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## **UK Government needs to think about older buyers not just those starting on housing ladder**

*Written by Charlotte Cook, Partner at Winckworth Sherwood*

The Government needs to shift its housing obsession away from first time to later life buyers and occupiers, a housing conference in London was told this month.

Over 50 delegates from housing associations, housing charities, social care providers and local authorities attended the conference hosted by housing law firm Winckworth Sherwood, and supported by the Housing LIN, to discuss the way forward for the residential property market.

A survey of delegates at the conference found that 60% agreed that the Government's focus on first time buyers is misplaced, driven largely by the economy, and that its focus should be largely on the later life housing. Just 10% believed the Government's current focus is right and at the same time delegates threw down a gauntlet to developers and providers, saying much greater choice is needed.

Charlotte Cook, a Partner at Winckworth Sherwood specialising in working alongside later life developers and operators, pointed out that by 2020 it is estimated that there will be some 20 million people aged over 60.

"Even now, there are more over 60s in the UK and there are under 18. The Government's housing policy does not reflect that and whilst social housing providers and local government are responding, much greater choice of housing and tenure is needed," she said.

Delegates were told that the last home should be the pinnacle of the housing journey, and not one of compromise. Later life housing should focus less on care and more on hospitality and lifestyle.

"When considering a home in later life, people look for very much the same things as when buying a first or family home such as space, location, access to friends and family, concern of flats and the lack of outdoor space, transparency in relation to service charges," Cook explained. "The one thing they do not want is the feeling or appearance of an old peoples' home or care home," she added.

When asked whether development design can be blind to tenure and age, 90% of delegates agreed, with calls for providers and occupiers to work together, creating flexible spaces that work across a range of ages and needs.

Cook believes that there is a real lack of meaningful information to help people decide on the best route for them. “The offer varies enormously from local authority to the next and from one private sector provider to another. Decisions are taken both by family members and residents, yet information provided often does not reflect that,” Cook told the conference.

Delegates also heard that planning presents developers with significant challenge for later life developers. In London alone, for example, there are 450 local plans and they all have different aspirations, and just 18% of those local plans make reference to older people.

“Developers have two big asks of planners. First, create a dedicated use class for later life housing and secondly, ensure local plans reflect the needs of housing for the elderly. That would play a major role in bringing forward new and varied schemes,” Cook said.

The conference concluded with calls on developers, planners, care providers and local authorities to focus their provision on the individual, not the scheme, to ensure that homes are delivered in the way residents want and in locations where they are needed.

And for more information on housing for older people, visit the Housing LIN Strategic Housing for Older People (SHOP) pages at:

<http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingExtraCare/ExtraCareStrategy/SHOP/>

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