



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Accommodation for older people in Wales - The foundations for the future

Research Summary

SJLG 07/07 RS

Introduction

In recognition that the changing demographic profile of Wales are creating an ageing society, this study has aimed to help ensure that future policy stands the greatest chance of guiding accommodation provision and associated medical, care and support services for older people in a way that meets their age-related requirements. It follows publication by the Welsh Assembly Government of the first ever strategy for older people and a recommendation from the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee that a baseline study be carried out into specialist housing for older people.

In order to establish the most appropriate forms of accommodation to meet the future age related requirements of older people in Wales, the research aimed to:

- assess the current levels, types, locations and condition of all accommodation provision for older people in Wales for all sectors;
- assess the current provision of medical, care and support services provided to older people in general needs housing;
- evaluate whether current accommodation for older people is meeting their age-related requirements and assessing the changes in demand for different forms of provision;
- provide an appraisal of how the accommodation, medical, care and support requirements of older people are likely to change over coming decades; and
- provide an appraisal of how the spectrum of existing accommodation and related medical, care and support services will need to respond.

The consultants did this by conducting:

- a review of the definitions of accommodation for older people in Wales;
- a detailed survey of providers of accommodation for older people in Wales which was sent to 1,782 valid addresses and received a 31% response rate;
- 19 in-depth case study visits to schemes or homes representing all types of accommodation for older people;
- an analysis of demographic data to forecast the future need for housing, care and support;
- a review of literature on the historical development of accommodation for older people in Wales and on the housing aspirations of older people; and
- 12 interviews of key stakeholders to enhance the final recommendations.

Historically, sheltered housing for rent dominated provision of housing for older people from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s. In the 1980s, some schemes became more difficult to let, the average age of tenants increased,

leading to more support needed for this part of the population, and there were increasing variations in the services offered.

In conventional sheltered schemes considerable effort has been put into modernising the role of the warden. Alongside this change, extra-care schemes began to emerge, with a marked increase in funding bids in recent years. There has been growth in the provision of Care and Repair services to support older owner-occupiers.

However, these developments have occurred without clear definition of purpose for the various forms of provision and with little strategic direction for the whole system that will embrace services for those in general housing, through the various forms of sheltered housing, to residential and nursing home care.

This synthesis report brings together the key evidence from all strands of the project and draws out conclusions and recommendations.

Key findings

Existing provision of specialist accommodation for older people

Specialist accommodation for older people is varied but is dominated by conventional sheltered housing, which was the main form of accommodation for almost half of the survey respondents. Demand for all forms of sheltered housing was generally reported to be strong but with some individual schemes being hard to let. The strength of demand was found to arise from the lack of alternative accommodation. Sheltered housing was being offered as the only option to people over 55 years of age and seeking accommodation. In addition, the strongest feature of many schemes was found to be location. A good location would sustain a scheme that had little else to commend it in terms of design, facilities or flat size.

The evidence on all types of existing provision shows:

- There were almost three times as many flats as bungalows in schemes, but bungalows were more common in designated housing than across all categories of accommodation.
- One-bedroom units were the most common type of accommodation, accounting for almost two-thirds of stock. However, 12% of units across Wales were bedsits, which are often the least favourite and therefore hardest type of unit to let.
- Almost half of units had standard access, and over a third met Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales standards. Nursing homes and residential

care had the highest proportion of units meeting these higher standards. Accessibility was worst in conventional sheltered housing and designated housing.

- Almost a fifth of specialist units had telecare installed.
- In general, total staff hours increased in line with higher levels of care, with designated housing having the lowest average hours per resident (1 hour per week) and nursing homes the highest (34 hours per week).

Current and future demand for accommodation

The resident population in specialist accommodation was generally in the oldest age bands, was female and was more likely to experience mobility problems. Overall, the population had the following characteristics:

- In general, the oldest populations were found in settings with higher levels of care. Designated housing and conventional sheltered housing had more evenly distributed populations by age.
- 62% of all households were single females, 25% were single males and 12% were couples.
- 36% of all residents had mobility problems, which was the most common type of impairment. Mental illness and dementia were the two least common types of impairment across all respondents. However, dementia was reported to affect almost 1,500 residents, over 10%...

Projections for older people show:

- The number of people in Wales over 65 is projected to rise from 518,000 in 2004 to 885,000 in 2044, an increase of 71%. However, the number of people aged 85 or more will rise by 217% to 190,000.
- By 2026, households headed by an older person will account for a third of all households in Wales.
- The proportion of social rented sector tenants aged 65 or more will decline from 26% to 21% from 2001 to 2026, as the current cohort of owner occupiers grow older but continue to live in private housing.
- Despite expected improvements in health, people aged 85 or over will still be most in need of additional care and support needs in future.

Emerging aspirations for older people include: more space; greater tenure choice; higher degrees of privacy; security from crime and intrusion; easy or affordable maintenance; access to private transport; access to community services; and opportunities to participate in the shaping of facilities and services that impact upon their quality of life.

Implications for the future supply of accommodation

The increasing number of older people and their changing aspirations mean that the current level of specialist accommodation and the services provided will both have to adapt to meet the demand from future generations of older people.

Increased male life expectancy means that demand for provision for couples is likely to increase, as will that for enhanced forms of sheltered housing as the age at allocation increases. The future viability of extra care will depend on its capacity to meet the changing aspirations of older people including those relating to lifestyle.

The low occurrence of dementia in certain types of the surveyed schemes, particularly extra-care in sheltered housing, implies unmet demand for the condition among these types of specialist accommodation.

Although this project has concentrated on specialist accommodation for older people, the majority of older people live in their own homes. In future, levels of homeownership amongst older people are projected to rise, met by a likely increased demand for outright or shared ownership as a form of tenure in specialist accommodation. For other homeowners, problems will be most significant for those who live in low value or older properties, or those on the lowest incomes, in the poorest health and in the oldest age groups.

Recommendations

The report ends with 10 key recommendations for improving the planning, commissioning and delivery of specialist accommodation for older people. Overall, more needs to be done to ensure that specialist accommodation for older people is planned and commissioned according to the needs and aspirations of these people. The use of a definitional matrix of specialist forms of accommodation for older people is encouraged, along with targets for provision of various categories of accommodation.

Other recommendations consider:

- the role and management of designated housing;
- letting of sheltered housing to inappropriate groups;
- option appraisals for all social rented sheltered housing;
- the role of high dependency models of extra-care;
- the community development role of scheme-specific staff;
- how private developers can share in meeting the needs of older owner occupiers; and

- investment in their homes by older owner occupiers and those approaching old age