

A new advice service on housing, support, care and finances

Introducing FirstStop

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FirstStop was launched in 2008 as a one-stop pilot advice project by four national organisations that specialise in complementary aspects of housing and care information and advice work for older people, their families and carers:

- **Counsel and Care** – accessing care and support, including preventive services;
- **Elderly Accommodation Counsel** – full range of accommodation options, from home adaptations, retirement housing, to care homes;
- **Age Concern and Help the Aged** – Seniorline service, meeting high volume information needs about housing and care;
- **NHFA** – financial advice specialising in funding long term care.

Through one telephone number and one website, FirstStop partners work collaboratively to pool their expertise, knowledge and materials, providing:

- A telephone advice line, staffed by specialists, offering information and advice across all aspects of housing, care and support;
- Details of all specialist housing provision, housing support services, home improvement agencies, handypersons services, telecare services, day centres, care services and care homes, within any postcode area;
- Website and library of written materials covering all aspects of housing, support and care, including finance and entitlements.

Our unique web based case recording system, accessible by all FirstStop partners, means enquirers only have to tell their story once, and if returning at a later stage, will not have to repeat information already shared. This system also means we can analyse outcomes and create an invaluable detailed picture of older people's needs.



Government backs the expansion of FirstStop

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has pledged £1m over 2009- 2011 to FirstStop to support its aim of strengthening the availability and quality of national and local housing and care advice for older people. Announcing the award, part of CLG's commitment in the National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society, Communities Minister Baroness Andrews said:

"We are putting new services in place to help inform and support the best housing choice so that older people can make the right decisions at the right time and not in times of crisis or despair when the only choice is the wrong choice. We don't want anyone to have to say:

'If only I had known..... I'd have done something different.'

CLG is particularly keen to see FirstStop working with local agencies that commission or provide, or would like to provide, housing and care advice services. In this first newsletter we illustrate some of the ways we think this could happen. However our aim is to start a dialogue with



Local Authorities and local agencies about what would be right in local circumstances, and add value to service initiatives already underway or planned. We would very much like to hear from you.

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FirstStop contributes to key policy ambitions that feature strongly on both national and local government agendas.

We aim to work alongside local advice and information services to help older people achieve independence, choice and control by empowering them to make informed decisions about meeting their housing and care needs.

This means being equally committed to and skilled at working with *all* older people – those with complex needs as well as those just looking for 'that bit of help' at home; people of all cultures; self-funders as well as those who need state or local authority support; people who want information alone through to people who need support to get access to services.

FirstStop is a national service, delivering directly to older people, families and carers, but also a willing partner to local agencies, as the articles in this Newsletter will explain.

FirstStop for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts

FirstStop aims to enable older people to live healthily, safely and independently for as long as possible by providing all the advice and information needed to choose the right environment and the right support.

This means community nurses, GP practices, hospital ward and PALS staff can all draw on our expertise to support their work in improving older people's lives and preventing hospital admissions, re-admissions and Accident & Emergency attendances.

Many Local Authorities already provide their own advice and information (A & I) services, or contract these from the voluntary sector. Delivering A & I to the wider community is a precondition for the success of the personalisation and transformation agendas with which authorities are currently engaged.

FirstStop can support existing A & I models by providing expertise in all aspects of housing and

care, by providing searchable databases of all types of accommodation, or through cross referral of clients. Where A & I services are being developed locally, FirstStop can help to strengthen local services through:

- A bespoke local service, including a co-branded website with searchable databases of local services and resources;
- Housing and care home searches specifically for the local authority area, but with the potential to include national searches;
- A dedicated telephone number 'hotline';
- Local co-branded factsheets and guides.

Alternatively, local authority and health staff can request FirstStop posters, leaflets or other literature to distribute to anyone who might benefit from our service.

FirstStop welcomes more expertise

The FirstStop Advice model is unique in bringing together the expertise of respected advice and information services, and our intention is to bring on board other expert services that can help people meet their aspirations in later life.

HOMESHARE

Bringing together people who can help each other – householders who have a home that they are willing to share and are at a stage in their life where they need some help and support, and homesharers who need accommodation and are willing to give some help in return for this. There are currently five Homeshare programmes in the UK, with more in development.



BEREAVEMENT ADVICE CENTRE (BAC)

This is a not for profit organisation. It gives practical information and advice on the many procedures that face us after the death of someone close. BAC welcomes calls from the bereaved and professionals and volunteers who support them. Its service is overseen by a policy committee of clergy, hospital bereavement support, care home, medical, funeral directing and local government representatives.



BENEVOLENCE TODAY

A collaboration between 30 charities and friendly societies with funds to support individuals in need. Its mission is to work with other services like FirstStop to ensure that potential beneficiaries are linked with appropriate sources of help.

More information and links to Homeshare, BAC and Benevolence Today can be found on the FirstStop website.



FirstStop IN ACTION



Philip Spiers,
Acting Chief Executive

Philip has over 18 years' experience of specialising in and advising on long term care funding and state support for older people. He is a frequent writer, speaker, consultant, adviser and trainer across all sectors on the funding arrangements and legal com-

plexities of long term care in the UK, and a passionate advocate of the importance of good quality advice and information. He has been involved in Government consultations on care including the CRAG Stakeholder Group and current Green Paper Private Finance Group, the OFT report on Care Homes, Consumer Association reports, Department of Health and FSA regulation of long term care advice. He is also co-author of the *Which? Care Options in Retirement.*

Training programme to be launched

In September 2009 FirstStop will launch an affordable training programme delivered by Housing Options services pioneers, Care & Repair England.

A range of courses will be available for both the specialist adviser and anyone working with older people across the social care, housing and health sectors. There will also be freely downloadable self training packages available on line. Check the FirstStop website www.firststopadvice.org.uk or email info@careandrepair-england.org.uk asking to be added to the FirstStop training email alert listing.

Meet the team



John Galvin
Chief Executive of EAC

John has led EAC since 1995, and in 2005 initiated the discussions with allied organisations that led to

the creation of FirstStop Advice. His role is to ensure that FirstStop delivers on its funding contract with the Department for Communities and Local Government including partnership development with local agencies, the joint training programme with Care & Repair England and an overall evaluation of FirstStop's impact.



Sheila Coles
Team Leader of EAC's Advice Team.

Sheila joined EAC in 2002, after extensive experience of both delivering and managing housing services for older people.



Gill Coombs (left)
Advice Services Manager with Counsel and Care.

Richard Kitch
Manager of Help the Aged's Seniorline service.



Irene Borland (left)
Advice Line Manager with NHFA Ltd.

FirstStop for HIAs

Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) help vulnerable people to maintain their independence.

Their traditional focus has been on repairs and adaptations to clients' homes, but many have built up a portfolio of associated services addressing home security, energy efficiency, falls and accident prevention, gardening and even home-from-hospital arrangements.

The Future HIA Project was commissioned by government to examine options for the

FirstStop offers an extremely flexible approach to helping HIAs rise to this challenge, including:

- Adding a 'FirstStop Local' service to existing HIA services, with FirstStop working alongside the agency to deliver this, including building a joint website;
- Providing information and expertise to support HIA staff delivering a comprehensive housing options service. This could range from providing fact

future delivery of HIA services and specifically to test the hypothesis that *HIAs can be the hub around which vulnerable clients exercise choice about their home environment.*

It recommended that all HIAs should examine their potential to deliver personalised advice and information to their clients about the full range of available housing options, and encouraged commissioners and HIAs to consider how to engage effectively with FirstStop to deliver their chosen model.

sheets, to 'hotline' telephone support, to building a complete local 'housing options' information resource;

- Acting as a gateway to HIA services, and other related local services. FirstStop could offer an affordable initial housing and care options service to all clients before referring to the HIA those who want its specific services.

FirstStop builds on the 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?' programme begun by Care & Repair England in 2002.

This project helped 8 local housing options services to develop: 4 based in HIAs, 2 in local authorities, and 2 in local Age Concerns.

A parallel national work programme delivered training, information, and support to the local projects and commissioned an evaluation of their impact. A key finding was that the biggest single factor prompting older people to review their housing situation was health problems – hence FirstStop's equal focus on housing and care.

For a brochure about the programme, summary findings and full Sheffield Hallam University evaluation report, please see: www.careandrepairengland.org.uk/sisosig/eval.htm



Bespoke training course for HIA staff

FirstStop is funding a bespoke training course for HIA staff, to be delivered by Care & Repair England. The course will be delivered at venues throughout England, starting in August, and attendance will contribute to the evidence requirements for meeting the National HIA Quality Mark, administered by Foundations (*a new quality mark is due for launch in September 09*). A self-training package will also be developed

and made freely available via the FirstStop and Foundations websites. The objectives of the course are to increase advisors' understanding of housing options available to older people, and factors that influence older people's decision making about their housing situation, and therefore how to most effectively assist them in making decisions and choices.

Further details at www.firststopadvice.org.uk



FirstStop for Local Advice Agencies and Voluntary Organisations working with Older People

FirstStop is a resource for anyone advising and working with older people.

We welcome opportunities to integrate and cross refer our work with local advice and information services and other organisations involved with older people, and to share FirstStop's expertise, written materials, and housing and care databases.

FirstStop national can do much to help older people, their families and carers understand their entitlements, their care and housing options and how to fulfil their needs. But we recognise that local knowledge is also vitally important, and face-to-face contact and support is sometimes essential. We therefore want to establish good connections with local organisations and resources to ensure that all clients receive the best possible service.

Plug that gap! If there are areas of care and housing advice that as a local service you lack, FirstStop can help – so please get in touch.

FirstStop's local offer

Perhaps the most obvious possibilities are around information provision, specialist support to staff and volunteers, and our capacity for casework. *For example, FirstStop could, in addition to the support offered by Age Concern and Help the Aged, provide:*

Information

Personalised housing or care options for individual AC clients

Directories of local retirement housing and care homes

Website content

Support

'Hotline' telephone support on complex matters

Casework

Acting as a trusted agent to provide in-depth casework to clients facing complex issues, particularly around accessing and funding care

FirstStop for Care Professionals and Care Providers

The aim of care professionals and care providers is to offer older people - at perhaps the most vulnerable time of their lives - freedom of choice and independence and dignity. However the reality of funding constraints can make it difficult to achieve these ideals.

FirstStop can help older people, their families and carers understand the options, whether they require state funding or are self-funding their care and housing needs. Many older people miss out on benefits or support they could be entitled to, or might benefit from financial advice to make life easier and more affordable: FirstStop can help with all these aspects, too.



FirstStop information resources

These key publications are available in bulk for distribution to your clients.

See order form on back page of this Newsletter.

FirstStop can provide personalised housing and care options reports for your clients, including details of sheltered and retirement housing schemes and/or care homes that meet their specific requirements. Reports can be posted overnight or emailed as PDFs for you to print for your client.

Our website will shortly offer you the option of producing these housing and care options reports for yourself.

FirstStop website

www.firststopadvice.org.uk contains:

30 pages of information and guidance

70 selected factsheets and guides to download

UK care home directory

UK retirement housing directory

Glossary of terms



FirstStop promotional material

Please use the form on the back of this Newsletter to order copies of:

- FirstStop poster
- FirstStop flyer
- FirstStop handy-sized benefits card



Helping FirstStop to help others can help you

It's not just older people who can benefit from making informed choices.

Local advice agencies and organisations, care providers and care professionals can all fulfil their roles to their own and their clients' satisfaction;

Home Improvement Agencies and care providers can deliver their services to more older people if they are informed and understand how to get what they need when they need it;

Local Authorities benefit by supporting older people to make informed choices as part of the move towards personalisation. And through intervention, enabling older people to be supported and live independently, there is less demand on local authority budgets;

PCTs benefit if older people are less likely to require hospitalisation because their living environment promotes the best possible health and wellbeing;

Finally, older people and their families have the peace of mind that the right care and support is being received at the right time.

Get connected.

Call FirstStop Advice on 0800 377 7070 for more information or visit our website www.firststopadvice.org.uk or simply complete and post or fax us the form below to order literature for distribution.

ORDER FORM

Help us to help others

Please send me

Please enter quantity required

FirstStop A5 Flyer

FirstStop A4 Poster

FirstStop Guide: *Housing and Care Options for Older People*

FirstStop Guide: *Choosing and paying for a Care Home*

Please return or fax this form to:

FirstStop Care Advice, c/o EAC, 3rd Floor, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP
Telephone 020 7820 3755; Fax 020 7820 3970

Name

Organisation

Address

Postcode

Telephone Number

Email Address

Contact us

FirstStop Advice Newsletter appears every 4 months.

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