**A Window of Opportunity for Change**

**Heléna Herklots CBE, Older People’s Commissioner for Wales**

It was an honour to be appointed Older People’s Commissioner for Wales and it is a privilege to represent older people throughout Wales as their independent voice and champion.

Ten years ago, Wales led the world in establishing the role of Older People’s Commissioner and my ambition is for Wales to lead the way again and be the best place in the world to grow older.

I was delighted to be the keynote speaker at Housing LIN Cymru’s recent [‘Live Smart, Live Well’](https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Events/Housing-LIN-Cymru-Symposium-Live-Smart-Live-Well/) Symposium in Newport where I highlighted **this new ambition and discussed the ways in which we can deliver improvements for older people.** Housing is central to this and in recent years we have seen growing recognition of its vital role, alongside health and social care services, in supporting older people’s well-being and independence. Having the right home is important for us all, but can be especially important for a good later life, particularly as older people spend more time in their home and immediate neighbourhoods than any other age group.

There are, however, some significant challenges relating to housing for older people, including the quality of housing stock, rising fuel poverty, and communities that are not age-friendly which disable, rather than enable, older people.

Since I took up post, a number of the older people I have met and spoken with throughout Wales have shared concerns with me about housing. They often feel that the housing options available to them are severely limited and that if they were to move out of their home, the only choice available would be a move into a care home.

A report published last year by the Expert Group on Housing an Ageing Population in Wales – [‘Our Housing AGEnda: meeting the aspirations of older people in Wales’](https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Our-Housing-AGEnda-Meeting-the-aspirations-of-older-people-in-Wales/) – reflects these concerns and makes clear that the housing supply in Wales does not meet older people’s needs.

The report includes a number of recommendations – including providing help for older people to remain in their or help to move if they wish, developing Lifetimes Homes standards and revised planning standards that include the housing requirements of older people, and tackling unfit housing – but we have not yet seen much tangible action to take these forward and deal with the wide range of housing issues currently being faced by older people.

We must ask why, despite the hard work of a wide range of professionals and stakeholders, including the Housing LIN, we have not seen the progress we would want. After all, the evidence is robust, the health and economic benefits have been clearly demonstrated, and good practice has been widely shared.

The lack of meaningful action is likely to be the result of our tendency as a society, whether as individuals or at a government level, to avoid planning for our later life.

There is, however, a window of opportunity for change as the Welsh Government develops its new framework for an ageing society. The ‘Living in the Community’ workstream, which is supporting the development of the framework, supports all of the recommendations in the report of the Expert Group and the Welsh Government’s commitments on housing within the framework should reflect this.

But we must also continue to be bold and relentless in calling for change and applying pressure on the Welsh Government to deliver upon its commitments so we see meaningful action and change for older people.

If this action and change is delivered, if there is sufficient political will to improve housing for older people, then we will be one step closer to delivering upon my ambition – an ambition shared by stakeholders, the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Services and, most importantly, older people – for Wales to be the best place in the world to grow older.