

GOVERNMENT URGED TO REGENERATE THE UK'S SHELTERED HOUSING STOCK

A Panel of Parliamentarians and experts have called for urgent action to regenerate a significant proportion of the estimated c.527,000¹ sheltered housing properties in the UK, to provide good quality, accessible homes for people in later life that meet contemporary standards and expectations.

An inquiry initiated by the All-Party Parliament Group (APPG) on Housing and Care for Older People into *The Regeneration of Outdated Sheltered Housing*, has found that the scale of re-investment required across sheltered housing is significant. Produced by the Housing LIN and sponsored by Abbeyfield, Abbeyfield South Downs Ltd, Abbeyfield The Dales Ltd and Abbeyfield Wessex Society LTD, the report provides some examples of where providers have regenerated existing sheltered properties with impressive results. It recognises the financial pressures faced by many providers of sheltered housing, making it challenging to invest in updating existing stock.

Chaired by Lord Best, the report is aimed at policymakers, governmental agencies and sheltered housing providers involved in housing development. It addresses the urgent need to upgrade and regenerate outdated sheltered housing for older people, emphasising the importance of maintaining and improving existing housing stock to meet 21st-century standards. The report appeals to Government, Homes England and the Greater London Authority, to recognise the value of investing in the refurbishment of sheltered housing and ensure a decent home for older residents. And it urges to social landlords to consider the broader social benefits of upgrading housing for older people to sustain accommodation that improves mental and physical health, and well-being.

The report also draws attention to requirements of a contemporary service model in sheltered housing, which should cater for a diverse range of older people and be carefully crafted to balance the benefits of on-site presence and non-resident staff along with the integration of technology to enhance resident contact, experience and support social interaction.

The Inquiry gathered evidence from a wide range of contributions from social housing and care providers, private sector operators of retirement housing, architects and surveyors specialising in regeneration projects and residents of sheltered housing schemes.

The evidence presented during the Inquiry highlighted the positive impact of living in sheltered housing for residents. So, with the current state of existing sheltered housing, the aim must be not only to grow this sector but also to give a new lease of life to the precious assets we already have.

Key recommendations from the report:

- A significant proportion of sheltered housing should be refurbished/regenerated; attractive and contemporary sheltered housing can continue to enable down-sizing/right-sizing that allows families to obtain much-needed homes – including vacated ‘general needs’ social rented properties.
- A 10% target for older people’s housing should be part of a flexible approach by Homes England/Greater London Authority for future capital investment, including the 2026-2031

¹ According to data from the Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC).

Affordable Homes Programme and other funding streams, of which at least a third should be for replacing, updating, and refurbishing existing forms of sheltered housing.

- Recycling of ‘historic’ grant funding, previously awarded to Registered Providers by Homes England and the GLA, should be permitted for refurbishing existing sheltered housing schemes (as well as for developing new schemes for older people).
- Homes England and GLA capital grant funding rules should ensure that housing providers can apply for and use capital grant to refurbish and upgrade existing sheltered housing schemes without ‘additionality’ requirements.
- MHCLG should work with the Treasury and DHSC to identify and secure revenue funding that can be used by local authorities and/or providers of sheltered housing to meet the revenue costs of providing support to residents of sheltered housing.
- Local authorities should undertake periodic Older Persons’ Housing Needs Assessments to determine local need and demand for all types of housing for older people, including sheltered housing, in addition to housing for older people that falls within the definition of supported housing in the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act.
- Despite financial pressures, local authorities with social care responsibilities should make available revenue support to residents of sheltered housing.
- All social and private landlords with sheltered housing stock should conduct a strategic review of their portfolio’s current and future suitability, identifying options for:
 - a) refurbishment/upgrades
 - b) repurposing for other people/uses
 - c) replacement development
- Disposals/sales should be avoided where possible. Both the Regulator of Social Housing, as part of its new standards regime, and all social housing providers should adopt a ‘charter for disposal of supported accommodation for older people’. (A suggested charter is provided in this report at Appendix 4.)

This Inquiry, covering existing housing for older people, ran in parallel to the previous Government’s Older People’s Housing Taskforce (OPHT) which considered options for the provision of new homes for older people. The panel urges the newly appointed Labour Government and devolved administrations to increase the range of housing options available to older people by adopting the findings and recommendations of this Inquiry and the OPHT.

Chair of APPG on Housing and Care for Older People, Lord Best said:

“Sadly, a lot of the sheltered housing of the 1960’s and 1970’s is now past its sell-by date and ready for a serious upgrade. Bed-sits – let alone shared bathrooms – are no longer acceptable. If this accommodation becomes hard-to-let or is sold off, the nation will lose a precious asset that will be hugely expensive to replace.

So now is the time for a significant programme of imaginative regeneration of outdated sheltered housing that can provide much-needed affordable, accessible, sociable homes fit for our ageing population for decades to come.”

Jeremy Porteus, CEO of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) said:

“We are immensely proud of the Housing LIN's role as Secretariat to this important APPG Inquiry. It has shown that sheltered housing still provides a safe and secure home for tens of thousands of older households in the UK.

From council and housing association stock to almshouse charities and Abbeyfields, it is also the single largest designated accommodation type available for older people.

However, we have discovered that the sector is encountering significant operational challenges in maintaining this valuable asset. Much of the housing stock is in need of improvement, and there are increasing cost pressures on services.

But with technology advances, modern construction materials and methods, as well as older people's housing preferences changing too, we believe the timing is right to generate a contemporary sheltered housing offer that takes the 'sheltered' out of 'sheltered housing' and provides an attractive housing choice in later life for future generations instead.”

Paul Tennant, Chief Executive of Abbeyfield Living Society, who sponsored the Inquiry, said:

“At Abbeyfield, we understand the importance of high-quality housing to the lives of older people, and the role for providers such as ourselves to help ensure that an increasingly ageing population is catered for. We also have experience first-hand of the challenges facing those owning and operating homes that require significant investment to meet future needs and standards.

This report highlights the vital contribution that existing sheltered housing is making in communities for older people. It also underlines that for many providers, particularly smaller ones facing multiple financial pressures, these assets are under threat. There is an urgent need for a clear plan for the future which includes access to funding and investment opportunities geared towards the refurbishment, upgrading and maintenance of existing housing stock as a viable alternative to simply building new developments.

The recommendations set out clear and effective ways in which the government and providers can address these challenges and protect this precious asset for future generations”.

– ENDS –

NOTE TO EDITORS:

This report was launched on Tuesday, 23 July 2024 at an event hosted by the House of Lords. The event was attended by our Panel of Parliamentarians and experts listed in Appendix 1 of the report.

The report can be found at www.housinglin.org.uk/Re-HAPPI

For this APPG's previous Inquiry reports, visit: www.housinglin.org.uk/APPG-HCOP

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 20,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population and for people with care & support needs. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist, supported and accessible housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

Jeremy Porteus, CEO and Lois Beech, Consultancy and Partnerships Manager at the Housing LIN, are Secretariats for this Inquiry.

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About Abbeyfield

Established in 1956, The Abbeyfield Society is a charity that provides sheltered housing, independent living and residential care to older people across the UK. It creates communities that keep people connected in later life, fostering a sense of security, warmth and belonging and allowing residents to thrive in the company of others whilst retaining their independence.

This foundation of companionship was one of the motivations for setting up Abbeyfield nearly 70 years ago and remains at the core of what the organisation stands for today.

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