

# Policy Position Paper

## Housing design, adaptations and support (England)

April 2016

**New and existing homes need to be adaptable to the changing needs of an ageing population to promote both independence and self-determination,**

### Key issues

Poor and inaccessible housing conditions have profound implications for our ageing population. There were 2.3 million older people registered as disabled in 2002 and this is set to increase to 4.6 million by 2041<sup>1</sup>. Yet only 5 per cent of homes have the four essential features that would make them accessible to a person with mobility problems (level access to main entrance, flush threshold to main entrance, WC at entry level and circulation space)<sup>2</sup>.

The majority (93 per cent) of older people live in general needs housing and many would prefer to continue living independently at home, wherever possible. This can be difficult because increasing numbers are living in sub-standard housing that requires adaptation to allow the delivery of care and support. Government figures show that 19.9 per cent of the homes occupied by older people (60+) in England fail the decent homes standard (just over 1.7 million households)<sup>3</sup>. The estimated cost to the NHS of poor housing is £1.4bn a year<sup>4</sup>, whereas home modifications that defer entry into residential care can save £20,000 per person. Home Improvement Agencies and local handy person services help thousands of older people to have essential repairs and adaptations carried out, but are only able to reach a fraction of those who need help. A survey of local authorities in 2014 found that the number of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) fell by 5,500<sup>5</sup> and many are struggling to sustain adaptations services.

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<sup>1</sup> PSSRU (2006). Future Demand for Long-Term Care, 2002 to 2041. Available online at <http://www.pssru.ac.uk/pdf/dp2330.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Available online:

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/335753/EHS\\_Profile\\_of\\_English\\_housing\\_2012.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335753/EHS_Profile_of_English_housing_2012.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Survey of English Housing 2013 Table DA3203 (SST3.4, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> Roys, M. Davidson, M. Nicol, Garrett, H (2014) The real cost of poor housing. BRE. Available online at: <https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/pdf/87741-Cost-of-Poor-Housing-Briefing-Paper-v3.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Guardian (7/8/14) <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/07/liz-kendall-labour-fund-nhs-savings-health-social-care>

The Government has increased spending on the (DFG) from £220m in 2015-16 to £394m in 2016-17<sup>6</sup>. This is a significant increase in funding for adaptations. It forms part of the Department of Health Better Care Fund, which provides an opportunity to develop preventative services that bring together housing, health and social care. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has commissioned Foundations (the coordinating body for Home Improvement Agencies) to look at how the delivery of the DFG can be improved.

Grants for home improvements for homeowners were completely cut in 2010/11, but the issue of low income homeowners struggling with disrepair is still a pressing issue. The loss of the Supporting People funding in 2015 is having a broader impact on all housing support services including those providing access to home improvements.

Problems with the current housing stock demonstrate the importance of improving the design of future homes. One approach is to seek the adoption of the Lifetime Homes Standard (LHS) in both the social and private sectors. The LHS contains a set of basic design features that would make homes easier to adapt and therefore provide significant social and economic benefits over the long term. In October 2015 the Government introduced new building regulations to include a higher accessibility standard for new homes, based on the LHS (known as category 2). However, this new standard is optional and will require local authorities to assess local needs and apply a viability test to all new developments. As well as building homes that comply with higher standard we also need housing that goes beyond this and appeals to existing and future generations of older people. New homes also need to make it easier to install and maintain assistive and smart home technology that can greatly benefit older and disabled people.

## Public policy proposals

- Local authorities should work with housing organisations and Health and Well Being Boards to commission adaptations services that reduce the demand on the NHS as the result of falls, accidents and a poor home environment.
- Older patients should automatically be offered practical help to adapt their homes as soon as they enter hospital to facilitate discharge and to reduce the risk of patients having to return.
- The Government should ensure that the additional allocation to the Disabled Facilities Grant reduces the time that older people have to wait for help and is deployed to improve the delivery and efficiency of the scheme.
- Where possible home adaptations need to be offered as part of a comprehensive independent living service to ensure that older people are offered choices that fit their individual needs, circumstances and aspirations.
- The Government should protect the requirement on local authorities to offer free adaptations under £1,000, without means testing. This threshold should be increased to £6,500<sup>7</sup> (the average cost of an adaptation). Combined with a

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<sup>6</sup> Available online at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/490559/BCF\\_Policy\\_Framework\\_2016-17.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/490559/BCF_Policy_Framework_2016-17.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Available online at: <http://careandrepair-england.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Briefing-1-final-with-PHE.pdf>

simplified system of assessment this would speed up the delivery of work and reduce costs to the health and social care.

- Housing associations should continue to have a key role in the development of housing support services, e.g. home improvement services that are available to the local community across tenures.
- All new homes in the public and private sector should be built to higher accessibility standards. The Lifetime Homes Standard should be a core requirement of the building regulations, but in the meantime the Government's revised accessibility standard should be applied to all new homes
- Regeneration initiatives and the refurbishment of existing housing should incorporate elements of the Lifetime Homes Standard wherever practical.
- Better housing design needs to be linked to planning strategies that deliver age friendly environments and infrastructure for older people. Government reform of planning regulations should incorporate this approach.
- Age friendly design principles should be applied to new town developments, garden cities and all other new settlements.
- There should be further investment in Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) to coordinate repairs and adaptations.
- Housing advice and information on equipment, aids, adaptations and housing options should be promoted before retirement to allow forward planning, greater choice and to facilitate independent living. There should be a national review of how we fund and deliver adaptations and repairs for older homeowners, including the deployment of financial products, loans and grants, particularly for the most vulnerable living in the poorest conditions.

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