitive guide to the development of supported housing for older people. Rather there are a range of useful sources detailing particular aspects relevant to this study. These sources have been referenced at the conclusion of this section. Where specific examples of good practice have been identified these have been included with the relevant recommendations.

Promotion of models of supported housing

It is recommended that:

- Local authorities should actively promote the different models of supported housing to older people within their area;
- The promotional material should describe the various models of supported housing by reference to their characteristics and avoid the use of generalist descriptions, such as sheltered housing, which evoke negative stereotypes;
- As part of the promotional strategy, older people should be encouraged to visit existing supported housing schemes to gain first hand experience of them and to talk to existing residents; and
- While older people themselves will be the main focus for promotional work around supported housing, 'influential others' also need to be made aware of the various supported housing models in recognition of their role in the decision making process about suitable housing for older family members.

Mainstream versus specialist provision

It is recommended that:

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- Specialist supported housing provision, based on ethnicity or lifestyle, should where possible be avoided with the emphasis upon mainstream provision being accessible to all sections of older people;
- Sensitive and tailored support will need to be provided within the supported housing schemes, reflecting the diversity of the residents;
- Training on equality and awareness of all groups, including LGBT, should be provided to all care workers and support staff; and
- Schemes will need to have anti-discriminatory policies which all residents are made aware of.

Location of supported housing

It is recommended that:

- Supported housing should be located within existing community settings as opposed to being located on the periphery of settlements;
- Schemes should be located in close proximity to a range of services (post office, shops, public services, such as library, GP and dentist) and with good public transport links; and
- New provision should not be considered within the context of an urban verses rural location but rather, on the basis of the level of demand among older people from the immediate area and the accessibility to services, facilities and public transport.

Supported housing standards

It is recommended that to ensure that supported housing meets the future needs of older people it should conform to a number of design standards as follows:

- A maximum of 40 units per scheme on either a dispersed or integral basis;
- One bedroom, self-contained units with separate designated living and cooking areas and a bathroom;
- Minimal shared facilities, such as communal kitchens and bathing facilities;
- Communal areas both inside (residents lounge and reception area) and outside (e.g. gardens) which actively promote interaction among residents;
- The provision of communal IT facilities;

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- Design features which cater for the needs of residents with a range of health problems/disabilities, such as large signage, wide corridors and access points for wheelchair users, and the use of colour;
- The incorporation of a range of assisted technology initiatives; and
- Existing supported housing schemes should be reviewed to ensure that they meet the current and future expectations of older people in terms of the design standards and features and location. The potential for refurbishment, remodeling or decommissioning of those currently experiencing low demand or declining satisfaction with residents should be reviewed first.

Responding to under-occupation

It is recommended that:

- A package of support is developed for current home owners and social housing tenants who might consider downsizing, which incorporates a 'user guide' which provides a step by step guide on moving home and the range of assistance that can be provided by the local authority and their partners to facilitate this;
- The support package is promoted among older people, their advocacy and support services (e.g. Age Concern, CAB etc.).

Extract from: Discussion Paper: Tackling Under –occupation. Tenant Services Authority

- Making better use of the allocations framework to give greater priority to under-occupiers. This will include placing under-occupiers in a higher band or giving them more points. However, it may also include being flexible in their eligibility for property sizes if they will free up a large home, and allowing those with a certain level of arrears to move.
- Making use of mutual exchange schemes to help people to find their own suitable moves. This approach will tend to be more successful where someone has the role of identifying under-occupiers and tries to match them up with suitable homes through the mutual exchange scheme.
- Targeted support for under-occupiers to make them aware of their options. A good database of those under-occupying is important to sufficiently target this work. The provision of practical support during the move process can be vital. This can include arranging and paying for the removals but also dealing with utilities, carpet layers, etc.
- Cash incentives to encourage under-occupiers to move. This is normally calculated on an amount per bedroom given up. Experience from some pilot areas suggests that this cash incentive alone is not sufficient to encourage

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people to move put can be important as part of a package, especially if there is some flexibility in how it can be used (e.g. to clear rent arrears).

- Developing a package of incentives and services that are common to all the social landlords operating in an area. Such a common approach tends to make the scheme easier to publicise and people gain a better understanding of how the scheme operates.

Role of Retirement Villages

It is recommended that:

- Further investigations should be undertaken around the Retirement Village model to identify those features that older people would find appealing and investigate the level of future demand.

Staying Put

It is recommended that:

- Greater support needs to be given to those who wish to remain in their own home in terms of their awareness of the range of support services available to them.

Older Gypsies and Travellers

It is recommended that:

- Existing Gypsy and Traveller site provision is reviewed to examine the extent to which the preferred housing and related facilities for older Gypsies and Travellers can be accommodated.
- New site provision should include within the design a proportion of pitches which are developed specifically for older Gypsies and Travellers.

Older migrant workers

It is recommended that:

- Research is undertaken specifically with older migrant workers within Leicestershire to identify any specific future housing and related needs and aspirations among this group.