

# Newcastle & Gateshead Housing Advice Exemplar Project 2010-11

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Findings and recommendations from action research on housing options advice for older people. Conducted in partnership with Newcastle Quality of Life Project and Newcastle Elders Council.



Final report from the Newcastle-upon-Tyne & Gateshead  
First Stop Exemplar Project

Prepared for the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Quality of Life  
Partnership and the Newcastle Elders Council

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# 1 Introduction

This report brings together the main findings and recommendations from work undertaken for the First Stop Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gateshead Exemplar Project during 2010. The work included sharing the excellent information and training resources available from First Stop with front line staff, volunteers and older people and learning what worked best. Action research on the suitability and extent of housing advice for older people uncovered the vital need for appropriate and comprehensive housing options advice services that meet the requirements and wishes of our growing older population. The report explains what is required and points out the relatively easy and cheap changes that would bring massive improvements for older people and their relatives in Newcastle.

A short summary of the report will also be available.

## *1.1 About First Stop*

First Stop is a national programme of work funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government. At its heart is a website that collects, stores and circulates information and advice suitable for all older people, carers and relatives and expert as well as front line staff. The content stored on the site covers any aspect of housing and accommodation, adaptations, care and support, finance and grants, trades people and repairs.

The website makes information available to people in easy to read and easy to find chunks. Websites are here to stay but the problem with many of them is that they get out of date pretty quickly. Not the First Stop site because it is regularly updated. It is also well designed and the front pages are a gateway to good information. All the fact sheets, brochures and booklets can be downloaded and printed and the information is provided in a consumer friendly way. There is also a free First Stop national advice line and advisers can link to local services.

First Stop is run by a partnership between the Elderly Accommodation Counsel who is the primary delivery body, with Foundations and Care & Repair England involved in implementation. A wide range of stakeholders from the benevolent and specialist health and charity sectors are also in discussions with First Stop re partnerships.

## *1.2 The First Stop Exemplar Projects*

The Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar (which operated to a lesser extent Gateshead) is one of nine English Exemplar projects receiving funds from the Department of Communities and Local Government to experiment with and develop integrated housing advice services for older people who want to stay put or move. The projects all reflect the need to meet the modern challenges and demands of the growing older population most of whom can and will help themselves if they get the right information and advice although a minority of vulnerable older people need a lot of support and assistance. Each of the Exemplars is trial ling new approaches to meet people's needs.

## 2.0 The Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gateshead Exemplar

The Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar brings together the 'Navigator' case work service provided by Clare Mathews based at Anchor Staying Put and a training and research project headed by Moyra Riseborough and commissioned by the Newcastle Quality of Life Project and the Newcastle Elders Council. The combination of resources enabled the Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar to go further than the other Exemplars. It was able to explore for example, the principles of a modern 'housing options or choices' service for older people, which *covers the whole* range of people's requirements. The analysis led to a critical appraisal of existing services and arrangements and to suggestions for making improvements. In addition the Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar undertook training, awareness raising and action research. The Exemplar also connected with and had inputs into a range of other relevant projects and activities including work to develop the Older People's Housing Strategy and work being undertaken by Peter Fletcher Associates to develop a better understanding of demand and needs for specialist housing provision and support by older people.

- The learning and practice developed as a result of the Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar are important contributions to current understanding and knowledge on housing options advice and older age and this report is one of a number of outputs on the theme<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.1 Activities and tasks

The Newcastle and Gateshead exemplar has been:

- Mapping current housing and advice and information services for older people in Newcastle and considering gaps and issues
- Identifying case work themes and practice from the case work carried out by Clare Mathews
- Providing training and information on First Stop and housing options for older people, relatives, carers, front line staff and volunteers
- Promoting the First Stop website and services
- Encouraging a dialogue between a range of staff and older people on Key themes from the Exemplar project
- Contributing to local understanding and local strategic directions in order to influence the future of housing options services for older people in Newcastle (and to a lesser extent Gateshead)
- Identifying key practice messages and learning
- Disseminating practice and contributing to national discussions.

From the start the Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar project sought to understand the local context including the nature of housing and related advice and information service provision for older people and issues and

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for a full list of all the outputs from the Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar project.

concerns. Five main themes are used here to organise the subjects that emerged from this work. Those themes are:

- 1 The nature of services and their suitability compared to the scope of information and advice offered by First Stop
- 2 Information and training – how First Stop makes a difference?
- 3 A map of fragmented services
- 4 A developing new knowledge on people's needs and requirements
- 5 Contribution to learning
- 6 What needs to change? Recommendations.

## *2.2 Background to the themes*

The themes came from various routes including:

- Case-work undertaken by the Navigator Project in Anchor Staying Put
- From enquiries and referrals via other organisations e.g. Newcastle Age Concern
- From previous work undertaken by the Elders Council and Quality of Life Partnership which underlined the importance of advice and information on housing and housing related subjects
- From discussions with older people, a wide range of front line staff and volunteers and organisations that provide information and advice to older people
- Previous work undertaken by Care and Repair England, the Elderly Accommodation Counsel and myself including work on information collection for the website behind the First Stop site which is run by the Elderly Accommodation Council
- My previous involvement in research and policy discussions nationally on the need for better information and advice in order to help older people make more informed housing and related choices.

## **3.0 Further details on each theme**

### *3.1 The nature of services and their suitability*

There is extensive partnership working in Newcastle and Gateshead and collaborative arrangements between voluntary and statutory partners are well advanced. There are also a good range of information and advice services particularly in Newcastle and to a lesser extent, in Gateshead. However, services offering a specific expertise in the full range of information and advice on housing options and related areas of advice for older people are much thinner on the ground.

The First Stop approach to scoping the nature of housing information, advice and support for older people is very broad and follows the lay person's thinking in which home and where we live is not divided artificially in our minds from being able to care for ourselves and is central to how we feel. This is markedly different to a compartmentalised approach that dominates most service design and which leads to local services in Newcastle tending to focus on narrow or partial aspects with only the Navigator Service, Newcastle Age UK and the Search Project offering broad integrated approaches. The nature

and extent of current services and their suitability for meeting older people's enquiries and service needs therefore became an important theme.

### **3.2 Information and training**

Together with Clare Mathews the other half of the local First Stop Exemplar from the Anchor Trust Navigator Service at Anchor Staying Put Project and Annette Payne from Your Homes Newcastle and myself the Exemplar project organised and ran a series of information and awareness raising sessions for front line staff and volunteers and older people. The purposes of sessions were to:

- Promote the First Stop website and national advice line
- Encourage a wide range of people particularly front line staff and advisers to use First Stop as the main source of information because it is up to date and comprehensive
- Encourage people to use the accommodation finder resources from the First Stop website to identify possible accommodation options
- Work with a variety of organisations to ensure that staff and volunteers are aware of the First Stop resources and that they will encourage and work with members of the public to enable them to use First Stop
- Raise awareness about local services including the First Stop Navigator Service and Your Homes Newcastle services
- Encourage and facilitate debate and discussion amongst older people.

Nine awareness raising and training sessions were held. Another was planned but had to be cancelled. Sessions were held with

North east HIA case workers  
Gateshead Older Peoples Assembly  
Advice Workers in Newcastle  
Newcastle Welfare Rights Service  
Anchor Staying Put team  
Two sessions for front line staff  
Two sessions for older people

Two Learning Laboratories were also organised and held.

I led the sessions and prepared the bulk of materials for them, adapting First Stop resources for the task. I also developed and tested new material for two Learning Labs. The sessions were generally popular and well attended and participants had very positive things to say about the quality of the information provided, about the First Stop website and the learning and housing information resources available from the site. An evaluation of the sessions was carried out both at the time and later on.<sup>2</sup>

The training sessions were augmented with information sharing and discussion sessions with people in key organisations ranging from the set of

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for the collated evaluation results.

services provided by Anchor Trust Staying Put project to those provided by Newcastle CAB<sup>3</sup>.

A central objective was to improve the quality of the information available to front line staff including advisers and older people and their relatives on the range of housing choices and options available to them. First Stop through the resources available on its website has the most up to date sources of information and advice on almost all the housing, accommodation and related subjects older people are seeking. It is updated regularly and has links to more sources of information. It was vital to get these messages across and people were encouraged to use the information available from the First Stop website as their first and best source of information at all times.

### *3.2.1 Ensuring people use First Stop as the first choice*

Using First Stop always and as a first choice was repeated as a message several times in each training session or discussion. However it became clear that some staff and volunteers are not used to using websites on a regular basis as part of their everyday work. On the other hand most staff were keen to incorporate the information available to them from the site wherever possible. Overall the feedback from staff and volunteers indicated that they are willing to go to the site in order to get information however, there were some resistances and barriers, which I discuss later.

Older people and their relatives who are familiar with websites rated the First Stop site highly. As awareness grew so did the 'hit rate' on the site, which doubled from the start of the sessions and is still rising. Older people who are not keen on computers and websites were not keen to access the site but could see why there are good reasons for holding and being able to regularly update and access the kind of information they want and need in electronic format. They could also see that there are advantages in at least knowing where the information is and most people are able to ask someone for help to access it.

### *3.2.2 A demand for training and awareness raising*

The number of training and awareness raising sessions planned for the Exemplar project grew as their popularity increased. The project could not pursue all enquiries and demands. There is nothing equivalent in terms of training on the comprehensive housing issues and related concerns that affect older people for advisers, volunteers and older people and their relatives.

It is fair to say then there is a demand for more training and awareness raising sessions on housing options information and advice for older people and the Exemplar project indicated that this need would continue.

Some staff from key organisations attended sessions with the intention of cascading training to others in their organisations but this was not necessarily the norm for all organisations. There are therefore concerns that the burst of

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<sup>3</sup> A full list of the services and individuals that were consulted and who responded to requests for discussions and interviews is given in various progress reports.

training achieved through the Exemplar will have a short life and the long-term impact may be reduced.

### *3.2.3 Popularity – opportunities to discuss and think*

One of the most important findings from the First Stop Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar training and awareness raising sessions was that for many participants they were being introduced to brand new concepts and ways of thinking as well as new information. It is a challenging experience that can only be made sense of when people talk to each other and share experiences and views. These exchanges enabled people to think through the information they were presented with and discuss what kinds of information they wanted to find. For many older people the discussions are intensely personal and may be the start of a process of preparing for the future.

The training and awareness raising sessions therefore provided opportunities for reflection on the training material including what worked well and what needed to be amended and improved or not used at all. As a result a separate discussion paper is being written which brings together the lessons from delivering the training and awareness raising sessions including how best to communicate complicated material and how to raise difficult subjects so people can discuss or think about them.

### *3.3 A map of fragmented services*

A substantive part of the action research work involved mapping existing services and comparing these services to people's expectations and experiences when older people actually look for information, advice and support.

Initially the mapping focused on trying to understand whether the housing advice and housing related services offered primarily in Newcastle covered the kind of subjects older people wanted advice and information on. It soon became clear that there was a good range of services but not many holistic housing advice services that match older people's requirements on the full range of housing options information so the map is a story of fragments. In addition people need a lot of insider knowledge including being able to use the terminology that different agencies and organisation in the system use in order to find their way around.

The 'service maps' produced by the Exemplar and shown in Appendix 4 are the first comprehensive maps of Newcastle's relevant housing options services for older people. The maps also illustrate a 'de facto' Newcastle 'system'. De facto because it has grown up in response to various pressures and needs but was never planned as a system although older people, relatives and front line staff actually have to get to grips with it and experience it as a system that doesn't work all that well.

No one is to blame for this state of affairs and it's probably replicated across many towns and cities. The fact is that the older population, its housing and income behaviours and experiences and expectations have all changed and



they will go on changing. The system such as it is hasn't caught up and needs to – fast.

The maps are one of the lasting resources from the First Stop Exemplar. They will appear on the NOW site together with improved older person centred details of the services. A graphic has also been produced to enable front line staff particularly health staffs give accurate information on home visits. The graphic need further work but the rough draft is shown in Appendix 5.

### *3.3.1 Referrals and protocols*

There is some excellent work going on in Newcastle to ensure that older people and other vulnerable groups are referred to the most appropriate services and front line staff who visit people at home have an important job to play in this. The 'Joining the Dots' project for example has encouraged working protocols and links to develop between staff so they are better informed and aware and can ensure that citizens get the services they need. The expertise and good will amongst front line staff, volunteers and people who try to assist older citizens makes things a lot better for everyone. Without this kind of input it is doubtful that anyone would make much sense of the system that exists.

There are several problems though when it comes to housing options information and advice for older people. First, it's a complex advice and information area and anyone advising older people does need to have a grasp of the full picture. But and secondly, as the service maps indicate there are very few services that can provide integrated comprehensive information and advice that is older people centred. The experience of the Navigator casework service is that people are often referred to the wrong service and information is often out of date.

The service maps provide for the first time, accurate information provided they are used and updated at least annually. However, wouldn't it be better if a system were created which is older people friendly so people can understand and find their way around? There would be far less need then for referrals and protocols at all but especially for those people who can actually help themselves provided the system is easier to follow. This would also enable staff to spend their time concentrating on those people who are the most vulnerable and cannot help themselves or need help to do so.

### *3.3.2 Gaps in services*

Some gaps in services exist in Newcastle and no doubt elsewhere in the UK. They include a lack of advice and information on financial subjects, that older people want advice on and which are tricky. Some of these subjects come under the heading of financial literacy and planning but others are harder to categorise. They are not always debt related and are rarely part of the remit of money advisers. Understanding and resolving the nature of older people's requirements would need some expert research and exploration.

For example, under the heading of financial literacy are subjects like choosing the most appropriate and advantageous financial product whether that is an

income reversion scheme or an annuity. As a nation we are generally poorly equipped to make financial decisions – or to put it another way we are often financially illiterate. The present and former Governments are keen to improve our understanding and there is no doubt that people approaching older age should be part of any improvement schemes. The problem is that they aren't or at least not at the moment. When they ask for advice and information on how to choose products they tend to be given at best a selection of approved products. Older people who came to some of the First Stop awareness raising sessions in Newcastle asked about good sources of advice on investing and looking after their savings or where to go to get a good reputable financial service and they report that they are being ignored. The question is what to do about it? Education is one route but so too is having different approaches by financial advisers. I will come back to this subject later.

Other gaps included lack of legal advice on housing issues for older people on moderate incomes due to services being aimed at people who qualify for Legal Aid and lack of advisers able to deal with complex housing and finance issues including debt, equity release, disrepair and low capital values. In addition there is widespread evidence that homeowners lack basic knowledge on maintaining their homes and finances in such a way that would enable them to have a good older age. Some of the people affected are people who bought homes under Right to Buy but there are many who bought on the open market.

The discussion here highlights how older people's needs for advice and information have changed. Many are owner occupiers whose decisions for their future older age are heavily tied up with decisions about selling or drawing down equity, down sizing and or moving to different kinds of accommodation in different locations and possibly living in different tenures. Decisions are also affected by making best use of savings and income from the state and other pensions. Older people's needs for information, advice and support are therefore highly diverse and much more complicated than may have been the case say twenty or thirty years ago. They are not the stereotypical advice customers but they need good information and advice in order to make the best of their assets and avoid becoming a burden on the state. They are currently vulnerable to sharp practice and bad commercial behaviour including illegal practices.

Advice services have tended however to be aimed at people who are poorer and less articulate or vulnerable because of acute health problems. The balance of services is also heavily welfarist and paternal. They are skewed towards social renters and people on low incomes. The welfarist and paternalistic philosophy is now out of step with older people's needs and there are many implications for practice and the way that services interact with older people.

It is a huge challenge for everyone to prepare for their later lives but some older people can do this and they want to. The key is enabling people to get the kind of information they require in order to help themselves. It is clearly a challenge that has to be met.

### 3.4. Gaps in intelligence and lack of monitoring information

Most information and advice services collect data and statistics on service use by the kind of enquiry and age of enquirer. However, some services that work within the system as it is now and which are not strictly speaking advice or information services do not. There is also no central place that gathers information so that the state of play can be monitored for older people across the City. As a result it is very difficult to enumerate and monitor some things that need to be monitored, such as, the number of older people who are living in sub standard housing or who have been served orders for disrepair.

### 3.4 A developing new knowledge on people's needs and requirements

Interest has steadily grown in the importance of housing and accommodation options in older people's lives. Research has gradually and increasingly shown that older people live better in later life if they are able to live in locations and accommodation they choose particularly if their accommodation enables them to self-care for longer. Having adapted bathrooms and kitchens are part of the ingredients that work but life time designed homes which enable people to self care across the life course are the holy grail. Specialist housing is also part of the mix and sometimes moving to specialist housing is the best option and can enable people to continue to live independently rather than move into residential care. However, the fact is that there is a huge mix of options and people's knowledge of them is often limited – even when they are advisers or they work in organisations that older people and their relatives seek help from.

I was able to look closely at the Anchor Trust Navigator Service and what it does. I was also able to collect information from the older people and staff who participated in awareness raising and training sessions and the two Learning Laboratories held to test out ideas. Through this a detailed picture developed of how a modern housing options service for older people should be shaped and what it should do. The Navigator Service, which has been running for a year ticks all the boxes – it also benefits from being nested within a set of other services provided by Anchor Trust. This provides a powerful integrated and comprehensive approach that is unique.

Financial advice and support so people can obtain funding to do the adaptations or repairs and maintenance work

Property assessment to ensure that repairs and other work are project managed including managing contractors and working with Building Regulators. Ensuring any proposed work is practical and feasible

The dedicated housing options service for older people – the Navigator service is nested within other Anchor Staying Put services and all their expertise are drawn on

Technical services  
Small repairs  
Hanging curtains  
Installing grab rails  
Moving furniture including putting beds downstairs  
Installing security equipment

Technical staff are very experienced and well trained and will take action to help customers

Information and communication hub at the centre of all services ensuring that calls and enquiries get to the right people – staff are well trained in listening and regularly assess the quality of services for customers

Gardening and trades register

Older people contact Anchor for information on trusted services and to have services matched to their requirements

Gardening services are provided for a number of customers including self-payers

### *3.4.1 Practice challenges*

The Exemplar project identified many practice challenges for advisers. Here are some of the most important.<sup>4</sup> A forthcoming paper for First Stop from Clare Mathews will discuss practice issues and concerns in more detail.

*All advisers need to recognise the vital importance of housing options information for all older people and their relatives.*

People need to be signposted to the right places to get the information they need and First Stop is the best place to start.

The evidence from the Navigator Service and First Stop is that older people and their relatives and friends approach services for many reasons. For example, because they are thinking of moving or staying where they are but want to know what the implications are. This is often prompted by financial worries or health concerns or because people would like to plan.

Most people have some information but it is usually partial and inadequate. Deciding to move or stay is a huge decision and people need a lot of information on all the options and what they entail. Advisers really need to know how to get hold of such a varied set of information and ensure it is accurate. Members of the public also need to know what life will be like for them if they take one route as opposed to another. For example, while most people say they prefer to stay put if possible their views often change when the long-term implications become clear to them.

### *3.4.2 Decisions involve processes and quite long time lines*

The adviser should be giving information so people can make informed choices but they have to make it clear that the actual decision making process comes late in the day and the information gathering and sifting processes come first. They take time. People need to be prepared to look at the First Stop website, to read entries about accommodation options, their costs and locations and so on and they need to think about the practicalities of applying or purchasing the choice they want. If they think they want to stay put they

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<sup>4</sup> The paper will be available from the Newcastle Quality of Life Partnership.

need to think about the changes that might be needed in the home to enable them to self-care as they age. For example, having an adapted bathroom or a ramp up to the home. Who will organise and pay for these changes are matters that people need to think about. At the moment most of these matters are dealt with in bits and pieces by different agencies and older people get sent or referred to different organisations. As a result they can and do fall through the cracks between services and few services see housing options and related matters as their main area of expertise.

#### *3.4.3 Moving away from paternalism to enabling and empowering*

There is no doubt that some older people – often the most vulnerable, least articulate or unwell, need a lot of help and assistance that goes far beyond information giving, advice or advocacy. However, most people don't need this level of intervention and services are not currently geared up to help them.

A practice challenge for all front line services that come into contact with older people and any aspect of housing options is to understand that older people are generally able to help themselves provided they are listened to and they receive the correct information. Older people coming to First Stop sessions had mixed experiences. They noted for example that it is hard to know which words to use in order to get the information they want and there is a kind of paternalism which although well meaning is inappropriate. As a result people said they were often not listened to.

Owner-occupiers reported repeatedly that they did not know where to start looking unless they had a specific problem because the general view was that services were aimed at social renters and people on low incomes. Yet disrepair is a frequently reported problem amongst older households. Anchor Staying Put for example finds that once enquiries from older people and relatives about grants and loans for adaptations are followed up there is a consistent thread of disrepair and other issues. Homeowners do not routinely maintain their homes or have plans to do so.

Ensuring that **all** older people have access to advice and information to enable them to make informed choices is obviously very important and paternalism has to be challenged. Listening skills need to be sharpened.

#### *3.4.4 Using websites and interactive approaches to empower the public*

It seems such a small thing but very few of the front line staff and volunteers who came to First Stop discussions used lap-tops on home visits or their PCs when engaging with people seeking advice. Yet being able to use information and see the same information that advisers or front line staff use **is** enabling and democratic. It is also interactive and enables the member of staff to have open conversations with people about actual choices and actual implications there and then instead of having to say that some information will be sent out later to the individual. Of course people need to have printed and other information as well and this can often be downloaded from the First Stop site

but technology is there to enable advisers and empower the public. It needs to be incorporated into every day work by front line staff and volunteers.

#### *3.4.5 Changing cultures, funders and hearts and minds*

Since the nature of housing options advice and information encompasses very wide areas of knowledge and expertise, practice amongst agencies involved in delivering information and advice needs to change. At the moment most attention is focused on those people who need a lot of assistance and support in order to live independently and very little resource is spent on preventing the vast majority getting into such situations.

#### *3.4.6 Questions and challenges*

A lot of money is also spent supporting people to have quite poor lives and to continue living in poor housing and accommodation – should this continue?

Disrepair is a frequently reported problem amongst older households including those applying for grants and loans for adaptations. Anchor Staying Put for example finds that once enquiries from older people and relatives about grants and loans for adaptations are followed up there is a consistent thread of disrepair and other issues such as damp.

Homeowners do not routinely maintain their homes or have plans to do so.

Do older people really want to have the option to stay put if it involves living very narrow lives? These are practice dilemmas and it is unclear how often dilemmas are raised with people or if they are ever raised even though they should be part of the rationale of making an informed decision. Older people in discussions with us tended to be much more straightforward than the front line staff we talked to, saying that they would welcome frank discussion although it might take a while for things to sink in.

There are other difficult questions and challenges but they cannot be ignored. Do commissioners and funders want to go on as they are or do they want to recommission services to do a bit more on the prevention side? Do commissioners and funders want to continue funding advice and information services that are heavily skewed towards results in terms of numbers of enquiries and throughput or will they recognise that modern housing options services work at three different levels all of which are geared to enabling and supporting people to make informed choices and this takes time?

#### Three levels – modern housing options services for older people

Level 1 – excellent information to make sure people have access to good quality accurate information on the full range of choices – this is available from First Stop

Level 2 – advice services and advocacy inputs to enable people who need some assistance to find out information and make choices.

Level 3 – more intensive support and advocacy for the minority of people whose housing and living circumstances are very poor and or they need to consider options about moving or staying

#### *3.4.7 Having the tools and training to do the job*

The First Stop awareness raising and training sessions underlined the fact that few front line staff has adequate training or information on housing options information and advice. There are concerns that the short burst of knowledge and training provided by the Exemplar and the impacts on staff and volunteers will die away without regular refreshers and a real commitment to put information and advice on housing options for older age on the commissioning agenda.

#### *3.4.8 Not casework but a more longitudinal responsible agreement with users*

The Navigator service has been exploring and developing an approach for working with service users which isn't case work in the traditional sense of the word but is closer to a contractual relationship between users and service providers on expected outcomes including targets and timescales. This approach seems to be in keeping with a modern person centred service and is effective.

### **5 Contribution to learning**

The Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar project is contributing to national and local understanding and knowledge. It is contributing to local understanding on the nature of housing advice required by older people in the context of an increasingly complex and ageing population. It has identified practice issues and areas that need to be discussed further and it has contributed to understanding on how best to communicate quite complex information to different audiences. It has also contributed knowledge on how to establish and run modern housing advice services aimed at older people particularly owner-occupiers.

#### *5.1 Working with older people to create better services*

The Exemplar involved and worked with older people in several ways and used their knowledge and expertise to appraise systems and training material. One of the most powerful examples involved older people talking about their experiences and thoughts about moving or staying. Different people and organisations in the present 'system' in sharp contrast to the technical language used their everyday language and words. As a result of this I developed some training material which is person centred and is based on the real experiences of people who want to obtain some information, advice, support or practical help with housing or accommodation options. We used this material in a Learning Laboratory to good effect. It will also be made more widely available to other First Stop exemplars and others.

As a result of the above work proposals were made to update and redo the information on the Now website – this work is likely to start in the New Year.

Another piece of work involved older people as consumers and mystery shoppers – volunteers from Newcastle Elders Council used ‘scripts’ based on real case studies to test out the services at Age Concern Newcastle (now Newcastle Age UK), the City Council and First Stop national advice line. All came out pretty well but the older people commented that they got fed up with being asked for their names and addresses although they realised that this was probably for monitoring purposes. The experience highlighted older people’s talents and showed what a force they could be for quality assurance.

Overall these experiences illustrate older people’s tremendous capacity but they were very clear that they need more support and training in order to do this. The appetite is however, very evident. They are keen to participate and are being under used.

### *5.2 Discussion papers and presentations*

The Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar has been contributing to national discussions. It is recognised as a leading example. Several discussion papers and presentations from the Exemplar have been widely disseminated locally and nationally. Clare Mathews will be producing a paper highlighting practice issues and exploring the nature of a modern housing options service aimed at older people. A final paper on training and learning will also be produced and hopefully there will be some articles and shorter outputs.

## **6 What needs to change? Recommendations**

### *6.1 What needs to change?*

#### *6.2. Gather and monitor information*

More needs to be done to gather information on the needs of older people for advice and information and assistance on housing options and related subjects. It would be relatively simple to do this, for example, by adopting common recording categories and reporting perhaps to the Quality of Life Partnership on a biannual basis?

#### *6.3. Investment – towards prevention*

Some small changes would go a long way towards creating a preventative approach but bigger changes need investment.

##### *6.3.1 Small changes*

The small changes include:

- Asking everyone in the system to always use First Stop to find information on housing options including actual housing and accommodation because it is a tried and trusted information source that is regularly updated
- Ask everyone in the system to work towards being person centred



- Train everyone to think about housing options for older people and to use information and resources that are already available like First Stop
- Have an information and learning event once a year for services, staff and volunteers with older people
- Invite older people to advice and information and housing related services and assess the extent to which they are person centred and older people friendly – the Newcastle Elders Council is a great resource that could be called upon

#### *6.4 Other changes that would make a difference:*

Regular promotions and information campaigns need to be organised to get messages across to staff, volunteers, older people and their relatives so they use First Stop.

Older people need to be encouraged to actively plan for their later age and to consider the reasons for moving or staying and what these mean.

Cultures need to be shifted – the deep vein of paternalism that persists from a previous era is not helpful – services that empower and enable people to make informed choices should be the objective

Commissioners and funders can help to create the conditions where the centrality of housing options information and advice is part of everyone's business and they can do this through contracting and service level agreements.

A proper system needs to be created with the ingredients that are needed by all older people instead of the impenetrable hard to understand fragmented system that has been inherited.

The practice of advice and information giving needs to change so it is more in tune with the requirements of all older people and all practitioners need regular opportunities at least once a year to share knowledge and update their information.

#### **6.5 Recommendations**

There are six recommendations from the Exemplar project. They are for the Quality of Life Partnership and the Newcastle Elders Council to work with its partners in order to influence key commissioners across the City of Newcastle and partners in Gateshead to:

- 1 Highlight the central importance of good comprehensive housing information, advice and support to older people and their relatives as the starting point for a modern approach to enabling and empowering

older citizens and encourage everyone to use the resources from First Stop

- 2 Support the current Navigator housing options services for older people and ensure it continues and feeds into practice
- 3 Begin the process of creating a meaningful person centred system of services and culture built around older people to enable and empower the majority to plan and make informed housing choices decisions and thereby prevent crises arising
- 4 Look at commissioning and contracting opportunities with voluntary and other organisations to ensure that the requirements of older people for the full range of housing options information, advice and support are acknowledged and embedded into practice
- 5 Ensure that older people are at the heart of future service and system redesign driving processes and thinking including training and information sharing
- 6 Obtain resources to ensure that everyone locally involved in the field of housing advice and services meets together and shares practice and information at least once a year.

## **Appendix 1 Outputs produced and forthcoming from the Newcastle and Gateshead Exemplar Project**

Powerpoint presentations used for training and awareness raising sessions

Powerpoint presentations used for other audiences

Learning laboratory number 1 and number 2, presentations and other material including write-ups from each Lab

Discussion papers 1 and 2 by Moyra Riseborough

Principles of a housing options service, Clare Mathews

Progress reports

Practice papers 1- 3 (forthcoming)

Powerpoint presentation on key findings

Case studies produced for the Exemplar and national events

Training material produced for Learning Laboratories

Final report.

All are or will be available from the Newcastle Quality of Life Partnership