



**Ideas for action:
Older people shaping local
housing policy and practice**

**Leeds Older People's
Forum shaping a
local Older People's
Housing Strategy**

About this guide

This **'how to' guide** is part of a series produced by Care & Repair England in partnership with the Older People's Champions Group and older people's groups and organisations. The guides offer practical ideas for older people's groups and forums around the country who want to influence local housing policy, plans and actions.

The guides describe the ways that local groups have gone about raising housing issues with decision makers, their successes and lessons for others. They also show how local groups have tried different ways to involve a wider range of older people, especially those whose voices are often ignored.

At a glance

Since 2013 Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF) has been campaigning for a housing strategy for older people in Leeds. LOPF has been the driving force that set the *principles* of a housing strategy for older people. The Forum ran a listening event using a model developed by Care & Repair England at which older people from across the City worked alongside council officers and professionals to come up with shared priorities for the strategy.

The four core themes agreed at this event were further developed in a council run online survey. The results of that survey reinforced the messages of the listening event. Since then the Forum has developed its own *housing strategy* to further influence the council.

1. What Leeds Older People's Forum's action was aiming to achieve

1.1 Aims and objectives

- To work towards an all embracing housing strategy across all tenures for older people in Leeds with a clear action plan and a method to monitor progress and impact
- To facilitate the engagement of all older people across Leeds in housing issues and to ensure older voices are heard and acted upon
- To have a comprehensive housing strategy encompassing both the public and private sectors

1.2 Who is involved

Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF) set up in 1994, aims to promote the well-being of all older people in the city of Leeds, and to give a more powerful voice to older people in shaping their city for the benefit of all its citizens. Leeds Older People's Forum does this by:

- Representing older people's views, needs and aspirations
- Enabling older people's organisations to participate fully in policy discussion and development
- Enabling and sustaining good communication between individuals, groups and public, private and voluntary sector organisations
- Supporting projects to enhance the wellbeing of older people in Leeds
- Ensuring Leeds Older People's Forum is an effective and well-run organisation.

It has a membership of over 100 voluntary sector organisations working with older people across Leeds, including the 37 Neighbourhood Network Schemes.

1.3 How the work on a housing strategy for Leeds initially developed

Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF) produced its first *Housing Policy Statement* in February 2014, based on surveys that had been carried out with older people over the previous two years. LOPF formed a working group to promote the development of a housing strategy for older people in late 2013, consisting of three volunteers from the LOPF Board of Trustees. The three trustees were all involved in housing issues, locally and nationally, with two members on the *Older People's Housing Champions Network* and the third the Chief Executive Officer of Care & Repair Leeds.

This working group met with several different departments within Leeds City Council to establish what work, if any, had been carried out in developing a strategy for older people's housing. It became obvious that there was no overriding strategy, but piecemeal work being carried out by different people in separate sections of the council. This was primarily due to the funding cuts being imposed at that time, the disbanding of the private housing section and the loss of experienced staff.

The council was concerned primarily with social housing and the development of a private housing market policy aimed at achieving high levels of new build private homes.

The 2014 LOPF *Housing Policy Statement* aimed to galvanise interest and commitment by the council to develop a comprehensive housing strategy for older people.

The introduction to the Policy Statement included the following:

“ Leeds Older People’s Forum and Care & Repair Leeds are working together to produce the key foundations of a policy for Housing and Older People in Leeds. At its heart is the fundamental importance of involving older people and organisations that represent them and work with them in the development and future monitoring of the policy. ”

The Policy Statement summarised the key factors that needed to be included in a housing policy for older people in Leeds.

Key elements of a housing policy for older people in Leeds

- Most older people wish to remain living in their existing homes within their existing communities. They value the support from family and friends, access to good transport and proximity to local shops and amenities.
- The provision of practical services including handy person, falls prevention, home security improvements, minor adaptations, essential repairs, improvements in insulation and heating systems are all essential to promote independent living and improve the health and wellbeing of the residents.
- Access to rapid home adaptations and repairs is essential.
- Access to housing options advice is essential for older people to be able to make informed decisions about their current and future housing needs
- Approximately 66% of people with dementia live in their own homes and most say that they would prefer to remain there for as long as possible. Packages of flexible services are needed to achieve this including those listed above plus reminiscence libraries, retro-decorating schemes, telecare interventions and home support services.
- Specialist housing, including sheltered and extra care, should be planned based on clear assessments of need and designed to allow people to remain living in them for as long as possible, with links to local services and amenities. It is essential that the needs of older people with dementia and those who are deaf and blind are taken into account in formulating specialist housing policies.
- A formal structure should be established to involve older people and organisations that represent them in the development and future monitoring of housing policy. This structure should include Leeds Older People’s Forum, Age UK Leeds and Care & Repair Leeds.

- Joint planning and commissioning between the City Council (including Public Health and Adult Social Care), NHS Trusts, Clinical Commissioning Groups, and all relevant social housing providers is essential. Included in this is the need to promote multidisciplinary cooperation across health, social care and housing.
- Any new housing developments in Leeds should include the provision of bungalows and/or ground floor flats with good links to local transport and social amenities.
- To achieve independent living for the longer term, all new homes should be built to Lifetime Homes Standards.

The LOPF working group continued to meet with all relevant council officers and councillors but it was not until Leeds Public Health took the initiative in Feb 2016 and established a wider housing group that any progress was made.

1.4 The event and consultation on the housing priorities for older people in Leeds

With links between the Forum and the council better established and a strong commitment from public health a *listening event* called Me and My Home was held in July 2016 which attracted around 50 people. This event used learning from models developed by Care & Repair England to actively engage older people, council officers and members and voluntary and professional groups in Leeds with an interest in older people and housing. City Councillors introduced and closed the event.

The Council's elected members introduced the event to demonstrate both political and officer commitment to the process and outcomes. The aim was to engage together to come up with a list of housing priorities for older people in Leeds.

The event set up facilitated tables to consider the issues. Each table had one case study to consider which covered:

- Bungalow living
- Remaining in the family home (house)
- Sheltered housing
- Rural retreat
- Adaptations

and a list of questions for each scenario to build some case studies:

- What issues does the older person face and how can these be overcome?
- What does living well day to day mean for the older person in that scenario?
- What advice and support do older people need?
- How can housing related organisations help?

The case studies developed were either real life stories captured from an older person at the event or a made-up scenario. These outlined some of advantages and disadvantages to each situation.

Gathering all these responses and grouping them together, four themes were identified and agreed as the areas that need to be addressed for all older people in Leeds:

The four key themes identified

1. **“I have the support I need to live independently and well in my own home”**

I want to be independent but with support. I need support from the right people to resolve issues. Support needs to be more creative and make use of new technology. Everyone’s needs are different. It is good to have people (family/friends/neighbours/carers) nearby who are a support network. I like to feel part of the community and live in a safe environment. It is important to keep people involved and active in their community. I enjoy getting together with people. I need access to services, for example GPs and shops. I need transport to take me where I want to go. I need support to go out into the community. I need my home to be safe, warm and energy efficient.

2. **“I know what my options are and where to go for information”**

I need information about what my options are to help me make an informed choice about where I live. I need good financial advice about my home. I need advice about benefits, adaptations and carers’ support. I need information telling me what’s available locally. Everyone has unique housing requirements and will have personal preferences about the type of home they want to live in.

3. **“When I need it, I have the option to move to a home with extra support”**

I need to know more about what support is available in sheltered housing and extra care housing. I need to understand about any additional costs of moving into sheltered or extra care housing. If I move into a home with extra support I expect more than a once a day ‘are you alright’ call. If I move into a home with extra support I expect the staff to understand my needs.

4. **“I know that when new houses are built my needs are considered/my voice is heard”**

When new homes are built for older people I expect that they will be consulted about the design and features of the homes. If I move into a newly built home I expect it to be a lifetime home, easily adaptable as my needs change.

1.5 Leeds Council's online consultation

The themes above were then used as the basis for a wider public consultation.

An online survey initiated by Public Health was used which drew responses from a further 44 people. The survey asked if the four themes identified at the event were the right ones, asked for comments on all four themes as well as any general comment on housing issues.

By October 2016 the survey was concluded, and a summary produced.

Some quotes from older people from the online survey

"People are always nervous about moving home especially if they have been there for a long time. The strategy needs to cover the concerns people face whether moving or staying at home"

"It is important that older people have a good environment and company around them especially when they live on their own"

"We have no support to speak of. We are independent now, but we need to plan for our future not wait until we are housebound"

"I am independently living in my own home without support at the moment. When I get to the stage where I need support I need to know where to go"

"Being near shops and the community means an awful lot"

"I need services that will enable me to stay in my home to the end of my life there"

"It is not always easy to access the information/options available and accessing information and getting them are two different things"

"I would not want to leave my home. I am very comfortable and have everything I need"

"When your health declines you need help with your housing"

"I would like my voice to be heard when the council talks about housing"

This - and the listening event - provided a broad agenda for the housing group to consider further.

2. Developing the Forum's housing strategy and work with the Centre for Ageing Better

Following the 2016 consultations, and with input from Care & Repair England, LOPF decided that, because of the slow progress being made with this work, it would produce its own *housing strategy*, which was published in 2017, drawing on the principles established in 2014, the listening event held and the online consultations.

This has provided new impetus to work to influence the council which has also been helped by a new partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better, Leeds City Council and Leeds Older People's Forum. This partnership was set up in October 2017 and has identified housing alongside transport and community contributions as its three linked priorities for action over the next five years. The aim is to apply evidence to make changes that lead to a better later life for older residents in Leeds, now and in the future. A partnership manager has been employed who is working closely with LOPF to engage the council in work on housing and ageing.

Despite its aspiration to be 'the best city in which to grow old' and, after four years work initiated by LOPF, there is still no comprehensive council strategy for older people, but LOPF working with the Centre for Ageing Better and Care & Repair England will continue to press for this.

3. Lessons learned

- So far perseverance and patience are the lessons to learn from Leeds Older Peoples Forum's work on housing. Whilst there is obvious commitment from some sections within the council, and some progress has been made, the lack of strategic leadership has caused serious delays and it will be very difficult to produce a meaningful and comprehensive older people's housing strategy across all tenures. The work developed at a time when the council has been decimated by funding cuts and the loss of experienced staff. Changes in personnel and priorities have meant that the initial enthusiasm for a council led Leeds Older People's Housing Strategy has been dampened. Because of this LOPF did not give up but decided to take matters into their own hands and develop their own strategy which has been very influential.
- LOPF have benefitted enormously from their links with Care & Repair England, Care & Repair Leeds and the Centre for Ageing Better.
- Be aware of consultation fatigue. Many people can be tired of people asking their views but seeing no action.
- Aim for regular and diarised meetings to maintain momentum and get the right people around the table.

- The work has gained new impetus from the new partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better. Leeds Older People's Forum is looking forward to the day when the council publish its own housing strategy. In the meantime, they have produced their own strategy which not only included a list of the issues of concern to older people in Leeds but also the evidence base for the recommendations it wants to take forward.

In conclusion, those involved in this work have said *'never give up'...after all 'if we are not asking the questions, developing policies and pressing for change who will?'*

4. Next steps

Because information and advice about housing was one of the priorities identified by older people in Leeds this is being explored in the new partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better. The Centre is commissioning *work* to determine what housing options information and advice currently exist in Leeds and when, how and if older people are accessing this and acting upon it. This will identify and document any gap between provision, need and desire with the aim of making recommendations made to reshape the provision of information and advice on housing options in Leeds. It is also imperative that LOPF in partnership with others continues to press for a comprehensive older people's housing strategy.

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Organisations involved in this guide

Care & Repair England

Care & Repair England is an independent charitable organisation which aims to improve older people's housing. The contact for all information on all the Ideas for action guides.

It is a Registered Society with Charitable Status Reg No 25121R.

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Older People's Housing Champions

The Older People's Housing Champions is a network of older activists who support action by older people's groups to improve housing and related services for an ageing population across England.

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Leeds Older People's Forum

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About Care & Repair England

Care & Repair England is an independent charitable organisation (Registered Society with Charitable Status Reg No 25121R) established in 1986 which aims to improve older people's housing. It aims to innovate, develop, promote and support practical housing initiatives and the related policy and practice which enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as they wish, particularly for older people living in poor or unsuitable private sector housing.

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