

ERoSH response to Help the Aged report “*Nobody’s listening – the impact of floating support on older people living in sheltered housing*” February 2009

1. ERoSH is aware of the strength of feeling by many existing sheltered tenants regarding the increasingly widespread withdrawal of the resident warden service, the main focus of the Help the Aged report. We therefore welcome this report, commissioned by Help the Aged, as it draws government, public and media attention to these and related issues.
2. There is a curious mismatch between the conclusions (of the researchers) and the recommendations (of Help the Aged). In particular, the conclusions summarised in the Executive Summary on page 7 state that “*We consider that it would be unrealistic to argue for a return to the resident warden model in all localities and for all providers... resources are finite... some people may not want, need or value... support*”. Yet the recommendations by Help the Aged (page 9) state that “*residential wardens should be retained if alternative arrangements are unsatisfactory for tenants living in existing schemes... residents should be able to decide by majority vote whether the warden should be retained*”. We consider this recommendation is unrealistic and unwise.
3. There is no reference to the CSHS Code of Practice regarding standards of service and practice in sheltered housing (though the ARHM Code of Practice is referred to, page 12).
4. **We agree with the recommendations of Help the Aged that:**
 - a. The government should immediately carry out a review of policy on sheltered housing, involving residents (and see paragraph 8 below).
 - b. There should be greater support and funding for the adoption of the hub and spoke model.
 - c. The Tenant Services Authority should have a clear role regarding standards for consultation and engagement. The roles of the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government Ombudsman need to be clarified to establish where residents go to pursue complaints about unsatisfactory housing support services.
 - d. Older people must have access to appropriate advice and advocacy.
 - e. Providers should offer greater clarity regarding the types of sheltered housing and support available.
 - f. Commissioners and providers should manage change better in the light of limited resources.
 - g. Supporting People, district councils and providers should all agree the approach to change and engagement – good practice guidance is needed.
5. **We agree with the researchers that:** “*changes may be needed (to support services) and should be carried out with regard to due process, managed sensitively and over an appropriate timeframe following effective information and consultation.*”
6. These responses (in 4 and 5 above) to the Help the Aged report are based on the following **ERoSH position on the resident warden** issue:
 - a. Many residents are pleased with changes that have been made to their support services, including a move away from resident warden services.

- b. The withdrawal of resident wardens by some support providers have had a number of “drivers”, including: recruitment difficulties in attracting resident wardens; the European working time directive preventing staff being on-call at night; low levels of need in some schemes due to historical allocations policies; inequitable work loads; cover difficulties; difficulties in maintaining professional boundaries.
 - c. Support services need to move away from routine five times weekly visiting, a model of service delivery often offered by resident wardens, and one that can sometimes be institutionalising and wasteful of public funds. Patterns of support service should be tailor made and based on individual assessed need, not on the traditional one-size-fits-all approach. This fits well with the introduction of support plans for tenants following the implementation of the Supporting People programme in 2003.
 - d. We favour hub and spoke models of support service, in which some sheltered housing schemes are used as a base for the delivery of support and other services to people who need them, including tenants in schemes and those in the community.
 - e. ERoSH is not in favour of models of support that favour only floating support as they fail to capitalise on the potential of sheltered housing schemes as a hub and resource to the wider community.
 - f. We favour better use of assistive technology (eg. to address access problems and routine checking), a strategic approach to sheltered housing allocations and greatly improved information, consultation and engagement with tenants. It is no coincidence that the Help the Aged report noted a link between satisfied tenants and good communication / information by landlords/support providers.
7. ERoSH has positioned itself publicly in this debate in:
- a. An article written by our Director of Policy, jointly with a policy officer from the National Housing Federation, published in Inside Housing, March 2007.
 - b. A statement to Communities and Local Government Department in August 2007 (quoted in full as Appendix B in the Help the Aged report).
 - c. A position statement in January 2008 (referred to on page 40 in the Help the Aged report).
 - d. A contribution by our Director of Policy to a Radio 4 *You and Yours* programme in March 2008.
 - e. A letter from our Director of Policy published in Inside Housing in October 2008.
8. We understand that Baroness Andrews has agreed to consider a review of sheltered housing, along the lines recommended by this report. ERoSH is delighted if this is the case and would welcome an invitation to join this review.

Written by Imogen Parry, Director of Policy, ERoSH. 18 February 2009

Email imogen.parry@btopenworld.com for copies of the references referred to in paragraph 7 or for other background information on the points made in this paper.

See www.shelteredhousing.org for more information about ERoSH.