



A housing crisis for older people

Help the Aged believes we could be heading towards a potential housing crisis for future generations of older people. According to Government figures older people will make up 48 per cent of all new growth in households by 2024¹. Population statistics show the numbers of older people over 65 are set to rise by nearly 60 per cent over the next 25 years from 9.6 million in 2005 to over 15 million in 2031².

As well as this there is likely to be a significant increase in older people needing access to specialist housing with support. For example, it's estimated that the number of older people with dementia alone will rise from 700,000 to over one million by 2025³. All these factors are contributing to a growing realisation that older people's housing can no longer be considered a marginal issue but must become core to any serious consideration of our country's future housing needs.

Research and recommendations

New research shows one in five older people (20 per cent) are finding it increasingly difficult to get around their own home⁴ and many say they need help with everyday jobs. Worryingly, older people are struggling with daily household activities such as bathing and using the stairs.

To help older people remain independent in their own homes for longer, Help the Aged is calling on the Government to introduce a lifetime homes standard, a national network of handy person services and ensure a more integrated approach to providing social care services and low level housing support.

Lifetime homes

Help the Aged believes in the introduction of lifetime homes standards for all new housing so that it remains accessible and adaptable for all of us throughout our life spans and as our needs change. The introduction of the basic design features included in the lifetime homes standard could make it much easier and more affordable for older people to continue to live independently in their own homes. There would also be intergenerational benefits such as making it less problematic to use a

¹ (CLG 2007) *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable*, p.59.

² Government Actuary Department (GAD) website Period life expectancy, based on mid-2004 population estimates, and Eurostat New Cronos database.

³ Facts about Dementia http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/Facts_about_dementia/index.htm

⁴ ICM interviewed a random sample of 1000 adults aged 60+ by telephone omnibus between 25th July – 2nd August 2007. Research commissioned by Help the Aged.

wheelchair or store a child's push chair. Lifetime homes standards would make sure there is access to a ground level shower making it easier for people with mobility problems to have a wash. Windows, door handles and taps would require less effort and it would facilitate fitting stair lifts and other forms of assistive technology, if required. It has been estimated that the lifetime homes standards could result in saving of £5.5 billion over 20 years because it would make housing cheaper to adapt⁵. Government has committed to build 3 million new homes - it would be a scandal if these homes were built but weren't suitable to meet the needs of our ageing population.

Help the Aged wants to see the lifetime homes standard immediately incorporated into the building regulations for all newly built homes. Those promoting lifetime homes have been waiting 20 years for these standards to be incorporated into mainstream housing. We believe that the Government's proposal to link these standards into the Code for Sustainable Homes simply does not go far enough and will take too long to implement.

Handyperson services

Basic help with repairs and adaptations in the home could make a tremendous difference for many older people. They would help to prevent deterioration in their living conditions and at the same time would allow older people to retain their independence in a safe and secure environment. There are just over 200 handyperson schemes in England offering help small jobs like putting up curtains or shelves and home safety measures like securing loose carpet or putting up a grab rail. They can also include security measure like installing locks, chains or a spy hole.

Handyperson services can also put older people in touch with Home Improvement Agencies who can advise them on more substantial repairs and adaptations and identify grants to help pay for the work. Older people often don't know where to go for help with small scale housing repairs and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by cowboy builders. An accredited network of handyperson services would help to combat this worrying situation. Older people consistently tell us that they highly value getting that little bit of help with small jobs around the home to allow them to continue living independently.

Help the Aged is calling for a significant expansion in handyperson services nation wide and a single call centre that can help older people arrange work with an accredited handyperson service in their local area.

Social care

⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/housingandcare/lifetimehomes/>

The majority of older people (90 per cent) live in ordinary mainstream housing as opposed to sheltered or retirement housing⁶. Increasing numbers of older people want to continue living independently in their own homes. The Government says it supports this objective and wants more health and social care delivered in the home. The Department of Health have specific targets for reducing the proportion of older people living in residential care and increasing the number of people with access to intensive support in their own home.

Yet the reality is that many older people have problems getting access to social care services or even low level housing support through the Government's Supporting People initiative. Often the only help that is offered is to the most vulnerable groups, yet many others desperately need a little extra help to live at home. Where services exist, many older people don't know about them or how to access them and Help the Aged believes a much more integrated approach is badly needed. There is a great deal of variation in local home care services available to older people and many older people avoid services because of means testing for even the most basic assistance.

Help the Aged wants to see a more robust Government strategy to ensure greater consistency in basic housing support and a fresh approach to overcoming the barriers created by means testing.

The political agenda

Housing is currently high on the political agenda – the Housing Green paper has recently been published and later in 2007 the Older People's Housing Strategy is due to be published in October. Help the Aged wants older people's housing needs to become core to any serious consideration of our country's future housing needs.

The Housing Green Paper

The Housing Green paper published in July 2007 plans three million new homes by 2020. Of these it has promised 180,000 affordable homes over the next three years increasing to an annual rate of 70,000 by 2010. The paper says that regional and local planning must take into consideration the housing needs of an ageing population. It sets out proposals to make more new housing adaptable to the needs of older people, particularly through the application of the lifetime homes standards. Finally it recognises that providing more attractive housing options for older people, as they retire, could contribute to freeing up more family size housing.

The Older People's Housing Strategy

The Government will publish a more detailed strategy for older people's housing in October 2007. Help the Aged believes this strategy needs to create the conditions for urgent measures to meet

⁶ Housing Choice for Older People, Help the Aged, 2006

older people's current and future housing needs. We are particularly looking for more action on the growing numbers of older owner-occupiers on low incomes who desperately need help to maintain and adapt their homes to live independently in a comfortable, secure environment. We're also pressing to see an expansion in access to specialist housing and planning measures to meet growing demand at a local level. Most importantly we want to see mechanisms to ensure housing providers are in touch with the changing needs and aspirations of new generations of older people.

Help the Aged services

Help the Aged operates its own range of Home Support services aimed at helping older people remain living independently in their own homes. Its HandyVan service offers help with security, safety and small household jobs and is to be expanded to include minor adaptations. Feedback from users of the service has consistently demonstrated that there is a need for this type of help. To find out more please phone 01255 473999.