

Older Person's Housing Strategy *2023-2025*



Introduction

Older person's housing is no different to the other homes we provide in that our priority is to deliver affordable homes of exceptional quality that people want to live in. Equally, we recognise that as people's circumstances change, a range of support and adaptations in the home may be required to maintain independent living. This strategy sets out how we will provide older person's housing that is modern, inclusive, and able to meet a wide range of physical and social needs throughout every stage of life.

The strategy is a core component of our commitment as a long-term custodian of the communities we serve. We recognise that some individuals require additional support to live in their homes independently, while others may prefer to live in purpose-built older person's housing. We aspire to offer a range of options to meet individual housing needs and evolving life circumstances.

The document also contributes to the regional and national policy context that highlights the importance of housing in addressing social care and health needs. We will support the work of Kent County Council and the NHS to deliver preventative and pro-active services to support individuals to remain well and active in local communities.

Residents were consulted to inform the development of this strategy. Our research indicated that residents living in our existing sheltered housing were generally satisfied with their accommodation. This strategy therefore sets out how older person's housing will meet future housing needs and provide a sustainable service for older people in the long-term. In addition, the strategy will be used to ensure that we deliver value for money so we can continue to provide viable options that meet the future housing needs of an ageing population.

In April 2023, Town and Country Housing (TCH) and Rosebery Housing Association Ltd (Rosebery) joined together to form a new partnership. Together, we form a new organisation and become the southern counties operating region of the Peabody Group. This will bring Rosebery's operations in Surrey and West Sussex together with TCH's operations in Kent and East Sussex, further strengthening our influence as a leading regional place maker.

This was closely followed in June 2023 by the acquisition of Rapport Housing & Care (Rapport), consisting of 252 homes in three extra care schemes in Tonbridge & Malling and one in Gravesham and a supported housing scheme for older persons in Paddock Wood. The schemes are of exceptional quality and will complement and diversify our existing operations.

This strategy was developed prior to the merger with Rosebery and acquisition of Rapport, with a focus on TCH's operating regions and residents. Where this strategy refers to TCH's existing services and operating areas, this applies to legacy TCH. Likewise, where this strategy sets out our strategic approach to older person's housing, we will collaborate with our colleagues in Epsom and in the newly acquired extra care schemes to deliver quality, older person's housing in every locality, by identifying and sharing best practice.

The strategy was developed during a period of national economic turbulence. During TCH's 30-year history, we have demonstrated our ability to adapt to external challenges and consistently deliver high-quality services. This strategy sets out our direction of travel for older person's housing, however we will regularly review our targets to ensure they remain deliverable. The document will therefore be a working document that can be amended as needs dictate.

Context

National policy

Housing for older people is an important priority in national and regional policy and strategy development.

The Housing and Care for Older People All-Party Political Group (APPG) Inquiry estimated that there will be demand for an additional 21,000 social rented older people's housing per year up to 2050.¹ The Inquiry further identified that building older person's housing is necessary to free up family sized social and affordable rented housing. Furthermore, it is estimated that over the next 25 years, the proportion of households where the oldest person is aged 85 or over will grow faster than any other age group.²



In the Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper (2020), the government emphasised the importance of quality housing to support positive physical and mental health in the community. It also stressed the critical role that social landlords can play in tackling loneliness and isolation in the community.³

Likewise, the government's Social Care White Paper, 'People at the Heart of Care' (2022), made a commitment to make every decision about care a decision about housing. The white paper made a clear commitment to provide people with greater housing choice and deliver services to promote independence.⁴

In September 2020, the government launched a consultation about raising the accessibility standards of new homes, recognising the importance of suitable homes for older and disabled people. The outcome means that the government will mandate the M4(2) standard, that sets a higher standard for accessible homes, for all new homes. Specifically, the higher M4(2) standard requires additional features, including having a living area at entrance level and step-free access to all entrance level rooms and facilities, wider doorways and corridors, as well as clear access routes to reach windows.⁵

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- 1 APPG Housing and Care for Older People, Rental Housing for an Ageing Population, 2019.
 - 2 PHASE @ Manchester School of Architecture, RIGHTSIZING: Reframing the housing offer for older people, 2018.
 - 3 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, The Charter for Social Housing Residents, 2020.
 - 4 Department of Health and Social Care, People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform white paper, 2021.
 - 5 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Consultation outcome: Raising accessibility standards for new homes, 2022.

The enhanced standards also include further features to make homes more easily adaptable over time for a wide range of occupants, including older people, those with reduced mobility and some wheelchair users. For example, sanitary provisions that can be easily adapted for the installation of grab rails and stairs designed to enable the easy fit of a stair lift.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) recommends that inclusivity be considered in planning and designing housing for older people. It also recommends the inclusion of the design principles set out in the Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI) report (2009): integration with the surrounding context, social spaces that link with the community, space standards that facilitate flexibility, enhanced natural light, and priority for pedestrians in outdoor spaces.⁶

In England, it is estimated that around 676,000 people have dementia.⁷ This number is expected to rise as the population continues to age. In turn, this will continue to place further demands on the NHS and social care. Ensuring individuals have access to appropriate housing and social care is imperative to preventing 'bed blocking' in hospitals and ensuring that individuals have access to suitable homes that meets their needs, prior to and following a crisis.



6 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Housing for Older and Disabled People Guidance, 2019.

7 National Health Service England, Dementia, 2022.

Context

Regional policy

The regional strategy context has been set by Kent County Council in its Adult Social Care and Health Accommodation Strategy 2019-2021.⁸ The strategy laid out the aims for adult social care and health accommodation:

- Right homes in the right place with the right support
- Increase in housing with care schemes
- Increase capacity for specialist dementia care
- Increase in supported accommodation
- Work with the market to foster continual improvement in the quality of nursing and residential care homes
- Make best use of land availability for developments of housing that meet the strategic priorities of this strategy.

Current supply and demand

The 2021 Census data shows that, nationally, the proportion of the population aged over 65 years has increased from 16.4% (2011) to 18.6%. Throughout the local authorities in TCH's operating region, the proportion of those aged over 65 years and over exceeds the national average, except for Dartford and Gravesham (please see Appendix 1). The areas with the largest proportion of population aged over 65 years are Wealden, Folkestone and Hythe, Dover, and Thanet at 26.5%, 25%, 24%, and 23.7% respectively.

Consistent with national trends, housing need studies by local authorities in Kent and East Sussex estimate that there will be an increased demand for affordable older person's housing.⁹ One exception is Canterbury Borough Council which presumes that current need can be met by current supply, although it predicts that an additional 576 older person's units will be needed by 2040. In Tunbridge Wells borough, where the majority of our existing sheltered schemes are located, sheltered accommodation is a relatively popular housing option. The housing needs studies identified that 13.9% of over 65s would consider renting sheltered accommodation and 12.4% would consider renting from a housing association.¹⁰



⁸ Kent County Council, Kent Adult Social Care and Health Accommodation Strategy, 2019.

⁹ All local authorities are required to produce a housing need study to inform planning and housing policies.

¹⁰ Shakespeare Martineau, Retirement Housing White Paper, 2021.

Local housing need studies demonstrate that adaptations are a key priority for those aged over 65 years. In the 2017 Tunbridge Wells Housing Need Survey, of applicants aged over 65 years, 14.6% stated a need for adaptations to bathrooms, 12.7% a need for internal handrails, 9.1% for external handrails, and 9.4% for stairlifts.

Additional support is also an important priority for those aged over 65 years. In the 2017 Tunbridge Wells Housing Need Study of households aged over 65 years, 38.4% said they require assistance with personal care, 24.3% need help with repairs and maintenance, 20.8% need help with gardening and 51.1% need help with other practical tasks.

Any future development of older person's housing will be informed by local housing needs to ensure we develop the right homes in the right places.

Perception

The older person's housing sector has noted that providers have struggled to challenge stereotypes about older person's housing. Research by Shakespeare Martineau found that almost 1 in 5 members of public think that nursing homes are synonymous with older person's housing.¹¹

However, local housing needs surveys and resident consultation suggest that those aged over 65 years have a variety of needs that can be addressed in purpose-built



older person's accommodation, for example step-free access and additional security.

Therefore, a key challenge for the sector and TCH is how to overcome this stereotype and communicate the range of benefits offered by older person's housing and how it can meet a diverse range of needs.

Risks

The delivery of this strategy may be affected by the external environment in which TCH operates. In particular, future development of new older person's housing may be impacted by factors impacting on the delivery of housing generally, including inflation rates, the 2023 rent settlement, and risks to external funding.

11 Shakespeare Martineau, Retirement Housing White Paper, 2021.

Strategy

We currently manage fourteen Independent Living (sheltered) housing units for residents generally aged 55 years and above. The schemes are predominantly based around the Tunbridge Wells area. We also own a number of 'lifetime homes' within our general needs housing stock that are suitable for later living, such as ground floor flats and bungalows.



This strategy sets out a vision for how TCH will deliver modern 'later living' housing and services to support ageing in the community that meets a wide range of needs and aspirations. We are ambitious and want to meaningfully contribute to the evolving housing needs of an ageing population by ensuring that the right homes are developed in the right places.

To meet these demands, we remain mindful that wider TCH services may need to adapt to changing demographics. This could include improved resident communication and high-volume customer facing services, such as the customer services call centre and repairs and maintenance.

Theme 1

Branding and marketing

We believe that older person's housing for those aged 55 and above can be an excellent option for individuals in later life, from working professionals to individuals with physical disabilities. The size of older person's housing – usually one or two bedrooms – also provides an attractive choice for those looking to downsize. Supporting individuals to find a home that is right for them at any stage of life will ensure that residents have access to homes that meet their needs, rather than waiting for crisis to occur.

A priority outcome for this strategy will be to review the branding and marketing to better promote our existing sheltered housing schemes and 'lifetime homes' as an aspirational housing option.

Within this exercise, we will target downsizing where appropriate to do so. We will also reconsider the suitability of the term 'sheltered housing' and 'tenancy sustainment officer' (scheme manager) to reflect the older person's housing service that we provide.

We will identify 'lifetime' homes within our general needs stock that would be suitable to meet the needs of individuals as they age in the community. We will promote these as an aspirational housing option.

We will also investigate options to promote downsizing. We will utilise tenant incentive schemes to incentivise residents to downsize and ensure households have access to homes that are suitable for their needs. For example, we may offer removal packages for those seeking to downsize.



Theme 2

Existing schemes

As with all housing stock, we will continue to review and assess the viability of our existing sheltered housing schemes, to ensure we maintain quality homes, while also remaining viable.

We use an in-depth feasibility assessment process (detailed below) to assess existing schemes. Our feasibility assessment process enables a clear comparison of overall viability. We will use this to inform any future decisions by asset management group and/or subsequent recommendations to Board to dispose of or repurpose existing sheltered housing schemes for alternative uses.

Feasibility assessment process

Our feasibility assessment includes a review of:

- The time taken to let vacant flats
- The quality and energy performance of accommodation, including fuel poverty considerations
- Accessibility and proximity to local amenities
- Mobility aid storage
- Maintenance options
- Exit strategy.

We will map out the number of 'lifetime homes' we manage to get a clear picture of our stock. We will also develop a plan to use our lettings process to advertise these as aspirational homes, suitable for all stages of life.

When 'lifetime homes' and homes in our sheltered schemes are empty, we will bring them up to a minimum standard, informed by HAPPI design principles to ensure our stock best meets individual needs, whilst reducing the amount of time that homes are left empty.

We will review our approach to lettings and ensure that where a property has been adapted, we will aim to match the property with a suitable applicant, even if this means leaving a property empty for a longer period.

Consultation with residents in our existing schemes also highlighted concerns around the cost of communal utilities and difficulties accessing recycling facilities. Improving access to recycling and engagement with recycling services is a priority in the asset management strategy. As a result, we will identify schemes to target for intervention. Throughout the delivery of this strategy, we will also identify opportunities to reduce communal utility costs to further support affordability.

Theme 3

Community and wellbeing

Many of our schemes have large communal spaces that are underutilised.

Older person's housing can offer more than accommodation – it can also create and animate a community. We will identify opportunities to bring more community activities into communal spaces, including activities to improve the physical and mental health of residents and wider communities. Residents in our existing schemes felt that a key priority for this strategy should be to optimise the use of communal spaces.

Community cohesion will also be an important consideration when reviewing the marketing and rebranding of existing housing schemes. Where there is recourse to do so, we will work with the community investment team to support place-making in our schemes.



Commercial use of communal spaces also has the potential to maximise value for money. Appropriate commercial use of communal spaces may also help to subsidise service charges for residents and investment in communal facilities.

In addition, we will support partner agencies, such as the NHS and Social Care to deliver community health and wellbeing initiatives, including dementia services. Good lifestyle choices, including suitable housing and healthy living spaces, may help reduce the prevalence of such conditions and impact positively on wider issues in public health and society generally. In line with the Peabody Group's community investment strategy, we will continue to invest in health and wellbeing initiatives based on local needs.

Theme 4

Development

Any future development of older person's housing will be determined by an evidence-based approach and analysis of local need. We always seek to prioritise the development of homes for social rent, or homes for affordable rent in some areas in East Kent where this option is more affordable than social rent.

We will ensure that the accommodation we build for older persons is fully adaptable. Our approach to design is informed by best practice in HAPPI design principles.¹²

Minimum standard

We will develop new older person's housing to a specified minimum standard, informed by the HAPPI design principles and consultation with our residents. As a minimum, new older person's housing will:

- Be adaptable and have 'care ready' design, with the ability to immediately integrate telecare and telehealthcare technologies where needed
- Incorporate dementia-friendly design and layout principles
- Provide access to outdoor space or balconies
- Provide ample natural daylight in individual flats with windows and in communal spaces
- Be highly energy efficient, with good ventilation
- Provide storage for mobility aids and bicycles
- Provide generous space to accommodate mobility aids
- Include a communal space for community activities
- Communal facilities including industrial quality laundry appliances
- Have offices near communal spaces
- Have ample parking.

We also aspire to deliver the same standard in our existing sheltered schemes and as a priority outcome of this strategy, will identify the percentage of units that do not.

Supporting digital inclusion is also a key strategic priority for TCH. We will ensure that we develop new older person's housing with excellent communal Wi-Fi connectivity to support residents to contact family, health professionals and to access other services.

As part of our commitment to reducing energy consumption and the running costs of utilities in homes, improving energy efficiency is a key priority in all our new developments. We will install electric car charging points in our schemes where a need is identified, and where it is viable to do so.

Furthermore, we may consider purchasing purpose-built older person's housing from other registered providers where and if there is a demonstrable need.

¹² Housing LIN, Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI).

Theme 5

Adaptations

We are committed to providing a quality aids and adaptations service to support residents to retain independence and to provide additional support in purpose-built older persons housing.



Access to Disabled Facilities Grant funding is an equally important tool for persons with disabilities to maintain independence. The asset management team enables and assists TCH residents to apply to local authorities and undergo an occupational therapist assessment. The grant is used for the installation of aids and adaptations that promote independent living, such as wider doors and ramps and improved access to rooms and facilities, for example stairlifts or a downstairs bathroom.

In April 2022, the Home Improvement and Support Team (HIST) (previously Peabody SouthEast Care and Support) transferred to TCH. HIST has enabled diversification, namely the provision of a wider range of services to support local residents with complex support needs (including non-TCH residents). Services are designed to promote independent living by providing adaptations, a handyman service, specialist advice and signposting.

We will further improve the efficiency of our aids and adaptations service by aligning and integrating the home improvement and support service and asset management approach to aids and adaptations.

Theme 6

Service offer

We recognise that society has changed dramatically over the past 20 years and with increased life expectancies, older person's housing provision is not necessarily age driven. In other words, persons aged 70 years and over are the new 65s or younger. By 2030, the UK's average life expectancy for women will be 85.3 years and 82.5 years for men. This compares to 82.3 years for women and 78.3 years for men in 2010.

Our existing sheltered housing schemes are open to persons aged 55 and over but many residents are still working, volunteering and living an active, healthy life. The traditional model of older person's housing with a scheme warden present for five days a week is no longer needed or appropriate for most residents. Our current service model reflects this diversity and offers an adaptive and value for money service, while providing the right support and signposting for those who need it.

We will continue to deliver our sheltered housing services through the current service model detailed below. We are also committed to collaboration with regional colleagues and partnership working within the Peabody Group to share information, innovation and best practice.

Service delivery model

TCH's older person's independent living service model:

- Tenancy sustainment officers (TSOs) provide an intensive housing management service which covers a range of duties, including managing anti-social behaviour, rent arrears, tenancy audits, health and safety, and liaising repairs
- TSOs are on site a minimum of two days a week and undertake welfare checks on residents up to five days a week where requested
- All residents have an alarm system hard wired into their property and an additional pendant alarm is available if required
- Regular house meetings for residents to engage about local issues
- Scheme communications to keep residents informed about changes likely to affect them
- TSOs work closely with TCH's community safety and tenancy support teams and external agencies to provide additional support to residents.



Consultation with existing sheltered residents highlighted that it was important that TCH retains the current level of service currently delivered by TSOs. TSOs will continue to identify additional support needs, ensure that records are up to date and signpost residents to external support as necessary.

We will ensure that all residents receive timely, relevant communications and are kept up to date with the issues effecting their communities. For example, when estate services or communal repairs are due to be completed. We will use noticeboards, newsletters and other appropriate mechanisms to achieve this.

TCH is committed to embedding the 'resident voice' and during the delivery of this strategy, we will continue to determine the best way to enable residents to influence and improve services.

With the additional and specialist resource of the home improvement and support service, we will revisit our 'bed blocking' support plan and accommodation offer to hospital discharge patients. This could provide patients with appropriate housing and support the NHS by freeing up beds.

Theme 7

Extra care housing

As previously stated, 252 homes were acquired from Rapport in June 2023. Although TCH owns the homes and delivers the housing management service, the care service will continue to be provided by a third-party specialist provider.



The research undertaken to inform this strategy supports our current service delivery model prior to this acquisition. However, if there is a demonstrable need to develop further extra care housing in the future, we may do so and source management and/or care from a third-party organisation.

Success measures

We will develop specific actions in the local (corporate) delivery plan to deliver the outcomes and success measures contained in this strategy. The local delivery plan is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains relevant, with progress reported to Board at least every six months.

Success measures

- Review branding of sheltered/older person's housing by 2025
- Reduce the average void time homes are left empty for sheltered/older person's properties by TBC%
- Reduce utilities costs in existing sheltered housing schemes
- Map the percentage of existing sheltered housing units that do not currently meet the HAPPI standard
- Map the number of 'lifetime homes' and the numbers that do not currently meet the HAPPI standard
- Complete the feasibility assessment of existing schemes by the end of 2023
- Enable residents in sheltered/older person's housing to influence and improve services
- Determine the best way to keep residents in sheltered/older person's housing up to date with the key issues that affect their communities.





Equalities statement

This strategy will be implemented in accordance with TCH's equality, diversity and inclusion policy. An equalities impact assessment has been completed to ensure that the strategy is inclusive and does not impact negatively on any resident or group of residents.

Resident consultation

Extensive consultation was undertaken to inform the development of this strategy.

Consultation

- Telephone interviews were conducted with TCH residents who had moved into older person's housing within the past six months
- Attended a range of sheltered house meetings in our existing schemes to hear from residents about their future aspirations for older person's housing
- The sheltered housing panel reviewed a draft of the strategy.

Resident consultation identified that a significant proportion of those TCH residents surveyed who had recently moved into sheltered housing were not specifically looking for sheltered accommodation. Furthermore, most residents interviewed as research for this strategy did not favour the term 'sheltered housing' due to its institutionalised connotations. The strategy was updated to incorporate this feedback.



Appendices

Appendix 1:

Total population and proportion of over 65s in boroughs within TCH's operating region, 2021 Census.¹³

LA	Number aged 65 and over	% of population aged 65 and over
Ashford	26,000	19.6
Canterbury	34,200	21.7
Dartford	16,000	13.7
Dover	27,900	24.0
Gravesham	18,400	17.2
Maidstone	33,500	19.1
Sevenoaks	25,900	21.5
Folkestone and Hythe	27,500	25.0
Swale	28,800	19.0
Thanet	33,300	23.7
Tonbridge and Malling	25,200	19.1
Tunbridge Wells	22,400	19.4
Wealden	42,400	26.5

Appendix 2:

Current sheltered housing supply in Kent, Kent District Profiles, Kent Accommodation Strategy for Adult Social Care.¹⁴

Local authority (Kent)	Sheltered housing units (2019)
Ashford	1,530
Canterbury	1,810
Dartford	580
Dover	1,380
Gravesham	950
Maidstone	1,780
Sevenoaks	1,680
Folkestone and Hythe	2,160
Swale	1,820
Thanet	1,980
Tonbridge and Malling	1,240
Tunbridge Wells	1,040
Wealden	42,400

¹³ Office for National Statistics, Census 2021 Results, 2022.

¹⁴ Kent County Council, Kent Adult Social Care and Health Accommodation Strategy, 2019.



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