



Response to Opportunity Age

Submitted to the Department for Work and Pensions

By Care & Repair England

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1. About Care & Repair England

1.1. Care & Repair England is a national charity established in 1986 to improve the housing and living conditions of older and disabled people.

1.2. Its aim is to innovate, develop, promote and support housing policies and initiatives which enable older and disabled people to live independently in their homes for as long as they wish.

1.3. The interconnection of housing, health and social care has been at the forefront of Care & Repair England's work. A major part of the wider remit of the charity has been to champion joint initiatives between housing, health and social services at a local service delivery level.

2. About This Submission

2.1. We welcome the publication of Opportunity Age and particularly endorse the acknowledgement of the centrality of housing to well being in later life.

2.2. Our comments are primarily about the housing related implications of an ageing population.

2.3. These comments are to a significant degree shaped by the views expressed by older people at a series of housing 'listening events' that we have been involved with around England over the past 2 years (see enclosed brochure – *Housing for an Ageing Population*).

2.4. The key messages emerging from these events can be summarised thus:

Older people want information and choice, leading to accessible, affordable, spacious and secure accommodation.

- We want accommodation that is well designed, allowing people to live independently, with access to social activities and support.
- We would choose to remain in our homes, but we will require services to enable us to maintain our independence, such as practical help with small repairs and adaptations.
- We want greater choice and control over our housing – so we need better information.
- We want better, well-located, diverse move-on housing options of a decent size.
- We want housing that offers safety, security and peace of mind. We want independence, not isolation.

When planning housing and services, speak to older people, listen to what we say and act upon it.

3. Our Response to the Specific Consultation Questions

3.1. Chapter 5: *Are there areas of the existing machinery that need improvement?*

- 3.1.1. Yes. There is scope for considerable improvement in ensuring that Regional Housing Strategies (RHSs) and Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) are adequately addressing the needs of an ageing population.
- 3.1.2. The majority of Regional Housing Strategies pay inadequate attention to the ageing of the population. The priorities set in RHSs largely determine local housing investment and planning; consequently there will be little or no investment in housing that meets the needs of an ageing population if this is not identified as a priority in the RHS.
- 3.1.3. Regional Spatial Strategies are currently in the process of being developed – drafts due out in Autumn.
- 3.1.4. Because RSSs are to a very significant degree driven by economic development considerations and the needs of the working age (“economically active”) population there are concerns that these too will not address the ageing of the population.
- ***Recommendation: That ODPM issue guidance to Regional Assemblies with regard to taking due account of the ageing of the population in Regional Housing Strategies and Regional Spatial Strategies and ensuring that the wider housing needs of older people are adequately addressed.***

3.2. Chapter 5 and Annex 1: *Outcomes and Indicators*

- 3.2.1. We would suggest that housing should be explicitly included in the proposed quality of life framework on page 83.
- 3.2.2. The conclusion of the major study on housing in later life (*Homing in on Housing*, Clough Leamy and Bright, 2003) was that “*In old age people see housing as possibly the most essential factor in whether they will be able to manage and live well*”. Therefore we suggest a further indicator -

“Do older people have access to decent housing which is accessible, adaptable and facilitates independent living within the wider community.”

- 3.2.3. With regard to the key indicators on page 84 Chart A2 we welcome the inclusion of the current decent homes target but would suggest that this be expanded to also refer to the availability of decent homes which meet lifetime homes standards – this would relate to the key point made in Chapter 1, 1.9 (p.4).
- 3.2.4. Possible indicator 3 (“*Choice over where people live*”) is rather vague. We would suggest an alternative:

“Availability of a range of housing options; including access to impartial information and advice to enable informed choice.”

- 3.2.5. Reports by the Audit Commission and others have concluded that adaptations can be critical to independent living. Therefore a further possible indicator would be;
“speed and efficiency in delivery of home adaptations and assistive technology”
- 3.2.6. With regard to chart A6 and *“what matters most”* box 3 (Provision of lower level of care and home adaptations) we suggest 2 indicators:
“Availability of home improvement agency services, including provision of handyperson services”
(This relates to the issues identified in the SEU’s report – Excluded Older People).
“Availability of Fast track minor adaptations system”
(This relates to the current DH National Service Framework for Older People and possible developments from the review of Disabled Facilities Grants).

4. Other Comments Arising from the Main Text of the Report

4.1. Chapter 1, Point 1.9 (p4)

- 4.1.1. Whilst acknowledging that people are living longer (*“adding years to life”*) current research does not support the assertion that we are necessarily adding healthier extra years, particularly amongst lower socio economic groups (as point 1.28 acknowledges).
- 4.1.2. As the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing and other studies have shown, there is a significantly early onset of disability amongst lower socioeconomic groups, who in turn are the major occupants of social rented and lower equity housing.
- 4.1.3. Therefore with regard to planning for an ageing population it is even more crucial that social rented housing incorporates some Lifetime Homes Standards at the very least.
- 4.1.4. Given the socio economic dimension of disability and the tenure patterns of existing dwellings, at least key elements of Lifetime Homes Standards should be applied to the massive programmes of improvement being undertaken in the social rented stock under the Decent Homes Programme.
- 4.1.5. The age profile of tenants in this sector is old (60% of social rented housing tenants are over 45yrs, 19% over 75) and we are missing a tremendous opportunity to age proof this stock through relatively simple, low costs measures (*such as installation of a downstairs wc, option of a shower, lever taps, accessible positioning of sockets and switches when rewiring, designing out key falls hazards*).
- 4.1.6. This suggestion also relates to 3.19 (*..“we believe that we should move progressively to a position where the lifetime use of a home is taken into account when it is built or when renovations are undertaken.”*). Action is needed as a matter of urgency, given the target of bringing all social rented housing up to a decent standard by 2010. Sheffield City Council is a good example where they are applying Lifetime Homes Standards to their renewal programmes.

4.2. Chapter 2, 2.25 – 2.29 (p22)

4.2.1. We would suggest specific inclusion of planning ahead in retirement to take account of developing housing needs, including meeting the costs of home repairs and adaptations and use of home equity in retirement. Please see p 19 of our enclosed brochure '*In Good Repair*'.

4.3. Chapter 4: Principles (P45)

4.3.1. We strongly endorse these principles. They are central to our suggestions re: benchmarking/ indicators.

4.3.2. With regard to housing, the concept of dignity is important. Where is the dignity in a strip wash in the kitchen, in using a commode because you cannot get upstairs? Many older people are being refused help with bathing adaptations because they do not have a "medical" need for a bath. Robust systems for adaptations, including independent advice for those who can afford to pay and grants for those who cannot, are key to this issue.

4.3.3. P.47 – Box

4.3.4. We note that the vast majority of SP resources go to those in the social rented sector. There is limited expenditure on low level housing related practical support, especially for lower income home owners. This balance needs to be readdressed.

4.3.5. We are about to embark on national research into the provision of handyperson services and will publish the findings in late Autumn 05.

5. Concluding Comment

5.1. We very much welcome the publication of Opportunity Age, its founding principles and its aim of ensuring a connected response across Departments to the critical issue of the ageing of the population.