Living well in the South East
planning homes and
services for our lifetime

Summary and key messages
Spring 2010

Summary

The population of the South East region is ageing rapidly. Over 1/3rd of people are over 50 (almost 3 million people). It is estimated that 1 million more households will be over 65 by 2031 and over 200,000 people will be over 85.[1]

Currently over 90% of people over the age of 65 and about 80% of those people aged over 80 years old live in their own homes.

Good housing enables people to stay connected with their local communities and promotes 'active ageing'. Poor housing for too many older people contributes to loss of independence, poorer quality of life, health problems and excess mortality.

Plan to deliver greater housing choice

We must plan for demographic change. There is both an opportunity and a challenge to develop a wider range of local housing choices for older people, to enable them to remain independent in their own homes and communities.

The older population structure in the region will be more complex than previously, with a wider array of family arrangements and ethnic and cultural mixes which needs to be taken into account by the housing market.

Specialist housing and support

There is need for a wider range of more specialist housing and support options, to enable those with dementia and other long term conditions with care needs to continue to live in their communities or remain in their own homes.

Locality planning for a lifetime

Neighbourhoods need to be designed to create inclusive places to live for all ages. This includes the application of inclusive design standards, 'age friendly' cities and towns, alongside addressing the needs of those living in the many rural areas in the region.

Transport continues to be a major issue impacting on the quality of later life.

Effective involvement

The 'voice' of older people needs to be heard: for those living in residential care settings and those who are harder to reach, as well as those living in their own homes.

Key messages

Improving the Choice of Housing Options in the South East

- A full range of good quality housing should be available in localities across the region to support an ageing population. There should be a wider choice of 'ordinary' housing for rent and sale and more specialist housing to meet the growing needs of older people.

- Development of such housing choice would allow many older people living in 'under-occupied housing' to 'downsize' if they so chose, helping to alleviate some of the wider housing shortages facing the region.

- The housing market should be encouraged to provide a wider range of housing options, with better design and space standards to support a more diverse older population in future.

- Lifetime Homes Standards should be the norm for new build. Where practicable, higher housing standards, energy efficiency improvements and adaptations should be 'retrofitted' into existing homes.

Enabling Informed Choice

- Older people and their families should be able to easily access information, advice (including impartial financial advice) and sources of practical help. The philosophy underpinning information and advice services should encourage people to better plan for changing circumstances in later life, enable housing decisions to be taken at an earlier stage and seek to reduce crisis decision-making.

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[1] Office of National Statistics 2008 mid-year estimates.

■ More should be done to raise awareness of different housing options; the role of Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) and other housing providers; as well as access to aids and adaptations, that support independence in the home. Such information services should not rely on the internet as the key communication channel.

■ Information and advice services should co-ordinate with good referral arrangements, across local housing departments, social care, the NHS and other related services locally.

■ Assistive Technology (including telemedicine and telecare systems): there is a need to promote better awareness, with both professionals and consumers, of the potential role which assistive technology can play to enable people to remain in their own homes. Design and development of assistive technology needs to be encouraged, to improve comfort, style and use by older people. Affordability remains a significant concern, although further spread and technological developments may help to bring down costs.

Addressing the Housing and Support Needs of People with Dementia and other Long Term Conditions

■ A better choice and quality of housing and support options for people with dementia is needed, with more attention to enabling people to remaining at home as long as possible. This includes measures to address the needs of carers.

■ There is a need to raise awareness about dementia with both the public and professionals. There should be joint training about supporting people with dementia for housing staff with other care providers. Local protocols should be agreed to ensure good communication between different agencies and rapid response when required.

■ While the conference focused on living with dementia, it is important to recognise the wide range of other long term physical and mental conditions that should be considered in any comprehensive plans for an ageing population.

Locality Planning for a Lifetime

■ Housing exists in neighbourhoods and communities and, as such, community-wide planning of wider infrastructure support and services, including public transport, must take better account of an ageing population, while also promoting mixed communities. The particular issues for those living in rural areas need to be given proper attention.

■ Access to general amenities and services are key factors as to whether people can stay in their own homes as they age. Further integrated working between statutory services to sustain local amenities and delivery of services is to be encouraged.

■ Statutory services need to be able to better demonstrate that they are taking a joined up approach locally.

Effective Involvement

■ Effective involvement should acknowledge and take account of the diversity of individual needs of people in later life, ranging from those 50 plus to 100 plus, and acknowledge the wide ranging contributions older people make rather than focusing on them as a burden.

■ There is strong support for more effective involvement by older people and their carers. People asked to see evidence of listening, more attention to feedback and evidence of impact. There is concern that, with increasing financial constraints, there will not be funding to ensure the sustainability of effective approaches to involvement. Firm commitments should be made to protect and develop this work.

■ In particular, local planning authorities need to involve older people to ensure their requirements are taken into account, when considering planning and housing issues. Local planning authorities need to develop new approaches to respond more effectively to an ageing population.

■ Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) need to recognise and respond to the changing needs of an ageing society and be based upon robust Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) and Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs).