

Response from Care and Repair Scotland to the Scottish Government's Draft National Strategy for Housing for Older People: Consultation

Introduction

Care and Repair Scotland welcomes the development of a national strategy for older people's housing. We are very encouraged by the recognition within Scottish Government's Independent Living Team that housing an ageing population represents a significant challenge to policy makers and will require careful long-term planning and significant redirection of resources.

The overall vision presents a positive, refreshing and very encouraging view for the future direction of housing policy in Scotland and it is one that we fully support:

'Older people in Scotland are valued as an asset, their voices are heard, and older people are supported to enjoy full and positive lives in their own homes in a homely setting' (P.8)

Where older people live and their expectations of how they live have changed considerably in the last twenty years. The aspirations of older people now and in the future will be very different to those of previous generations. It is becoming very clear that older people want more choices and greater say in how they live their lives. Most people have moved away from the idea that a residential care setting is the ideal place for them to live out their later years. They are happy to live in the community perhaps with some support from family, friends, neighbours and voluntary sector groups.

However the majority live in the private sector and are home owners. If the National Strategy is to be successful there must be a fundamental shift in the attitude of national and local government towards homeowners. Housing policy and funding has traditionally focussed on the social rented sector with an impression given that somehow the private sector will sort itself. If the practical outcomes set out in the National Strategy are to be realised, homeowners must be recognised as the principal players in it.

The Role of Care and Repair

There are a number of circumstances which can result in a person being unable to continue to live independently which include:

- Housing which is not adapted to a person's needs, following an accident or major change in their health
- An inability to maintain the fabric of a property
- An inability to fix minor repairs
- Fear of crime
- Social isolation
- Dementia or confusion
- Bereavement

Recognising the importance of these needs and supporting older people to enable them to make informed choices about their housing maintenance, adaptations, small repairs and improvements is

the starting point to ensuring that older people can remain in their communities and maintain their independence. We therefore fully support the objective that:

“Older people should live in homes, which are warm, dry and secure, and should have easy access to reliable trades people to undertake repairs and maintenance”. (P.19)

Care and Repair teams have demonstrated since 1987 that their ethos of providing home-based support and technical assistance to older and disabled homeowners is one that works and is highly valued by clients. We are grateful for the recognition given to the work of Care and Repair in the National Strategy document and intend to provide case study example from local teams that will demonstrate our ability to deliver the practical outcomes identified:

- Demonstrate the case for housing support services. (P.14)
- Provide case study of advice service for older people. (P.15)
- Provide case study of fast track adaptations service. (P.18)
- Demonstrate how older people can be assisted to undertake repairs and maintenance (P.19)
- Demonstrate how more older people can be assisted to use their personal resources to make improvements to their home. (P.24)
- Provide case study of Care and Repair service run as social enterprise and/or handyperson service provided by Care and Repair. (P.30)
- Demonstrate how handyperson services have contributed to a reduction in the need for care homes and emergency admissions to hospital. (P.31)
- Demonstrate how Care and Repair has assisted with the installation and maintenance of Telecare support. (P.32)

We will also continue to support the development of the National Strategy through the National Director’s contribution to the Working Group discussions.

We would specifically welcome further discussions between Care and Repair Scotland and Scottish Government about developing a future framework that will stabilise the existing network of Care and Repair services and provide a platform for expanding our services and support to older people to achieve the objective outlined on page 18:

“We are confident that more can be achieved within the existing arrangements and the current level of resources. As part of this, we will consider whether there are organisational changes which may be of benefit and ways to make better use of existing network of Care and Repair services across Scotland”.

We are very interested in exploring options for the long-term funding of Care and Repair services. There was wide-spread disappointment within the Care and Repair movement that the Scottish Government Review Findings on Care and Repair in 2009 did not address the stakeholders’ concerns about funding and long-term viability of services. We are therefore fully committed to the views expressed on page 30:

“Care and Repair have an established network of projects across Scotland offering a wide range of different services, but there are many older people and disabled people who could benefit from

these services, if additional funding could be found or a viable social enterprise model could be identified”.

General Comments

Care and Repair Scotland recognises the difficulties that Scottish Government will face in implementing the National Strategy against the current background of financial austerity and uncertainty. In our view, the limited resources that are available need to be protected by a robust national framework that compels local authorities to engage with the objectives of the Strategy. We would also like to see timescales and targets for national and local government in the final version of the document. We are very supportive of the overall direction of the document but think that more work needs to be done in describing how the objectives will be delivered.

We suggest that there needs to be clarification of the definition of handyman services in the document. In our view, small repairs must be embraced in the final definition. Small repairs services provide skilled, qualified, tradespersons and are vital for proving minor repairs and maintenance as well as delivering a wider range of services that are valued by police, fire, social services and NHS. Unskilled and volunteer handyman's services have a valuable role to play but the Strategy must recognise the need for both strands of service.

We have also noticed an increasing trend for some older homeowners who have resources to fund repairs and adaptations themselves to seek the advice and support of Care and Repair in organising and overseeing major repairs. We believe that such cases contribute to the overall objectives of the Strategy and could be developed further if the core funding of Care and Repair teams could be stabilised.

Although the draft Strategy rightly emphasises the importance of joined up thinking between housing, health and social work at the strategic and planning level, we consider that there is also needs to be a more joined up approach to funding so that, for example, housing services that help to reduce demands on health and social work services should benefit from a transfer of funding. We suggest that the final Strategy should include a commitment to review the funding regimes to enable cost effective housing interventions and avoid perverse incentives to favour the status quo. So far, our experience of the Change Fund suggests that it has achieved very little movement of funding from NHS to housing services.

We also believe that the Scheme of Assistance for homeowners needs to be urgently reviewed and the funding stream redistributed from back-room local authority staff to front-line services such as Care and Repair. If the Scheme of Assistance is to have a long term future, and we do not necessarily believe that it has, it is our view that owners will only embrace the idea if it is delivered through a one stop shop arrangement through Care and Repair, as is the currently the case in Dumfries and Galloway, Orkney and Shetland isles.

We fully support the frequent references in the draft Strategy to the importance of delivering adaptations to disabled people as quickly as possible. Angus, Scottish Borders and Lochaber Care and Repair teams have dedicated occupational therapists that have cut through traditional bureaucracy to deliver fast track adaptations. Highland Council Care and Repair teams operate self assessment fast tracking for installations of showers that can deliver the adaptation in less than a month. The

Council is now exploring the idea of allowing Care and Repair to deliver adaptations across other tenures. We would hope that the final Strategy will recognise the value of such good practice models and recommend a radical review of the delivery of adaptations that will include the provision of a single funding point for adaptations that is available across all tenures.

While we recognise the desire of Scottish Government to encourage homeowners to take responsibility for the repair and maintenance of their property, we would contend that in the long term it will not be helpful to turn off repair grants to all homeowners. We would argue that, at the very least, a review of the Scheme of Assistance should examine the advantages in making grants available for ancillary works that relate to disabled adaptations, for example, to rewire a property in order to fit a stair lift.

Our final comment around funding is that we sense a lack of understanding amongst older people about the introduction of Self Directed Support. We believe that this funding stream could usefully support the aims of the Strategy and homeowners who will receive SDS could be given further advice and guidance about using some of their resources to fund minor repairs perhaps through approved services like Care and Repair.

Conclusion

We are genuinely encouraged by the direction and clarity of a strategic vision that supports the future care of older people in their homes and communities. Care and Repair Scotland is committed to actively engage with Scottish Government to assist in finalising the document and to help move the National Strategy forward to deliver the services that will be required by older people. The critical next step is to turn the vision into practical measures that will deliver effective services on the ground and Care and Repair stands ready to play its part in delivering them.