

Talking about Housing Options and Choices for Older People

**A report on two listening events with older
people held as part of the development of
Newcastle's Older Person's
Accommodation Strategy**

January 2008



Talking about Housing

A report on two listening events - 'Talking about Housing – Options and Choices for Older People' and 'When I'm 64 ...'

1. Talking about Housing - Introduction

On the 17th January 2008 the event at Gosforth Civic Hall “Talking about Housing Event – Options and Choices for Older People” was jointly organised by Newcastle City Council, Quality of Life Partnership and Elders Council. The event attracted 58 participants from different areas of the city, demonstrating the high level of interest in this topic. There was a mix of people who are homeowners and people living in social rented housing. People living in private rented housing were not represented.

The aim of the event was to give older people the opportunity to put forward their views on housing and the key issues they felt should be included in the “Older Person’s Accommodation Strategy”.

Fiona Dodsworth from Newcastle City Council, Strategic Housing Service, introduced the “Older Person’s Accommodation Strategy”. She highlighted some of the key issues which would be included in the Strategy:

- The housing offer for older people in Newcastle ought to be affordable to rent and buy.
- People should be offered a range of housing within a safe and accessible environment.
- People should be able to access advice on housing to help them to plan for the future and remain independent.

Fiona indicated that the draft framework for the Strategy is based around the following key themes:

- Living independently in your home
- Living independently with “that little bit of help”
- Living independently but wanting to move on or make changes

- Living independently in specialist accommodation (e.g. sheltered housing)
- Living in residential care

In her introduction, Vera Bolter from the Elders Council stressed the importance of older people contributing their ideas and experiences to the development of the housing strategy and welcomed this opportunity to work on the Older Person's Accommodation Strategy at this early stage.

After the introductions participants took part in small group discussions.

2. Key Issues

The main issues arising from the discussions were as follows:

2.1 Information and Advice:

- There is not enough emphasis in the current Strategy framework on transitions and helping people through change. Older people need more information and advice on their housing options, financial options and on the types of help and support available to enable them to live independently. In addition to written information, older people need opportunities to talk through issues face to face with an independent adviser.
- There is a need to encourage people to plan ahead and downsize gradually in their own time rather than in a crisis. The inclusion of housing as part of pre-retirement courses was suggested.

2.2 Housing options and choice

- There is a need for greater choice of affordable and different kinds of accommodation across all areas.
- Even when older people downsize, they still need space for activities, carers and family. Most people require 2 bedrooms.
- Older people highlighted the importance of good housing design (e.g. lifetime homes) and building a greater understanding of the options (e.g. design choices and financial support) for adapting your home to changing circumstances.
- Older people have mixed views about specialist housing such as retirement communities or sheltered housing. For those who do choose this option, the importance of having your own front

door and choice about the activities you take part in were highlighted as important, and the security and support offered are welcomed.

- Some people prefer to live in mixed communities and the need for suitable housing such as bungalows or adapted houses in their own community was highlighted.
- There was limited discussion about extra care housing and care homes, but the point was made that these need to be integrated into the community.

2.3 Older person friendly neighbourhoods

- Older people stressed the importance of older person friendly neighbourhoods which are secure and well maintained. The importance of working with private landlords to ensure that they take responsibility for the maintenance of properties and behaviour of their tenants (e.g. noise, litter, anti-social behaviour) was highlighted. The street warden service was considered to be of benefit and would be welcomed in all areas.
- Older person friendly neighbourhoods also means access to a range of local facilities including venues and meeting spaces for community events; shops and facilities (e.g. food shop, post office, church, work place etc.) and a GP (health facilities).
- Community 'hubs' where older people can get access to advice, help and support would be welcomed. The Search Project in Benwell was given as an example of a hub.
- Being within easy reach of a good transport system to get out and about, in particular to town centre facilities was stressed.

2.4 That bit of help

- Older people highlighted the importance of a range of local support services that can offer 'that bit of help' which is essential to enabling people to maintain their independence e.g. gardening; shopping; cleaning. The importance of being able to access these services in a timely and flexible way was stressed, so that people get help before problems start to escalate but also have some flexibility and choice about the services they use.
- Older people need better access to equipment (e.g. stair lifts) to support independent living.

3. “When I’m 64 ...”

On the 21st January 2008 an early evening session was jointly organised by Newcastle City Council, Quality of Life Partnership and Elders Council. This session aimed to offer an opportunity for younger people who may be caring for older relatives or thinking ahead for themselves to contribute their ideas to the development of the Older Person’s Accommodation Strategy. Seven people attended the session. The outcome of the discussion drew out very similar issues to those raised at the “Talking about Housing – Options and Choices for Older People” event. In particular, the following issues were raised:

- the need for clear and sufficient information about housing options;
- the importance of older person friendly neighbourhoods;
- the need for adequate space standards;
- the need for more choice of appropriate and affordable housing.

4. Next Steps

The issues raised in these two sessions will be used to inform the development of the Older Person’s Accommodation Strategy. The intention is to publish a draft Older Person’s Accommodation Strategy for consultation in summer 2008 when older people will have another opportunity to contribute their ideas and comments.

5. Staying in touch with older people’s housing issues

The Elders Council Housing Group meets on a monthly basis and will receive regular updates on progress on the Older People’s Accommodation Strategy. These meetings are open to all Elders Council members. For further information contact Barbara Douglas on 0191 255 1986 or barbara.douglas@qualityoflife.org.uk.

The Quality of Life Partnership produces a quarterly e-bulletin on local, regional and national issues of interest to older people and staff working with older people. If you would like to receive a copy of the e-bulletin contact Claire Horton on claire.horton@qualityoflife.org.uk or call 0191 233 0200.

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