

# Should I Stay or Should I Go?

## Issues for Rural Areas

A summary of the findings of the evaluation of pilot local housing options advice services for older people which are of particular relevance to rural areas.

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The 'Evaluation Overview' highlights the main findings of the *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* programme evaluation. This summary focuses on the particular issues and lessons that have emerged with regard to housing for older people in rural areas.

It looks specifically at this issue for a number of reasons:

### ■ **National debates are underway with regard to**

- *The implications of the growing proportion of older people living in rural areas*
- *Problems of housing supply and affordability in rural areas*
- *The lack of supported housing options in rural areas*
- *The extra costs and problems of delivering floating support services in rural areas*

■ **The demographic picture** – whilst there has been a large national increase in the level of owner occupation, the proportion of people who own their home is even higher in rural areas than urban, and is particularly high (and still rising) amongst retired householders.

### ■ **Anticipated issues** –

- *Shortage in many rural areas of accessible, adaptable housing for older people with mobility or other disability problems*
- *Lack of well located housing, both private and social rented, suitable for older people in rural areas, including any supported housing options*
- *The support of older people living in rural areas that lack public transport, shops and services is of growing concern amongst health and social care providers*

## About the evaluation

The following findings, conclusions and recommendations are based on the quantitative data collected from local pilot projects, plus qualitative data from face to face and telephone interviews with service users, housing options advisers, service providers, commissioners and planners undertaken with Sheffield Hallam University. Rural pilots were located in Derbyshire Dales, East Riding of Yorkshire and Warwickshire.

## **Key findings about demand for housing options services**

A demand for housing options services was identified in all pilot areas and the quantitative data does not show a significant difference between rural and urban areas. In most (but not all) projects staff reported managing demand by limiting publicity once the service had become established.

However, a higher level of publicity and promotion was reported to be needed in the three rural areas to establish and maintain a profile for the service. In East Riding this has still not generated the level of demand found in other areas. One of the reasons for this appears to be the part time staffing arrangements within the local authority which has not created adequate staff time to promote and develop the service.

The rural Warwickshire service has proportionately recorded the highest level of use of all of the projects. One of the reasons for this appears to be the location within Warwickshire Age Concern which provides a very wide range of services, including running a home improvement agency and other housing related support.

In all rural areas there was a longer lead in time to setting up and establishing the housing options services. This should be taken into account when planning for housing options type services in other rural areas.

### **Who do the housing options services help?**

In all areas the age group most likely to use the service was that of 80 yrs or more. This was particularly marked in Warwickshire (50% of service users were 80+ vs average of 36%), but less so in the other two rural areas. In Derbyshire Dales and East Riding couples were more likely to use the service than in the other areas (42% and 40% vs average of 25%). Females living alone were the main service users in 6 out of the 8 pilot areas. The group most likely to move home were those of 80 yrs or over (44% of all movers, 80% of movers in Warwickshire).

With the exception of Hackney, the three rural services helped the highest proportion of private tenants (Derbyshire Dales 11%, East Riding 16%, Warwickshire 9% average 7%), reflecting perhaps an issue with regard to housing needs amongst this group in rural areas where there may be a history of tied accommodation and local private rental agreements from major land/property owners. Again, this factor needs to be taken into account when considering local housing needs.

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

An issue that emerged in rural areas from qualitative analysis was lower expectations about the availability of help and surprise that such a service was on offer. The majority of service users interviewed valued the assistance that they had received very highly and those who had moved home valued it the most, with many commenting that they did not see how they could ever have moved without the help of the housing options service.

### **Moving Home**

In 17% of all closed cases the older person had moved home. The incidence of moving home vs staying put varied considerably between projects and there was no clear quantitative difference between rural and urban areas (Derbyshire Dales 16%, East Riding 1 case, Warwickshire 23%).

What is significant in Warwickshire and Derbyshire Dales, as well as some urban areas, is the high rate of movement from owner occupation and private rented housing into social rented.

## Tenure patterns before and after moving home

	All areas		Warwickshire		Derbyshire Dales	
	Moved from	Moved to	Moved from	Moved to	Moved from	Moved to
Owner Occupier	41 (69%)	7 (12%)	6 (60%)		2 (22%)	
Private tenant	6 (10%)	1 (2%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	2 (22%)	
Residential/Nursing home	0	11 (19%)		1 (10%)		2 (22%)
Social housing	5 (8%)	36 (61%)		8 (80%)	2 (22%)	7 (77%)
Other	7 (12%)	4 (7%)	2 (20%)		3 (33%)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>

In East Riding the project reported problems with helping people to move due to a lack of available social rented housing in well located areas, indicating a potential unmet demand for supported or general social rented housing.

In Derbyshire Dales the housing options project has worked very closely with the local authority with regard to availability and allocation of social rented housing and is starting to have some impact on housing for older people. However, shortage is still a major issue.

All rural areas reported a lack of suitable alternative housing to purchase or rent that would meet the needs of older and disabled people. Older people in rural areas were also more likely to give their reason for not moving home as the lack of any suitable alternatives (30% vs 10% for the whole group). Space standards and location were two of the reasons mentioned for non acceptability of alternative properties.

Most of those who moved home moved to sheltered housing (59% of all movers).

### Factors influencing decisions

Ill health and its consequences (eg access/mobility problems), closely followed by maintenance were the main reasons for considering moving home in all project areas

One factor, other than the actual property characteristics, which emerged as particularly important when looking at alternative housing was location in relation to transport, shops and other facilities. Access to public transport was particularly noted by those living in rural areas (32% of interviewees mentioned problems with public transport).

30% of interviewees mentioned isolation and loneliness as an issue, 10% in rural areas and 20% in urban areas, which could indicate that more older people in rural areas may have better networks of support. In such circumstances moving home could be even more disruptive in terms of key support networks if alternative housing was some distance away.

*They [neighbours] literally come in, I've got a new back gate on, my next-door neighbour noticed my old one was getting a bit tatty and he made me one and fitted it. Neighbours are great and the local trades people. The log man brings the logs in and he stacks them up on the side, people are just so helpful and friendly. I don't want to move.*

Mr J (decided to stay put)

## Conclusions and Recommendations for Rural Housing

- The preferred option of the majority of older people is to stay put in their existing home for as long as possible. In rural areas supporting this option through adaptations, repairs and other practical help can be even more critical as it enables older people to retain important local support networks which can be lost if they move home.
- However, for a significant minority, particularly amongst older age groups (80+), moving to supported housing may become a necessity, particularly in rural areas which lack public transport and local services. The assistance of the housing options service was greatly valued by older people facing this difficult situation in the rural pilot areas.
- Lack of suitable alternative housing options hampered the ability of many older people to make planned housing moves in all areas, but in rural areas this was even more of a problem.
- In all rural areas there was a lack of suitable housing to purchase, even for those with moderate equity. Most of those who moved home left owner occupation and went into social rented housing, particularly sheltered housing. There was an unmet demand for general housing which is well located, adaptable and has adequate space standards.
- In looking at the future housing needs of an ageing population in rural areas, planners need to take into account the potential demand for both private sector and social rented housing amongst older owner occupiers and private tenants. For example, through insisting on the building of properties to Lifetime Homes standards, including smaller 2 bed units, which are well located in terms of transport and services, a more flexible stock may be created that can meet the needs of all ages.

## 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'.



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