

EROSH position statement on resident wardens¹ and their alternatives

1 EROSH position on sheltered housing and the removal of scheme managers / resident wardens

General position on sheltered housing

- EROSH promotes the benefits of sheltered housing and related support services – to the people who live in sheltered housing and to the wider community
- Recent research for the government demonstrated that for every pound spent on older people living in sheltered housing, the financial benefit alone was over four pounds through reduced need for admission to care homes and hospital
- In addition to these financial benefits, sheltered housing also promotes well-being and prevents anxiety, depression, falls, social isolation and more.

2 The changing role of sheltered housing and sheltered housing staff

The original concept of sheltered housing was that it was for relatively fit and active older people who, when they became frail, would move onto residential and nursing care. That has all changed since governments have encouraged people to stay at home, which is what most people prefer. Nowadays people move into sheltered housing at a much later age than originally intended and stay there or move in while relatively young but ‘age in place’. Therefore, many need more care and support than before, and this has implications for:

- Staffing - staff need to be trained, supervised and supported in order to be able to work with frail tenants and those with complex needs, providing a professional, consistent, quality service
- Buildings - many were not designed for people with mobility difficulties and do not meet modern day aspirations, eg bedsits, no lifts, poor locations.

Since 2003 change has been faster and sometimes without sufficient explanation to tenants of the reasons why or involvement in shaping the changes.

3 Our position on the removal of resident² wardens/Scheme Managers

There are several ways of ensuring that people who live in sheltered housing have the support that they need. The most common way for many years has been the resident warden who usually, but not always, checked every tenant every morning between Monday and Friday. This approach has been changing for several reasons:

1. The European Working Time Directive now prevents doctors, wardens and others from working very long hours – which is safer for patients and tenants, and fairer for staff
2. Recruitment difficulties in attracting resident staff
3. Low levels of need in some schemes due to historical allocation policies. Survey after survey has shown that between a quarter and a third of tenants move into sheltered housing with no support needs at all, they just want to be near family or

¹ EROSH prefers to use the job title ‘scheme manager’ as this conveys the professional role more accurately than the original term of ‘warden’.

² Scheme managers / resident wardens live on-site. On-site scheme managers / on-site wardens may or may not live on site: they may live nearby and usually work with only one scheme. Some scheme managers are not employed to work on specific sites, but may cover a few schemes in an area.

to downsize or to have better accommodation. Many of these tenants therefore find the daily call intrusive and wasteful of either their own money or the government's money

4. There are increasing numbers of older people in the population as a whole and a need to more fairly share finite resources into the community, not just support those who live in sheltered housing (only seven per cent of older people)
5. Improvements in remote monitoring / out of hours / mobile services by community alarm centres
6. The traditional five times a week daily check on all residents does not give people choice or focus on what they actually need or want
7. Resident staff can sometimes have greater difficulty than non-resident staff in maintaining clear professional boundaries.

In essence, the EROSH position is that the residency of staff is irrelevant now, due primarily to the European Working Time Directive. And not everyone who moves to sheltered housing wants and needs a scheme manager / resident warden. This model can be wasteful of public resources and unfair to other older people living in the community who would benefit from the services of a visiting warden, or floating support. People living in sheltered housing who need and want a support service should be able to access this via floating support or 'hub and spoke' models, perhaps by being offered a menu of services, high, medium and low, with related charging levels.

4 Alternatives to the resident warden approach – the hub and spoke model

- EROSH promotes the use of sheltered housing schemes as a resource or hub for the wider community as well as individual tenants
- Teams of staff based in selected schemes can deliver support services to those living in sheltered housing and to those in the community. There are powerful examples, for instance in Mendip Somerset and in Calderdale, West Yorkshire, of tenants who were initially very against such changes, who are now extremely happy and see the changes as an improvement on the previous resident warden service
- Social, health, educational and other activities in the scheme should be developed and open to those in the wider community as well as to those on the scheme
- Schemes can be used as an office base for dedicated home care teams or for other workers delivering services to those in the locality.

5 Alternatives to the resident warden approach - Floating Support

- EROSH promotes the development of floating support to older and vulnerable people living in the community in addition to support services being offered to those living in sheltered housing who have assessed needs.
- Staffing of floating support may come from support staff based in sheltered housing schemes if extra capacity has been released through the cessation of routine five times weekly contact and creation of a genuinely needs led service
- We do not agree however with models which favour only floating support as this fails to capitalise on the potential of sheltered housing schemes as a hub and resource to the wider community.

For further information about EROSH, our aims, campaigns and publications visit www.shelteredhousing.org or email info@shelteredhousing.org or tel: 01249 654249.