



B2

Extra care housing 'mystery shopping' exercise

The purpose of a mystery shopping exercise is to find out how enquiries made to the Local Authority or to health services regarding extra care housing are dealt with at the first point of contact and what marketing information is made available to the caller. Conducting such an exercise should be beneficial to commissioners in order to:

- Ascertain the extent to which extra care housing as a concept and a service is understood by front line staff.
- Identify whether extra care housing is offered and promoted as a viable and positive choice to older people when enquiring about their future housing, care and support options.
- Inform improvements to service delivery.

When undertaking the exercise, it is recommended that the individual posing as the mystery shopper undertakes the exercise on all the access points most likely to be used by older people or their relatives to gain information on housing, care and/or support services.

Mystery shopping scenario

The following paragraph suggests a scenario to be used by the mystery shopper when conducting the exercise.

The shopper wants to find out about extra care housing⁸⁴ for her mother. If asked for further information about her mother's circumstances she should explain that her mum is 86, and is currently in hospital. She has also been assessed by social services as needing care. She is profoundly deaf, and is becoming confused and finding it difficult to cope on her own.

The shopper should explain that although her mother lives in (add local location), she (the shopper) lives in (add different local location) and that her brother lives in (add different local location), that they would like their mum to move nearer to them and therefore they want to explore the different options available in these locations. Her mother is an owner occupier.

The scenario is based on a real life example. It is important that the mystery shopper takes on the role and is able to answer more detailed questions about the scenario presented, and is consistent in doing so.

Model response

The mystery shopper is looking for the following responses from first point of contact in dealing with the request:

- To be asked the right questions to determine what it is the shopper wants and to be convinced that she understands what extra care housing is, ie, that it is not general sheltered housing. For example:

"When you say 'extra care' do you mean care going into a residential home or do you mean your mum moving into new accommodation and care being provided there?"

⁸⁴ The shopper should ensure that they use whatever local phraseology is used for extra care housing.

- To be asked sufficient questions about her mother's needs and what she wants, in order to check out if extra care housing would suit her. Also to determine the urgency of the request so the shopper can be given a realistic picture of how long the process might take. For example:

"Tell me more about your mum"

"What does she need help with?"

"Is she getting any support now?"

"Has she been assessed by social services?"

"Has she been diagnosed with dementia?"

"What's her medical condition?"

- If there are schemes available, to be provided with information on extra care housing in order to understand what it is, how to apply and where to do to find out more, ie, verbally, by post, via website or referral to elsewhere.
- If the call was directly to an extra care scheme then the shopper should receive an offer of a visit to the scheme as a follow-up to the information.

Conclusions

In concluding the exercise, the mystery shopper should compare results against the model response as outlined above. Suggestions should then be made, if any, as to how the local authority and/or PCT can better respond to requests for information, and market extra care as a positive and viable alternative for older people, as well as make any improvements.