

# Searching for a new model of 'housing with care' to meet the needs of ageing

**This project is looking at new types of accommodation that could boost well-being and independence among people from diverse groups wishing to grow old in an active and socially inclusive manner.**

**M**any people don't see care homes as their preferred option in older age, so there's definitely a push for more age friendly and enabling environments,' says Dr Simon Evans, senior research fellow at the University of Worcester.

Dr Evans is leading a two year project with the universities of Kent and Bristol, housing association Housing 21, and the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) into the provision of the type of accommodation that fits this bill – 'housing with care' – and the part played by social care services.

The latest estimates suggest that there are now over 1000 dedicated extra care housing schemes and retirement villages offering independent living in self-contained accommodation. However, they have varying combinations and levels of leisure, health, domestic, and personal care facilities and/or services included in the package.

'Extra care housing evolved from sheltered housing, but has a larger range of care available, and a greater focus on independent living and active ageing,' explains Dr Evans. 'The activities depend on the size of the scheme, but can include gyms, saunas, restaurants and libraries. Many have facilities that are open to the

wider public, both to generate income, but also to root them in the wider community,' he adds.

But it's still a relatively new concept, so it's far from clear what's out there; which approaches and combinations work best; or whether it can offer a viable and cost effective alternative to residential or community care.

It's not only local authorities that have a statutory duty to develop strategies for housing older people, amid increasingly constrained budgets, who will want to know the answers to these questions, he says.

'This is an increasingly customer driven business, so providers want to know what people's preferences are, and what enhances their quality of life, while older people and their relatives want to know what their options are, and that information is currently not easy to pin down,' suggests Dr Evans.

To begin with, the team reviewed the international published evidence, both to bring together current thinking and good practice for wider dissemination among commissioners and social workers, and to help inform the second phase of their research – a scoping survey.



*'We expect to find a complex range of commissioning and delivery arrangements out there. But how well the different providers and elements of the scheme work together will be a crucial aspect of whether care is effective and efficient.'*

Dr Simon Evans

This will be distributed to a selection of local authorities in England in a bid to gather a representative sample (30 per cent) of housing with care provision around the country. Recipients will be asked how they commission and deliver services; what is being provided; and by, and to whom.

The final stage of the project will involve an in-depth analysis of different types of provision in 10 local authorities, and include interviews with residents, relatives, social workers, providers, and local authority commissioners, as well as an economic evaluation.

#### **Location important to wellbeing**

Issues such as the provision of meals; the opportunities for social interaction, which can be enhanced by a building's design and facilities; and location are all key to the health and wellbeing of older people, says Dr Evans.

'Often, fleeting social interaction is just as important for a sense of belonging as deeper friendships,' he explains. 'And, if there is no decent public transport or the scheme is not in an accessible

neighbourhood, there are implications for social life and physical health.'

How well facilities meet the needs of diverse groups is another key aspect of the research. 'Men are often a minority, largely because women live longer, and there's a lot of prejudice around dementia,' he says.

Whatever the arrangements, it's the relationship between the different providers and elements of the scheme that will be critical to success, he suggests.

The findings will inform sets of recommendations for all those involved. These will be distributed through the 40,000 strong Housing LIN membership, at relevant conferences, academic and professional journals, and through the advisory panel, which includes representatives from a range of sectors – from service users to building contractors.

'A one size fits all model is very unlikely,' he concludes. 'And with the move to personalised care, personal preferences and choices will assume much greater importance.'

**Project:** [ASSET: Adult Social Services environments and settings](#)

**Lead:** [Dr Simon Evans \(simon.evans@worc.ac.uk\)](mailto:simon.evans@worc.ac.uk)

**Institution:** [University of Worcester](#)

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