

# Age Friendly Homes: Building Solutions Together Event 9<sup>th</sup> May 2018

## What Did We Learn?

### An overview of our learning

We will use the learning from this event to further develop Bristol's Age Friendly action plan. The purpose of this event was to hear the views and experiences of people in Bristol and together learn about the barriers to Age Friendly housing and the possible short-term and long-term solutions.

Within this report we use 'supported housing' as an umbrella term to refer to the wide variety of housing options in which an individual receives some form of care or assistance, including care homes, extra care housing, supported housing, sheltered housing, specialist housing and other residential accommodation.

### What are the barriers to Age Friendly housing?

Four barriers to age friendly housing were identified during the event:

1. **Lack of knowledge and information about the housing options available**
2. **Funding difficulties**
3. **Most of the housing needed by 2050 has already been built**
4. **Stereotypes about both housing and older people**

#### **Lack of knowledge and information about the housing options available**

A key theme to emerge was the complexity of the different housing options available. Many professionals and older people reported that they lacked information and yet were also unsure where to go to find out the information they needed.

This was complicated further by the terminology and jargon related to housing. What is the difference between extra care housing, supported housing, sheltered housing, residential accommodation and care homes? Do some tend to be private and others tend to be statutory? What are the average price differences? Are any available in the city centre or would they all require a move to the suburbs? These are just some examples of the questions asked by those attending the event.

#### **Funding difficulties**

There appeared to be a mismatch between the intentions behind some housing options and the reality, brought about by a lack of funding to fulfil these intentions.

An example is extra care housing schemes which have coproduction as a central value, aiming to be flexible and shaped by the residents. While some seem to be successful at meeting this aim, others had to compromise due to funding difficulties. This included funding for activities and resources, but also the capacity of staff to help physically move those with higher support needs into the communal space in cases where the building was not fully accessible.

### **Most of the housing needed by 2050 has already been built**

Based on population growth estimates, 80% of the homes needed by 2050 have already been built. This means that when we talk about the need for housing to be accessible, we need to remember that in most cases we are not starting from scratch – these buildings have already been built.

Some of the complications of this are already coming to light. For example when some extra care housing schemes were originally designed they were intended for those with lower care needs, meaning that aspects of physical accessibility (e.g. wide doorways) were often overlooked. The current trend of people moving into these schemes at a later stage when their care needs are higher means that staff now need to provide more assistance to help residents move around the building and get to the part of the building where activities are taking place, something which would not be needed if this housing was designed from scratch now. The need for more staff support can mean that residents' involvement in activities is affected by staff shortages.

### **Stereotypes about both housing and older people**

Lack of easy-to-access information about the housing options available increases the chances that professionals and older people alike will rely on stereotypes such as assuming that bingo will be the only activity available in supported housing. In some cases this will be true, however other schemes foster self-organisation and enable residents to have a lot of control, in some cases leading to political groups.

### **What are some possible ways forward?**

Eight possible ways forward emerged from the workshops and discussions during the event:

- 1. Having a 'one-stop-shop' where older people can talk about their housing options**
- 2. Encouraging older people to think about their housing options *before* they need to**
- 3. Challenging stereotypes and creating a cultural shift in housing attitudes**
- 4. Developing a shared vocabulary**
- 5. Training for staff and volunteers in supported housing settings**
- 6. Facilitating supported housing residents to support each other**
- 7. Improving the home adaptation process**
- 8. Undertaking further research**

## **Having a ‘one-stop-shop’ where older people can talk about their housing options**

Having a ‘one-stop-shop’ for housing information would reduce the current confusion for both older people, their families and professionals. It would increase older people’s confidence that they have considered all of the housing options available to them, including statutory and private services, before making a decision about where to grow old. It would also empower older people to take ownership of their future housing needs by making this information more accessible and person-centred. It would be beneficial for this one-stop-shop to offer face-to-face support as well as paper and online resources.

## **Encouraging older people to think about their housing options *before* they need to**

Many older people and professionals attending the event agreed that it is important for people to start thinking about housing well in advance. In other words, not waiting until something happens which would then require them to move or make adaptations in a hurry, without being properly prepared.

Suggestions for how to encourage this way of thinking while people are still in their 50s included: retirement information days for employees who are about to retire; delivering talks to community groups for the over 50s; and working with mainstream stores (e.g. B&Q, Homebase) to design home adaptations which look attractive and can be bought on the highstreet.

Although it was recognised that you cannot fully predict what support you will need too far in advance, familiarity with the most common adaptations required by older people may help with this preparation.

## **Challenging stereotypes and creating a cultural shift in housing attitudes**

Some of the housing options available in other countries may work in the UK if there was a cultural shift in attitudes towards both older people and housing. There is currently a cultural attitude in the UK that, once you get older, you either live on your own, with family or in a supported housing scheme. However this attitude means that other possible housing solutions, for example living with friends or in an intergenerational setting, are very unlikely to be considered by older people.

By encouraging a cultural shift in housing attitudes and broadening the possibilities available, it would provide older people with more options and therefore may be better able to meet individuals’ varying needs. It is likely that changing housing attitudes will also involve changing society’s broader attitudes towards older people, including perceiving older people as valuable assets with lots to offer within an intergenerational housing setting.

## **Developing a shared vocabulary**

It became clear that when we talk about housing in Bristol, we are not always talking about the same thing; in order to find meaningful solutions it is important to first make sure all stakeholders are on the same page. By knowing what we mean when we say ‘sheltered housing’, for example, we can then have a meaningful conversation about the Age Friendliness of these types of homes.

## **Training for staff and volunteers in supported housing settings**

Older people in supported housing come into contact with a variety of staff and volunteers. It would be valuable for all of these staff and volunteers to receive training in how to support older people to come up with ideas for the activities they wish to do and then to take ownership of these in a way that is asset-based. When people get older they do not lose their ability to make decisions or significantly change their interests.

Similarly, it is important for staff and volunteers to be as flexible as possible in order to enable residents to exert control of their care needs. This includes coming up with creative solutions for overcoming health and safety restrictions, which can indirectly affect residents' independence (e.g. when mobility scooters are not able to be parked in corridors outside flats, when there are limitations on the physical support able to be provided between residents etc.) Training staff and volunteers in both coproduction and in flexible solution-focused person-centred thinking may have a significant impact on the experiences of supported housing residents.

## **Facilitating supported housing residents to support each other**

It is well known that older people often rely on family and friends for informal care, However the ECHO research found that some of those in supported housing also rely on their neighbours and fellow residents for this informal care, for example bringing food round to their neighbours or checking-up on them if they haven't seen them in a while. This could be a great way for residents to build up their connections with each other and to maintain a level of independence by helping out their neighbours in a similar way to how they may have acted towards their neighbours and wider community when they were in independent accommodation.

This type of support and sense of community may be enabled by: formal volunteering schemes within the accommodation (e.g. check-up calls); by staff creating an environment where residents are encouraged to self-organise and to help each other; and by residents having access to and knowledge of assistive technologies and WiFi.

## **Improving the home adaptation process**

It is important to continuously review and improve the home adaptation process, ideally making it simpler and more user-friendly. A key aspect of this is ensuring the process done in a timely manner so that older people can have adaptations installed at the point when they need them, minimising the risks to their physical and mental wellbeing (including loneliness) which can often be affected by reduced mobility. Adaptations are also most effective when done in conjunction with other repairs and home improvements, meaning it would be valuable for the home adaptation process to incorporate this element.

These adaptations should go beyond a standard risk assessment to be person-oriented; what does that individual like to do within their home? What would enable them to maintain this independence without having to change their behaviour? Do they have a preference regarding the colour or the type of fitting?

## **Undertaking further research**

We need a greater understanding about the experiences of older people living in supported housing schemes, particularly regarding what makes them want to join in or set up activities

and what makes them want to stay inside their own flats within the scheme. While it is also important to understand the barriers for those who want to get involved but for various reasons are not able to, there is very little known about the motivations for (not) doing this for older people who live in supported housing.

Similarly, it would be valuable to research older people's motivations for adapting their home and/or for moving home when they are older. What encourages and discourages them from making this change? What made them do it at that point in time rather than earlier or later? A greater understanding of these perceptions and experiences will help to ensure any Age Friendly housing solutions are utilised by the older people they are designed for.

## Appendices

### 1. The Role of Mainstream Housing in Improving Later Life

*Dr Rachael Docking, Centre for Ageing Better, Senior Evidence Manager*

The role of mainstream housing in improving later life is a key focus for the Centre for Ageing Better. The homes we live in are crucial to our health and wellbeing. Homes headed by someone aged 85 or over are the fastest growing households in the UK and are projected to increase (by 2025 there will be 1.5million of these households – an increase of 54% from 2015). Housing that meets the needs of this ageing population are going to be increasingly in demand. 80% of those aged 65 and older want to stay in the homes they are currently in and do not want to move in the near future, although it is unclear whether this is due to a lack of good quality options in the area where they want to live or whether this is for some other reason.

Conversations around housing are often dominated by supported housing options. However 90% of those aged over 65 live in mainstream housing. 80% of the homes that the population will need in 2050 have already been built; many of the homes that we will need in the future therefore already exist. Those aged 85 and over spend on average 80% of their time in their home and in their immediate neighbourhood.

The problem with this is that many of these homes are not suitable of older people or other people across the life course. There are very few homes which meet basic accessibility features to allow someone with any level of mobility difficulties to live safely and independently.

There is strong evidence that home adaptations improve people's quality of life. However almost half a million people are living without an adaptation which would allow them to remain at home for longer. The average cost of a disabled facilities grant (the money Local Authorities provide to those who cannot afford adaptations themselves) is £7,000, compared to the annual care home cost of £29,000. Home adaptations can therefore improve people's lives at a much lower cost.

The Centre for Ageing Better commissioned a review of the evidence to understand the role of home adaptations in improving later life. Key findings:

- Minor low cost adaptations have a large effect on an individual and also provide good cost effectiveness for the NHS and social care. Most effective when done in combination with repairs and other home improvements; need to consider the wider home environment beyond the adaptation itself.
- Adaptations need to be person-oriented. It is important to ask the individual what they want to achieve and do in their home, beyond just safety.

- Those who were receiving funding for adaptations from Local Authorities reported significant delays in getting these installed, often having falls in the meantime.
- Older people themselves often put off installing adaptations. People would rather change their behaviour instead of their environment, often because the adaptations themselves are unattractive and they were unsure where to go to get advice about what to get. The system to get adaptations in place is very complex.

Recommendations from the Centre for Ageing Better following this review:

- Local sustainability and transformation partnerships need to have improved quality of housing embedded within their local plans.
- Local Authorities should review their processes so that they can deliver adaptations in a timely manner, working with the individual to see what they want in their homes and looking at other home repairs at the same time.
- Improved regulations on private landlords so that private rental tenants can be supported to make adaptations.
- Have a home improvement and handyman organisation funded in every Local Authority.
- Mainstream retailers and designers should design products that are attractive and make them much more visible on the highstreet in order to cater for those who can afford to buy adaptations themselves.

More information about this research can be found here: <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/room-improve-role-home-adaptations-improving-later-life>

## **2. Housing that can adapt to you as you grow older**

***Richard Pendlebury MBE DL, Anchor Society, Chief Executive***

Housing is one of the key parts of the work that the Anchor Society does. Most homes are difficult for people to live in as they get older, some older people are reluctant to have home adaptations but many older people also do not wish to move from the house they are familiar with and have been living in for a long time. Retirement villages can often be at the higher end of the housing market (although not entirely as there are some exceptions) and therefore this is only an option for some people.

The Anchor Society currently has a housing project in Lawrence Weston especially designed for people aged 55 and over. These are eight houses which are fully adaptable, fully accessible and relatively inexpensive. They all have an upstairs where you can live if you want to, or if you have difficulties with taking the stairs then it is also possible to live on the ground floor and to keep the upstairs for when people visit or for a live-in carer if this is something you wish to have. Some adaptations (for example a grab rail on the stairs) come pre-installed. These houses are located within the local community, not separated from it. They are near to facilities such as shops, bus stops and doctor's clinic. This principle of being embedded in the community is central to this project and will be key to any further houses they might develop.

Because these houses are available to anyone over the age of 55, it enables people to start thinking about this as an option early and to move while they are in their 50s, *before* they need it, so that they are prepared. These houses are able to be bought by full or part ownership. The Anchor Society have the right to buy these houses back, making sure that these eight houses will always be available specifically for older people.

In the future the Anchor Society would like to build more homes like these, for example owning 8 or 9 homes within a new build being developed, as long as these were located within the community rather than existing separately from it.

The equity made by the Anchor Society is reinvested back into these properties or into their other projects.

### **3. Presentations from the Age Friendly Homes event**

The presentations from the following speakers can be found on the Age Friendly Bristol website; [www.agefriendlybristol.org.uk](http://www.agefriendlybristol.org.uk)

- **The Role of Mainstream Housing in Improving Later Life**  
*Dr Rachael Docking, Centre for Ageing Better, Senior Evidence Manager*
- **Housing that can adapt to you as you grow older**  
*Richard Pendlebury MBE DL, Anchor Society, Chief Executive*
- **Responding to older people's changing care needs in extra care housing**  
*Eleanor Johnson, University of Bristol, The Provision of Social Care in Extra Care Housing Project, Senior Research Associate*

The following two presentations will be made available shortly:

- **Global Perspectives on Age Friendly Housing**  
*Francesca Sander, Soil Association, Head of Service Design*
- **Age Friendly Housing for the 96%**  
*Dan Lyus, We Care & Repair, Director of Development and Operations*