



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

2016 could yet sow the seeds for a bountiful harvest

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Amid the damp and the darkness it can be difficult to peer out at the New Year with hope and confidence. One giant cloud looming very large on the horizon of supported and specialised housing providers is the housing benefit changes and social rent reductions announced in Chancellor George Osborne's budget and comprehensive spending review (CSR).

For those of us wishing to see the development of a viable supported housing market, the reversal of those changes is near the top of any New Year wish list. The pressures on social care and related budgets over recent years had already left many housing providers under pressure as they seek to sustain appropriate housing for older and vulnerable people in the community.

Now the double-whammy of changes to local housing allowances and the social rent reductions could force many providers to withdraw from the market. Ministers and their advisers must take note of the stark warning from the PlaceShapers network for community-based supported housing provided by housing associations to be exempt from the planned cut in social rents. The network also warned of the 'catastrophic' impact for such schemes if they are caught in the government's plan to cap housing benefit at local housing allowance levels.¹

We will work with our partners through the year to highlight how such schemes save health and social care budgets hundreds of millions of pounds each year by supporting some of the oldest and most vulnerable people in the community, as recently outlined in independent research for ExtraCare Charitable Trust.²

We will also all look with interest at the details of the £400million capital investment in specialist housing for older people and those with long term conditions announced in the CSR. The government wants to see that money secure at least 8,000 new homes in partnership with housing associations and the private sector.

The sector could also enjoy a warming mid-winter glow when the Department of Health announces allocations for the second phase of its Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund. The schemes funded under phase 1 of the programme have provided encouraging templates that have reinforced just how supported

¹ <http://www.placeshapers.org/supported/>

² <http://www.extracare.org.uk/research/findings>

housing can transform the lives of people with disabilities and care and support needs and reduce the demand for health and social care services. To support knowledge and information exchange, the Housing LIN hosts an online directory of these innovative schemes.³

There are other reasons to return to work after the holidays in upbeat mode. Our partners in healthcare are increasingly recognising the impact that investment in housing for older and vulnerable people can have on reducing demand for NHS services. The Housing LIN is working with Public Health England on a series of briefings aimed at fostering local partnership working between the sectors. These will range from tackling health inequalities to active ageing and end of life care.

As in so many sectors, how we exploit technology will become increasingly important. That is why we are relaunching the Telecare LIN this year. We are also working closely with partners to better understand the full potential of technology and how it can support people to remain independent in their own home.

And, as a signatory to last year's health and housing memorandum of understanding⁴, we are keen to build on the spirit of that document by building effective partnerships within acute, primary care and public health services. NHS England and Public Health England have clearly signalled their ongoing commitment to working with housing with their 'Healthy New Towns' programme.

Such partnerships and innovative thinking can help us build the case that specialist and supported housing benefits not only individuals and communities but the public purse. Healthy homes and communities contribute to healthier lives. However, penny-pinching in other areas could undermine that promise and we should seek to make that case.

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³ <http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/ECHScheme/search/>

⁴ www.housinglin.org.uk/pagefinder.cfm?cid=9425