

# HAPPI days – the ACEnet annual conference

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Jeannie Swales



## About the author

Jeannie Swales is a former freelance journalist and press officer. She has been HQN's Print and Publications Manager for the last four years.

## Introduction

Of all the babies born now, more than half will live to be 100.<sup>1</sup>

It's just one of the many startling facts from the recent report from the Housing for our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation,<sup>2</sup> along with: the number of over-60s is projected to increase by seven million over the next 25 years,<sup>3</sup> and: between 2008 and 2025, the number of people with dementia will rise by over a quarter of a million.<sup>4</sup>

The HAPPI report was produced by Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department of Health (DH) and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), who pulled together a diverse 13-strong panel comprising key figures from the housing world, residents, architects, builders, journalists and academics.<sup>5</sup> The panel visited schemes for older people in both the UK and across Europe, aiming to find out both what works well and – equally important – what doesn't work.

There are many, many more startling figures in the report, which is a wake-up call to all of those involved in housing for older people. HQN's Ageing Communities Excellence Network (ACEnet) recently invited key speakers to address its annual conference – with the upbeat title of *HAPPI days: new and creative ideas for age-friendly housing* – on the various aspects of the report.

***"The HAPPI report is a wake-up call to all of those involved in housing for older people"***

## Imogen Parry

The conference was chaired by Imogen Parry, Sheltered Housing Consultant and Director of Policy at the charity EROSH,<sup>6</sup> which aims to promote good quality sheltered housing and the services it provides. Imogen explained how the HAPPI report had been pulled together in double-quick time, taking just six months from start to finish, and was launched at the end of 2009. The panel's remit to answer the question: "What further reform is needed to ensure that new build specialised housing meets the needs and aspiration of the older people of the future?"

Imogen said that she felt that the housing projects in the report gave her an overwhelming impression of the passion, vision, imagination, dedication and tenacity of key individuals; and of very effective joint working by all the various professional disciplines and organisations involved.

***"There is an overwhelming impression of the passion, vision, imagination, dedication and tenacity of key individuals"***

## James Berrington

The first speaker, James Berrington, is Senior Policy Manager at the HCA, and provided support throughout the HAPPI process to project manager Kevin McGeough.

James summarised the HAPPI report, pulling out key facts. He explained that the panel covered a broad range of types of provision from both the public and private sectors, and looked at what housing, and homes, mean for older people: what we don't want to do is create tomorrow's hard-to-let properties, buildings which haven't stood the test of time in 30 years, as many of those built in the 60s and 70s did.

The focus of the panel's work, he said, was to ultimately improve the quality of life for older people, challenging perceptions of what older people are like, raising aspirations, and spreading awareness of the issues. It looked at a whole spread of provision, from general needs to extra care, both social and private, in a variety of settings from urban to rural, and right across Europe.

After looking at some of the case studies<sup>7</sup> James asked: "What next?" Much work, he said, was going on to push the panel's recommendations to a wide range of organisations and government bodies, including social housing providers, housebuilders, CLG, the DH, the Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions, the police and fire authorities, financial institutions, architects, and the HCA. The latter will seek to include the ten HAPPI design criteria in specialist housing design and sustainability standards from April 2011. These include recommendations on internal space standards, light, layouts, adaptability, circulation, multi-purpose spaces, public spaces, energy efficiency, storage and shared external spaces.<sup>8</sup>

How the funding would be put in place, he said, would be part of the Single Conversation, the business model through which the HCA aims to agree and secure delivery of national objectives at a local level: the HCA believes that it's important to embed the needs of older and vulnerable people into plans for the future.

He explained the strategic process which must take place:

- Ambition for place – what stock is out there?
- Assessment of need – how do we assess it?
- Agreement of priorities – we can't fund everything at once

*"What we don't want to do is create tomorrow's hard-to-let properties"*

- Investment planning – there isn't going to be as much money around – planning, prioritising, resourcing, etc, are very important.

There are, he said, a range of funding solutions, including the National Affordable Housing Programme, the various elements of the housing stimulus programme,<sup>9</sup> and private finance initiative. It is important to look at more integrated ways of funding that tie into the local community, and move away from the 'old model' of sheltered housing – grim units that no one wants to live in, to schemes with floating support, flexible design and residents who are keen to organise themselves in terms of activities.

Ultimately, said James: "We are trying to find solutions to meet people's needs."

The findings of HAPPI have been enthusiastically received, but how do we implement them? Pollard Thomas Edwards architects (PTEa), co-author of the HAPPI report and in attendance at the HQN HAPPI days event, now wants to hear from providers, designers, resident groups, local authorities and sector organisations about the challenges and opportunities faced in trying to put innovative ideas about housing for older people into practice:

- Are local authorities able to use the right tools in identifying housing need?
- Is there a market for new ideas about cohousing and self-starter schemes in this sector?
- How can we join good practice in housing to better design at neighbourhood scale?
- What kind of guidance is needed: new standards, or more debate?

PTEa wants to compile the experiences of those on the frontline of delivery and debate, in the hope of informing the future direction of development. Please contact them at [happi@ptea.co.uk](mailto:happi@ptea.co.uk), or telephone Matthew Barac on 020 7336 7777 for further information. [www.ptea.co.uk](http://www.ptea.co.uk)

## Jeremy Porteus

Next up was Jeremy Porteus, National Programme Lead for Housing at the Department of Health, and a member of the HCA's recently appointed Older and Vulnerable People's Advisory Group.

Discussing the health drivers for good quality housing, Jeremy said that we need to take a closer look at the preventative aspects of housing and related services to promote the wellbeing of individuals, and to achieve great improvements and efficiencies in local health and care economies.

He pointed out that, as a society, we often think about health issues, but leave it very late to decide what we want in health and social care – but these issues are rising up the political agenda as people are ever more reliant on health services.

“What control do we have over the development of age-friendly environments, and health and social care?” he asked. “We all buy a car maybe ten times in our lives, and we carefully consider the make, the CCs, the number of seats, etc – but we purchase social care with no real understanding. How do we make it more person-centred?”

Jeremy said he was very encouraged by the HAPPI report, in particular the fourth of the ten recommendations for design:

**In the implementation of measures to ensure adaptability, homes are designed to be ‘care-ready’ so that new and emerging technologies, such as telecare and community equipment, can be readily installed.**

“This needs maximising,” he said. “It’s still very embryonic and aspirational, but is a platform for future development.

“The key message is that we must where possible avoid residential care and/or facilitate hospital discharge and transfer of care.”

Providers, he said, need to look to the future and address some key questions, including:

- Is your stock fit for the future – adaptable or care-ready?
- Is personalisation a threat, or an opportunity? What will it mean under a new government – will it extend choice and control even further?

*“The key message is that we must where possible avoid residential care and/or facilitate hospital discharge and transfer of care”*

- Can you evidence efforts to tackle health inequality, prevent homelessness, sustain tenancies, and avoid moves to residential care?
- How close are you to your residents?
- Are you looking for efficiency savings in all areas, and access to capital/revenue streams?
- Are your workforce arrangements flexible? If so, at what price?
- When it comes to regulation and inspection, are you clear about your housing function, Supporting People element, and health and social care responsibilities? Integration does not mean over-regulation.



## Judith Torrington

Reader in Architecture at Sheffield University and a former practising architect, Judith Torrington was a member of the HAPPI panel. Judith's particular interest is in how the built environment can be configured to promote better health and wellbeing, which starts, she said, with actually looking at existing buildings and talking to people about the kind of housing they need.

***“The most important issue is that people can live out the rest of their lives in this place”***

“Between retirement and death, our homes become much more important to us,” she said. “We can spend up to 90% of our time at home.”

She said that when people move into different types of accommodation as they age, they're affected by 'push' factors (such as concern for their health, worries about garden maintenance, and fear of crime) and 'pull' factors (the desire for tenancy rights and one's 'own front door', the security that can be offered by sheltered schemes, the type of tenure available, for instance.)

“There are key design issues here,” she said. “The most important is that people can live out the rest of their lives in this place – that it's capable of being adapted, allows for aids and adaptations and for wheelchairs, possible accommodation for carers, etc. People don't want to move again when they reach 65, they want to be somewhere that is able to be adapted.”

She said that although we are very good in the UK at understanding what's needed in terms of things like providing enough space for wheelchairs, we don't always do it. “Some of the European schemes we looked at were very generous in size and flexibility – one scheme had four very different apartments on the one floor because they were designed with partitions to the residents could create smaller and bigger rooms as needed.”

Another thing that the Europeans tend to be better at, Judith said, is understanding the importance of light to health and happiness. Exposure to a natural cycle of darkness and light triggers hormones that have an impact on crucial things such as sleep cycles, appetite and mood. Many of the European schemes took this into account with generous windows, double-aspect apartments, and sophisticated systems of blinds, awnings, balconies, etc.

Judith was also impressed by cohousing schemes, which are more common on the continent than in the UK. Cohousing brings individuals and families together in groups to share

common aims and activities, while still enjoying their own self-contained accommodation and personal space.

“People have such a good time,” she said. “They’re in charge of their own housing, and they feel empowered. It’s doing it for yourself, instead of having it done for you.”

Judith concluded by asking what can be done to achieve age-friendly housing in the future. “Lots of people need to be very proactive if there’s to be any kind of change in housing, including government agencies, local strategic planners and housebuilders and developers,” she said. “Barriers are very difficult to overcome – but there are many opportunities, from an individual level to large organisations.”

## Charlotte Harrison

Charlotte Harrison is Director of Policy and Planning at the Northern Housing Consortium (NHC). She discussed the recent groundbreaking two-year research project carried out by the NHC, entitled *A Guide to Age-friendly Communities in the North: People and Places 2020*<sup>10</sup> – but was keen to point out that the research wasn't geographically-restricted, but applicable to all regions to the UK.

“Our worry was, are we funding the right types of homes to sustain us for the next 20 years?” she said. “We didn't want to run into a situation where we'd built homes only to have them standing empty.”

The project aimed to answer four questions:

- Why are we interested in creating age-friendly communities?
- What do we mean by inclusive design?
- What have we learnt?
- What happens next?

Charlotte said that age-friendly communities benefit everyone, young and old; they recognise the great diversity among older people, and promote their inclusion in all areas of community life; they respect the decisions and lifestyle choices of older people; and they anticipate and respond flexibly to ageing-related needs and preferences.

Inclusive design, she said, places people at the heart of the design process, acknowledges diversity and difference, offers choice, provides for flexibility in use and provides places which are convenient and enjoyable to use for everyone.

What is not true about inclusive design are some of the myths that have arisen – that only a small number of people benefit; that it only helps older people and those with disabilities; that disability legislation has created equality, so we don't need to do any more; and that it costs too much and has no sustainability in the marketplace because people can't afford it.

The NHC talked to many of its members, including strategic authorities, housing associations and ALMOs, to ask them how they were planning for demographic change, which is going to be dramatic – within the next 30 years, more than 30% of the North's population will be aged over 60. It also consulted with

450 older people, and with architects, planners and artists to come up with a vision of what an age-friendly community.

“But there isn’t a blueprint,” said Charlotte. “The solutions have to be locally-specific. You may need a culture change in your organisation – the right people in the right places, and with the right attitude.”

The research suggested that inter-generational activities to forge links and strengthen communities, such as gardens, community calendars, oral history projects and time banks, can reduce a sense of isolation. Other valuable factors can include neighbourhood facilities that everyone can use; imaginative use of space, even if only for temporary activities, like outdoor cafes; outdoor gyms; carefully-planned travel routes, taking into account the needs of less mobile older people; effective signage and integrated transport systems.

“Research by the Royal College of Psychiatrists shows that older people are very clear that they know that their physical health may decline – but if they’re supported with their mental health and sense of wellbeing, they accept that,” said Charlotte.

So, what happens next? Charlotte suggests that providers should ask themselves:

- Do we understand our communities?
- How can we shape more effective delivery?
- How do we understand and capture the impact of our decisions and actions?

The answers to these questions should generate debate and ideas. She also directed delegates to Northern Silver Screen 2,<sup>11</sup> a series of short films connected to the research.

***"Inter-generational activities can forge links and strengthen communities"***

## Nick Cross

The day ended with a case study from Nick Cross, Head of Housing Management at Southampton City Council, who described how his authority has recently done a complete review and redesign of their sheltered housing service.

Southampton City Council had over 3,300 'sheltered' residents living in 185 separate schemes. It decided to review because of an oversupply of traditional sheltered housing, which was above CLG guidelines for the size of the city; because some schemes, particularly those comprising bedsits and studio flats, were becoming hard to let, and because there was a wider Supporting People review of older people's support going on in the city. The staffing structure was very traditional, it was beginning to prove difficult to recruit 'live-in' staff, and the service was inflexible, limited to 'core' hours, and with limited activities. And, crucially, the type of accommodation was not desirable to future residents.

An extensive nine-week consultation with tenants, including questionnaires, a helpline and meetings across the city, resulted in a 'vision' for sheltered housing in Southampton, including:

- A customer-led service with local teams providing support to residents in their community based on individual needs
- Attractive and welcoming homes which fully meet residents' needs
- A choice for residents as to type of accommodation
- A modern, efficient and quality service which can provide support to a much wider group of people across the city and is best placed to maximise opportunities to develop in the future
- Sheltered housing schemes to be at the heart of the community.

A swathe of staffing and support improvements followed, including new locally-based teams providing support to residents, some schemes retaining their existing wardens, extended support hours, 'activity co-ordinators' (two former wardens who have introduced various social initiatives aimed at improving residents' health and wellbeing), a dedicated cleaning service (which also acts as 'eyes and ears' for the Council, keeping an eye on residents in their patch), and new

*"An extensive consultation with tenants resulted in a 'vision' for sheltered housing in Southampton"*

support planning processes to provide tailored support to those who need it, and not based on where they live.

Improvements to the Council's stock included reducing the age criteria on nearly 1,000 units to 50-plus; transferring nearly 90 units to general needs; remodelling schemes to remove bedsits and studio flats; a £2.8m asset management strategy for improvements to communal areas, and reviewing alternative client groups, including talking to Supporting People about housing for people with learning disabilities.

***"The phrase 'sheltered housing' turns people off"***

Nick said that much of the exercise had gone very well. The consultation, though resource-intensive, was well worth it; most (although not all!) of the staff had supported and embraced the new approach; the re-designation of units had reduced void times and created greater choice; many residents have voluntarily opted-out of support, leaving more capacity to support others; the new activities have breathed life into many schemes, and the asset management strategy has given a clear plan for future investment.

But he was also honest about what had not gone so well. The period between consultation and decision was too long and, he said, left both staff and residents feeling uncertain. Feedback to residents during the consultation process could have been better, and some staff didn't completely 'buy-in' to the overall message, meaning residents were not always clear about how their involvement was helping. The remodelling of schemes, and decanting of residents during it, was 'challenging', and left some older residents feeling unsettled. And the new suite of service charges is over-complicated – Southampton is currently looking at simplifying it.

Nick also pointed out that some current terminology isn't helpful, and said that Southampton is attempting to change it. "The phrase 'sheltered housing' turns people off," he said.

Nick concluded by paying tribute to Supporting People. "They have been very supportive throughout," he said. "They've learned from us, and we've learned from them."

Imogen Parry is interested in hearing from anyone with thoughts on key strategic and operational issues relating to sheltered housing buildings and services that have not been addressed by the HAPPI report or the Ministerial Working Group on Sheltered Housing – contact her at [imogen.parry@btopenworld.com](mailto:imogen.parry@btopenworld.com)

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- 1 Christensen, K, et al (2009) *Ageing Populations: The Challenges Ahead*,  
The Lancet
- 2 [http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/Housing-Ageing-Population-  
Panel-Innovation](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/Housing-Ageing-Population-Panel-Innovation)
- 3 Office for National Statistics, 2009
- 4 Department of Health, 2006
- 5 [http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/public/documents/Biographies\\_  
HAPPI\\_1.pdf](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/public/documents/Biographies_HAPPI_1.pdf)
- 6 <http://www.shelteredhousing.org/>
- 7 [http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/Housing-Ageing-Population-  
Panel-Innovation](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/Housing-Ageing-Population-Panel-Innovation)
- 8 For more detail, see pp38 and 39 of the HAPPI report:  
[http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/Housing-Ageing-Population-  
Panel-Innovation](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/Housing-Ageing-Population-Panel-Innovation)
- 9 [http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/housing\\_stimulus](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/housing_stimulus)
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