



## **Serving up a united voice to get ahead in the funding game**

*By Jeremy Porteus and John Galvin in a personal capacity*

We're well used to the phrase 'housing crisis' and the slightly demeaning terms, 'the demographic time bomb'. The two come head to head in the challenge of addressing the housing implications of our ageing society.

Public policy, based on evidence of 'what works', has evolved encouragingly over recent years. However, innovative thinking has not always been backed up by fully coordinated initiatives and funding pots to turn good services into winners.

We need to change that and up our game. The specialist housing and social care sectors should start working with partners to forge a comprehensive, co-ordinated lobbying strategy for next year's comprehensive spending review (CSR).

The aim? A realistic and costed 'Challenge Fund' package that local government and health secretaries can present to the Treasury this autumn, persuading the chancellor to hand over £1b for local authorities to invest in the sector between 2016 and 2019.

Five years into 'the age of austerity' we need to set out:

- how the money will be spent
- how it will benefit increasing numbers of older people
- the wider economic and social benefits (not least by releasing more family homes into a market dominated by a shortfall in supply) and
- the health dividends it will reap in future savings to the exchequer.

At around £330m a year, that figure wouldn't represent a significant increase on current funding. It would, however, establish a 'Challenge Fund' that could be a catalyst and critical friend for the sort of move away from a complete reliance on public money to one where the prize is a partnership with business and commerce.

That applies particularly in information and advice (I&A) services. And if the commercial and financial services industry wants to get more involved in this sector, we need to test approaches that will ensure independent, quality I&A services continue to be available. Otherwise, we risk losing a vast reservoir of independent expertise built up over decades, especially if central and local government pull the plug on voluntary sector funding.

We therefore need careful testing, considerable planning and must develop sustainable solutions that guarantee an on-going independent voluntary sector player alongside a growing older people's peer support movement. That organisation could be the consumer's voice on housing I&A for older people, offering impartiality and quality and be a source of expertise that new market entrants could draw on.

So how do we see the £330m annual investment being spent?

- Some £10m to fund third sector housing advice and information services for older people. **FirstStop Advice** brings together the main I&A providers, as well as older people through the expanding Silverlinks volunteer programme, to deliver a comprehensive solution that has been shown to help older people make the housing and care decisions that are right for them.
- £250m for housing aids and adaptations so that older people can continue living in them – the **Disabled Facilities Grant** has proved its worth over many years and, under the Better Care Fund, is one avenue for allocating this funding
- £70m capital funding for building at least a small proportion of the new accessible specialist housing for older and vulnerable people that is needed now.. Again, an appropriate vehicle already exists if there is no appetite for new funding streams – the Department of Health's **Care and Support Specialised Fund**.

The latter could include a series of 'vanguard' style projects to test out the specialist housing solutions best suited to each community and to identify further public and private inward investment opportunities to meet local demand.

The volley of reports and policy documents of the last five years have produced the evidence that this sort of plan is a great example of 'investing to save'. For example:

- Care and Repair England published research confirming that a one-off investment in good quality aids and adaptations can save the NHS £4,000 per household each year<sup>1</sup>.
- Similarly, the Extra Care Charitable Trust reported recently that NHS costs for 195 residents fell by 38% in their first year of living in the charity's specialist housing<sup>2</sup>.

Join with us in the coming months to rally around a costed plan to ministers for the development of a 'Challenge Fund' that can test out new ways of working and the specialist housing solutions that best suit local communities.

If we succeed we won't have deactivated any sort of time bomb or solved a crisis. We will, however, have finally set out an approach that can act as the base line for a new approach to meet the housing needs of older people in an era of public spending cuts.

On the eve of the emergency budget, that sounds like the sort of progress any self-respecting CSR should be delivering to achieve game, set and match!

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<sup>1</sup> *Time to Adapt: home adaptations for disabled people*. Care & Repair England (2010)

<sup>2</sup> *Collaborative Research between Aston Research Centre for Healthy Ageing and the ExtraCare Charitable Trust (2015)*