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 ***Parliamentary Briefing***

 **MEMBERS DEBATE: Graham Simpson MSP**

 **Housing through the lens of Ageing**

 **(Tuesday 29 January 2019)**

**HOUSING THROUGH THE LENS OF AGEING: INTEGRATION, COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY**

**INTRODUCTION**

What role does the home play in older people’s quality of life, and how can we better prepare for and meet the housing needs of an ageing population in Scotland? The University of Stirling and Age Scotland joined forces and worked directly with older people from across the country to find out.

Through a roadshow of consultation events in 11 separate locations[[1]](#footnote-1) in mainly non-urban Scotland, a national survey of over 400 respondents and through the input of a group of trained community researchers, hundreds of older people had their say. They shared what they believed contributes to a more enjoyable life in older age, the role the home plays in that, and how well the Scottish Government and councils are doing in meeting the older population’s housing needs.

**Helping older people to live independently and safely in their own homes for as long as possible is rightly a key focus of Scottish Government policy on housing and support services, and the research showed that many older people across Scotland also believe this to be important.**

**The aim of this project is to better understand the unmet needs of older people, in order to strengthen the Scottish Government’s older people’s housing strategy[[2]](#footnote-2) and to help housing providers supply the improvements, adaptations and services older people truly need and want.**

Housing for older people must take into consideration connections to neighbourhood and community, and look beyond the physical home; this should be done by adopting a lens of ‘ageing in place’, which takes into consideration place, services, amenities and wider social networks as well as what constitutes an appropriate home.

Three key areas emerged that could be improved to better support older people and their housing needs: integration, communication, and community, all of which are intrinsically linked.

# **INTEGRATION**

Before touching on the roles of communication and community in older people’s housing, it’s important to talk about integration – because it is the foundation on which all other issues lie.

**A lack of integration between local authorities, health and social care providers, service users, and everyone in between leads to confusion, poor management, ineffective strategies and systems, and, ultimately, an inferior housing situation for older people.**

*I was in hospital and I wouldn’t get out until my care system had been set up, so I think I was probably in there for three days longer than I needed to be. (Elgin)*

To effect meaningful change in the integration of housing that supports Scotland’s older population, there are a number of areas which still require to be addressed and improved. These include:

## **Engaging with older people**

The most effective way to find out what’s in the best interests of the older people of Scotland is to talk to them directly. Co-producing evidence with older people means being able to tap into their experience, knowledge and skills, and use what’s learned to implement plans and strategies that align with people’s actual needs and wants, rather than presuming to know what these are. It’s important to be inclusive in this process, to ensure all voices are heard – especially those who would be easy to overlook, such as people who are less privileged or people living with a disability.

## **Integration of health and social care**

Everybody’s needs are different, and this only becomes more apparent as people age and are more likely to become frail, vulnerable, disabled, or develop long-term health conditions such as dementia. As the home is where people spend most of their time, a holistic, person centred approach that allows health and social care services to work more seamlessly and effectively with the housing sector and older people in their homes is imperative.

## **Appropriate social housing provision**

Current Scottish housing policy is supportive of social housing and is committed to building 50,000 affordable homes, two thirds of which are for social rent, during the term of this parliament**. Age Scotland welcomes this commitment. However, issues in this area include lack of wardens, lack of choice in smaller, rural locations, and lack of targets for age-friendly properties in planned new-builds.**

## **Early intervention and preventative measures**

Preventative measures, such as home adaptations and energy-efficiency upgrades, are among the most cost-effective ways of ensuring the satisfaction and wellbeing of people in later life. However, along with prohibitive ‘cut-off’ age bands and misinformation, some older people overlook their future needs in favour of their present ones, or simply feel that, for them, preventative measures would take too long to implement, and that they will be ‘fertilising the daisies’ (quote from Kilmarnock participant) before any meaningful benefits are felt.

# **COMMUNICATION**

A major setback for older people looking for support in their lives and housing is poor communication. Many research participants cited **a lack of knowledge about where to turn or who to ask as a reason they hadn’t sought advice in areas of their lives and homes that they needed help with. The stigma of asking for help is another issue that prevents older people from seeking the support they need.**

*My husband was very ill and needed a wheelchair and getting access is very, very difficult and I hadn’t a clue who to ask. (Dumfries)*

There were some crucial areas that were confusing to many participants:

## **Home adaptations and assistive technology**

Home adaptations and assistive technology, such as telecare, are some of the best ways to allow people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. Unfortunately, many people don’t know how to apply for them, find out if they’re eligible, or even what the options available to them are in the first place.

## **Fuel poverty**

Older people are more likely to live in fuel poverty with 39% of older households living in fuel poverty compared to 25% for the population as a whole.[[3]](#footnote-3)This can lead to numerous health issues in older people. This could be because they live on relatively fixed incomes that make it harder to absorb rising fuel costs, or because they’re less able to leave their homes and need the heating on more – or because they’re unaware of the energy-efficiency measures they may be eligible for and how to apply for them.

## **Housing choice**

Many research participants were confused about the housing options and related support services available to them, and there was even more confusion over regional variations. People were unsure where to get information and advice, and concerned about the quality of the information.

## **Traditional support vs. the Internet**

Most older people still rely on traditional means of getting support and information, such as word-of-mouth in their community or voicing concerns to a local councillor. Internet use among older people is increasing, but **only 37% of those aged 75 and over use the internet[[4]](#footnote-4).** The Internet, on the other hand, is seen as untrustworthy to some older people, and they’re reluctant to use it to get the help they need.

# **COMMUNITY**

**When considering the role of the home in older people’s health and wellbeing, it’s imperative to consider not just the bricks and mortar of the buildings themselves,** **but also the external environment those homes are located in – the surrounding community, support networks, nearby amenities, transport options, and everything else that makes people feel part of a community when they’re not *at* home.**

*You can’t isolate housing in one bit without bringing in the community side of it, because it’s all the infrastructure, the roads, the lights, the pavements, the drains, everything. (Kilmarnock)*

## **New builds and “age-friendly” design**

While the majority of older people are satisfied in their homes and wish to remain living in them for as long as possible, there are some who need or want to move – and for them, it’s important that there are suitable options available. **There needs to be an adequate supply of different types of housing across ALL tenures. These need to be flexible so that the home can adapt to meet the changing needs of the person living in it rather than the person having to move house because it is no longer suitable.**

“Age-friendly” design and “lifetime homes” are an important consideration in new builds, as they can allow people to “age in place”, even if they have a long-term condition such as dementia, and stay involved and connected with their local communities.

## **Downsizing**

“Downsizing” or what might be better termed “rightsizing” is a contentious topic among older people, with some expressing an unwillingness to move (even if in unsuitable housing), exasperation at being expected to move or looking to move but having no options. However, this is clearly linked to the desire to stay in local communities and “age in place” in areas with limited options for moving to a more suitable home. Many older people would happily move into a smaller home that’s easier to look after, if they were able to do so while remaining settled in the communities they know and love.

**Public transport, accessibility, and the urban/rural divide**

Many older people, especially in smaller, more rural places, find the lack of public transport available an issue. People in more remote areas were sometimes less

able to connect with their local communities, amenities and services. Social inequality is an issue here, with those on lower incomes being less able to access transport. Innovative schemes led by older people in communities, such as community transport, need to be supported.

## **Repairs and handyperson services**

While services such as Care and Repair are largely looked on favourably because of the tasks they’re able to assist with, there is another less obvious benefit to having a handyperson attend someone’s home: the social connection. Having access to a known-and-trusted service was something several participants acknowledged as positive and able to help alleviate loneliness and social isolation.

**Taking forward good practice**

The report sought to identify examples of innovation and good practice in order to demonstrate what works and the types of initiatives that can make a positive difference to the lives of older people.

The **Scottish Borders Council** was highlighted as an example of a local authority that has harnessed community resilience to improve responses to issues that affect homes and neighbourhoods.

The report also looked at the work of **the Energy Agency in partnership with NHS Ayrshire and Arran** in demonstrating the benefits of domestic energy efficiency improvements such as Solid Wall Insulation (SWI) to the health and wellbeing of fuel poor households. It also looked at the development of lifetime homes in **North Ayrshire**, the importance of preventative support through **good care and repair services** across the country and the innovation taking place in the Highlands through the work of the **Highland’s Small Community Housing Trust**.

**Some notable topics, issues and ideas also discussed in the research:**

* Wanting affordable supported housing for people ***without*** personal care needs but whose mobility is beginning to deteriorate.
* Requiring greater support in areas where there was a lack of wardens, which has impacted who can access sheltered housing and strongly affected people with dementia’s ability to remain at home in particular.
* Specialist short-term housing that could be used while home adaptations were being made for people living with long-term conditions or receiving palliative care.
* How to assist vulnerable people in emergencies and promote resilience in communities, for example in response to flooding and severe weather.
* The long waiting times for major works, especially around energy efficiency.
* Wanting more support around reducing energy costs, including switching suppliers and finding the best deal.
* Creating community spaces, such as community gardens, by working with payback schemes and other organisations.
* Community’s needs not being addressed because of a lack of visibility, possible because those who are marginalised socially, culturally or geographically have less opportunity to contribute to consultations.

# **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Housing at the centre of Health and Social Care Integration** - Housing provision and support for older people is becoming integrated with health and care support needs; work must continue to support housing’s role within the Integrated Joint Boards (IJBs) charged with taking forward health and social care integration.

**Strategic Planning –** The planningprocess should be reviewed to ensure an adequate supply of different types of housing, across **ALL** tenures. “Age-friendly” and “lifetime home” design should be a requirement of new build properties.

**New Housing and “Life time homes”-** We need to scale up the provision of “life time” homes that can be adapted to meet people’s changing circumstances over time, thereby minimising the need to move house due to developing health issues.

There is a need to promote understanding and information regarding dementia- and “age friendly” features, both internally in the home and externally in the environment.

**Information and Advice** – People should have greater clarity about how to access the range the range of support and information services available. Lines of communication for information and advice, especially in areas of energy efficiency, should be made clear.

**Adaptations** – Adaptations were highlighted as one of the main areas that supported people living at home for longer. There is a need to think of more cohesive support and processes for adaptations in the home and environment (including within the planning system)

**Preventative Support –** There is a need to address the fact that preventative measures may be hindered by confusion over cost, eligibility and a cultural reluctance or stigma to apply for help, whether this be for home insulation measures or adaptations to the home. Availability of services, such as **Care and Repair and handyperson services**, should be consistent across council areas.

**Fuel Poverty/Energy Efficiency** - Fuel poverty and energy efficiency were shown to be key areas of anxiety and worry for older people. Information and advice on these issues should be clearer and support schemes longer in duration.

**About Age Scotland**

Age Scotland is Scotland’s leading charity advocating on behalf of older people. Our vision is a Scotland where everyone can love later life. Our mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people in Scotland can enjoy better later lives.

Age Scotland’s Strategic Aims are to promote positive views of ageing and later life; help older people to be as well as they can be; and to tackle loneliness and isolation.

**For more information:**

Contact the Age Scotland Policy and Communication team on policycomms@agescotland.org.uk or 0333 323 2400

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1. Consultation events were held in Hawick, Aviemore, Wick, Dumfries, Elgin, Kilmarnock, Aberdeenshire, Taynuilt, Oban, Tongue and Stornoway. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Scottish Government’s Housing Strategy for Older People, Age, Home and Community was launched in 2011 and the refresh of the strategy was published in August 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Scottish House Condition Survey 2017,The Scottish Government. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Age, Home and Community, Annual Monitoring 2018, Communities Analysis Division, The Scottish Government. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)