



## **Extra Care Housing in Wales: A Flexible and Appealing Alternative**

*Written by Sarah Rochira, Older People's Commissioner for Wales*

Over the past decade or so, there has been a significant shift away from providing care and support for older people in settings such as care homes or long-term care of the elderly wards, towards a much more community-based approach that supports older people to remain living within their own homes and communities.

This is, of course, to be welcomed – for many of the older people I have met and spoken with across Wales, the prospect of having to move into a care home and leave behind their communities, which they may have lived in for decades, is quite simply unbearable.

But a model of support that is increasingly based on domiciliary care is, unfortunately, not without its problems. For many of the older people who receive care in their own homes, the only people they will see all day are their carers, who often have very limited time to provide care – some slots can be less than 15 minutes. And cuts to social services budgets across Wales as a result of austerity measures mean that the provision of effective, compassionate domiciliary care is more difficult than ever.

Furthermore, much of the housing stock in many parts of Wales is of a poor standard, which can lead to a number of health problems for older people, increase their risk of falls and accidents, and can result in much higher energy costs.

That's why the move towards providing more extra care housing for older people in Wales is such a positive step forward.

I have visited a number of extra care schemes across Wales and have seen for myself the difference they can make to people's lives, providing older people with purpose built accommodation that is designed to meet their needs, as well as allowing access to a range of amenities, services and support from carers as and when they need it. Living alongside their peers also has many benefits for older people, with opportunities to form new friendships and feel part of a strong community, helping to avoid the loneliness and isolation that some older people can experience.

But more than this, what is perhaps most attractive about the extra care model is the flexibility it provides to older people, not only with regard to the choice and control they have over their day-to-day lives, but also with regard to their longer term care needs: if these needs change over time, the right support can be provided at the right time; a crisis need not occur, as is so often the case for people living at home, before an older person gets the help they need.

For many older people, extra care housing offers a flexible and appealing alternative to more traditional forms of care and support. As the extra care model continues to grow and develop, there is a real opportunity to provide housing that meets an individual's short and long-term needs and is seen as a positive choice. But there needs to be a significant increase in the supply of extra care housing to ensure that this choice, which can massively improve an individual's wellbeing and quality of life, is available to even more older people across Wales.

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