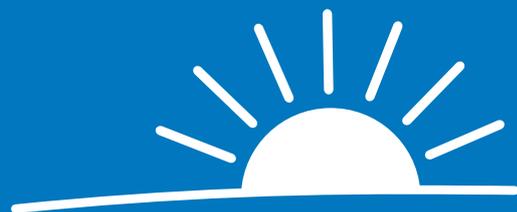


Sheltered housing and the resettlement of older homeless people

Briefing paper on a report for
Help the Aged/hact
by Imogen Blood



Help the Aged



Summary

As sheltered housing providers develop new ways to respond to the housing and care needs of an increasingly frail elderly population, *Sheltered housing and the resettlement of older homeless people* highlights the existence and needs of a different group of sheltered tenants. The traditional demand for the sector is declining and new lettings are being made, typically to younger male tenants with histories of homelessness and/or additional needs arising from alcohol use, mental health problems, learning disability and past offending. The report considers some of the challenges this group can pose to mainstream sheltered schemes and explores the potential benefits of sheltered housing as a resettlement option.

Sheltered housing and the resettlement of older homeless people presents the findings of research and development work conducted between 2001 and 2002 by the Manchester-based Older Homelessness Development Project with funding from the Help the Aged/hact Older Homelessness Programme. The report's recommendations are aimed at sheltered housing providers, agencies working with older homeless people, local authority housing and Supporting People officers, and policy makers concerned with older people and

housing. The report itself aims to stimulate debate among this audience as to what constitutes good practice in the resettlement of older homeless people in sheltered housing and whether, and how, the sector might develop to meet the needs of this group more effectively.

The research consisted of:

- a review of literature, research, policy and initiatives on both older homelessness and sheltered housing;
- a survey of English Churches Housing Group's (ECHG) 21 sheltered schemes in the north west, including in-depth interviews with six scheme managers and further interviews and focus groups with managers, housing officers, resettlement workers and supported accommodation staff working for ECHG North West Business Unit;
- interviews and focus groups with 15 resettlement workers in Greater Manchester and staff from 18 registered social landlords designed to explore their perceptions and experiences of sheltered housing as a resettlement option; and

- a review of mainstream and specialist models of sheltered accommodation in England, Wales and the United States that provide temporary and permanent accommodation to older homeless people.

The ECHG sheltered housing research

The main aims of this research were to:

- identify the extent to which ECHG's sheltered accommodation is already providing support and accommodation to older people with histories of homelessness and needs that are not traditionally associated with older people;
- consider with sheltered scheme managers and their managers some of the issues raised by integrating these groups into mainstream provision; and
- explore workers' perceptions of the factors that seem to influence the success of these tenancies so that recommendations for future service development can be made.

From interviews with ECHG managers, approximately 50 case outlines were obtained of people who, in the perception of the scheme managers, had been previously homeless and/or had additional needs. This data was analysed in order to explore the following questions:

- Which factors seem to increase the success and sustainability of sheltered tenancies for tenants who have histories of homelessness and/or additional needs?
- What are the risks, both to the individual and to the scheme, of letting mainstream sheltered properties to people from these groups?

- How can these risks be assessed, managed and reduced?

Key statistics

- Twenty-seven per cent of the 99 lettings made to ECHG's sheltered tenancies between April 2000 and summer 2001 were made to people who had previously been homeless. Over half had moved from temporary and/or supported accommodation projects.
- The average age of this group was 67 and 83 per cent were male. All were currently single.
- Out of a total of 629 sheltered tenants, the survey identified 29 as having alcohol problems, 20 with mental health problems (other than dementia), eight with learning disabilities and six who were known to be ex-offenders.
- A third of the previously homeless tenants with recently issued leases were described as having alcohol problems, compared with 3 per cent of the remaining tenants. Eleven per cent of the homeless tenants were reported as having mental health problems compared with 3 per cent of remaining tenants.

Findings from the case studies and interviews with scheme managers

- The vast majority of these tenancies were deemed to have been largely successful.
- Most resettled tenants kept their flats in immaculate condition and seemed to appreciate the peace and security of schemes.
- The presence and severity of additional needs was felt to be critical to the success or failure of the letting.

Alcohol

- Although most heavy drinkers caused few disturbances, nuisance problems that had arisen tended to be alcohol-induced.
- Personality, drinking pattern, behaviour when intoxicated and degree of insight or denial were key factors in distinguishing those who caused problems from those who settled well.
- Monitoring the safety of drinkers was particularly stressful for scheme managers.

Social isolation

- This was felt to be one of the major risks of resettlement in a sheltered scheme, especially when tenants had moved from a more communal environment.

Factors improving the chance of a successful tenancy

The main factors which improved the chance of a successful tenancy emerged as:

- a thorough assessment before the tenancy began, focusing on social isolation, risk assessment and additional support;
- ongoing input from a resettlement worker who communicated regularly with the scheme manager;
- the tenant having supportive friends or family;
- the tenant being familiar with the local area;
- the tenant attending activities on or off site; and
- the tenant building good relationships with neighbours in the scheme.

Information sharing/ confidentiality issues

The report recognises and discusses some of the problems surrounding confidentiality and information-sharing between agencies.

Scheme managers expressed a need for as much information about a tenant as possible. With information, they felt they could:

- advise on the dynamics of the scheme and the location of the flat prior to letting;
- set clear boundaries at the outset; and
- monitor the tenant's well-being and behaviour.

Views of resettlement workers

- In principle, sheltered housing could be beneficial to some of their older clients.
- The combination of peace and quiet, permanence, privacy, independence, an instant social network and warden support were advantageous to this group.
- However, mainstream schemes were felt to be inappropriate both in terms of social mix and level of support for those with unusual or challenging behaviours.
- The availability of ongoing support to help residents sustain their tenancies, social services' input and alcohol-sensitive home care were felt to be critical factors to the increased use of the sector for resettlement.
- The risk of social isolation was still felt to be high in sheltered schemes.
- The importance of careful assessment and planning with both client and scheme were emphasised.

Resettlement workers reported difficulties accessing registered social landlord sheltered tenancies for their clients

- The application processes were complex, varied and long-winded.
- It was difficult to keep abreast of the many providers.
- Common application systems made it easier but reduced the opportunity for direct negotiation with housing association staff.
- Confusion over confidentiality arose where registered social landlord staff were not familiar with the resettlement worker's role.
- Lengthy waiting times for some schemes made it difficult to plan and retain momentum within the resettlement process.
- Some workers identified clients in their early 50s who they felt would benefit from sheltered housing but were excluded by lower age limits.

Views of registered social landlord staff

- Ongoing support to help residents sustain their tenancies was identified as a major issue.
- All interviewees agreed that it was vital to assess the existing dynamics in a scheme and to conduct a risk assessment, ideally through open and honest dialogue with both referrer and applicant.
- Some felt that the slow turnover in many of their schemes made them unresponsive to the needs of homeless people.

- The regulations on concessionary TV licences were felt to hamper a reduction in lower age limits.
- Most registered social landlords in the north west reported infrequent local authority nominations and some schemes had built relationships direct with potential referrers such as the Salvation Army.
- Most registered social landlords were essentially positive about the scope for developing the accessibility of the sector to older homeless people.
- Some of the registered social landlords suggested monitoring and reviewing allocation policies, offering furnished and 'pet friendly' flats and promoting the use of dispersed schemes (ie those which are not grouped within a single complex) for resettlement purposes.

Recommendations

National governments, departments and agencies should:

- develop specialist advice and advocacy for older homeless or insecurely housed people to help them access suitable sheltered tenancies;
- provide funding for older people's resettlement workers who can develop links with sheltered providers and provide tenancy support;
- encourage the further development of common application systems for sheltered housing at a local level, linked into specific steps in local homelessness strategies to meet the needs of older homeless people;

- improve the provision of support for those in the 50–60 age group with moderate or multiple needs, possibly through social services, including help with keeping their tenancies and alcohol-sensitive home care;
- involve sheltered providers in the development of older people’s mental health services;
- review the concessionary TV licence scheme to cover sheltered tenants in their 50s;
- develop pilot schemes using enhanced multi-disciplinary sheltered models to accommodate older homeless people with high support needs; and
- monitor the impact of local authority fast-tracking of residents into low-demand sheltered schemes and of common application systems for sheltered accommodation on older homeless people.

Local homelessness agencies and local authority housing/homelessness departments should:

- ensure a thorough assessment of individuals’ suitability for specific sheltered schemes, considering their risk of social isolation and ability to live independently with low-level warden support, the client’s preference and the dynamics of the scheme;
- provide honest and accurate information about clients to sheltered schemes, using agreed confidentiality protocols;
- arrange training and information on sheltered housing for resettlement staff or, if possible, employ a specialist older persons’ worker;
- raise awareness of the needs and diversity of older homeless people among sheltered housing providers, through the promotion of inter- and

- intra-agency skill-sharing, exchanges, events and training;
- develop ‘starter flats’ within hostels to promote the transition to independent living, especially for older, long-term hostel residents; and
- forge partnerships with sheltered housing providers to give floating support, training, out-of-hours cover, etc.

Sheltered accommodation providers should:

- offer some sheltered flats fully furnished;
- hold a risk assessment and support-planning meeting, ideally prior to letting, involving the warden, the prospective tenant, their family and friends, and external agencies;
- define clearly in a contract the support to be provided and agree an action plan for contingencies;
- provide training, resources and ongoing support for scheme managers on alcohol, mental health, learning disability, offending behaviour and homelessness issues;
- monitor the out-of-hours input of resident wardens;
- review the accessibility and transparency of sheltered application processes and allocations policies for older applicants experiencing different types of homelessness;
- assess the need and funding/partnership opportunities for floating tenancy support aimed at older tenants, including those in grouped (ie Category 2) sheltered schemes, noting the need to submit proposals to launch new schemes using Transitional Housing Benefit to local authority Supporting People teams quickly and before the introduction of Supporting People in April 2003; and

- consider the feasibility of developing new or existing models targeting older homeless people. These might include:
 - supported transitional-to-permanent schemes for resettlement into sheltered flats;
 - enhanced or very sheltered schemes catering specifically for older homeless people;
 - dispersed schemes offering support in a less institutional environment; and
 - support provided by sheltered complexes to neighbouring general-needs properties.

Further research should:

- map needs and supply at a local level, eg difficult-to-let schemes and ‘silted up’ hostels: what are the needs of the long-term hostel residents and how could local difficult-to-let schemes be enhanced, redeveloped and/or used as a resettlement option?
- investigate how regional variations in demand affect access to sheltered housing for older homeless people; and
- evaluate both specialist and integrated sheltered models in terms of resettlement outcomes and cost effectiveness.

For a copy of the full report,
*Sheltered housing and the resettlement
of older homeless people*, contact
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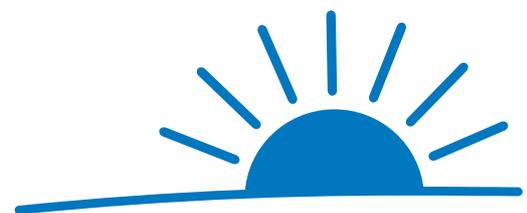
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Help the Aged

Working for a future where older people
are highly valued, have lives that are richer
and voices that are heard.

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