



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Viewpoint 120

Holmes on Homes. It's time to act and include housing as a key ingredient of a better future

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Adult social care can feel like a Cinderella service from the perspective of the NHS although this year, at long last, there's optimism this is changing. I have experienced welcome but somewhat superficial platitudes from the NHS about the importance of "fixing" adult social care over the years, but with the Prime Minister's leadership it feels like there is the potential at last to move into practical two-way conversation and a set of actions that moves beyond hand-wringing.

But before I get too holier-than-thou, it seems clear that the shift in relationships and effectiveness we want between the NHS and adult social care must also be achieved between adult social care and housing. I have heard the mantra that we must make *"every decision about adult social care a decision about housing"* and I feel it in my bones to be true. But how to turn this mantra, this platitude, into something meaningful? I don't think I have pulled up any trees on addressing this question in my career to date, but sadly being ADASS President doesn't allow me to keep my head down and try to change the subject – so here goes.

One general bugbear I have about attempts to fix social care over the years is that reform always seems to start with considering supply rather than demand. This is another way of saying that we are often service-led rather than needs-led. We often talk about the funding and capacity we think is required for different types of care provision without having first checked on the problem we are trying to solve from the perspective of the person. The solutions we come up if we focus excessively on supply just turn into a rearrangement of the deckchairs. The same risk applies to the way we characterise housing. If we just build it they will not necessarily come.

By contrast, the Social Care Future vision puts the person front and centre and describes housing as a key determinant of wellbeing:

"We all want to live in the place we call home, with the people and things we love, in communities where we look out for each other, doing the things that matter to us."

Housing is characterised subjectively in terms of

- (1) what it is – the place we call home,
- (2) who is with us – the people and the things we love, and
- (3) where it is – in communities where we look out for each other.

These are all issues of design – in the fullest sense – for housing and for housing-related support.

I've wheeled this apocryphal quote out a few times of late, and I think I'll carry on wheeling it out, but *"projects don't go wrong, they start wrong"*. If the consideration of housing and housing-related support doesn't start from the right place, a place of authentic co-design and co-production with people who draw on care and support at a formative stage we will repeat the same problems we currently have.

I firmly believe that starting from the right place is a pre-requisite for future success but we won't get there if we don't have a grip on method and logistics. I owe a significant debt of thanks to an unnamed colleague from Torbay for the following four paragraphs – they were forwarded to me by Jo, the previous Torbay DASS, when we were having a discussion about the centrality of housing almost two years ago, and I have reproduced them almost verbatim in italics below.

“From a social care perspective, ‘housing’ is the health and social care system’s lazy catch-all term for a complex system of spatial and strategic planning, capital development, allocation of social housing, housing management and temporary accommodation, all of which relate to adult health and social care in different ways and on radically different timescales. Likewise, the planning, delivery and allocation of housing, particularly regulated social housing, has an entirely different legislative framework to adult social care, sharing little in the way that individual need is defined.

“The key to an effective strategic relationship between the local authority statutory functions of social care and housing need is a clear mutual understanding of strategic function and timetable. To deliver housing to support adult social care, housing commissioners require a clearly articulated and well-evidenced assessment of housing for the population drawing on health and social care services now and in the future.

The delivery of new social housing can have extremely long lead times – three years is the minimum in most cases – so the information must be included in spatial strategies, housing strategies and local area plans an exceptionally long way ahead. The statutory requirement via the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 for each local authority to produce an annual supported housing strategy and a five year assessment of housing need will partially support the strategic planning process for housing linked to health and social care, including for housing with a preventative role such as category one and two sheltered housing.

For housing with an additional intrinsic link to care and support, e.g. supported housing, extra care housing or specialist provision, there needs to be a clear understanding of where the greatly increased void / repair risk sits, because specialist housing must not be an opportunity for adult social care to shift business risk onto a social landlord. For general needs housing, ringfenced for people drawing on commissioned health and social care services, there needs to be clarity about any additional housing management impact, so that this can be built into future letting policies, site design and avoid the inadvertent creation of housing management risks through inappropriate grouping.

A joint commissioning body could facilitate a strategic partnership between health, housing, and adult social care along with other stakeholders such as probation services, children’s services, and others. The previously constituted Supporting People Commissioning Body was an excellent example of such a partnership, bringing together local geographies around a single unified plan. Whatever governance is or isn’t in place, commissioners and practitioners on both sides of the equation must be supported to understand the legislative and operational framework in which decisions are made about legal duty and how assets are allocated. “

I love the way our Torbay colleague almost casually throws in a reference to the catastrophic austerity-related decision to torch Supporting People funding and partnerships. I will be interested to see what Baroness Casey, who knows as much as anybody about interrelationship between housing and care, might say via her Commission. I think she has picked up on how adult social care is dealing with demand that has sometimes trickled and sometimes flooded in over years where other parts of the public sector have been forced to retrench.

Overall though, I think the combination of practice that starts in the right place (with the right people) and the adoption of effective logistics speaks to a wider challenge about strategic planning and commissioning in councils (and in Integrated Care Boards and in Strategic Authorities). There's work for us to do to build up the support and guidance we are giving to our local commissioners because this stuff is far from easy. Luckily there are some brilliant people with cross-cutting knowledge of adult social care and housing in councils up and down the country (like our anonymous Torbay colleague) and there's no better time for us to come together and learn from them.

ADASS have been gently but persistently lobbying government colleagues to consider some more inclusive and innovative approaches to both the rules around Disabled Facilities Grants and the design standards for general-needs housing. These might feel like niche or specialist issues but what price will be paid if, amidst all the discussions about Rewiring the State, the needs of people who draw on social care are not front and centre in discussions on housing with Mayors and strategic authorities? Similarly what opportunities will be missed if housing and housing-related support are not integral to Neighbourhood Health? Alongside the above fundamentals ADASS are also very much looking forward to supporting Sir David Pearson, who has been asked to convene a Supported Housing Advisory Panel in response to the 2023 Supported Housing Regulatory and Oversight Act. Ensuring sufficient supply of good quality supported housing is yet more essential work.

In conclusion, there are plenty of things to (sorry) build on as we make every decision about adult social care a decision about housing. The "Time to Act" roadmap for reforming care and support in England that was commissioned by ADASS in April 2023 emphasises housing as a key ingredient of a better future. Many other parts of the roadmap have gained significant traction and now it's time for housing to have its moment.

Further information

If you found this Viewpoint of interest, Phil Holmes will be speaking at the Housing LIN HAPPI Hour on Tuesday, 3 November 2026. More at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Events/From-caring-places-to-neighbourhood-health/>

The Housing LIN also curates dedicated webpages on supported housing and SHROA at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/Supported-Housing/SHROA/>

And finally, Iain McBeath, Senior Advisor for Adult Social Care at DHSC, is an Advisory Board member of the Suitable Housing for our Ageing Population Evidence Exchange (SHAPE) programme. Managed by the Housing LIN, It will be launching a UK-wide SHAPE Fund on 27 October 2026 where localities can apply for up to 3 years' funding to implement some of the key points outlined in this viewpoint. More at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/shape/>

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 15,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently
- provide access to intelligence on the latest funding, research, policy and practice developments
- raise the profile of specialist and supported housing with developers, commissioners and operators, and
- attract business to help and support clients plan, design and operate aspirational housing and services for people of all ages.

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