

Guide to resettling older residents from hostels

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This is a work in progress. We would welcome comments on whether it is useful and additional tips that you have found useful in resettling older homeless people. Please send comments to sarah.gorton@homelesslink.org.uk

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Introduction

Work done by the Coalition on Older Homelessness, a project working to improve services for older homeless people at Homeless Link has illustrated that there are a significant number of older people in hostels, some of whom have needs that go beyond housing related support and who need long term care and support. Others have been there for many years and become institutionalised, have not learnt independent living skills and are frightened of moving into the community. Resettling older people who have lived in a hostel for many years requires a distinct approach and a specific set of skills and knowledge. This guide outlines some of the approaches that have been found to work with this population and highlights the issues that may come up.

Reasons for older people experiencing long stays in hostels.

- There is a lack of appropriate places for older people with longer term care needs and a history of homelessness to move to, especially if they are alcohol dependent or have mental health problems.
- Prior to Supporting People there was not a strong culture of hostels being temporary or places of transition.
- Supporting People places the emphasis on a linear model, moving from dependence to independent living, something that is not appropriate for some older people whose level of dependence is likely to increase.
- Older people have been unassertive about moving on and in some cases very resistant to the idea.
- It is difficult to engage Social Services and health in the needs of this population despite their complex health, psychological and social problems.

The situation is changing. Supporting People are requiring evidence of resettlement work across the hostel population. Hostels are increasingly becoming places of transition; places that address substance misuse, encourage independent living and open up employment and training opportunities. There is pressure to move on the older population. Hostels are not the best places to provide the level of care and support that some of this group can require.

Reasons for addressing the needs of the older hostel population

Hostels are a temporary solution to a person's housing need, not long term accommodation. People staying in hostels need to be supported to move on, in order to free up bed-spaces for people who are sleeping rough.

Hostels are not a suitable environment for people to live in as they grow old. Not all older people have additional care and support needs but those who do need special attention. Hostel staff struggle to meet the needs of people who have continence problems, memory problems or difficulties with personal hygiene. They should not be expected to meet these needs as they are beyond the level of housing related support offered in hostels and staff are not trained to do that type of work. Hostels are unsuitable for people with decreased mobility or who are experiencing falls. People who have care needs should have those assessed and met by social services. Older people are at risk of being intimidated and exploited by the younger hostel population from whom there can be threats of violence or abuse

and extortion of money. Older people in hostels are at risk of being isolated from the wider community and of losing the chance of being integrated into activities and groups outside of homelessness.

Assessing the older hostel population

Start by looking at your hostel population, asking two questions:

- how many people are over the age of fifty; and
- what kind of needs do they have.

The Coalition on Older Homeless People at Homeless Link has developed a methodology that can be used by local authorities to audit the numbers and support and care needs of older homeless people they have living in hostels or in contact with street teams in their area. The method can also be used internally in one hostel or by one provider to capture the information on the older population.

The methodology provides a snapshot of the older homeless population in a local authority area and looks at their needs across twenty categories ranging from mental and physical ill health to their capacity to manage their room, to cook and to manage money. It is quick and easy to use. If your hostel or local authority is interested in carrying out this audit look at a report on our website at:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/issues/older/auditsummary07/> If you would like the tools to carry out the audit contact:
sarah.gorton@homelesslink.org.uk

Hostel commitment

Resettling older long-term residents requires commitment from the whole hostel. Resettling older people may require setting up a working group with manager involvement and perhaps involvement from the local authority and setting a timescale to work to. The process will obviously differ depending on the size of your hostel and the number of older residents. If it is a small hostel and there are just one or two older people the resources and planning required will be much less. It will also depend on the level of vulnerability of the residents and how responsive the local authority is.

One hostel in the North East was designated as a hostel for 16-25 year olds but had 20 older men living there who had been there for many years and once a new manager came in 10 were moved out to sheltered housing within a 6 month period.

The experience of one large London hostel was that it was necessary to appoint a lead worker with responsibility for resettling their over 55's, some of whom had been in the hostel for over 20 years, since it was a working men's hostel. Over an eighteen-month period he has resettled 5 older people. The role was facilitated as the management of the hostel recognised that it is a slow and time consuming process that required the acquisition of new skills and contacts in the statutory and voluntary sector and lots of resident contact.

Local authority commitment

It is important to make sure all your older residents are on the housing register. Resettling older people will require involvement from the local authority in facilitating the type of move-on required. Any hostel that has a group of longer-term older residents should contact their local authority to discuss working in partnership on moving them onto more appropriate accommodation and support.

Statutory duty to homeless people

Local housing authorities have a statutory duty to offer suitable housing to people who are homeless and in priority need. Vulnerability related to age is one of the reasons people are accepted as priority homeless. The Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/145343>

states that although old age alone is not enough to ensure someone is considered vulnerable all applications from people aged over 60 years need to be considered carefully and each case looked at in the light of individual circumstances. It is likely that if an older person has been long term homeless they have other vulnerabilities that should be taken into consideration. If they have diagnosed mental health problems or a physical disability they should be accepted as being in priority need. They may have a history of having been in the armed forces or in custody and not managed to find and maintain independent housing since then. Under the category of other special reasons if they have a chronic illness or if they have a need for support but have no family or friends on whom they can depend that should be taken in to account. Hostels need to be proactive in arguing the case for their older residents as they can be put off at the first hurdle when presenting at a local authority. Temporary hostels should not be seen as suitable housing for someone who falls into a priority category.

Clients who have ongoing care and support needs that go beyond housing related support may need registered care or a care package (either in the hostel or to support move-on). To access these services they would need to have a Community Care Assessment and be found eligible. (See section on Social Services below)

Move-on care and Support plan

Having identified the older residents the next step is to start to develop individual move on and care and support plans. These will include:

- Personal details
- Brief history including housing history.
- List of support contacts e.g. any day centres, activities, pubs, clubs or cafes they already attend plus GP etc.
- Medical needs, e.g. prescribed medications/ optician/ chiropodist etc
- Physical mobility
- Interests
- Any contact with family /friendship networks
- Life skills

Engaging the resident in the idea of moving

The plan will need to start by engaging the residents in the idea of moving. Some older people will be very resistant to this, especially if they are long-term residents. It is worth exploring what the resistance is based on.

Resistance to moving on could be based around any of these points or could be a combination of all of the factors:

- They may have pre conceived and inaccurate ideas about the sort of accommodation they will get, or what will happen to their benefits if they are moved on.
- They may be frightened about the responsibility of budgeting for rent and bills and for looking after themselves.
- Some of them will have left their last home because they couldn't cope with these responsibilities.
- They may be frightened of the loneliness.
- They may be frightened of going in to a care home and losing their independence.

These are all realistic fears and need to be addressed at the resident's own pace. Hostels with experience of these issues make a variety of recommendations:

- If there are a significant number of older people moving on ask housing and social services to come in to the hostel to do joint assessments and look at their housing and support needs.
- Take them to visit sheltered schemes or studio flats in the area that they are interested in, contact the warden and ask if there is an empty flat, or if someone has already been resettled from the hostel ask if they could show the resident.
- If there is a sheltered scheme they are interested in (and can expect a vacancy to come up) take them on repeated visits so that it becomes familiar and they are a familiar face to other residents.
- Start to break people out of very fixed routines in the hostel, i.e. where they sit for their meals and who they sit with, and try to introduce new elements to their regular patterns.
- If the next move is going to be to a registered care home find out what the range of possibilities is and see if they can be taken to visit different options.
- If they are going into independent accommodation talk to them in detail about what areas they would be happy with, taking into account any community facilities they already use, any friends, transport, shops, GP, day centre etc.
- Once it becomes clearer what area they will move to, work to integrate them into a community outside the hostel, find a day centre where they can go for lunch and other social activities in the area.

Independent living skills

- If they are going to move into independent accommodation a commitment will need to be made to work on their independent living skills. If they are catered for in the hostel, go out food shopping in the area they will move to, find ways to teach them to cook. A microwave is likely to be the cooking facility, make sure they know how to use one, and know some easy meals they can prepare.
- Get their benefits checked, ask CAB or an independent advice centre to come in and do benefit checks or go out with them to an advice centre.
- Talk to them about budgeting independently, what money they will be left with, getting bills paid directly etc.
- Talk to them about activities that they might be able to get involved in, in the community, going to the cinema, the park, volunteering, gardening, bowling, making links with a community of origin, i.e. Irish community groups.

Family and friendship links

Some older people have reconnected with their families after many years and gone back to live in a care home or sheltered accommodation in the area that their children or other family members are in. Talk to the resident about whether there are family members they are in touch with or would like to be. Be careful of any indications that there is an exploitative or negative relationship, which will not be good for the resident. Take into account friendship networks -if there are companionships amongst people being resettled take these into account.

Housing, sheltered housing, and choice based lettings

If the person is able to go and live independently sheltered housing is the most likely option. However people should not be offered sheltered housing as the only option just because they are elderly. Many authorities have voids in sheltered housing and some of it is hard to let. Some residents who have been homeless might be quite happy with a studio flat or with shared facilities and not want a lot of space. However it is important to ensure they are not being offered lets that no one else wants because they are run down, in a bad state of repair or not near any facilities.

If you have a number of older residents the Housing Department may come to the hostel to do an assessment and explain the system to them. Many local authorities now use a choice based lettings system where all the vacancies are advertised and people make a bid for properties that they want. In one area they have allocated 50 extra points in the Choice Based lettings scheme to older people in hostels to allow them better opportunities to bid for suitable properties in the area that will enable them to resettle more successfully (partly because this frees up hostel places for rough sleepers). If your area uses this system it is important to

understand how it works and to help your residents use the system. The residents may want hostel workers to bid for them because they find the system intimidating and difficult. If this is the case you will need to be clear that they have given consent and what properties they want you to bid for.

Sheltered housing is provided both by local authorities and Registered Social landlords. Some sheltered housing providers are not part of the common allocations system through the local authority and can be applied to separately. Applicants will not necessarily need to have been accepted as priority homeless. If a resident has been accepted as priority homeless by a local authority they are likely to be given priority by the RSL. It is worth contacting providers of sheltered housing in your area, finding out how they take referrals, the process for making applications and making a relationship with them. Most have an age criteria of over 55 years. If people are happy to move to another area of the country it increases their chances of being housed. Some sheltered housing providers can be very responsive to taking people with a history of homelessness and be interested in establishing services that are responsive to them.

Methodist Homes Association, which has properties around the country including extra care has developed a policy which specifically welcomes applications from older homeless people.

<http://www.methodisthomes.org.uk/>

Anchor housing have also been responsive to resettling older people with a history of homelessness. Information from their website states

- You don't have to be retired to apply. If you are over 55 you can apply for one of our studio, one, two or three bedroom properties.
- With Anchor you'll have your own front door and the freedom to decorate your new home the way you want. You could even bring your pet with you.
- Most of our properties have a scheme manager available on-site. They can help you maintain your home by arranging repairs, gardening and managing your tenancy. Scheme managers can also offer support and reassurance in an emergency.
- Most properties have a shared lounge so you can have privacy when you want it or enjoy the companionship of others. Our tenants frequently form social committees to organise activities and entertainment.

Direct applications can be made to Anchor Retirement Housing.

<http://www.anchor.org.uk/index.asp>

Supported sheltered housing

Abbeyfield UK provides rented accommodation in supported sheltered houses for people over 55 years, they have schemes all over the country. Their houses are either purpose built or adapted from existing buildings with added facilities. Residents have their own room and generally en suite facilities and communal lounge and dining areas. They can receive visitors and enjoy meals provided by the house staff. They are free from the worries of maintaining a house and garden, paying bills and dealing with loneliness.

A typical house offers:

- a paid house manager
- call alarm systems
- specialist facilities e.g. assisted baths, lifts etc
- two cooked meals a day
- network of support from local volunteers

Residents who need some extra help can arrange visiting services such as a home help, chiropodist or care assistant.

Abbeyfield welcome applications from people living in hostels and are currently considering setting up some specialist projects for older homeless people.

<http://www.abbeyfield.com/>

Ex Service men and women

There are a number of specific organisations set up to help homeless veterans of all ages. If an older person in the hostel has served in the forces at any time it is worth exploring the resettlement options available through Veterans Aid who can provide immediate help and accommodation in London .

www.veterans-aid.net

The Oswald Stoll Foundation provide permanent housing for vulnerable and disabled ex service men and women in London and can be contacted through

<http://www.oswaldstoll.org.uk/>

SSAFA Forces Help is a national charity committed to helping those who have served in the armed forces. <http://www.ssafa.org.uk/>

Viewing properties with an older resident

Going to view properties can be very stressful for an older person. Accompanying them and planning the journey beforehand reduces the stress. It is important to make sure they have eaten, taken any medication they need and to think about whether a toilet might be needed en route. If they can do the viewing at a time when there are not lots of other people viewing it helps. If it is a sheltered scheme and they can meet the warden and/or any of the neighbours and ask questions that is also helpful.

Below are some of the things to think about when viewing a property.

- Access lift / stairs
- Security
- Furnished or not, make a list of things needed
- Central heating
- Gas/electricity
- Kitchen appliances. Are there any, are they new or old, are they easy to use? . Make a list of what is needed.
- Laundry - is there a communal laundry or one nearby?
- Warden visits, are they on site, how often do they call?
- Emergency pull cord for warden

- Decorations (walls, curtains, light fittings)
- Neighbours
- Shops
- Post office
- Proximity to the GP

White goods and furniture

If the resident is in receipt of Income Support once the tenancy agreement is signed, they can apply for a community care grant for their furniture, white goods, crockery and cutlery bedding etc. There are often long delays getting a community grant, which can be very difficult if someone is waiting to move in. They may alternatively be able to get essential goods through a charity or apply for a crisis loan.

It is important to have made some contacts in some local charities that can help with new or second hand goods, particularly if the residents you are working with are not in receipt of Income support. Friends of the Elderly <http://www.fote.org.uk/community-services/welfare-and-grant-giving.aspx> is one charity that can be helpful. They define older as fifty years of age in relation to their criteria for giving grants to homeless people. Most areas have local charities that can assist, Age Concern or Help the Aged may be a good place to start.

Double rent

As soon as someone has signed up for the tenancy they become liable for the rent. If they do not have the essential items they need to move in and have to stay at the hostel for longer they will be liable for double rent. It is important this is addressed because if a person goes into a tenancy starting off with arrears it can be very dispiriting and make them feel as if they can't cope and want to abandon before they have begun. Some hostel providers are sympathetic to this and will give people 3 or 4 weeks free rent if they are liable for double rent. If someone moves into their new home but still has to pay rent on a former home because they were unable to give the landlord the notice he required, benefit may be paid for up to 4 weeks on their old home. However for this to be considered, they must have moved into their new home. The other possibility is that local authorities have a discretionary housing benefit budget that can be used in cases of hardship. This can be applied for to cover the period when double rents are due, but it is discretionary.

Tenancy Sustainment

It is important to set up the support that someone needs to help them settle into the tenancy. Some hostels are able to provide ongoing resettlement support for a certain period. This provides continuity of care and continued support from someone the older person knows, which can help them successfully settle in. During this time it will be important to ensure that the older person can manage practically in their new home and knows the locality well enough to get to the places they need to go to. It is important that they are registered with a doctor, transferred to a community mental health team if they receive care from mental

health services, know where the housing office is and can contact any care or support agency that is involved in their care. Many older people will need longer-term resettlement or permanent support to help them to live independently. Some local authorities have a generic floating support team, a small number have specialist floating support for older people or older people with alcohol problems. It will be important to link someone into whatever support is available. If they have been assessed by social services and have a care package in place, it will be overseen by a care manager. If that is the case it will be worth keeping in touch with the client to make sure they are able to assert their needs and the care package is happening as planned.

Older people with multiple needs

The Coalition on Older Homelessness is aware that there are significant numbers of older people living in hostels whose needs are too complex to move on to independent living and that there are often no appropriate move-on solutions locally. Some areas do have specialist long-term Supporting People projects or registered care homes for this client group. Some areas have extra care schemes that might be suitable for people with more complex needs. (See practice section of www.olderhomelessness.org.uk for details of some existing projects.)

We are working to raise awareness of this gap in services. We believe there is a need to remodel some sheltered housing schemes and develop specialist services for this group and to develop extra care schemes where people can have their own independent flat but where care and support, catering and communal facilities are available on site.

Social Services

Older people who have long term care and support needs such as the onset of dementia, continence problems, severe mobility problems, difficulties with personal hygiene and self-care, neglecting to eat, chronic alcohol dependence, should have a community care assessment done by social services.

If they are under the age criteria for the elderly team (generally 65 years) you may have to approach the physical disability team, the substance dependence team or the mental health team depending on the nature of their problems.

Accessing a community care assessment and community care services for this client group with multiple problems is difficult. Different teams within SSD (social services department) can sometimes pass individuals on as not being their responsibility, either to another team or because of dispute about whether the person has a local connection. Even where there is agreement about their needs it is hard to get appropriate funding and to find appropriate residential placements. Negotiating and advocating to social services on behalf of hostel residents can be time consuming and frustrating. It is important that the hostel management build up a relationship with Social Services and that an understanding is developed of the needs of the client group.

It is the experience of some hostels that because residents are somewhere that has 24 hour staff SSD assume it is appropriate for them to stay and offer to put in raised toilet seats, handrails, special bath equipment and to send in carers to

bathe people and put them to bed. If this is not appropriate and hostel staff will be left having to deal with e.g. incontinence when carers are not there, such an approach should be resisted and it needs to be made very clear to SSD that hostels are not alternative care homes.

The hostel needs to have a policy about whether it is appropriate to have domiciliary care coming into the hostel, and if so for what period of time. There are also issues to be addressed such as what the response is when the carer refuses to do the job. This has occurred because carers have found the person rude or abusive, or because they have been smoking in their room or they come at 5.30 pm to put someone to bed or 7am to get them up when they are not ready. It can take a very long time to build up trust with someone who has become very alienated from services over many years, and such work can be undone quickly by a carer who is not known to the person and is insensitive to their needs. It is important to talk about these issues when establishing care packages. This applies whether the care is being delivered temporarily in the hostel or established for their move.

If the person is eligible for registered care it is important to work with them to find a registered care home that is acceptable to them and will be accepting and responsive to their needs. This is likely to be difficult locally especially if they are alcohol dependent or have complex needs.

It may also be worth looking at extra care housing options in the area. These allow people to continue to live independently in self-contained accommodation but with flexible care on site. The COHP is interested in working with local areas to help to push for more appropriate long term solutions for this client group and would be interested to hear about the issues you have locally.

Homeless Link's *Resettlement handbook* is now free and online and can be accessed at <http://handbooks.homeless.org.uk/resettlement>

This goes into a lot of detail about the functions and role of resettlement of homeless people of all ages.

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