

Age Scotland
Housing Needs of Older People in
Scotland – Panel Research

March 2021

Prepared by Sheena Muncie

SCOTINFORM

Scotinform Ltd, 21 Young Street, Edinburgh EH2 4HU
0131 555 1104 | www.scotinform.co.uk | info@scotinform.co.uk

Contents		
Executive Summary	i	
1. Introduction	i	
2. Methodology and Sample	i	
3. Key Findings	i	
3.1 Part of a Community	i	
3.2 Impact of Covid-19	i	
3.3 Housing	ii	
3.4 Energy	iii	
4. Conclusions and Recommendations	iiii	
4.1 Conclusions	iiii	
4.2 Recommendations	iiv	
1. Introduction	1	
1.1 Background	1	
1.2 Aim of Research	1	
1.3 Reporting	1	
2. Methodology and Sample	2	
2.1 Methodology	2	
2.2 Sample	2	
3. Engaging with Others	3	
3.1 Part of a Community	3	
3.2 Impact of Covid-19	3	
4. Housing	6	
4.1 Moving Home	6	
4.2 Adapting Homes	7	
4.3 Care and Repair	8	
4.4 New Developments	8	
5. Energy	9	
5.1 Concerns about Energy Bills	9	
5.2 Energy Efficiency	10	
5.3 Awareness of Government Schemes	10	
6. Final Thoughts	11	

7. Conclusions and Recommendations	11
7.1 Conclusions	11
7.2 Recommendations	12

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

This research forms part of Age Scotland's work looking into the housing preferences and needs of older people in Scotland. This qualitative research used small panels of older people and telephone interviews, and took place in November and December 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic.

Age Scotland has previously commissioned national housing surveys in 2018 and 2020 through Scotinform Ltd. Participants from the most recent housing survey had the option to indicate if they'd be interested in participating in future Age Scotland research, and from those who were interested Scotinform Ltd recruited participants for four online discussion groups and eight in depth telephone interviews.

The aim of this research was to better understand the housing preferences of older people in Scotland and to use the small focus groups and telephone interviews as a way to dig deeper into the experiences of the participants, to discuss their preferences, and to understand what they would like to see change when it comes to housing options for older people.

2. Methodology and Sample

A total of twenty-one participants took part in four online discussion groups which were split by type of location: large

urban, other urban, rural and small town. Participants lived across Scotland from Shetland to Peebles.

In addition, eight in depth telephone interviews were organised with individuals who had not wished to take part in the online discussions but were keen to offer their input to the study.

The research was facilitated using a topic guide agreed with Age Scotland prior to the discussions and interviews commencing.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Part of a Community

To what extent participants felt part of a community was dependent on how active they were in engaging with local groups, church and services. The majority of participants were proactive, and active, when it came to engaging with local groups, church, local services and neighbours. Many had lived in their current home for some time and had built up social networks. For those who had moved into a new area they were still often perceived as 'incomers' and becoming part of a community had been a slow process.

3.2 Impact of Covid-19

This research was conducted in November and December 2020 in the midst of a global pandemic when areas of Scotland were under restrictions impacting on residents'

freedom of movement, among other restrictions. Regardless of how engaged participants were with their local community, the pandemic and subsequent closures of groups and any face-to-face contact, meant that they had been more or less housebound with significantly less contact than prior to March 2020.

Unsurprisingly, participants who lived alone were the most affected by Covid-19 with access to local facilities, neighbours and family seriously impacted. Even participants living in sheltered housing/retirement complexes had felt isolated as tenants' common rooms were closed to keep residents safe from the virus.

There were examples of local services which had kept in touch with local people, particularly those living on their own, which had been appreciated and valuable.

The restrictions imposed by Covid-19 had impacted on participants' mental health with concerns about catching the virus and mention of '*dark days*'. Difficulty in accessing services during lockdown, including GPs, dentists and health professionals, added to the anxiety and disappointment felt by some participants.

Whilst some participants had been able to keep in touch with family and friends via the internet, it was acknowledged that some older people were less familiar with technology. In addition participants mentioned broadband inequalities across Scotland as a barrier to internet access.

In general, participants remained in a limbo whilst waiting for

the pandemic to pass so they could start again planning for their futures.

3.3 Housing

The majority of participants had not considered moving in the future and lockdown had not had an impact on this decision. A desire to stay in their existing homes was due to being comfortable in their current home with a social network of friends and access to local services.

The key factor which would influence a decision to move home was a deterioration in health and well-being as well as a desire to live nearer family as they get older. The 'ideal' home was described as being on one level and preferably with a garden.

In the main, participants felt that their property met their current needs with a few expressing concerns about external/internal stairs and the size of the property and/or the garden but others had already had adaptations made to meet their needs.

Approximately a third of participants had heard of Care and Repair but a number of participants were clearly unaware of this service and the criteria for its use.

In general, participants agreed that the Scottish Government should help people (of all ages and type of disabilities) to adapt their homes to meet their needs. Participants agreed that their preference was to adapt their homes rather than to

move into residential care. They welcomed the proposal that the Government could make a percentage of all new developments accessible housing which would encourage a more intergenerational community. There was some scepticism, however, as to whether this would go ahead and how well planned it would be.

3.4 Energy

Participants agreed that, in general, energy bills were too high and expressed concerns about paying such bills in the future. This was perceived as less of a problem amongst those participants living in rented accommodation when energy bills were part of their rental payments.

A few participants actively searched for good deals and had used an energy switching service to do so. In the main, participants felt that energy switching was a 'hassle' and were disappointed that there were no rewards for being loyal to one specific energy supplier over a period of time.

There was mixed awareness of energy schemes: Home Energy Scotland (Scottish Government funded advice service), HEEPS (Home Energy Efficiency Programme provided by Warner Homes Scotland) and HEEPs Area Based Scheme. Awareness was highest amongst rural participants with awareness from prior contact and/or information supplied by local groups such as Community Councils.

In terms of raising awareness of energy schemes participants suggested channels including advertising, MSPs, community

noticeboards, local newspapers, posters in GP surgeries, press advertisements/articles, TV, radio, Age Scotland and mailers.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

- The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly had a strong detrimental impact on the wellbeing of the participants in this research. Loneliness and isolation appear to be the biggest negative results of this, along with a general fear for one's health. The longer-term impact on the mental and physical health of older people is not yet known, but it seems likely that the experience of the pandemic will impact how older people make decisions in the foreseeable future.
- The importance of being part of your community came through strongly in this research, and it seems fair to suggest that the experience of the coronavirus pandemic had made older people feel more strongly a part of their community and therefore more reluctant to leave it. During this research, participants explained that they were unwilling to make plans for the future due to the pandemic, as it was uncertain when they could start to resume their normal activities or plan a holiday.
- When it came to future housing planning, the participants expressed strong preferences for staying in their current homes and would prefer to try and

- install adaptations to their homes rather than move, if this became necessary.
- The thought of moving home highlighted mixed views with some feeling they would be quite organised and others clearly feeling overwhelmed by the prospect.
- The key factor that would influence a decision to move home was a deterioration in health, which suggests that participants would wait until they had no choice but to move home, without realising that by that time the situation might be taken out of their control.
- There was limited awareness of Care and Repair and the services that they offer. Of the participants who had heard of it, there was considerable uncertainty about who the service was available to. One participant highlighted the variation in service offered in different areas of Scotland.
- The issue of internet access and broadband connectivity was raised during this research. Participants in rural areas, in particular, highlighted that many older people local to them did not have access to the internet. Both the issue of poor connectivity and some older people's reluctance to learn to use the internet were highlighted as reasons people may not be online.
- The cost of energy bills and making homes more energy efficient was a source of worry for the participants in this research. A few participants had used switching services to try and get lower energy bills and generally found this to be a 'hassle'.

- Energy efficiency was less of an issue for participants who lived in rented accommodation for whom energy bills were included in their monthly rent payments.
- There was limited knowledge of energy efficiency schemes although some participants had made changes to their owned homes, such as through loft insulation or a new boiler.
- This format of online and telephone focus group sessions worked well to engage with older people during the pandemic, when meeting up in person was not possible. The feedback from the participants was very positive and this form of research and engagement should be used in future to explore topics in depth.

4.2 Recommendations

Age Scotland's research has identified the strong preference of older people to remain living in the community where they have established links and relationships. Remaining in their own home and making the necessary adaptations to improve accessibility so that they can live well and as independently as possible is very important to them.

The challenge older people face if they want or need to move home is a lack of available, suitable housing in the community which they are part of or close to a support network. They are often looking for homes that are accessible, a manageable size, preferably on one floor, with a limited number of steps or step free access and ideally with a garden space.

Age Scotland recommends:

- The Scottish Government should ensure that their housing and planning strategies such as Housing to 2040 and the National Planning Framework 4 recognise the housing needs of older people and outline measures to meet them.
- The Scottish Government should consider how it can work with and influence housebuilders to start building a greater mix of types of homes, including more accessible homes, that would start to address the lack of diversity in the housing stock.
- Local Authorities should have targets to address the lack of choice and availability in accessible housing and they should consider ways, such as with their planning powers, in which they can encourage a wider range of housing type to be built.
- It is important to recognise that there are a variety of preferences among older people about where they would like to live and the type of community they would like to live in. This research highlights a particular desire of participants to live in a community with a mix of ages and generations. House builders and Local Authorities should look at encouraging the building of housing developments which foster an intergenerational community.
- Older people must have access to cost effective ways to make simple adaptations to their current home in order to live safely and well. Adaptations can enable a person to live in their own home for longer, prevent hospital admission and speed up hospital discharge. The Scottish Government and Local Authorities should look to boost investment in Care and Repair services across Scotland so that there is a consistent level of access wherever someone lives.
- The impact of lockdown and subsequent Covid-19 related restrictions have demonstrated how valuable a person's local community is to their wellbeing. Planning authorities should make greater efforts to ensure that there is good access to public services such as healthcare, amenities, transport links and greenspaces when granting permission for new housing developments.
- The Scottish Government should look at how internet connectivity, speed and reliability can be improved across Scotland as this is a significant barrier to older people being able to keep in touch with others and access information online. This requires greater rollout of highspeed broadband infrastructure across Scotland so that every home has fast internet access. Further work on supporting older people to learn how to use the internet should be pursued.
- The Scottish Government should run a long-term, national awareness campaign of the various home energy efficiency schemes available to older people as this research, and previous Age Scotland housing research, has demonstrated that there is low awareness among older people about the schemes that are available. Greater promotion of services such as Home Energy Scotland would be beneficial so that

older people would know where to turn for impartial energy advice.

- The Scottish Government could consider providing support to a central advice service that could help people to switch their energy provider, so that older people have the option of calling and speaking to an advisor, which may provide a better service than online switching services.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This research forms part of Age Scotland's work looking into the housing preferences and needs of older people in Scotland. This qualitative research used small panels of older people and telephone interviews, and took place in November and December 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic.

Age Scotland has previously commissioned national housing surveys in 2018 and 2020 through Scotinform Ltd. Participants from the most recent housing survey had the option to indicate if they'd be interested in participating in future Age Scotland research, and from those who were interested Scotinform Ltd recruited participants for four online discussion groups and eight in depth telephone interviews.

The aim of this research was to better understand the housing preferences of older people in Scotland and to use the small focus groups and telephone interviews as a way to dig deeper into the experiences of the participants, to discuss their preferences, and to understand what they would like to see change when it comes to housing options for older people.


1.2 Aim of Research

The main aim of the study was to expand further on the issues raised through the quantitative research namely to explore:

- The impact of Covid-19 on the lives of older people in Scotland
- Satisfaction with current housing and plans for the future in terms of appropriate housing
- Issues surrounding energy bills and awareness of Government schemes
- Awareness of Age Scotland and its role
- The issues that Age Scotland should focus on going forward to ensure it addressed the needs of older people

1.3 Reporting

Throughout this report please note:

- 'Participants' refers to those who took part in an online discussion or in depth telephone interview
- Open-ended feedback from participants is identified with 

2. Methodology and Sample

2.1 Methodology

In November 2020, 21 participants took part in online group discussions. These individuals had previously completed Age Scotland's National Housing Survey and expressed interest in taking part in further research. The discussions were text based with no need for a camera or microphone and facilitated by Scotinform Ltd using a topic guide agreed with Age Scotland at the outset. This was designed to probe more deeply into the issues raised in the previous housing survey. Each group lasted approximately 90 minutes and each participant was given an incentive for taking part. This took the form of a £20 e-voucher for a retailer of their choice.

Four online groups were arranged and split by type of location: large urban, other urban, rural and small town. Participants lived across Scotland from Shetland to Peebles.

In addition eight in depth telephone interviews were organised and facilitated using the same topic guide as prepared for the online groups. These were individuals who had not wished to take part in the online discussions but were keen to offer their input to the study.

2.2 Sample

Overall participants ranged in age from 60 to 80.

Table 2.1: Profile of online group participants

Type of location	Number of participants	Gender	
		Male	Female
Rural area	5	3	2
Large urban	6	4	2
Small town	6	2	4
Other urban	4	3	1

Table 2.2: Profile of in depth telephone interview participants


Type of location	Number of participants	Gender	
		Male	Female
Large urban	1	0	1
Other urban	7	3	4

3. Engaging with Others

In this section of the discussion, participants were asked about their local communities and what impact Covid-19 had had on their lives.

3.1 Part of a Community

To what extent participants felt part of a community was dependent on how active they were in engaging with local groups, church and services. The majority were proactive, and active, with a sense that as long as they were able they would engage with local clubs, their community and neighbours. In communities which participants had moved into there were very positive stories about how they had been helped to integrate into the area. There were other stories, however, from those who were still perceived as ‘incomers’ and for whom becoming part of a community had been a slow process.

 *‘We’re very lucky in that an upstairs neighbour was a community development officer and through him I went to a class at the community centre. His wife introduced me to the community choir and their son-in-law voted me onto the Community Council. So I was sort of absorbed.’ (Large urban participant)*


‘There is quite a strong community spirit in Crail but it can be a bit difficult to penetrate at first as an

‘incomer’’. (Small town participant)


3.2 Impact of Covid-19

This research was conducted in November and December 2020 in the midst of a global pandemic when areas of Scotland were under restrictions impacting on residents’ freedom of movement, among other restrictions. Regardless of how engaged participants were with their local community, the pandemic and subsequent closures of groups and any face-to-face contact, meant that they had been more or less housebound with significantly less contact than prior to March 2020.

Of note is that the majority of participants lived alone and this undoubtedly impacted on their experience of lockdown.

 *‘I had to shield between March and September and if things continue rising here (Covid cases) then will need to do so again. With osteoarthritis in both knees and as I live on first floor it is painful getting out and about. However, thankfully Sainsbury’s have been keeping me fully supplied with food and essentials.’ (Rural participant)*

Even participants living in sheltered housing/retirement complexes had felt isolated as tenants’ common rooms were closed to keep residents safe from the virus.

 *‘We have zero community within the building as the tenants’ common room has been closed since March.’*

(Rural participant)



'Really devastating for some of the residents who have no family.' (Large urban participant)

There were examples, however, of local groups who had kept in touch with older people to make sure they were not isolated. One participant recalled receiving a card through his door from the local Community Council offering help and support which had made him *'feel good and humbled that others wanted to look out for me'*. In a few instances, participants had themselves been members of groups which helped others whilst others had been recipients of such help.



'I am fortunate in that I am still very active but that allows me to assist others who are less active to be part of our group and so part of the community. Even now, in lockdown, we keep in touch with one another making sure the more vulnerable among us are coping/being cared for.' (Rural participant)



'The pandemic has put a lot of local clubs out of business so they cannot meet but I still ring around our members to see if they are OK.' (Rural participant)



'I had great help from the community during lockdown. Emails and calls to check that I was OK as I live alone. They picked up prescriptions of my gluten free food and I got gifts of fruit and veg from the local community group. Grey Matters delivered cooking kits and craft kits to keep us busy and set up zoom chat meetings every week.' (Small town participant)

The pandemic had also impacted on participants' mental health with some very openly talking about the depression which had accompanied isolation, *'dark days'* and fear of catching the virus. Participants were trying to remain positive although this was often difficult particularly when they felt alone. A few participants who lived with a partner also found lockdown stressful. Despite not feeling isolated, they felt challenged by the fact that they were with their partner 24/7 rather than being able to go out and about separately and *'do my own thing'*.



'It has had a huge impact as I was furloughed because of my age and felt I was in a sort of death row waiting for the virus to come and get me. I got back to work at the end of July. It took every fibre of my being to stay positive and not descend into a pit of despair. Ceasing to listen to the mad politicians helped as well!' (Rural participant)



'Initially I was positive but now that depression and loneliness make me feel down and some days cannot be bothered.' (Rural participant)



'I moved from terrified to resigned to 'dealing with it' to utterly furious at people not complying with regulations.' (Large urban participant)




'The first one – pretty awful, latest one not so bad.' (Small town participant)



'I wasn't shielding and I felt exceptionally grateful for having a safe place to be with a garden etc. For some


people it was truly a miserable time.’ (Other urban participant)

The creation of extended household bubbles had allowed some older people to be able to see their families, which was a significant concern during lockdown. It was also particularly welcomed by those who lived alone and had not seen people during the initial stages of lockdown.

 *‘At first I found the lockdown difficult as I LIVE on my own however I am now in my son’s bubble so i can visit him on a regular basis.’ (Small town)*


 *‘Bubbles are excellent - saved me.’ (Small town)*

One participant who lived alone had enjoyed the opportunity to meet with neighbours during the ‘Clap for Carers’ when she met, for the first time, local families who now made an effort to talk to her.


 *‘Clap for Carers meant I met neighbours I had never seen before. It created a great community feeling.’ (Large urban participant)*

Many participants had been able to stay in touch with family, friends and local clubs via the internet but one rural participant pointed out that *‘fewer than 35% of the community’* had Internet access, highlighting the broadband inequalities across the country. One participant felt that some of her older peers were reluctant to use the internet because of a fear of change or looking like they were ‘stupid’. She felt that now was a good time to encourage older people who were not computer literate to come forward because lockdown had been


particularly hard for those unable to use the internet to keep in touch with others.

 *‘Zoom, FaceTime and WhatsApp have been invaluable – I use them almost daily. The amount of digital resources available at the moment is astonishing.’ (Large urban participant)*

Limited access to services during lockdown, including GPs, dentists and health professionals, added to the anxiety and disappointment felt by some participants. One participant had, however, gained access to health professionals via MacMillan Cancer Support. Participants also mentioned issues contacting the Council if repairs etc were required as they had found that councils were difficult to contact without internet access.

 *‘I simply cannot get an appointment with the GP.’ (Rural participant)*


A few participants had become more active during lockdown by taking up ‘Couch to 5k’, walking their dog more regularly, taking pilates and yoga classes online etc.


 *‘I did start Couch to 5K running regime and we were able to do pilates and yoga almost every day on zoom with our fitness club. I actually have improved greatly in fitness and lost of lot of weight in the last six months.’ (Small town participant)*


Two participants were still working (while being in their 70s) and were very keen to continue doing so. They felt that they were more likely to feel ‘invisible’ if they were retired.

Lockdown had, however, given them an indication of what being retired would be like and they were concerned that this would lead to a lack of social interaction which they knew was not good for anyone.

Participants were not thinking in the longer-term but waiting to see what impact Covid-19 would have and when restrictions were lifted. At the time this research was conducted, restriction levels were changing on a regular basis making it difficult to forward plan. For some, however, the pandemic had impacted on holiday plans and career opportunities. A few were looking forward to being able to travel and take holidays abroad or elsewhere in the UK. One male participant who had no family had realised, during lockdown, the importance of planning a funeral. He had now talked to his friends about his wishes and told them where the document detailing these plans was stored.

 *'I am not making any plans for the future yet. I don't want to be disappointed if I have to cancel anything planned. I will be very happy when I am able to take up my previous activities and get to see my grandchildren again.'* (Rural participant)

 *'It's made me more determined to spend time with those I love, rather than worrying about plans.'* (Large urban participant)

 *'I was going to participate in an oil industry start up business and make an investment. Life seems too short now and so I withdrew and am now focussing totally on retirement properly with the emphasis on*

friends and family and perhaps a bit of pleasure seeking when we get the chance.' (Small town participant)


4. Housing


This section of the discussion focussed on how appropriate participants' homes were for their current and future needs.

Of note is that the vast majority of participants lived by themselves, with only two participants living with one other person. The sample was split almost equally between those who lived in a house or in a flat.


4.1 Moving Home

The majority of participants had not considered moving in the future and lockdown had not had an impact on this decision. A desire to stay in their existing homes was often due to a sense of security in the community in which they lived as they had friends, a social network which was important to them, access to local services and/or access to green space for walks.


 *'I like and trust my neighbours and know where to find the things I need locally.'* (Large urban participant)


 *'I value my independence and when I floated the idea of moving before this pandemic I was shocked to find my family, and others, expected me to move in with them? I am not ready for that!' (Rural participant)*

The key factor which would influence a decision to move home was a deterioration in health and well-being, including a desire to live nearer family and/or when health deteriorates. The 'ideal' home was described as being on one level and preferably with a garden. Some participants had already made a move, but in one instance it had not been entirely successful with a participant moving from London to a small seaside town in Scotland.

 *'The change from living in a very cultural and ethnically diverse and huge city to small peninsula town has been quite challenging. I love opera and music generally, and visiting art galleries etc but the bus service takes 90 minutes and the trains only run once an hour. I do drive but I'm not happy driving in B roads at night so I'm beginning a bit hemmed in.....' (Small town)*

For a few participants the prospect of moving did not concern them as they would *'plan things out'* but others realised that any move was often accompanied by stress and upheaval. One commented *'if I win the lottery I will hand over the key and get someone else to manage it for me'*.


 *'I thought about it (moving). I would like to live in the middle of nowhere at the loch side and not having to climb the four set of stairs to my flat would be an*


 *added bonus. But it's too difficult to find somewhere at the moment.'* (Small town)

'Moving house is a nightmare in itself.' (Small town)


4.2 Adapting Homes


In the main, participants felt that their property met their current needs with a few expressing concerns about external/internal stairs and the size of the property/garden. Some others had already had adaptations made to meet their needs.

 *'We had a stair lift installed two years ago which I rarely use. Had the power points lifted for easier reach and a walk-in shower.'* (Large urban participant)

 *'We have tried to future proof the design with upstairs and downstairs bedrooms, kitchen that is suitable for less mobility and so on.'* (Small town participant)

The ability to make adaptations, however, depended on whether the participant owned their property or whether they were renting from a local council/private landlord.

 *'The Council refused to allow me to install a stair lift (at my cost) as lady next door owns her flat. Also I have been on the housing list here since 2016 and on Benbecula since 2018 but nothing.'* (Rural participant)

 *'Bath hand rail inserted by me.'* (Other urban participant)

Participants were asked which organisations they would contact if they needed to make changes to their homes. Suggestions included:

Age Scotland
Blind Veterans UK
Change Works
Citizens Advice Bureau
Disability Shetland
Home Energy Scotland
RNIB
Sight Scotland Veterans
Social Work Department

One participant mentioned Care and Repair unprompted.

4.3 Care and Repair

Approximately a third of participants had heard of Care and Repair, but a number of participants assumed that this was not a service available to Council tenants with one stating that *'they cannot do work in council properties according to MSP'*. One participant based in North Lanarkshire stated that the service was no longer available in his area and that the terms of engagement varied across regions i.e. in Stirling recipients of the service were required to be on benefits, and in some

areas electrical services are not provided. This led him to conclude *'I've done my research on this and it's a confusing Service, it's not consistent'*.

One rural participant had had prior contact with Care and Repair but this had not been a positive experience.



'I had an unfortunate experience with them when my mother required a wet room. The advice was to alter a bedroom next door to the bathroom and that was so unnecessary when all that the current bathroom needed to have done was remove the bath ... A very disappointing experience.' (Rural participant)

Participants were told that the service was funded by local councils and offers advice and assistance to enable repair, improve or adapt their homes. Given this information participants expressed interest in contacting Care and Repair in the future if they felt sure that they fitted the criteria.



'It's certainly something I'll now investigate.' (Large urban participant)




'I had heard of them but now you have reminded me I will consider them if I need any help in the future.' (Other urban participant)


4.4 New Developments

Participants welcomed the proposal that the Government could make a percentage of all new developments accessible housing which would encourage a more intergenerational

community. There was some scepticism, however, as to whether this would go ahead and how well planned it would be.

In general, it was agreed that the Government should help people (of all ages and type of disabilities) to adapt their homes to meet their needs. Participants agreed that their preference was to adapt their properties rather than to move into residential care.

 *'I totally agree with this. Intergenerational communities benefit everyone - and there is also a desperate need for more social housing in this country.'* (Large urban participant)


 *'Accessible housing would be hugely beneficial but people who need accessible housing also need easy access to services and amenities. A lot of new house building is on the edge of towns so may not be ideal.'* (Other urban participant)

5. Energy

The research sought to establish how concerned participants were with energy bills and if they had taken any action to make their homes more energy efficient.

5.1 Concerns about Energy Bills

Participants agreed that, in general, energy bills were too high with *'power companies making unacceptable profits while delivering a poorer service'*. Concerns were expressed about paying such bills in the future although those living in rented accommodation were less anxious as their energy bills were included in their rent.

 *'Huge concerns about energy bills to the point where I sit and freeze rather than switch on my central heating! I have used Martin Lewis several times to switch companies but every time their prices rise too. I never know whether to heat every room or just the one I sit in to save power. Also my meters are impossible to read – one up very high so I am on a ladder and one out in the busy street!'* (Small town participant)

A few participants actively searched for good deals when it came to energy companies and four had used an energy switching service. In the main, however, participants felt that energy switching was a 'hassle'. Participants were

disappointed that they had to look at changing suppliers to lower bills rather than being awarded for customer loyalty.



'I make sure to shop around for the best deals so my energy bills are manageable. Mind you, I only have electricity for cooking and lighting and my coal fire supplies my central heating.' (Rural participant)



'Our energy bills are affordable but I work hard at keeping them low – switching lights off etc – both from a cost perspective but also to minimise our energy use/save the planet. I agree that people shouldn't have to switch to get a better deal. The extent of fuel poverty and food poverty across the country is shocking and that cuts across all generations.' (Other urban participants)

5.2 Energy Efficiency

Many of the participants had made changes to their properties to make them more energy efficient and this included:

- Loft insulation
- Repair of shutters
- Radiator reflectors
- Repair of flooring (replaced with recycled bamboo)
- Installation of double glazing
- Installation of a smart meter
- Purchasing a new boiler
- Installing LED lighting



'I've used Energy Aware Scotland for loft insulation and draught proofing. My doors and windows are in need of upgrading but I can't afford to do them right now and as far as I am aware no grants or financial assistance is available because the windows are already double glazed.' (Large urban participant)

5.3 Awareness of Government Schemes

Participants were asked if they were aware of the Scottish Government's energy programmes: Home Energy Scotland (Scottish Government funded advice service), HEEPS (Home Energy Efficiency Programme provided by Warmer Homes Scotland) and HEEPs Area Based Scheme.

All rural participants were aware of the schemes and were made aware via prior contact and/or information supplied by local groups such as Community Councils. Two of large urban participants were aware and one of the other urban participants was aware.

In terms of raising awareness of such schemes participants suggested channels including advertising, MSPs, community noticeboards, local newspapers, posters in GP surgeries, press advertisements/articles, TV, radio, Age Scotland and mailers.

6. Final Thoughts

In closing, participants were keen to express how pleased they had been to take part in the research and have their voice heard.

'Thanks to Age Scotland for organising this session, keep it up and give us the feedback.' (Rural participant)



'Thanks for the opportunity to discuss this. It's given me a few things to think about and follow up on.' (Large urban participant)



'I think it's about shifting the mindset of the country and the political agenda. We should be celebrating that people are living longer not treating older people as a 'burden' but there also needs to be a focus on supporting people to live well in later life, as independently as possible, with older people taking on responsibility for living as well as they can (including staff safe from Covid ... In many ways it's not about someone's age it's about their state of health.' (Other urban participant)

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

- The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly had a strong detrimental impact on the wellbeing of the participants in this research. Loneliness and isolation appear to be the biggest negative results of this, along with a general fear for one's health. The longer-term impact on the mental and physical health of older people is not yet known, but it seems likely that the experience of the pandemic will impact how older people make decisions in the foreseeable future.
- The importance of being part of your community came through strongly in this research, and it seems fair to suggest that the experience of the coronavirus pandemic had made older people feel more strongly a part of their community and therefore more reluctant to leave it. During this research, participants explained that they were unwilling to make plans for the future due to the pandemic as it was uncertain when they could start to resume their normal activities or plan a holiday.
- When it came to future housing planning, the participants expressed strong preferences for staying in their current homes and would prefer to try and

- install adaptations to their homes rather than move, if this became necessary.
- The thought of moving home highlighted mixed views with some feeling they would be quite organised and others clearly feeling overwhelmed by the prospect.
- The key factor that would influence a decision to move home was a deterioration in health, which suggests that participants would wait until they had no choice but to move home, without realising that by that time the situation might be taken out of their control.
- There was limited awareness of Care and Repair and the services that they offer. Of the participants who had heard of it, there was considerable uncertainty about who the service was available to. One participant highlighted the variation in service offered in different areas of Scotland.
- The issue of internet access and broadband connectivity was raised during this research. Participants in rural areas, in particular, highlighted that many older people local to them did not have access to the internet. Both the issue of poor connectivity and some older people's reluctance to learn to use the internet were highlighted as reasons people may not be online.
- The cost of energy bills and making homes more energy efficient was a source of worry for the participants in this research. A few participants had used switching services to try and get lower energy bills and generally found this to be a 'hassle'.

- Energy efficiency was less of an issue for participants who lived in rented accommodation for whom energy bills were included in their monthly rent payments.
- There was limited knowledge of energy efficiency schemes although some participants had made changes to their owned homes, such as through loft insulation or a new boiler.
- This format of online and telephone focus group sessions worked well to engage with older people during the pandemic, when meeting up in person was not possible. The feedback from the participants was very positive and this form of research and engagement should be used in future to explore topics in depth.

7.2 Recommendations

Age Scotland's research has identified the strong preference of older people to remain living in the community where they have established links and relationships. Remaining in their own home and making the necessary adaptations to improve accessibility so that they can live well and as independently as possible is very important to them.

The challenge older people face if they want or need to move home is a lack of available, suitable housing in the community which they are part of or close to a support network. They are often looking for homes that are accessible, a manageable

size, preferably on one floor, with a limited number of steps or step free access and ideally with a garden space.

Age Scotland recommends:

- The Scottish Government should ensure that their housing and planning strategies such as Housing to 2040 and the National Planning Framework 4 recognise the housing needs of older people and outline measures to meet them.
- The Scottish Government should consider how it can work with and influence housebuilders to start building a greater mix of types of homes, including more accessible homes, that would start to address the lack of diversity in the housing stock.
- Local Authorities should have targets to address the lack of choice and availability in accessible housing and they should consider ways, such as with their planning powers, in which they can encourage a wider range of housing type to be built.
- It is important to recognise that there are a variety of preferences among older people about where they would like to live and the type of community they would like to live in. This research highlights a particular desire of participants to live in a community with a mix of ages and generations. House builders and Local Authorities should look at encouraging the building of housing developments which foster an intergenerational community.
- Older people must have access to cost effective ways to make simple adaptations to their current home in order to live safely and well. Adaptations can enable a person to live in their own home for longer, prevent hospital admission and speed up hospital discharge. The Scottish Government and Local Authorities should look to boost investment in Care and Repair services across Scotland so that there is a consistent level of access wherever someone lives.
- The impact of lockdown and subsequent Covid-19 related restrictions have demonstrated how valuable a person's local community is to their wellbeing. Planning authorities should make greater efforts to ensure that there is good access to public services such as healthcare, amenities, transport links and greenspaces when granting permission for new housing developments.
- The Scottish Government should look at how internet connectivity, speed and reliability can be improved across Scotland as this is a significant barrier to older people being able to keep in touch with others and access information online. This requires greater rollout of highspeed broadband infrastructure across Scotland so that every home has fast internet access. Further work on supporting older people to learn how to use the internet should be pursued.
- The Scottish Government should run a long-term, national awareness campaign of the various home energy efficiency schemes available to older people as this research, and previous Age Scotland housing

research, has demonstrated that there is low awareness among older people about the schemes that are available. Greater promotion of services such as Home Energy Scotland would be beneficial so that older people would know where to turn for impartial energy advice.

- The Scottish Government could consider providing support to a central advice service that could help people to switch their energy provider, so that older people have the option of calling and speaking to an advisor, which may provide a better service than online switching services.