CIH submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group inquiry on the regeneration of outdated sheltered housing

Upgrading the service model: technology, housing management, customer experience

What does/should the service model (staffing offer, technology offer) model consist of in contemporary sheltered/retirement housing?

This is a very diverse sector, both in terms of providers and service models. Arguably this has contributed to a lack of awareness of the retirement housing / service model in the wider public (identified for example in Shakespeare Martineau's Retirement Housing White paper, 2021, and in Anchor housing's research of 2022, Fragmented UK). However, in some cases this variety positively reflects services being developed with and for the community, and therefore meeting the priorities of residents as these change.

Service model changes have been driven by a loss of revenue funding (notably the previous Supporting People funding stream). Where there are limited opportunities to find alternative funding streams, including self-funding from residents (due to affordability challenges), many providers have had to withdraw permanent on-site housing staff and make reductions/ limitations in the time and level of support available on site. In many cases it has reduced to safety checks on residents via alarm calls/ scheduled in person checks.

The reductions have particularly impacted on any support to develop social activities on schemes, which is often highly valued by residents (see Fragmented UK, which highlights older people's aspirations for community connections to address loneliness). CIH reported on the approaches that social housing organisations were implementing to address the loss of revenue funding.

Clarity on an agreed suite of sustainable core services across the sector, and consistent marketing, would be valuable to tackle the lack of awareness and understanding. Alongside that, a much needed increase in provision is required, so that it becomes a well-known and available option for more older people to continue to live independently in their local community.

The requirements of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 include the future development of national supported housing standards. Whilst this is aimed at addressing poor standards within the exempt accommodation sector, and may not therefore be adequate for retirement housing, it will provide a minimum/ baseline of what is required. Anecdotally, many local authorities are examining housing benefit claims and checking on levels of support provided, to reclaim where this is not being delivered. This has the potential to undermine the retirement housing sector as a housing option of

choice taken in advance of any future or growing support requirements (residents moving in with the confidence that help will be there should it be required in the future).

In terms of technology, many providers have raised concerns that the sector collectively is still slow to adapt to the digital switchover, with risks to existing alarm systems on which many services depend, including in relatively new schemes ([see blog from Appello](#)). For smaller providers with limited resources, the costs (one response estimates £25,000 for a 50-home scheme is fairly typical, to upgrade the speech modules and main equipment) and risk of further updates being required as the technology advances, has led to a 'wait and see' approach that may prove more costly in the long term.

Government funding exists for care homes to take on more technology, but this needs to be increased and expanded to retirement and extra care housing. The Housing LIN's [TAPPI project](#) provides valuable resources, but funding remains a challenge for many providers to implement change.

Physical and design standards - As a minimum retirement housing should meet decent homes standards, including any update following the government's review, and higher accessible and adaptable standards (Part M 4(2)), including a number of fully wheelchair adaptable homes. In many cases providers are voluntarily adopting higher design standards, such as the [HAPPI](#) standards.

What does/should the customer experience look like in contemporary sheltered/retirement housing?

The customer experience in retirement housing needs to be able to take account of the diversity amongst older people in the population, including increasingly people who will continue to be in work for a significant amount of time whilst living there. Whilst most providers traditionally have considered retirement housing to be for people of 55 and over, many services for older people are targeted at older ages and the state pension age is being raised. The [NHS](#) suggests that people might be considered old from 65. Frequently many people do not identify 55 as older age, and therefore the terminology used to identify retirement housing is important (although difficult to address, as below).

There are some common features raised by older people in terms of what independent living means that retirement housing should reflect:
- Being able to make one's own decisions (82 percent surveyed)
- Living in one's own home (75 per cent)
- Being able to make financial decisions (74 percent)
- Pursuing one's current way of living (69 per cent)
- Tackling loneliness and being connected was also significant.

(Anchor housing, Fragmented UK)

SCIE's project exploring the [role of housing in the future of care and support](#) identified seven principles of excellence:

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- Person centred and outcome focused
- Community connectedness
- Adopting innovation
- Enabling choice and control
- Promoting equality
- Co-production and shared decision making
- Strong leadership, culture and workforce.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act will require senior housing directors and managers to have a mandatory qualification (encompassing housing management and maintenance) within a broader standard of competency and conduct for all staff in the social housing sector, that will set expectations of how staff will listen to and involve residents in the services they receive.

Providers will need to consider how to develop services that can be flexible for the diverse and changing requirements of a broad range of people, spanning a wide age range (whether from 55 or 65). Taking account of existing local services and enabling better connections, identifying key gaps in services and how these might be developed, working with older people within and around the schemes to identify their priorities - these are all ways for providers to be able to assess and extend the life span of retirement schemes.

What terminology works best to describe contemporary sheltered/retirement housing?

This is a problematic issue that has long been debated. Sheltered housing is still used within the social housing sector, but is not well understood by the public; retirement housing may not be appropriate given the changing nature of work and rising retirement ages. A more generic term such as housing for older people may still put off those who do not consider themselves old. Often terminology depends on the provider, and should reflect residents' preferences as well.

It may be more appropriate to define by the objectives and core services – as these also benefit many other groups within the population as well as older people (those with learning disabilities for example).

Upgrade, modernisation, and extension of outdated sheltered housing.

What are the biggest drivers for upgrading, modernising or extending outdated sheltered housing?

Increased demand
The increase in older people within local populations, and many living alone, and the pressures on other public services all support the need to increase the options available

for older people, through improvement and expansion of existing schemes, whether through upgrade and modernisation or demolition and new development.

<u>Changing demands</u>
Meeting changing demands of current and potential residents in terms of space, facilities and services provided. Much has been made of the expectations of the 'baby boomer' generation, but overall, younger cohorts of older people will require and expect well designed space and housing conditions, IT connectivity, energy efficiency and affordable homes (to access and to run). Storage is and will become more critical for belongings, scooters, and more parking and electricity charging points for cars.

Some retirement housing stock has small space standards currently and not all have the potential to incorporate higher space, accessibility or design standards.

Location, access to facilities, transport and parking all impact on the viability of schemes and long term demand.

<u>Changing local needs</u>
In some cases, despite ongoing demand for quality retirement housing, it is more economic and suitable to change use to other customer groups, particularly smaller accommodation, where there is a lack of homes that single people can afford (low supply of social housing, high rents above local housing allowance rates etc.).

<u>Partnership support</u>
The potential for retirement and other supported housing to be a stronger element in planning for local communities more widely was identified in the government's adult social care white paper, [People at the heart of care](#), and the commitment of funding for local strategic planning was very positive. That commitment was not followed up and no such funding is available. This will mean that, in many places, there will be lost opportunities to develop new housing schemes, as well as more services within existing retirement housing, to support local health and wellbeing needs in local communities (and potentially other streams of funding from partners to increase services, such as assistive technology to support health and wellbeing).

However, some housing providers have engaged with health and social care and are able to access support from them (access to NHS land, funding for some support services, strong referral routes for other support etc).

(Examples can be found in CIH's recent paper; [Building blocks for life: how to develop effective health and housing partnerships](#).)

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act will establish the requirement for local housing authorities to review the provision of supported exempt accommodation in their area, in collaboration with the social services authority – this may provide the opportunity for a joined up strategic approach to planning for wider specialist housing and services in

a local area, and encourage a greater focus on the role of retirement and other housing to support independent living and wellbeing.

What are the biggest challenges/barriers to upgrading, modernising or extending outdated sheltered housing?

Costs and resources are significant challenges / barriers, even where a retirement scheme has been identified as a valuable resource to modernise.

Skills and workforce availability are also challenging to access when there is such demand across the housing sector to maintain and improve existing homes and develop new homes.

The housing sector is facing numerous pressures in terms of improving existing housing currently – tackling damp and mould in the social housing sector, meeting building and fire safety requirements, retrofitting homes to tackle fuel poverty and the climate challenges. For the social housing sector, this is compounded by limited resources due to the previous rent reductions, having a particular negative impact for local authority provision.

At the same time interest rates, materials and labour costs are all increasing meaning less can be achieved with the resources providers have.

To undertake costly modernisation, or demolition and regeneration, of schemes requires large capital outlay but also assurance about revenue streams for the long term to make the investment viable. Many smaller providers will struggle to meet requirements, and not all are able to access Homes England funding (lacking capacity or willingness to become registered providers).

A lot of funding streams seem more centred on extra care housing rather than retirement housing and much of the research into benefits for health, social care etc, is similarly focused on extra care. This means that local health and care partners also require these schemes and are looking for housing solutions for people with high and increasing care needs, rather than investment in the lower level but preventative services of retirement housing.

Specialist providers (almshouses/ large scale older persons providers) are able to reinvest and have created a number of innovative designs with a range of communal spaces, larger and flexible accommodation in line with good practice – as highlighted by the Housing LIN, and the Almshouse Association Awards.

What best practice examples are there of:
- **Upgrading/modernising outdated sheltered housing.**
- **Upgrading/modernising and extending outdated sheltered housing.**

- Examples are included in the links above.
- [Extension to Mason House, Shirley](#) – Sir Josiah Mason almshouse
- Improvement and extension of almshouses and new developments can be found in the [almshouse](#) sector but these are smaller in scale.
- As part of a wider regeneration project in Broomhill, by River Clyde Homes, a new retirement housing model was introduced (see pp20-23 in the [evaluation report](#) by Stirling University.

Demolition, replacement, and repurposing outdated sheltered housing

What are the biggest drivers for demolishing and rebuilding outdated sheltered housing?

Where the location and facilities are still driving demand for retirement homes, but the standards within the accommodation and communal facilities is poor, demolition and rebuild can be desirable, to develop accommodation that fits current standards and the requirements of older people.

Access to land for development can be problematic, particularly for these schemes that require a lot of upfront funding and are not amenable to phased development and release, providing more capital flow. This is a driver for demolition and redevelopment of retirement housing whether separately or as part of a wider housing development (see also the example from Regeneration Revival report below).

What are the biggest challenges/barriers to demolishing and rebuilding outdated sheltered housing?

Many challenges echo those for updating/ modernising existing schemes. Larger scale regeneration is complex and beyond the capacity of many smaller specialist providers.

What best practice examples are there of:
- **Demolishing and replacing outdated sheltered housing.**
- **Repurposing outdated sheltered housing for another client group, this could include repurposing with or without adapting the building.**

CIH's previous work on regeneration included a Stafford case study which resulted in more provision of retirement and extra care housing, and dementia facilities. Whilst this was not a direct demolition of retirement housing, there were retirement housing schemes on the edge of the regeneration project that benefitted from linking into the new facilities. It involved a number of partners providing land, funding and skills to bring the project together and resulted in an improvement in the local area and increased options for local older people. The project included work with local residents to shape services.

More details can be found in the full report: [Regeneration revival? making housing-led regeneration work across England](#)

Improvements in sheltered/retirement housing asset management e.g. decarbonisation agenda, energy efficiency, digital switchover, disrepair

What strategies or plans do you have in place?

The housing sector is facing multiple pressures and grater levels of funding will be required to ensure it can meet these. CIH has developed a [10 point plan for more and better homes](#), and a long term housing strategy, [Homes at the heart.](#)

Within that strategy, CIH calls for:
- Flexibility in grant programmes to enable funding for regeneration and retrofitting schemes
- The restoration of strategic level planning to provide better cooperation and certainty for regeneration as well as significant growth
- More investment for the decarbonisation of homes (including a ten year cross sector retrofit programme).

All of these apply more broadly to housing, but would also benefit the issues identified for retirement housing.

CIH also calls for a national, ringfenced funding stream for housing related support to tackle the long-term viability of (new and existing) supported housing schemes.

These asks are reflected in our [submission](#) to government ahead of Spring Budget.

About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple – to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support and knowledge they need. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation so the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership of people who work in the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world. Further information is available at: [www.cih.org.](#)

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