

All Party Parliamentary Group for Ageing and Older People
Housing our ageing population

Monday 14th March 2016 4pm-5pm
Committee Room 2a, House of Lords

Present:

Parliamentarians:

Rachael Maskell MP, Baroness Masham and Peter Bottomley MP.

Chair of the meeting:

Baroness Greengross.

Guest Speakers:

Sue Adams OBE, Care & Repair England; Jane Ashcroft, CBE, Anchor Housing; Jean Hewitt, Habinteg; Jenny Allen, National Housing Federation; Ellen Lebethe, Lambeth Pensioners Action Group.

Apologies:

Nusrat Ghani MP, Eleanor Laing MP, Dave Anderson MP, Baroness Gardner, Sarah Champion MP, Mark Prisk MP, Kevin Hollinrake MP, The Bishop of St Albans, Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville, Clive Betts MP, Graham Brady MP and Alison Thewliss MP.

Introduction:

Baroness Greengross welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the running order.

Guest Speakers:

Baroness Greengross introduced the first speaker, Sue Adams OBE, Chief Executive of Care & Repair England.

Sue Adams OBE – Sue started the discussion by talking about where people lived – she explained that the majority of older people (96%) live in general housing, 43% of all housing was lived in by those over the age of 55yrs, most are owner occupiers (76%) and that there was a myth that all pensioners were well off. She went on to say that 2 million older people were living in non-decent homes, and that the majority (78%) were homeowners. She added that there was a need to be realistic about the alternative housing options that older people had, given that there are 9.5 million older households and half a million specialist housing units 77% of which is for rent and there was generally more choice for social housing tenants as opposed to owner/occupiers, particularly for at the lower end of the housing market.

Sue explained that one element of Care & Repair's work was to improve the provision of impartial information and advice on housing options for older people. She added that they had a partnership with the Elderly Advice Council, the main national provider of such I&A, but also noting that the big challenge was the lack of suitably designed housing stock for an older population.

Baroness Greengross introduced the second speaker, Jane Ashcroft CBE, Chief Executive of Anchor.

Jane Ashcroft CBE – Jane introduced the work of Anchor, explaining the types of housing they provided. She commented that no one model of housing was right for an ageing population and commented that there needed to be certainty around future housing policy. Baroness Greengross commented that many people became disabled as they got older, so suitably designed housing was extremely important.

Baroness Greengross introduced the next speaker, Jean Hewitt, Director of Centre for Accessible Environments at Habinteg.

Jean Hewitt – Jean reiterated that with age comes the increase in the likelihood of disability, however people like to stay in their own homes if they can. She added that only 6% of older households lived in supported/extra care housing, so there was a need to look to mainstream housing to meet our needs as we get older.

Jean explained that a “lifetime home” had a number of criteria, such as accessibility, sustainability and good value. Lifetime homes were future-proofed, with features such as a ground floor accessible toilet, stronger walls to be able to support grab rails, wider doors, window handles at an appropriate height and space for step-free access if required.

Jean referred to the toolkit that Habinteg had put together to help local authority planning teams to assess the need for lifetime homes in their area.

Baroness Greengross introduced the fourth speaker, Jenny Allen from the National Housing Federation.

Jenny Allen – Jenny explained the work of the National Housing Federation and said that there were a number of innovative ideas to build upon when approaching housing for an older population, adding that there was an increasing awareness across the sector. She commented that there were examples of extra care housing being provided by housing associations however issues around social care funding was holding progress back, and there was uncertainty around caps on housing benefit affecting people in sheltered housing.

She explained that it was important for housing associations to have access to land to build on, and they had been doing work with NHS Trusts around potential land to build good quality houses on.

Baroness Greengross introduced Ellen Lebethe, a local housing champion and Chair of the Lambeth Pensioners Action Group, the final speaker for the meeting.

Ellen Lebethe – Ellen commented that people were living longer in their homes, and that if they were disabled they spent even more time at home, so needed homes that were decent, warm and with suitable adaptations to be able to live independently. She explained that in Lambeth, there were gaps in housing policy, and that the needs of older people were rarely mentioned in local strategies for housing.

Ellen explained that the older people’s group she was involved in, Lambeth Older Peoples’ Alliance met every three months and was made up of representatives from Lambeth Community and Voluntary groups in the borough, sharing good practice to take back to their groups. She added that they also referred to reports from Care & Repair, Age UK and the LGA when advising their local authority. They responded to consultations and research, making sure that the voices of older people were heard.

Baroness Greengross invited questions and comments from the members and observers in the room.

An observer commented that he lived in sheltered housing and that many of the 500,000 people who lived in that sort of accommodation did so because of the security it provided, yet wardens were being cut around the country.

Baroness Masham commented that members of the Crossbench and opposition had spoken out against suitable housing being sold off and the need to safeguard it, in the Housing Bill currently in the House of Lords.

An observer from the charity Aspire stated that accessible housing was important for people with spinal injuries and that protections needed to be in place when selling off specialist and high value council housing, to protect this sort of housing stock. Sue Adams commented that not only was the country not building suitable housing for the future, but was also in danger of losing what was already available.

There was a discussion about house building, and comments that it was more profitable for builders to build lots of small houses than accessible housing. It was suggested that perhaps if links were made with smaller/medium sized builders things would improve, but national regulations would also help.

Ellen Lebethe commented that often older people who would be living in the houses were not consulted about their needs or what sort of house they would like to live in. She added that many older people wanted to downsize but did not want to move out of the area due to lack of suitable housing available.

Baroness Greengross thanked the speakers and group for attending and for their input. There was no further business and the meeting was closed.