

## Housing, Regeneration and Planning

### Review of Sheltered Housing in Scotland

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This Review of Sheltered Housing in Scotland has been undertaken by the Centre for Housing Policy and York Health Economics Consortium at the University of York for the Scottish Executive and Communities Scotland. The review was intended to address a number of questions relating to: the supply and condition of sheltered housing in Scotland; changes and barriers to change; costs of developing, maintaining, and staffing sheltered housing; issues relating to low or high demand; the changing role of sheltered housing; residents' experiences of sheltered housing; and the future housing aspirations of older people.

### Main Findings

- In total there are almost 1,200 sheltered housing schemes with approximately 36,000 dwellings across Scotland. There are 145 extra care (or very sheltered housing schemes), with just over 3,700 dwellings. Overall local authorities and housing associations each provide about 45% of the dwellings in sheltered housing, with the private sector responsible for the remaining 10%.
- Most local authority sheltered housing dates from the 1970s; most housing association sheltered housing dates from the 1980s. Most new sheltered housing schemes have been built by the private sector. The vast majority of accommodation is in one-bedroom flats.
- There is considerable diversity in levels and types of provision of sheltered housing across Scotland, as well as in the condition and accessibility of properties, levels of services provided, and charges to residents. This diversity makes generalising about sheltered housing difficult, and raises questions about equity of provision.
- Demand for sheltered housing is highly variable. Demand seems to be influenced by a number of factors including: size of accommodation; location; proximity to other services and facilities; whether schemes have lifts; presence of a resident warden on site. These factors, however, do not apply consistently to all schemes.
- Changes to sheltered housing, particularly changes to warden services have been driven by a number of factors: the European Working Time Directive; reductions and changes in levels of Supporting People funding; and new, alternative service developments (such as home care). Providers' responses to these drivers have been mixed. Some feel that sheltered housing remains a valuable form of provision, others do not.
- Sheltered housing is greatly valued by residents, however recent reductions in warden services are deeply unpopular.
- It is vital that sheltered and very sheltered housing are placed within local strategic frameworks alongside other types of services for older people including, housing, and health and social care.

- There are requirements for additional funding if sheltered housing is to continue in its present form and if the current stock of sheltered housing is to be maintained and improved to provide accessible and suitably spacious accommodation for older people now and into the future. The uncertainties about future levels of Supporting People funding must be resolved.
- Extra care (or very sheltered housing) appears to be the growth area of provision, however evidence suggests that this form of provision can be costly, and is not a panacea for all older people's housing and care needs. Extra care provision needs to be fully evaluated in the Scottish context.
- There is an argument for promoting a minimum standard for sheltered housing to give greater clarity about the core services that should be provided. A minimum standard would also facilitate more accurate service costings.

## Methods and data sources

The review drew on both quantitative and qualitative data as follows:

- Analysis of the Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC) database;
- Use of data on provision collated and published by the Scottish Executive (S1B etc);
- Analysis of the responses to an electronic questionnaire sent to all local authority and housing association providers of sheltered housing in Scotland;
- More detailed work in six 'representative' local authorities, including: interviews with senior managers employed by providers of sheltered housing; postal survey to a sample of a total of 1,200 residents living in sheltered accommodation; site visits to meet selected service managers, scheme managers and scheme residents;
- Specific discussions with older people from black and minority ethnic communities and other relevant interest groups, (including older people with disabilities);
- Local reviews of sheltered housing and other relevant documents provided by respondents to the electronic questionnaire.

The analysis of the EAC database was undertaken during October to December 2006, and utilised data submitted to the EAC during the first part of 2006. The analysis focussed on housing schemes classified within the database as "warden" and "extra care", thus excluding general needs and amenity housing suitable for older people. This analysis has provided the basis for determining the supply of sheltered and very sheltered housing in Scotland.

The electronic provider questionnaire was sent to all local authorities apart from Dumfries and Galloway, Glasgow City, and Scottish Borders, as these local authorities were known to have transferred their housing stock to local housing

associations. Two additional local authorities stated they were in the process of transferring their stock, and were thus unable to complete the questionnaire. It was also anticipated that 2 local authorities that do not provide sheltered or very sheltered housing would not submit a return, although one did. The questionnaire was sent in November 2006. Twenty one questionnaires were returned.

At the same time, the electronic provider questionnaire was also sent to 78 organisations identified as being Registered Social Landlords. Questionnaires were returned by 36 organisations (an overall response rate of 46.2%). These respondents included a wide range of housing associations, including most of the larger national housing associations responsible for a significant proportion of housing association sheltered housing provision in Scotland.

The survey of sheltered housing residents was dispatched in batches in February and March 2007. Questionnaires were distributed to 1,200 residents of sheltered housing across the six case study areas. Six hundred and forty one responses were received; 53% of respondents were local authority tenants, 36.9% were housing association tenants, and 9.5% lived in private sector sheltered housing. The survey was followed by visits to the 6 case study areas. Nine schemes were visited. Six focus groups were held with residents, supported by face-to-face interviews. More than 70 residents participated in this element of the review, with ages ranging from mid-fifties to late nineties. During the course of the visits we met with housing staff.

We also undertook telephone interviews with key informants in the six case study areas, exploring local issues regarding provision, demand, and the changes to sheltered housing.

A further element of the review was 4 additional focus groups – 2 with older people from BME communities, one with older disabled people not living in sheltered housing, and one with 'younger old' people. The purpose of these groups was to explore 'external' attitudes towards sheltered housing, and how sheltered housing could be made more attractive in the future.

# Overview of the supply of sheltered housing in Scotland

Below we highlight the main points regarding the supply of sheltered housing in Scotland. Perhaps the overriding finding is the differences in levels of provision across different areas, although where there appears to be lower levels of provision, there may be other types of services for older people (for example, amenity housing). Similarly needs may vary from area to area. Nevertheless, the figures suggest that older people will have more or less choice of sheltered housing options depending on where they live.

- In total there are almost 1,200 sheltered housing schemes with about 36,000 dwellings and 145 extra care housing schemes with just over 3,700 dwellings;
- Overall, local authorities and housing associations each provide about 45% of dwellings in sheltered housing schemes, with the private sector responsible for the other 10%;
- Housing associations provide about 85% of extra care housing dwellings;
- Analysis by geographical clusters and by local authority shows considerable variation in the amounts and rates of provision by age band of sheltered housing and extra care housing in Scotland;
- In recent years the number of dwellings in sheltered housing schemes has fallen (to 38.0 per 1,000 aged 65 and over in 2005) while the number of extra care housing units has increased (to 4.5 per 1,000 aged over 65 in 2005), although geographical variations are considerable.

## Age, condition and suitability of sheltered housing provision

With regard to age of the sheltered housing stock, the EAC database shows that:

- Most local authority schemes have been built since 1970 and most housing association schemes since the 1980s;
- Most extra care housing has been built since the 1990s;
- Most new schemes provided since 2000 have been built by the private sector and by housing associations.

With regard to type of property, the EAC database shows that:

- The vast majority of accommodation is in one-bedroom

flats; bedsits only account for a small (and decreasing) proportion of stock;

- Almost all accommodation provided by local authorities and housing associations is rented; almost all private sector provision is owner occupied.

With regard to physical condition of sheltered housing, responses to the provider survey indicated that:

- Considerable variations exist in the condition, quality and suitability (e.g. in terms of space standards and accessibility) of accommodation;
- In general, extra care housing tends to perform better against these criteria than sheltered housing and housing association provision is superior to local authority stock;
- However, there is not always a close correlation between dwelling age and suitability, as some older accommodation performs well and some newer schemes (including extra care housing) are relatively poor;
- In some areas considerable (though varying) proportions of stock are felt to be non-viable for a variety of reasons, including poor condition, inappropriate location, lack of space and poor accessibility;
- Some non-viable stock is being demolished or remodelled and converted for other uses (including extra care accommodation);
- Non-viability and remodelling decisions are locally-determined and will in part depend on other forms of local housing provision and strategies for providing care and support to older people; no consistent patterns or cost estimates emerged from the analysis.

## Demand for sheltered housing

Demand for sheltered housing is very variable. Several potential factors were identified that are perceived to influence demand for sheltered housing. They include the size of schemes (bedsits/studio apartments are generally unpopular, and many people want more than one bedroom); the location of schemes (schemes in 'bad' neighbourhoods are unpopular); the proximity of schemes to other services and facilities, particularly transport services; age and design of schemes (newer schemes tend to be more popular); the internal accessibility of schemes and whether they have lifts; the availability of other sheltered housing schemes locally; and whether there is a warden resident on site. While these factors are commonly reported to influence demand for particular schemes, the visits and interviews with key informants indicated that these factors do not apply consistently to all schemes, and many could give examples

of schemes that were popular or unpopular despite their age or location.

The increased provision of home care services was felt to make sheltered housing a less popular option, consequently many applicants for sheltered housing have reached a point where they can no longer be supported in their own homes, and have a range of complex needs.

In addition:

- Although data exist on numbers of applicants per vacancy and waiting times, many informants felt these did not reflect true demand or need;
- Some extra care schemes seem to be in low demand; the reasons for this low demand may be because often allocations are made by panels of different service providers, thus demand is managed in a different way, although perceptions of low demand could be usefully explored further;
- Charges for extra care are seen as being very high, which will also dampen demand, even if there is an assessed need for such accommodation;
- Schemes with good local reputations (often due to their wardens) are generally popular, irrespective of their attributes;
- In general, strategic and service managers anticipate that demand for sheltered housing and extra care housing will increase over the next 5-10 years, although no consistent pattern emerges;
- Overall, demand for accommodation provided by the private sector is expected to increase (e.g. due to increased numbers of owner occupiers), though again this was not the view of all respondents.

## Services provided and charges

In line with earlier observations regarding diversity in levels of provision, different elements of the review indicated that service provision – especially of warden support services – varies considerably across both sheltered housing and extra care schemes:

- Almost all residents have regular (though not necessarily full time) access to a warden, though these are generally non-resident;
- Weekly charges vary considerably, especially within housing association provision;
- Differences in charges will in part reflect different facilities

(e.g. the extent of communal facilities) and levels of support, but these alone are unlikely to explain all of the observed variation;

- Some providers include all services within their weekly rent, whereas others provide breakdowns for each service element;
- Costs for extra care include support costs, which seem to vary considerably, especially within council-run schemes (although these may also be influenced by economies of scale relating to the sizes of schemes);
- Residents who are self funders, especially if they have formerly been owner occupiers with no mortgage, may feel that the charges for sheltered housing and extra care accommodation are very high when compared with their previous housing-related costs.

## Residents' experience of sheltered housing

As noted above, survey questionnaires were sent to more than 1,200 residents of sheltered housing, including people in local authority, housing association, and private sector schemes. The survey demonstrates very clearly the continuing popularity of sheltered housing (as did the interviews and focus groups with residents). This is not to say that residents are entirely happy with all aspects of the service. Reductions in warden services are unpopular, and attracted much negative comment from survey respondents. Responses to the survey also demonstrated that service provision is not uniform across different schemes. Many respondents remarked on poor space standards (particularly for couples), and problems with access for disabled people. Value for money is also a concern. Nevertheless overall the great majority of residents were supportive of sheltered housing, and agreed that sheltered housing is a good service for older people, as illustrated by some of the headline findings below:

- 93.6% of all respondents agreed with the statement, "Sheltered housing is a good service for older people."
- 16.5% of all respondents agreed with the statement, "I would rather be living in an ordinary home than in sheltered housing."

The survey also demonstrated that residents in local authority and housing association schemes are more likely to have moved because of concerns about their health and because they wanted a warden service, compared to residents in private sector accommodation. Maintenance of independence, even if people required some assistance, was

also an important motivation for moving. The survey responses also show that the vast majority (92.4% of respondents) felt that sheltered housing allows them to be independent. Although survey responses indicated that people were not moving because they wanted more company, or felt isolated, 4 in 5 respondents felt that sheltered housing allowed older people to have company when they might otherwise be alone.

Of particular interest is the (unexpected) finding that almost 40% of residents in local authority and housing association schemes previously owned their own home. While there is limited access to private sector sheltered housing accommodation in Scotland, these results in conjunction with the responses regarding motivation for moving, suggest that many older people are happy to change tenure in later life.

## Key findings from site visits

Interviews and discussion with residents offered further insights into choice and motivations for moving to sheltered housing, and levels of satisfaction with accommodation and services. Bereavement, declining health, and the need for accessible and manageable accommodation were among motivations for moving. Many residents also wanted to know help was at hand. Where there had been changes to the warden services, these were deeply unpopular and generated much discussion, in line with the survey responses. It is not clear how the changes were presented to residents, but it was obvious that residents felt these changes had been imposed upon them. At the same time service charges had often risen. It was also clear that many people did not understand what was meant by “housing support”. Some were not clear what the different service charges were for. In addition many residents were concerned about how the out of hours services operated, and many were reluctant to use the community alarm systems.

With regard to accommodation, people were happy with their homes, but many remarked on generally poor space standards. For many people, it was not necessarily a second bedroom that was required as this would attract a higher rent, but more space generally. Many remarked how the lack of living space restricted their choice of social and leisure activities.

When exploring choice of tenure, those residents we met who had previously been home owners did not regret selling their former homes, however there were concerns about the affordability of rents and service charges particularly for those who were self-funding. There were inevitably some tensions between those who are self funding and those who receive assistance.

Again most residents were eager to say they were happy with sheltered housing, noting particularly the opportunities for company and social activities. With regard to how sheltered housing could be made more attractive for older people in the future, participants noted the importance of location of schemes, and also accessibility within schemes, for example, lifts to above-ground floors, space for mobility buggies to move around and also be parked, and re-charged. Walk-in showers were consistently referred to as being an important design feature, and one that would assist people remain independent for longer. However, warden services were felt to be the most important factor in making schemes attractive or successful.

## External impressions of sheltered housing

An additional four focus groups were conducted to explore ‘external’ attitudes towards sheltered housing, and how sheltered housing could be made more attractive to a wider range of older people.

The older people we met who did not live in sheltered housing could understand the attractions of sheltered housing, and some thought that it might be an option they would consider for themselves at some point in the future. Contentment with their current homes underpinned people’s decisions not to move, and some of the group had already installed walk-in showers, or made other adjustments to make their homes more manageable. With regard to sheltered housing, participants were concerned about the size of dwellings and the accessibility of sheltered housing, as well as maintaining their privacy. Some felt that being able to buy a property might give people more choice of when and where they could move. Participants were also aware of changes to services, particularly reductions to warden services, and many felt this undermined the purpose of sheltered housing.

For older people in black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, it was clear that there was a lack of knowledge about sheltered housing, although participants were eager to know more, and in discussion it appeared an attractive option for some people. It would be wrong to assume that all older people in BME communities can or want to live with younger family members, although even if living separately from families, having family close by is still important. The presence of staff with language skills and understanding of cultural beliefs and practices would make sheltered housing more attractive for older people from BME groups. Location was important, with access to culturally relevant facilities and services. Similarly having a significant number of other

residents from the same community was felt to be essential because it would enable people to have company. Views were mixed as to the desirability of having schemes that were entirely for people from one ethnic group.

For younger old people, the discussion about sheltered housing was focussed on affordability. For many in the group, the primary concern was how to make housing (and care services) affordable in the future. People felt that renting or purchasing sheltered housing was expensive, and associated charges were high. They were also aware that the availability of housing that was suitable for older people (e.g. bungalows, or flats with lift access to upper floors, in accessible locations) was - in their experience - very limited.

## The changing role of sheltered housing

Most providers felt that recent changes to sheltered housing had been driven by a number of compelling and inter-related factors. Of primary significance were: the new regulations and legislation, particularly the European Working Time Directive (EWTD); reductions and changes in funding and uncertainties around the future levels of Supporting People funding; new and alternative service developments that allowed older people the opportunity to remain in their own homes for longer; and changes in both levels and type of demand for services. Many felt that the having on-site 24 hour warden services was simply no longer viable, as it was too costly to provide the staff cover, and that community alarms provided sufficient cover. Resources would be better directed at other types of service. Although the changes to levels of Supporting People were often mentioned, it was felt that this was not the only driver for change. Many - although not all - providers felt that the introduction of other services for older people, particularly services that enabled people to remain in their own homes for longer, made sheltered housing a much less attractive option.

Although there was general agreement about the drivers for change, the types of changes made by providers to services were varied. Some felt that sheltered housing was still a popular and valuable form of provision, while others felt that it was out-dated and were moving towards replacement of existing provision with extra care or very sheltered housing, supported by amenity housing with community alarms and visiting warden services.

## Concluding observations

While this review has addressed many of the key questions, it raises more questions for the Scottish Executive and

Communities Scotland than it answers, in part due to the enormous diversity in levels and types of sheltered housing. This diversity make generalising about sheltered housing problematic, and it also raises questions regarding the equity of provision. Clearly some older people will have greater choice of sheltered housing schemes and services depending on where they live.

It is also very clear that sheltered housing remains very popular with those who live in it. This is not to say that residents are entirely satisfied, and the respondents to the survey and people who participated in the focus groups and interviews were greatly concerned about the reduction in warden services. It is the support element that makes sheltered housing attractive, and yet it is the support element that is being eroded. It will be difficult to convince older people that warden services are unnecessary, or that assistive technologies will provide a viable alternative. Sheltered housing without a warden service may not be an attractive option in the future.

There is a need to promote better and more realistic understanding of what sheltered housing can do for individuals with different levels of need. Again this is difficult given the diversity of provision. It is perhaps not surprising that health and social care practitioners are not fully aware of what sheltered housing can or cannot do in particular circumstances, when provision can vary from scheme to scheme, or that older people and their relatives sometimes have unrealistic expectations of provision.

Clearly there are requirements for additional funding if sheltered housing is to continue as a recognisable form of provision, and if the current stock of sheltered housing is to be maintained and improved to provide accessible, and suitably spacious accommodation for older people now and into the future. Again the diversity of provision make estimating the amount of funding required to up-grade sheltered housing across Scotland highly problematic.

Another key question is the future role of extra care or very sheltered housing. Many providers have indicated their intention to focus on the provision of extra care housing, given that there will be growing numbers of older people in the future, particularly of very old and frail people. Evidence from outside Scotland suggests that extra care housing is not a panacea for all older people's housing and care needs. It is perceived by some providers with experience of development and management of sheltered housing in Scotland to be an expensive option, particularly for those people who are self-funding. Some respondents to this review suggested that it could be "slow to let". The review also indicates that there is already some variation in extra care provision. It maybe that in future the same questions

that are now being raised about sheltered housing will be raised about very sheltered housing.

Given the increase in the levels of owner occupation in Scotland over the last 25 years, many respondents felt that that older people in future will be reluctant to rent sheltered housing. As the survey of sheltered housing residents showed, almost 40% of residents in local authority and housing association schemes were formerly owner occupiers. While there may be a number of reasons why older home owners change tenure, (for example, a restricted supply of sheltered housing in the private sector, lack of affordable alternatives for those people with not especially valuable properties), the survey and discussions with older people indicated that people were more concerned with the quality and accessibility of accommodation, and level of services on offer as opposed to the opportunities to purchase properties. It would be unwise to assume that homeownership is the tenure of choice for all older home owners.

It seems that a National Strategy for Sheltered Housing in Scotland is not feasible given the enormous diversity of current and planned future provision. It is vital that there are local strategic frameworks into which sheltered housing and

very sheltered housing are placed, alongside other types of services for older people including housing, social care and health services.

There is an argument for promoting a minimum standard for sheltered housing services. This would also allow better estimates of costs of services.

Additional funding is required if sheltered housing is to continue in its present form, and if the stock is to be maintained and improved to provide accessible and suitably accessible accommodation into the future. More work is needed to establish how much investment is required across Scotland.

The uncertainties regarding future levels of Supporting People funding need to be resolved to enable services to move forward and develop.

Given very sheltered housing seems to be the growth area in provision, a longitudinal evaluation of the effectiveness of very sheltered housing within the specific context of services for older people in Scotland would be of value. Opportunities should be created to share good practice, and develop practice and research networks.

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The report, "Review of Sheltered Housing in Scotland", which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Government website at

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