

# Older people's housing strategies:

Taking account of older people's views



Housing and Older People  
Development Group

## Overview

*“Housing can be the springboard that enables older people to remain involved and live their lives to the full”*

This statement is as true now as when it was published in the Government's strategic vision for older people's housing in 2001 (*Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing: A Strategic Framework*) and it is increasingly being recognised that housing standards and suitability are central to older people's quality of life.

30% of all households are currently headed by someone aged 60 or over and the most important factor in the growth in the number of households is the ageing of the population.

Demographic trends indicate:

- *increasing numbers of people aged 85 and over*
- *increasing numbers of older black and minority ethnic (BME) people*
- *increasing numbers of older people who live alone*

Yet mainstream housing policy makes limited reference to older people and their place in a dynamic housing market.

*The announcement by Government in January 2006 of its intention to develop a new housing strategy for older people is therefore timely.*

## Policy Context

In 2005 the Government published *Opportunity Age*, its national strategy on ageing applicable to all Government departments. *Opportunity Age* sets out the overall framework for developing a coherent strategy for an ageing population, stressing the importance of enabling all older people to live full lives and play an active role in the community.

At the heart of *Opportunity Age* is the idea of 'Active Ageing' – the recognition that in older age people should be treated as an integral and important part of mainstream life. Thus in any new housing strategy it will be essential to take account of the broader housing aspirations and needs of all older people in addition to the care-related aspects of housing. Whilst the latter are important, they affect only a minority of older people.

Housing does, however, have a key role to play in the emerging health and social care agenda's of prevention, reducing inequalities, enabling independence and providing care at,

or close to, home. The interconnections with these related objectives will need to be addressed in the new housing strategy

It is crucial to bring together the housing and active ageing agendas in order to ensure that housing is fit for purpose for an ageing population.

## Listening to Older People

HOPDEV believes that the views of older people should be a major force in shaping older people's housing strategies and that better policies will emerge if older people are fully engaged in the planning process. For example, older people were actively involved in the development of the Department of Health's National Service Framework for Older People and such practice should also be applied to housing at a national, regional and local level.

Planners can also take into account the growing body of evidence about the housing aspirations and needs of older people. The Audit Commission, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Social Exclusion Unit, amongst others, have all published reports based on direct work with a wide range of older people, which can offer useful insights into factors which impact on older people's quality of life.

*As the Government embarks upon the creation of a new Older People's Housing Strategy, it is timely to consider all information available with regard to older people's views about better housing for older age, to engage with older people in the development of a new national strategy and to encourage regional and local housing planners to engage with older people.*

## HOPDEV Working with Older People

Following the Government's announcement of their intention to produce a new Older People's Housing Strategy, HOPDEV organised two events in partnership with older people's organisations and HOPDEV members; with the *Quality of Life* project in the North East Region and with the *Greater London Forum for Older People* in London. In each of these areas there has been some engagement with older people on housing issues at a regional level.

The events provided an opportunity for older people from across each region to;

- meet together to share information about housing developments in their own locality and to find out about progress across the region,
- find out more about national developments around housing and older people,
- share views about what is important to older people with regard to housing in later life and to put forward key messages to HOPDEV.

Through discussion and structured activities, participants at the events came up with key messages for policy makers with regard to housing and older people (*detailed overleaf*).

## SUMMARY OF KEY MESSAGES FROM OLDER PEOPLE ABOUT HOUSING

- We want all housing to be well designed with growing older in mind, housing which better meets the needs of all age groups – we want adaptable ‘houses for life’.
- Older people must be involved in planning future housing options and have choices to enable them to make decisions and take control of their lives.
- Any future planning for housing must include user-friendly, safe internal design (particularly kitchen, downstairs WC and bathroom with shower and bath), affordable warmth, low maintenance and with access to green, private space and a secure external environment.
- Involve older people in design (including Lifetime Homes standards), spatial planning, creation of safer environments, testing new equipment and IT devices – in fact, in every aspect of life in a community. Do nothing about us without us.
- We want more funding to be made available to improve and adapt private housing, backed up by reliable, consistent repairs, maintenance and adaptations services.
- We need housing which is accessible to good local transport, facilities and amenities.
- Older people need more space that is able to meet their needs, not less. This should mean two not one bedroom both for single and couple households, and rooms need to be larger with good storage.
- We want real choice, for which we need access to information and a range of housing options, from retirement communities to decent general housing.

## 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.

*This brochure was written by Sue Adams of Care & Repair England, with contributions by Vera Bolter of the Elders Council of Newcastle upon Tyne and Lynne Strother, Director of the Greater London Forum for Older People. Text © HOPDEV. All rights reserved. The text of this document may be reproduced, in whole or in part, with due acknowledgment to HOPDEV. Illustrations © Pen Mendonça (email: penmendonca@btinternet.com). Reproduction of the illustration is by prior permission of the artist only.*

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