

Housing Advice and Information for Older People



Housing and Older People
Development Group

Overview

Access to housing information and advice was one of the five key areas for action identified in the Government's Strategic Framework 'Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing' (DETR/DH, 2001). The Strategic Framework noted that:

“Effective and timely housing information and advice plays a key role in enabling older people to access the kind of housing, support and care that meets their needs and preferences”

The key outcomes set for Government action were:

- *Better access for older people to advice and information on housing options.*
- *Advice and information that is appropriate for all older people – in different settings, formats and languages.*
- *A greater sharing of ideas and initiatives across national and local strategists and service providers to encourage new service models and provision.*

Thus information and advice has been one of the five areas addressed by HOPDEV in terms of advising Government, scrutinising progress and some directly commissioned initiatives.

Related Government Policy Developments

Shortly after the publication of 'Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing', the Department of Health began to develop ideas for providing older people with a single point of access to information, advice and services. The successful 'Care Direct' initiative was piloted in the South West of England and HOPDEV had some involvement in the inclusion of housing in this model.

Subsequently, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) became responsible for the national development of improved advice, information and service access for older people ('Link Age' and 'Link-Age Plus'). HOPDEV has commented on the development of this model with regard to the inclusion of housing and looks forward to further involvement with DWP on this matter.

The Social Exclusion Unit, within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, has also been developing ideas for provision which better meet the needs of socially excluded older people, publishing its final report, 'A Sure Start to Later Life: Ending Inequalities for Older People' in 2006. Housing features significantly in this report and HOPDEV was involved in commenting on the proposals. The model of a 'Sure Start' approach for older people is now being incorporated into the trial 'Link-Age Plus' pilots.

'Opportunity Age', the over-arching Government Strategy for an Ageing Population, acknowledges the centrality of housing to well being in later life and identifies easy access to information and services as a key strand of work.

Housing Advice and Information for Older People

One of the approaches that HOPDEV has taken with regard to improving housing advice and information provision for older people is to;

- encourage the specialist providers of housing advice to ensure that their services are meeting the needs of older people and
- encourage generalist organisations who are working with older people to develop their housing advice provision.

To this end, HOPDEV has acted as a catalyst to encourage advice providers to work together and to contribute to these objectives. It has organised two national conferences, published a suggested '*Competencies*' framework for the provision of housing advice and information for older people, created a self-training toolkit for advisers, produced and circulated around 40,000 copies of a '*Directory*' of sources of housing advice and piloted a 'Housing Options' information package aimed at older people, their families and advisers.

HOPDEV undertook a survey of the users of the Directory and Information Pack in order to assess their impact and usefulness plus identify key lessons (see below) for future developments in this sector. Lessons were also drawn from the two regional meetings held with older people (see HOPDEV brochure, '*Taking account of older people's views*').

KEY MESSAGES

- As well as general national information, older people require **detailed local housing options information, advice and assistance**. Following the introduction of far greater levels of local discretion in many areas of housing provision, ranging from the help available with repairs for low income owner occupiers to the allocation of social rented housing, it becomes more difficult to produce nationally applicable detailed information.
- However, there is a key role for **national databanks and general housing options information**, which can be easily accessed by older people, their families, generalist advisers and the wide range of organisations working with older people. These can then be supplemented by local knowledge about specialist provision.
- In order to ensure quality of services, there is a need for **national housing advice for older people training and standards** for advice agencies. The HOPDEV suggested competencies and self training kit is a small step in this direction, but a fresh impetus is now needed to encourage take up and further development.
- Advice and information which is trusted to be **independent and impartial** is highly valued by older people, as is advocacy and one to one support, in order to make an informed housing choice. This must be a key part of national service standards.

BETTER HOUSING ADVICE AND INFORMATION:

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

Choice is a key part of the wider Government agenda; for housing choice to be a reality for older people a range of housing options and access to impartial information about those alternatives are necessary.

Older people who attended the two regional HOPDEV housing events in 2006 were clear that access to information was important in retaining control over one's circumstances. A lack of information and advice can disempower people and works counter to stated policy objectives of enabling older people to live independent, fulfilling lives.

It is important to recognise that the term 'older people' refers to a widely heterogeneous group. Increasing numbers of people have a post retirement age span of 25+ years and will have a wide variety of life experiences. Any future developments in the provision of housing information and advice will therefore need to meet a wide spectrum of requirements, from the high tech silver surfer, to black and minority ethnic elders for whom English is a second language, to a person with a range of problems who needs intensive support.

HOPDEV is therefore keen to ensure that future developments in the provision of advice and information (national, regional and local) not only better address housing issues but are also fully inclusive to all older people.

About HOPDEV

The Housing and Older People Development Group (HOPDEV) was established in 2001 by the then Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (now the Department for Communities and Local Government) and the Department of Health (DH) to help Government deliver on the strategic framework *Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing*.

HOPDEV is the body charged with advising Government on matters relating to housing and older people. Its members include older people, housing providers, voluntary organisations, local authorities, and other experts on housing and older people. It works in partnership with other organisations and Government bodies.

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