

Retirement housing is often called sheltered housing.

There are many different types of retirement or sheltered housing schemes both to rent or to buy. Schemes usually consist of about 15 to 40 dwellings which may be bedsitting rooms, flats or bungalows. With a few exceptions, however, all offer independent self-contained homes with their own front door. Some schemes are simply housing schemes designed to meet the needs of older people and linked to a community alarm service. Other schemes have a scheme manager or warden and often include communal facilities such as a lounge, laundry, guest flat and garden.

New forms of retirement housing have been pioneered in recent years, to cater for older people who are becoming more frail and less able to do everything for themselves. These are known as extra care, very sheltered, close care or assisted living schemes. These may provide a range of extra features such as care staff and at least one meal a day.

Scheme Managers (wardens) and alarms

The duties of the scheme manager (or warden) can vary considerably between schemes. Some schemes have a resident scheme manager (warden) and a 24 hour service, others have part time or visiting scheme managers. Over the last few years there have been many changes to the scheme managers' duties. Most scheme managers (wardens) are now expected to manage the scheme, summon help for residents in an emergency, build up a relationship with older people living in their schemes, giving them information on availability and access to services and encouraging them to ask for additional support from statutory and voluntary organisations when appropriate.

Alarm systems offer the reassurance that help is at hand if needed and enable residents to summon help urgently. Residents can use a pendant or pull cord to contact a monitoring centre that is staffed 24 hours a day. If necessary the centre will alert relatives or friends or contact the emergency services.

Alarm systems are often used to provide assistance when the scheme manager (warden) is not on duty or not in the scheme. Alarm services are run by local authorities, housing associations and commercial companies.

Facilities usually provided in retirement housing schemes

● **Residents' lounge:** for the use of all residents. This might also be used for activities organised by residents or the scheme manager. It sometimes includes a dining area, or separate dining room, and perhaps a kitchen for the use of residents.

● **Guest room(s) or flat:** extra accommodation for residents' visitors. Usually available by prior booking and at a small charge.

● **Laundry room:** fitted with washing machines and either dryers or nearby clothes lines. Usually the cost is included in the general service charge/rent.

Design Features

Most retirement housing is designed with the needs of older people in mind and will have a lift for any dwellings above the ground floor. However many

schemes also cater specifically for people who are less mobile. Some or all of the dwellings may be to mobility standard (for ease of use by less mobile people) or wheelchair standard (for regular wheelchair users). Communal areas are normally all designed to mobility standard.

Who provides rented retirement housing?

Most retirement or sheltered housing for rent is provided by local councils or non-profit making housing associations (often called Registered Social Landlords or RSLs).

Local councils and RSLs generally aim to offer their housing to people in the greatest housing need, at rents which are affordable - perhaps with the help of Housing Benefit.

Who can apply for rented retirement housing provided by RSLs?

All can apply, but some will have more chance of success than others. In most parts of the country, registered social landlords receive applications from far more people than they can assist. All adopt a lettings policy, or set of criteria by which to decide who is eligible for their housing, and which applicants have most priority.

There is a fair degree of similarity between landlords' policies, which generally expect applicants to be able to show:

- some degree of housing need because of the physical condition of their present home; or
- medical and/or social reasons for wanting to move eg. poor

health, disabilities, loneliness, fear, or isolation from friends & family; and

- that they are not easily able, for whatever reason, to buy rather than rent; and
- that (if they are not local already) they have a good reason for wanting to move to the area they apply for. (Wanting to be nearer family or close friends is usually an acceptable reason).

How do I apply for rented retirement housing?

You should contact the landlord at the address given in the box on your EAC listing. Ask them to send you an applications pack, which will normally contain information about the landlord itself and the way in which applications will be handled.

If you are already a council or RSL tenant, you should first ask your present landlord to nominate or refer you to the new landlord. Contact your own landlord for details. Local councils will usually give priority to local residents. Some landlords will consider applications from owner occupiers if presented with reasons they accept as valid. You may also like to ask for details of the HOMES mobility scheme.

To apply for RSL retirement accommodation you need either to be referred to a particular RSL by your local council, or to approach the RSL yourself to find out about availability. Although RSLs may overlook residency qualifications there may still be long waits.

When applying you will need to mention any factors which might give you a higher priority

such as the need to be near family or friends who could help when necessary, or a particular need for retirement housing.

It may also be useful to ensure your landlord has a copy of any letters eg from a doctor or social services staff, supporting your need for a move.

What does it cost?

Costs vary quite significantly from one part of the country to another, and between landlords.

As a rough guide, in 2002 rents (including service charges) for new RSL tenants in England averaged about £80 a week for a retirement flat with a warden, and £75 without. Local council figures are lower, at £65 and £50. Tenants with less than £16,000 capital and a low income should check whether they are eligible for Housing Benefit to help with their rent.

Supporting People

From April 2003 charges for certain support costs (eg scheme manager service) will no longer be covered by Housing Benefit. Tenants who are eligible will have these charges paid by their local authority from the Supporting People Fund.

For further information contact the Supporting People helpline on 020 7944 2556, your local council Supporting People Team or EAC.

Understanding your EAC listing

The information has been provided to EAC by the landlords concerned. Should you discover any serious inaccuracies, we would be grateful if you would let us know.

Your requirements: At the head of your listing you will see the geographical area covered. Depending on your requirements, this may be a county, a local authority area, a single locality or a postcode.

Landlords: In the listing that follows, housing schemes are grouped together, and numbered, under each landlord. The box contains the name, address and telephone number of the landlord. If you would like more details of any of the schemes listed under any particular landlord, this is the address and phone number you should use.

Housing schemes: Information on individual housing schemes includes:

- The name of the scheme (if it has one), and its address;
- The date it was built or last refurbished;
- The numbers, sizes and types of dwellings included in the scheme.
- Details of any mobility and wheelchair dwellings;
- Whether pets are allowed; if this is blank it means the managing company has not given us any details.
- Any special facilities in the scheme or specific groups of residents to whom the scheme gives priority.
- The tenure; in most cases LA (local authority) or RSL (registered social landlord).