

Raising the stakes – promoting extra care housing

Abstract

This project aimed to clarify what comprises ‘extra care’ for older people and to establish shared standards for provision. Although a commonly agreed definition of extra care and standards could not be agreed across the sector, the outputs of the project did include tools, including a Quality of Information (QI) Mark, that encourage providers of housing with care for older people to give better information on their facilities, services, residents, ethos and outcome measures. This was a nine-month collaborative project by Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC), the Institute of Public Care (IPC) of Oxford Brookes University, Riseborough Research and Consultancy Associates (RRCA) and Peter Fletcher Associates (PFA).

Key findings

- The project adds weight to claims about the benefits of extra care housing;
- Organisations providing ‘extra care’ agree on the criteria that are most important for good extra care housing;
- Many providers do not agree on the need for ‘extra care standards’;
- Most providers do not want compulsory registration by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) separate from registration of the domiciliary care provider; and

- Some organisations do not wish to divulge how they measure outcomes, or to share their findings.

Key outputs

- A new questionnaire collecting more detailed information;
- Analysis of data on existing housing with care provision in the UK, including various models of housing with care services;
- A dedicated extra care housing website;
- A Steps to Success survey report and literature review; and
- A Quality of Information (QI) Mark.

Aims and objectives

To promote the extra care housing market and raise its standards by:

- providing interested parties with easily accessible information covering all aspects of design, funding, marketing and management, health and social care and domestic/hotel services; and
- establishing a ‘kitemarking’ scheme.

Work with stakeholders

The project closely involved stakeholders. Service providers were invited to a seminar to consider project proposals and early outputs. Next, a wide group of

commissioners, providers and investors, service users and members of the public participated in a two-day workshop. During the workshop participants considered a questionnaire developed to collect information, a self-assessment system for the Quality of Information Mark and a pilot web page used to display material. Participants also considered the team's findings on critical success factors – the things that made extra care provision a good experience. All the material was also distributed to everyone for comment.

An evolving brief

Most providers in public and voluntary sectors were ready to work towards the definition of 'basic standards' for extra care housing but others, mainly in the private sector, were not. The latter saw only disadvantages from 'standardisation'. The project team concluded with stakeholders that agreeing standards was unlikely whilst terms such as 'very sheltered' or 'assisted living' were being used to define very different products.

An 'extra care kitemark' seems distant. However, stakeholder discussions highlighted the need for better information and there are possibilities that better information for consumers could lead to a demand for agreed terminology. There are encouraging signs of agreement on 'extra care housing', as defined by the Department of Health and the Housing Corporation.

The project's outputs

Enhanced data

A first priority was to ensure that EAC's ongoing survey (National Database of Housing for Older People) collected data on all housing developments providing or facilitating some form of care for older people. This meant designing a questionnaire to collect more information. The project team considered the survey questionnaire used at the time by EAC and improved on it. The two-day workshop later added more and tested a lot of questions.

The questionnaire is underpinned by a conceptual framework developed by Moyra Riseborough and Peter Fletcher. The framework uses four domains to reflect the relationship between the lived environment, services, facilities and the quality of life that these provide for the older people who live in a particular development or scheme. The domains are customer base, lifestyle, environment and services. The quality of life approach means the questionnaire is tenure and sector neutral.

Currently commercial companies tend to operate within sub segments of the older people's housing and care market. The market is relatively immature and companies don't fully compete with each other. Fuller accurate data will help them target their investments more effectively to play their role in the local and regional housing strategies.

The data being collected by EAC is comprehensive and covers essentially things that consumers, relatives and professionals want to know. Having a standard way to collect and analyse the information is also offering new possibilities, for example, for the Housing Corporation and the Department of Health, to ensure new developments and remodelling projects respond to local need and take into account existing supply. An up-to-date picture of existing and planned stock is becoming a prerequisite and is available on EAC's websites and databases. Local and regional housing strategies will finally have to take older people into account.

Steps to success

What can extra care deliver, how can that be achieved, and which aspects need more attention to deliver success?

The generally positive view about the benefits of extra care housing (ECH) amongst professionals is not always based on a clear understanding of the evidence. The project reviewed the research literature to determine the weight of evidence for various common claims; such as that living in extra care improves health and wellbeing; and identified which appeared substantiated and where the jury was still out.

A telephone and postal survey was then undertaken with managers of 35 extra care schemes across 19 providers. Building on the literature review, it focused on what managers felt contributed to the successes of extra care, and on what measures they had in place to record and measure evidence of success.

The information from managers generally supported the literature review findings on the benefits of extra care. In reviewing those aspects that deliver these benefits, there was significant agreement about key areas, such as what best contributes to maintaining people with dementia in schemes.

Managers generally reported that they do record much of the information to gauge whether their scheme is achieving good outcomes for occupants; such as length of hospital stay, and move-on information. However, much of this is recorded on paper, in different formats which make the data difficult to collate. The actual use of this information by managers and their provider organisations was reported as being significantly less extensive than its recording.

Extra care housing website

The project created a new website www.extracarehousing.org.uk, aimed specifically at professionals. It hosts the new database, presents the project and works in parallel with www.icn.csip.org.uk/housing, the website of the Housing Learning & Improvement Network (LIN) of the Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP), which remains the Department of Health's main source of guidance and information on extra care housing.

The website www.extracarehousing.org.uk developed entirely new facilities to present the wider data collected during the extra care survey, including mapping, aerial photographs, plans and brochures. All these are now standard on EAC's main website www.HousingCare.org, which is visited by several thousand people every day.

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Quality of Information Mark

There is little appetite amongst providers for basic cross-sector standards for extra care although the idea interests commissioners. Providers expressed concern that minimum standards could stultify innovation. However, everyone welcomed a Quality of Information (QI) Mark.

The purpose of the QI Mark is to encourage and help housing providers deliver better, consistent information to older people, their families and advisors, and housing professionals. EAC has extended it to all specialist housing for older people.

The QI Mark is attracting a lot of interest from housing providers including those who want to make sure that their housing appears at its best on EAC's popular website www.HousingCare.org. To apply for the Mark providers must complete a seven-page questionnaire. The Mark has received official approval – see the Department for Communities and Local Government's recent Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods – A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society (February 2008) (page 139).

Legacy

In response to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) report Care Homes for Older People in England: A Market Study (2005), EAC, Care, Help the Aged and NHFA Care Fees Advice are about to launch First Stop Care Advice. By year four the service aims to help 250,000 older people and their representatives obtain information on care, accommodation, entitlement and costs. Raising the Stakes was an essential platform for this work and enabled EAC to combine its housing database with its care homes database. This introduced a new and seamless search progression from housing support to housing with care to care homes, for people looking at their options.

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