

## Should I Stay or Should I Go?

An overview of the findings of the evaluation of pilot local housing options services for older people.

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### Introduction

This summary provides an overview of the evaluation of eight pilot local 'housing options' services in **Bristol, Burnley, Derbyshire Dales, East Riding of Yorkshire, Enfield, Hackney, Leeds and Warwickshire**. These services provide information, advice, support, advocacy and practical help for older people living in poor/unsuitable housing and/or considering options for moving home. Care & Repair England's national programme *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* supported the development, monitoring and evaluation of these local services.

The evaluation addressed the following questions and drew out lessons for those concerned with the development of housing, health and social care services for older people.

- *Is there a need for and/or demand for housing options services?*
- *To what extent did these services improve the housing situation of individual older people?*
- *Can the services help to improve the local housing situation of older people more generally through influencing service provision and planning?*

### Why housing options services?

#### Social and Demographic Factors

Demographic changes and the ageing of the population have been well documented. Less well analysed are the housing implications of an ageing society, particularly with regard to the major shift to owner occupation and the housing consequences of more older people being supported by social services to live in their own homes for longer.

In 1981 only 57% of households were owner occupied and 32% were in the social rented sector. A radical change in tenure took place during the 80's and today owner occupation stands at 71% of households with 19% social rented (*Survey of English Housing 2003/4, ODPM*). For older people the percentage is even higher – 81% owner occupation in rural areas, 73% in urban (*2001 Census*).

There were 1.4 million individuals with a medical condition or disability requiring specially adapted accommodation in 2002-3 and 26% of these people were living in accommodation which was not suited to their needs (*Survey of English Housing 2003/4, ODPM*).

There is a decreasing level of state help for owner occupiers (*UK Housing Review 2004-5 reveals a 90% reduction in help for home owners since 1990/1, despite a significant rise in home ownership amongst lower income groups - half of poor households are home owners*). Reduced availability of grants for major renovations and limits on larger adaptations may result in more older people considering moving home, particularly if they are unable or unwilling to consider equity release to pay for necessary works.

In Regeneration areas people may have to move home where major clearance programmes are underway. Older, longer term residents may need help and support to get through what may be a traumatic process.

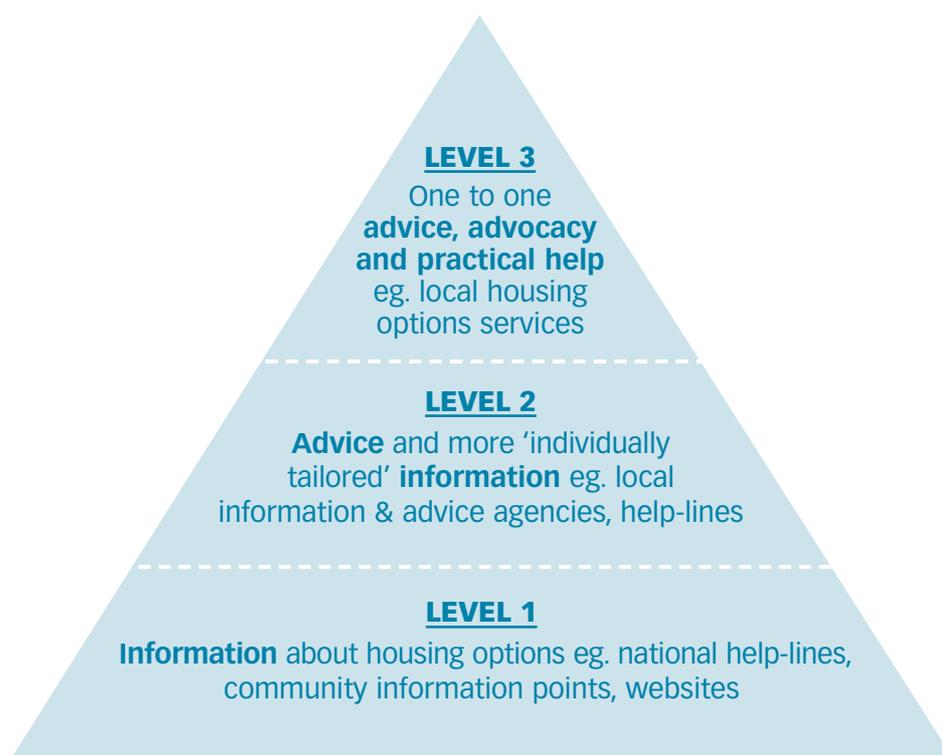
In rural areas lack of public transport, shops and services can result in some older people having to consider moving closer to such facilities.

There is also an issue of generational change, with the 'younger old' becoming more willing to consider moving home if the right information and advice is available.

## The Housing Advice Context

It is increasingly acknowledged that some older people need external help at transition points in their lives. Onset of a major health problem or bereavement may force older people to make a rapid decision about moving home: access to information, advice, advocacy and practical help is crucial to helping people through this process.

The specialised and comprehensive local housing options services for older people, which contributed to *Should I Stay or Should I Go?*, can be viewed as fitting within a housing information and advisory services 'pyramid'.



Whilst the housing information and advice needs of the majority of older people and their families/ carers may be met by the services operating at Levels 1 & 2, some older people will require more intensive 'Level 3' help. The following key findings, conclusions and lessons for the future aim to throw some light on this latter group.

*The conclusions in this summary are based on research undertaken with Sheffield Hallam University, including data from 561 older people who had used the eight housing options services, plus interviews with 50 service users, 18 professionals from housing, health and social care and the 8 project staff.*

## Key findings about demand for housing options services

In all pilot areas there was a demand for the housing options service, particularly amongst people over 80 with health and mobility problems (36% of service users and 44% of those moving home were 80 yrs or more).

The help provided for some service users was literally life transforming. The extensive support with all aspects of moving home that housing options services offer was highly valued, as was the provision of unbiased information about housing options. The mix of high and low need cases is a key factor determining how many people a housing options service can assist. Local circumstances also impact greatly on how many people a service can help.

Whilst initially extensive promotion and publicity was required to establish knowledge of the services' existence, thereafter a 'balancing act' was reported by most (but not all) services between further promotion and limiting the service profile to control level of demand.

The pilot services were employing no more than one full-time equivalent worker, and all were covering a significant area in terms of population and/or geography.

### Recorded demand amongst pilot housing options services

Site	Agency type *1	Project operating fully (months) *2	Working full or part time	Data Collection Period (months)	Number of service users	Projected no. of service users (per annum per f/t worker)
<b>Urban</b>						
Bristol	HIA (I)	72	100%	19	137	86
Burnley	HIA (HA)	7	100%	11	30	51
Enfield	LA	6.5	100%	10	22	41
Hackney	HIA (HA)	6.5	100%	11	48	89
Leeds	HIA (I)	18	100%	21	137	91
<b>Rural</b>						
Derbyshire	AC	9.5	100%	14	65	82
East Riding	LA	12	61%	15	25	41
Warwickshire	AC	16	65%	19	97	112
<b>Total</b>					<b>561</b>	

\*1 HIA = Home Improvement Agency (I = independent, HA = Housing Association), LA = Local Authority, AC = Age Concern

\*2 months that a worker was in post, minus 3 month start up period

This analysis indicates that a reasonable level of service productivity with a full time housing options worker is around 90-100 cases pa. However, this would not necessarily be enough to meet need in all areas – this would have to be a matter for local assessment.

## Key findings about improvements to the housing situation of individual older people

Most of the older people using the housing options services were doing so because of significant difficulties with their current living arrangements. Others were seeking information in order to weigh up possible options in advance of problems and to plan for their future housing. Thus from a service commissioning perspective housing options services are meeting both an urgent need for immediate housing help and also enabling older people to plan ahead and retain control over their living arrangements.

The main factors prompting service users to consider their housing situation were:

- Difficulties arising from health problem(s)
- Access and/ or mobility problems
- Problems with maintaining existing home

Poor health was prevalent amongst 74% of the older people referred to the housing options services. Health issues were identified by over a third of service users (37%) as one of the major difficulties they were experiencing that was prompting consideration of moving home.

### Characteristics of people referred to housing options services

No. of older people	% living alone	% with health problems (1)	% with support needs (2)	% with housing difficulties due to health problems (2)	% with access &/or mobility problems (2)	Unable to maintain existing home (2)
561	53%	74%	40%	37%	33%	25%

1 – recorded by referrer/professional      2 – identified as an issue by older people themselves

This predominance of ‘push’ factors rather than ‘pull’ factors in moving home was also reflected in the patterns of home moves, with 59% of movers going to sheltered housing, and 19% moving to residential/ nursing care. Only 10% moved within the general housing stock.

### How people were helped

On average, 17% of service users moved home (range 15-26%). Others were still waiting to move home, some had chosen not to move because of the lack of suitable housing on offer, others had made a positive choice to stay put after provision of information about options.

The most common move was from a house or bungalow to a flat (42% of all movers), and there was also a significant level of moves from owner occupation or private rented into social rented (39%). Moves to sheltered housing were significant (59% of all movers).

No. of people who moved (closed cases only)	% who were living in houses/ bungalows	% who moved from house/ bungalow to a flat	% who moved from owner occupation or private rented into social rented	% who moved to sheltered housing
59*	78%	42%	39%	59%

\*22 further moves had been made, but cases were still open. 218 people were still being assisted, some of whom will also go on to move home if suitable housing can be identified.

Those who reached a decision not to move home gave the following reasons for their decision:

### Reasons for not moving home (closed cases only)

Closed cases & reason given	No suitable option available	Preferred existing home to alternatives	Could not face upheaval of moving	Other reason(s)
123	34 (28%)	25 (20%)	8 (6%)	56 (45%)

In addition to helping people to move, the housing options services were in many cases able to bring about other improvements in older people's living situations via associated help. 40% of service users required help with daily living activities or other support to remain in their home and workers made a total of 328 referrals (open and closed cases) for other local services.

### Cases where housing options service refers on for/obtains associated help

Repairs	Adaptations	Daily living support	Gardening help	Befriending	Security	Welfare Benefits	Grants	Equity release	Alarms	Other
7%	18%	8%	2%	4%	2%	16%	4%	2%	7%	28%

17% of service users were from black and minority ethnic communities (*range amongst pilots 0% – 56%*). BME elders who had used the services were:

- *Less likely to have considered moving when first contacted (35% v 63%)*
- *More likely to stay put after being helped by the service (95% v 83%)*
- *More likely to prefer existing home to alternatives (closed cases) (33% v 20%)*
- *More likely to have been referred for major adaptations by the service (21% v 13%)*

### Older people's views about the housing options services

From the independent interviews with service users a high level of satisfaction with the housing options services was identified.

Older people who had received more intensive help and support particularly valued the ways in which the housing options worker had personally guided them through the process of determining where to live. The provision of practical help such as filling in forms, taking people to their banks, being present at meetings with estate agents, and accompanying older people to look at potential new homes were all highly valued. As the following comments illustrate, a housing options service can open up new visions and possibilities.

*"I think it's a brilliant scheme I really do. It has given me options which I didn't know I had. As I said, now I am looking at all the options."*

One disabled person was living in an unsatisfactory flat, the steps to/ from which made her virtually housebound and isolated. Because of rising London property prices she was able to purchase a private sector, fully accessible retirement housing unit on the coast where there were social activities and she could get out and about. *"I never would have dreamt that moving here was possible before [the housing options adviser] suggested it"*.

For some older people who were still waiting for a suitable property, help took a different but much needed form. The following comments illustrate that where there is an inadequate supply of properties to meet housing need, the local service may have to sustain support and efforts to resolve a housing situation for the individual over a long period.

*"Whether it comes this year or next year when it happens, [the housing options adviser] is bringing us hope. She's trying her very best for us, she really is. She goes out of her way for us..... she doesn't just come and look on it as a job, she actually cares."* [Comments by a disabled older man living with his wife and two daughters and struggling to cope living in a privately rented, inaccessible, unsuitable upstairs flat. The town where they live had no affordable properties to rent which could have met his needs and those of his family and the housing options service was having difficulty accessing suitable social rented housing]

One of the starker conclusions of the evaluation is that for many older people housing choice is simply not a reality.

Where cases were closed because people opted not to move home, 28% of the reasons given for this outcome was that no suitable alternative housing was available and in 20% of cases the person's existing (and often unsatisfactory) housing was considered preferable to any possible alternative housing identified.

There was a high number of open cases (218) a significant proportion of which, it may be surmised, arise from people waiting for suitable housing to be identified. The interviews with service users and housing options workers revealed a considerable degree of frustration about the lack of suitable local housing options for older people and the limitations that this placed on meeting older people's housing needs, let alone their aspirations.

## **Can the services help to improve the local housing situation of more older people through influencing service provision and planning?**

The housing options services have highlighted a lack of real housing choice for many older people.

Housing options services are generating valuable local data about practice and wider policy which can be useful to those responsible for housing and related service planning and delivery.

What most of the pilots have not been able to do, either because of limited staff resources or lifespan, is to translate the information that they have gained about shortcomings in provision of housing for older people into local action that would stimulate policy changes.

The situation is different in Bristol, a longer established service, where the project worker has become actively engaged with local planning of housing for older people and where both short and long term change is being achieved. Examples of this are improved access to the social rented sector for older people living in private rented and owner occupied housing, changes to the private sector housing renewal strategy whereby the council may help with the cost of moving home rather than adapting/ repairing, plus joint planning for mixed tenure retirement housing developments.

There are signs of early development of this 'wider vision' activity in some of the other pilot areas. Interviews with service planners and commissioners revealed that some had identified the wider potential of housing options services and some change had taken place including:

- *Changes to a council policy on new housing association developments to include leasehold schemes for older people*
- *A council review to include a broadening of support services for older people*
- *Major changes to a local authority's lettings policy.*

## Key lessons

### ■ Older people value an outside source of information, advice & practical help

The older people in the study valued having an impartial individual that they could trust who could guide them through the process of considering their housing situation.

### ■ Some older people require intensive help and support to make/ act upon a decision about their housing

Most service users were considering moving home because living in their current home had become very difficult. Many of those who had moved home felt they could not have done so without the help and support of their local housing options service.

### ■ For many older people housing choice is not a reality

Some older people made a positive choice to stay put after provision of information and advice. However, others wished to move home but were unable to obtain housing which met their needs and aspirations.

### ■ There is still a demand for supported housing amongst some older people

Some evidence has emerged of a demand for social rented housing (particularly sheltered housing) amongst older age groups (those 80 yrs or more) who are currently owner occupiers. This may be because this is the only supported housing option available to them.

## Commissioning and developing a housing options service

Providing a housing options information, advice, advocacy and practical support service, which includes home visiting and intensive casework, clearly costs more per service user than other less intensive types of information and advice service. However, it is this intensive one to one help for more vulnerable people that emerges as a key value of local housing options services.

The pilot housing options services were located within home improvement agencies, local Age Concern groups and local housing authorities (see table on p2). Pluses and minuses to each management model emerged. However, location within an organisation which already has a good track record on housing related provision, particularly one which is perceived as totally impartial and independent, does seem to impact on the effectiveness of the service.

There are clear cost benefits to housing, health and social care providers if older people can be enabled to live independently for longer through a suitable housing move. Housing options services should be jointly commissioned by all of these parties, including Supporting People.

### **Conclusions at a glance**

*Whilst most older people facing a stay put/ move home decision need limited information and outside advice, a significant minority of older people need the face to face, practical intensive help that a housing options service can provide. Such help can be life transforming.*

*Whilst there are constraints and limitations on what a housing options service can achieve for some individual older people because of a lack of suitable alternative housing options, the information generated about such shortcomings can be used positively by planners and providers to bring about wider improvements to housing for older people.*

## Recommendations

- That commissioners and planners of health, housing and social care services consider the added value a housing options service could bring to the portfolio of local services that enable older people to live independently and to local planning intelligence.
- That the inter-relationship is recognised between housing options advice and other services, particularly hospital discharge arrangements, provision of adaptations and social housing allocation. Services should be planned and supported accordingly.
- That areas scheduled for housing renewal give serious consideration to funding a specialised housing options service to assist older people and other vulnerable residents whose homes will be affected by the renewal programme.
- That home improvement agencies, local housing/generalist advice agencies and local housing providers work together to ensure that local housing options information is readily accessible for older people and their families. To ensure such information is accurate and regularly updated, consideration should be given to the cost benefits of a single agency acting as the local lead on this issue.
- That the training of health, housing and social care staff should address housing options issues and such training should highlight the views and experiences of older people. This is of particular importance amongst those responsible for the single assessment of needs and those who visit older people in their own homes.

## Find out more

General information about housing options services is provided in the leaflet *“What is a Housing Options Service?”*

Further evaluation summary reports and the more detailed Sheffield Hallam University Evaluation are available from the Care & Repair England website [www.careandrepair-england.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair-england.org.uk) – click on ‘Housing Options’.



**Care & Repair England**

**The Renewal Trust Business Centre, 3 Hawksworth Street, Nottingham NG3 2EG**

**Tel: 0115 950 6500 e-mail: [info@careandrepair-england.org.uk](mailto:info@careandrepair-england.org.uk)**

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