



Improving lives with Telecare: Making the right move

This case study explains how telecare can help to create socially inclusive communities and reposition the housing organisation as an integral partner in public health.

Written for the Housing Learning & Improvement Network by
Martyn Durant, Services Director, Enterprise & Health, Wakefield and
District Housing

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Introduction

Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) was established in April 2005 and became the largest single transfer housing organisation in the country when it took ownership of the local authority homes from Wakefield Council.

Although WDH is a not-for-profit and non-publicly funded organisation, it has become an integral part of the local health and social care agenda, and an influential partner to the local council, emergency services and other health and social care organisations. So how, as a charity with no public funding, has it positioned itself as a critical partner in public health? It believes that its use of telecare has been fundamental to its success. This case study sets out how this has been achieved.

Independent Living for health and wellbeing

Wakefield and District Housing has long been an advocate of telecare as a means of assisting older and vulnerable people, reducing isolation and improving safety and security. With over twenty years' experience using assisted living technology through our Care Link Telecare Service, WSD understands the effectiveness and value of unobtrusive methods of care and support.

As mentioned above, WDH was formed in 2005 after transferring from Wakefield Council and are now one of the largest housing organisations in England, owning and managing over 31,000 homes for families, older people, single and vulnerable residents, in addition to managing over 45 Independent Living Schemes for older and vulnerable people. For WDH, it's more than just bricks and mortar – their ambition is for tenants and residents to be at the heart of everything they do, and they are committed to building confident and thriving communities.

To drive forward their Vision to create 'confident communities', WDH developed programmes to ensure that they deliver a wide range of first-rate services that are targeted to their tenants' needs. While these initiatives have been created independently from their telecare service, telecare plays an integral part in the delivery of their Vision.

WDH's 'Tenant Priorities' programme was developed to ensure they know what their tenants' priorities are, so that they can offer more personalised services and solutions for them. It reflects the guidance from the Telecare Services Association, which says tenants should be offered 'real choice'. This choice is now being offered in all their Independent Living Schemes (ILS), so tenants can choose and pay for the individual services they receive. The schemes help tenants maintain their independence by providing comfort, safety and security, with each tenant given a built-in support system and a 24 hour a day emergency contact point.

Excellence is at the heart of everything WDH do, and part of their 'Excellence' initiative is for continual improvement and to build on past successes. In order to benchmark themselves against other providers, including leading private companies, they launched the WDH Excellence programme to support staff to enhance their performance.

They stress that it's important for WDH to nurture and support their workforce, ensuring they are equipped with the right skills, motivation and leadership to move themselves forward. The overall aim of their 'Shaping our Future' programme was to offer excellence, define new standards and have a highly trained workforce. They also recognise the importance of staff retention and developing a strong multi-disciplined workforce.

However, it is not just all about the staff, they also want to encourage their tenants to access services to gain skills, improve educational attainment and address their ill health and conditions, such as obesity. Their 'Lifestyle' initiative offers a more coordinated approach with local partners to help address health and wellbeing issues that their tenants face, helping them to broaden the scope of opportunities and achieve their potential, including better self care.

Taking Telecare Home

WDH's Care Link Service gives older and vulnerable people, and their families, reassurance and support, 24 hours a day. With over 15,000 customers, the service aims to help people feel more independent and confident in their own homes, while also reducing isolation. Anthony Weaver, 35, one of WDH's Care Link customers said, *"It's priceless for what it does. It is freedom, and you can't put a price on that."*



WDH Care Link customer Anthony Weaver and his two children

All Care Link customers are provided with a telecare unit that is linked directly to the Care Link Telecare Service Centre. Each customer is offered a range of additional sensors such as pendants, bed sensors, fall detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and movement sensors depending on their needs, to enable a complete lifestyle monitoring service. This means that if anyone has a fall, or feels ill, they can contact highly trained operators within the centre for help and advice.

In addition to monitoring their customers, Care Link also provides a response service whereby a team of support workers can respond to customer alarm calls in their own homes. The service can handle any call from a fall to providing general reassurance. Our Care Link support workers are trained in First Aid and can help reduce ambulance calls and hospital admissions.

WDH work closely with their partners, such as Wakefield Council, the police, fire service and health authorities, to make sure every customer gets the best possible care and support. The service can be tailored to meet the needs of the individual customer, making it an effective way of supporting people if they move back into their homes after a hospital stay.

They also provide a 'Take a Break' service where the Care Link system can be installed for short periods of time helping carers and families to take a well-earned break.

Building partnerships

Through the use of telecare, WDH has positioned itself as a public health counterpart to their partners in health and social care, as opposed to being identified as just a landlord. They have become a key player in the local health agenda, offering cost-effective and suitable accommodation with the appropriate level of support for individuals' needs.

Their involvement in the formulation of Wakefield district's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy means that they are ideally placed to help inform future commissioning priorities for preventative health and are seen as a willing provider.

Furthermore, they are playing an increasing role in meeting the growing needs of Dementia sufferers, locally. They are consequently a member of the district's Dementia Strategy Board and have signed up to the Regional Dementia Alliance with a view to championing and extending community based support to meet Dementia needs.

A number of WDH's partners advocate their services as preventative and supportive solutions to help people live independently for longer. For example, Wakefield Fire Service has been promoting Care Link as a preventative measure to reduce domestic fires and incidences, while the ambulance service has been using their on-site support workers as back-up during adverse weather conditions, relying on WDH to be the first point of call for emergencies.

Technology partner

In addition to working with partners in the local community, WDH have a strong relationship with a major telecare provider. Tunstall have been heavily involved in assisting product development, putting together user groups to help develop and provide new ideas based on WDH's service user experience. This has resulted in Care Link installing the first Lifeline Vi in the world. This is Tunstall's newest and most modern telecare unit, for one of its customers. This also has an optional inbuilt medication prompter and ambient temperature monitoring feature.

Applying telecare

When introducing new technologies into the homes of older people, there is occasionally a preconceived idea that it removes the 'human factor' from health and social care services. Care Link ensures that the human touch is provided at the right time and in the right place, as opposed to routine, and often unnecessary, daily checks.



WDH customer wearing a telecare pendant

WDH also believe in putting bespoke and flexible services in place to meet the specialised needs of customers, and endeavour to make their services affordable to fit with any individual budget and income. They stress that It is also important that WDH not only support their customers, but that they also support their friends and families, enabling them to live independently and help with their care.

Funders indicate that telecare is a cost effective way of delivering support, and has been used to support victims of domestic abuse as an extension of WDH's traditional services. It also meets health and safety requirements in terms of lone worker situations, ensuring WDH employees are safe in the knowledge that help is available if they encounter trouble.

In the light of the above, WDH believe that the benefits of telecare are clear, and growing, not only for WDH as a housing provider and employer, but also their partners and the individual customers who use the service.

And finally, for WDH, it offers them opportunities to enhance service provision and improve their position and relationships within the local health and social care economy. For example, it avoids expensive care and health costs and offers cost effective value for money alternatives to traditional services, such as residential care. Above all, for WDH customers and their families, telecare offers the choice of a personal, flexible and affordable option to promote independence, reduce isolation, improve safety and security and above all offer peace of mind 24 hours a day.

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

For more information on specific aspects of this case study, contact Wakefield and District Housing, Merefield House, Whistler Drive, Castleford, West Yorkshire, WF10 5HX. Tel: 01977 724444 or website: www.wdh.co.uk

About the Housing LIN

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions.

For further information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources and shared learning and service improvement networking opportunities, including site visits and network meetings in your region, visit www.housinglin.org.uk

The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues pertinent to housing with care for older and vulnerable adults. If you have an example of how your organisation is closely aligned to a 'Living Lab' approach, or a subject that you feel we should cover, please contact us.

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Housing Learning & Improvement Network,
c/o EAC, 3rd Floor, 89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7TP

Tel: 020 7820 8077

Email: info@housinglin.org.uk

Web: www.housinglin.org.uk

Twitter: [@HousingLIN](https://twitter.com/HousingLIN)