

This series of briefings summarises work undertaken by the Centre for Policy on Ageing on

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND OLDER PEOPLE

CHOICE IN LATER LIFE LIVING ARRANGEMENTS - A SEMINAR SERIES

Background

As a new generation moves into older age, people are beginning to give more thought to the types of living arrangements and choices available to them. For some years government policy has favoured the 'staying put' option, providing support in people's own homes. Arguing the case for 'staying put', policymakers make much of people's wish to stay in their own homes and to retain their independence and autonomy in that setting for as long as possible. There is an inference in this that independence could not be maintained in other forms of living arrangements. But many older people are already making positive choices in favour of alternative arrangements.

People who have made alternative choices are generally satisfied with their decision to move and with their new living arrangements which might include sheltered/retirement housing or residential care. The idea that some older people may actively want to move to live in association with other similarly persuaded individuals is rarely acknowledged or supported. In many cases the ability to make choices depends on the income and assets of the individuals concerned. Those who are both in need of care and dependent on needs-assessed and means-tested support have little option but to concur with the prevailing policies of local social services departments.

Outcomes

CPA invited small groups of people from diverse disciplines to debate selected topics around living arrangements in later life. Each topic was introduced to the group by a paper from a researcher experienced in the field, followed by responses from two further researchers. The aim was to bring together different approaches, disciplines and opinions to generate fresh thinking and innovative policy solutions. Participants included experts in the fields of gerontology, demography, social geography and social psychology, researchers, planners, policymakers, architects, major service providers and older people.

Seminar 1

- The meanings attributed to notions of 'independence', 'own home' and 'autonomy'.
- The extent to which such notions can be 'operationalised' in a variety of settings.

Seminar 2

- Genuine choice, the range and adequacy of living arrangements available to older people (e.g. own home, co-housing, sheltered/retirement housing, care home).

Seminar 3

- Patterns of mobility in the years up to and beyond retirement - how far is the idea of a home for life consonant with the real experience of current generations of older people.
- The impact of demographic changes over the next 20 years on choices in older age (e.g. the growth in the number of single person households; the increase in numbers of ethnic minority elders).

Seminar 4

- The relationship between current policies on long-term care (provision and funding) and the wishes and expectations of older people themselves - how far is choice constrained by government policy or how far is it consonant with it?

Seminar 5

- Opportunities for older people to participate in choosing and designing their future living arrangements - in terms of who they choose to live with and the environment of where they live.

Seminar 6

- The role to be played by designers and architects in developing living arrangements which suit the heterogeneous needs and preferences of older people.

These original papers together with the responses and discussion points from the seminars formed the basis of a book under the unified theme of 'living arrangements in later life' which is a valuable resource for students of social and housing policy, together with planners and policy makers. A national conference was held to ensure the wider dissemination of the outcomes of these debates.

Publication:

Sumner, K. (2002), *Our Homes, Our Lives: choice in later life living arrangements*, London: Centre for Policy on Ageing. £15.00 + p&p, ISBN 1901097854. Available from Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN Tel: +44 (0)845 458 9910.

THE ROLE OF PRIVATE SHELTERED HOUSING IN PROVIDING FOR THE NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE

Background

It has been estimated that around 5 per cent of people over the age of 65 live in sheltered housing of one sort or another with a further 5 per cent living in residential/nursing homes. With the growth in absolute numbers of older people and with changing living patterns, the number of people in supported accommodation of some kind is growing and likely to continue to grow over the next twenty years and beyond. At the same time, the distribution of resources which older people have at their disposal is likely to change with more people being owner occupiers and being in receipt of occupational pensions but with others having little to rely on over and above the state pension, income support and housing benefit. The market is thus likely to segment and in this context, the role of private sheltered housing is going to continue to be a significant and increasingly important player.

Private sheltered housing is not currently a public policy issue of concern to the government whose focus is primarily to do with poverty and pensioner incomes, health and social care, and what is generally known as 'social housing' (local authority and housing association) for those on low incomes or in poor health. There is, however, a persuasive argument that suggests that it should be. Where people remain housed in increasingly inappropriate conditions as they grow older (e.g. dilapidated accommodation, hard to maintain gardens, non-accessible design), they are likely to make greater claims on health and social services.

While a great deal of research has been conducted on *social* housing, there is relatively little on the part to be played by private provision or on the attitudes and expectations of people moving into it. This review draws attention to this imbalance and seeks to draw attention to areas where further investigation could be fruitfully undertaken.

The report covers:

- the demographic profile of older people now and up to 2030 showing how numbers are increasing and in what proportions;
- the socio-economic profile of older people looking at the levels and sources of their

incomes, and the outlook for different sections of the older population particularly in relation to housing;

- developments within the broad field of housing for older people focusing particularly on the development of sheltered housing and contrasting private and public sectors;
- a review of the changing attitudes and expectations to, and preferences in, living arrangements in relation to demographic, cultural and socio-economic issues;
- public policy relating to housing, health and social care for older people and the role of sheltered housing;
- planning, housing policy and sheltered housing.

Summary points

- public policy relating to specialised housing has focused on the social housing sector;
- public policy consideration of the general housing needs of older people and the needs of older owner occupiers has tended to be neglected;
- the Government's strategic framework, *Quality and choice for older people's housing*, is a welcome correction to this neglect;
- ambiguity about the role to be played by sheltered housing in meeting the spectrum of needs and wishes of older people should be clarified;
- private sheltered housing for older owner occupiers is likely to be an increasingly popular option;
- little is known about the impact that the continued growth of private sheltered housing might have on related policy and service areas (especially on community-based care services);
- if private sheltered housing is to be enabled to make a positive contribution to the well-being of older people, planning authorities need to consider whether the constraints imposed by planning requirements are unnecessary and should be changed.

Publication:

Dalley, G (2001) *Owning independence in retirement: the role and benefits of private sheltered housing*, London: Centre for Policy on Ageing. £15.00 + p&p. ISBN 1901097757. Available from Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN Tel: +44 (0)845 458 9910.

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