



**Housing LIN**

*Connecting people, ideas and resources*

## **L&Q Living – Is it worth the effort?**

*Written by Yvonne Arrowsmith, CEO East Thames part of the L&Q Group*

With the merger of L&Q and East Thames we created one of the largest Housing Associations in the Country, with huge ambition. Part of that ambition was to combine our care and support business to create L&Q Living, to grow our care and support services, deliver a new offer for older people living in our general housing and to develop more supported housing.

But is this wise? In a period of uncertainty around the future funding of supported housing and when we all know we won't get rich, it has small margins, is hard work and requires real commitment.

I have worked in supported housing for over 25 years, for those who can remember that long ago it included implementing the community care act, the closure of long stay in-patient facilities as well as the introduction of Supporting People. There have been fantastic examples across the country of housing associations providing services that make a real difference, providing high quality support to some of our most vulnerable residents.

It has been difficult to see the impact of public sector cuts, the removal of the Supporting People ring fence, the tendering merry go round and welfare reforms.

We now have the threat of the rent cut and the local housing allowance cap. It is no surprise that providers of supported housing are cynical about the security of a local top up fund, we have after all been there before, we are seeing services being cut or closed, providers having to hand back contracts because they don't stack up financially, customers struggling and dedicated staff leaving the profession.

It is not a surprise that some housing associations are withdrawing from services and reducing their exposure. It feels rather bleak, so should we be running for the hills, settling for an easier life or do we do what we have done many times before, roll our sleeves up and get on with it. I only need to visit our schemes, talk to our residents and staff to know that it really is worth fighting for. Housing Associations work with some of the most vulnerable, they build confidence and aspiration and enable people to live as independently as possible. We need more not less of that.

Our customer base has been changing, we are seeing more vulnerability in our general housing, many households coming to us through the homeless route and homelessness is rising again. We have an ageing population, which is great for life expectancy but does bring with it changing needs, including an increasing number of older people living with dementia. We have over 22,000 people over the age of 55 living in our homes, over 5000 over the age of 75 and this is predicted to increase to over 9000 in the next 10 years. These are already our residents, and with increasing

pressure on public services they will need us. We need to think differently about how we provide our services, what homes we build, how we embrace digital technology. We need a new service offer.

The demand for our services will continue to grow and the need for real partnership remains. Working with Health has not always been easy, but there does seem to be a change of approach with the Sustainable Transformation Plans (STP), Housing is clearly a major contributor to health and wellbeing and the STP's give a platform for us to work with Health and the Local Authorities to think strategically. Yes, I know we have been here before too, but as long as we all keep trying we might just get there. Housing associations have a lot to offer and now is the time to think of what we can do and what we can do differently.

We will continue to lobby for sufficient funding to provide quality services. We will need security and certainty around funding to develop new schemes and will continue to press on this issue.

So, is it wise to commit to the provision of supported housing? is it worth the effort? We think it is, for me supported housing is part of our DNA, so here we are rolling up our sleeves again alongside many over housing associations who are all doing the same.

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