

FINGER ON THE PULSE: Local Authorities Actively Engaging with Older People to Develop an '*Older People's Housing Strategy*'

What is an Older People's Housing Strategy?

No matter what their age, people wish to have a choice about where and how they live and need access to decent housing which can enable them to live life to the full.

Local authorities (LAs) have a key role to play in shaping the housing and services that can enable people to live comfortably and independently as they get older. Each housing authority is expected to plan for the provision of this housing through an '*Older People's Housing Strategy*'. This should set out what the LAs aims are with regard to housing and services and say how it will make things happen to achieve those aims.

Central Government has set out its ideas for older people's housing in a report called '*Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing – A Strategic Framework*'.

This sets out 5 priorities:

1. **Diversity and Choice** – services should be provided which respond to older people's needs and preferences
2. **Information and Advice** – this should be made available to older people themselves, and to professionals, on the variety of housing and support options available
3. **Flexible Service Provision** – LAs should make sure that housing and services enable older people to live as part of the community in their own homes for as long as they wish. Services should respond to people's changing needs for care and support throughout their lives.
4. **Quality** – housing should be of a decent standard; support and care services should be of a high quality
5. **Joint working** – housing, health and social services should work together to join up their services.

Local authorities are encouraged to work with older people in drawing up their housing strategies and to actively engage with people to find out what they want, rather than consult in a narrow way in what is wrong with current provision.

It was with this in mind that Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council embarked on a '*Listening Event*' in partnership with 'A Better Life in Later Life' (the programme which is following on from the Better Government for Older People pilot project) and Care & Repair England (a national charity dedicated to improving the housing and living conditions of older and disabled people).

Beyond Consultation: Actively Engaging with Older People

The idea behind the '*Listening Event*' was to provide the opportunity for older people, who were currently living in a wide variety of housing situations, to get together and think without limits about housing and services for future generations of older people. The local authority staff who are responsible for drafting the '*Older People's Housing Strategy*' were to be present at the event to listen, but not to direct the debate by putting forward their ideas or suggestions. The idea was

that officers' thinking about the strategy would be shaped by the views of older people, rather than the other way around.

People worked together in small groups on structured tasks which encouraged full participation of everyone involved. Tasks were designed to enable people to translate their personal experience of housing into guiding principles for future housing provision (detailed below).

The emerging key principles and major action points were then used as a foundation for the LAs older people's housing strategy.

Outcome

The older people taking part enjoyed the event and found the group tasks stimulating and thought provoking. The event was also useful and energising for the 'professionals' involved and the messages emerging from the day have been taken to heart by those drafting the strategy. Most of the older people taking part were positive about being involved in future events to follow through the development of the strategy.

Running a Listening Event: Newcastle-u-Tyne Model

Getting people along to the event

Invitations to the event were sent out by *A Better Life in Later Life* utilising contacts which had been built up through a series of events for older people. The aim was to ensure a mix of people living in a wide range of independent housing; local authority sheltered housing scheme residents, home owners including the local home improvement agency service users, tenants of the local authority and housing associations (care home residents were not involved).

Practical Issues which help to make the event a success

- Provide transport
- Use a welcoming, fully accessible venue (eg. level access, adapted WCs, good lighting and acoustics)
- Limit to half a day (this event lasted for 3 hours 1.00pm – 4.00pm)
- Provide good refreshments (eg. lunch or afternoon tea with cakes)
- Create a friendly, informal atmosphere through the choice of venue, room layout and speakers

Format of the Day

1. The chair of the Elders Council of Newcastle introduced the event, explaining its purpose and how ideas generated would be taken forward by the LA. It was stressed that the LA staff were there to listen to what older people had to say and then take these messages on board in the development of the housing strategy.

Having an older person as the key link person through the day is strongly recommended.

2. A short presentation about the shaping of older people's housing was given, both to set the scene and to stimulate ideas for discussion. This presentation is available from Care & Repair England.

3. Discussions took place in small round table groups (literally around round tables) and in each group there was a facilitator and a note taker.
4. The structured debates/ tasks then took place in small groups. The brief for these is detailed below.
5. At the end of the session each of the groups gave one key message to the LA and the chair thanked everyone involved for their time and effort.

Post Event

The notes taken during the group debates plus the charts produced were collated by the LA Housing Policy Officer who utilised these in drawing up the LA Housing Strategy.

Format of Day/ Structured Tasks

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| 1.00pm | Arrival and tea |
| 1.30pm | Welcome by chair of Elders' Council:
Sets out the aim and structure of the event, emphasise importance of older people's views in shaping the future of housing and services, explain that officers of the LA are there to listen and only offer information if asked. |
| 1.40 | Presentation to set the context for the event (see slides) |
| 1.50 | People go into groups each with a facilitator and note taker (individuals allocated to particular groups with the aim of achieving a mix of tenures in each group). Everyone introduces themselves and the facilitator explains the first task. |

Task 1: Housing – likes and dislikes

The session starts with a very general debate. Each person says where they live, how they came to live there and what they think in general about their housing situation.

Everyone is given a pink and yellow stickie/ post-it and invited to write down things that they like about where they live on the pink one and things that they dislike on the yellow. These are then placed in separate columns on the flipchart in the middle of the table.

There is then further discussion based on the following questions, with the note taker writing down the key points emerging.

Have you had to make any major decisions about where you live in the past few years? What was the outcome? Are you happy about this? Any regrets? Worries about the future? If you are not happy with the outcome, what would have made things better/ easier to make the decision?

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| 2.05 | <i>Task 2: What do I need to enable me to live independently?</i> |
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Each group has a sheet of flipchart paper with the above question in the middle. As the discussion starts, the facilitator writes down a summary term for the points which people make on "arms" or "suns rays" coming out of the centre question. For example, if someone says that a downstairs WC would make their life easier, the word *Adaptations* is written at the end of the 'arm', downstairs WC and any other adaptations which people mention are added along the arm. Or if someone says

they need a community alarm or help with cleaning, this go along an arm leading to the term, 'Support Services' and so on until all of the factors which participants mention as being needed to enable them to live independently are on the diagram.

To gain a view about priorities, each participant is given 3 stickie dots to place on the point(s) that they consider to be most important (they can spread these around or even place all 3 dots on one point).

2.40 Afternoon Tea

3.00pm Task 3: *What should housing for older people be like?*

As for task 2, the above question appears in a circle in the middle of the flipchart page with arms radiating out. As people discuss their ideas and ideals, the facilitator extracts headline ideas for the ends of the arms (eg. Separate from housing for other age groups – or conversely, fully integrated – or 'home for life so that I don't have to move') and aspects of these listed along the arm (eg. security alarms, on site support services, more storage, level access).

The facilitator could offer information about the new housing options that are being developed such as extra care housing, retirement villages, smart homes etc to further stimulate ideas and gain views on these proposed developments (particularly if there are any pipeline plans for such initiatives in the area).

As for Task 2, participants are given 3 dots to show their preferences and priorities.

3.40 In the light of the 3 tasks and discussions, each group chooses one key message which they would like the LA to take on as a key principle in its housing strategy.

3.45 Summing Up

Each group feeds back their chosen key message. Flip charts and notes are collected by LA officer for use in drafting policy.

Chair of the Elder's Council explains how the policy will be progressed, asks people for their feedback about the day and thanks everyone for their time and efforts.

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