

A3

## Conducting focus groups of pre-retirement populations designed to explore their responses to future problems as they age<sup>67</sup>

When estimating future demand for services it is important to understand what people's expectations might be and what would be their preferences. This brief guide describes an approach for conducting focus groups with pre-retirement populations. It is designed to elicit an understanding of the types, and characteristics, of services which people might expect to see if they become frailer or develop specific health needs.

### Aim

The aim of the focus groups is to understand from immediate pre-retirement age groups their plans and thoughts about care and support in old age. The focus groups should be semi-structured and run for approximately two hours.

given that there is a risk of the discussion being inhibited or observers being drawn into the debate. In addition to the facilitator and the recorder, it is also helpful to have a third person to manage logistics and follow-up if any participant is distressed.

### Facilitation

The groups should be facilitated by a skilled facilitator to pose questions, seek clarification and promote dialogue between participants. One facilitator should not conduct more than two focus groups in one day. The facilitator should be seen to be independent of council care services but could be a suitably trained council employee. A suggested approach is provided in *Anticipating Future Accommodation Needs*<sup>68</sup>.

### Participants

To get a reasonable sample across a local authority, organisers might wish to aim for five to ten groups (depending on the size of the authority) involving no less than eight and no more than twelve participants in each group (groups with less than eight people may not promote discussion; with more than twelve, some participants may not contribute). It is important to avoid the 'usual suspects', ie, people who are regularly involved in consultation exercises.

### Recording

An experienced note taker responsible for summarising the main themes should also be present. Tapes can be used but a note taker is often less obtrusive and can act as a useful sounding board in testing results with the facilitator. Observers are not recommended

Recruit participants aged between 63 to 65 years and who are broadly representative of the local population in terms of gender, socio-economic status, tenure, and ethnicity. Obtaining a sample has been achieved by local authorities in a number of ways; through co-operation with the local Department for Work and Pensions, using bus pass lists, citizens'

<sup>67</sup> This approach is based on work that IPC conducted for CSED as published in: *CSED (2007). Anticipating Future Needs toolkit.*

<sup>68</sup> *Housing LIN (2007). Case Study 31: Anticipating Future Accommodation Needs: Developing a consultation methodology.*

panels and advertising in local newspapers, libraries and shops. It may be important to get people to record at the start their approximate income, age and type of tenure/housing they occupy. For some people it may be necessary to consider making practical arrangements if they are full time carers. Some groups should be held in the evening to allow people who work to participate. It is important to reimburse participants' expenses incurred in attending. Most focus group organisers give people some form of honorarium, commonly in the form of shopping vouchers.

## Venues

Venues should have good transport links, easy access for those with disabilities and appear 'agency neutral' and not old age-biased, ie, not part of the local authority, health service or voluntary sector working with people in old age.

At the venue, provide level space for wheelchairs and walking frames, facilities for people with hearing difficulties, comfortable facilities with accessible toilets, and adequate breaks.

## Timetabling

Plan how people will be welcomed on arrival, how refreshments will be served and how to manage late arrivals. Have refreshments before the session begins rather than in the middle as a break may cause the discussion to lose momentum; refreshments at the end may cause confusion over when the discussion terminates and get in the way of the next group coming in.