

**Housing  
Executive**



# Older People's Housing Strategy

2021/22-2026/27



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**We can let you have a copy of the plans in a language that meets your needs and in different formats.**

# 1.0 Foreword

Over the next 25 years, Northern Ireland will see a significant increase in both the overall number and the percentage of older people within the population. This will have implications for the type of services that we deliver, along with increasing pressures on social and healthcare provision. Therefore, our Older People's Housing Strategy has been developed to ensure that our services evolve in response to the projected growth in the number of older people in Northern Ireland.

The Housing Executive is both a landlord with around 85,000 homes, and the Regional Housing Authority for Northern Ireland. In the latter role we need to understand the dynamics of change in the population and seek to promote active housing stock management. Such an approach would benefit older people and other members of the community through ensuring that people live in homes best suited to their needs at different stages of their lives. This approach would also assist in the co-ordinated delivery of healthy and social care to older people.

It is also important that we explore flexible housing solutions, which allow people to transition from one type of housing to another in later life, as their circumstances require. These solutions can range from 'ageing in place' with the assistance of adaptations to the home and/or care support, to helping to downsize to other accommodation, including sheltered housing and extra-care housing. The collaboration of a number of service providers will be essential to create places where older people feel safe and connected to their community, helping to prevent loneliness and isolation.

In writing this Strategy, we have used our recent research 'Housing and Older People: Issues, Needs and Aspirations' alongside other contemporary resources. We have also used our knowledge and experience of housing related issues that may impact older people. The Strategy is set out under the following four key themes:

1. **Planning for the future:** Under this theme there are two distinct strands: Exploring Housing Options for Older People, which looks at different housing models; and Supporting Independent Living, which looks at ways to assist those who can and wish to remain in their own home;
2. **Promoting and Maintaining Dignity:** This theme sets out the services we currently provide and looks at ways to develop new and existing services to promote and maintain the dignity of our tenants and customers;
3. **Providing Housing Advice for Older People:** In this theme we set out a direction to help us explore and develop new and existing housing information and advisory services, and how we can deliver these using a range of formats and methods; and
4. **Promoting Participation:** Under this theme we recognise how engaging, enabling and empowering older people to participate actively in community life can have positive impacts on their health, wellbeing and happiness. Loneliness can have a severe detrimental impact on all age groups, including older people, and we will work in partnership with others to support opportunities for older people to become involved in shaping, informing and enjoying the services that we deliver on their behalf.

We already work with a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community-based partners and stakeholders to deliver an impressive range of housing related services. These partnership arrangements have allowed us to serve the needs of our tenants, customers and communities more efficiently and effectively. Partnership working will be a key component in delivering places and services that provide age friendly environments where older people can continue to thrive.

Since the consultation period ended, there have been new and continuing factors that may further shape the strategy. These include the Ministers statement on the future of the Housing Executive (see page 21), the ongoing Programme for Government Outcomes consultation, budget and funding uncertainties, any impact of Brexit and the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic which we know has adversely affected the older population in particular and it will be important to learn from this for planning for the future.

We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all those who responded to the draft strategy and those who participated in online consultation events.

We received a significant number of responses from a wide range of individuals and organisations who provided a very broad range of comments related to the draft strategy. All responses have been considered and where appropriate, the strategy and high-level action plan have been amended. In addition, some of the responses will help us to formulate our more detailed annual action plans. In many instances, we have already commenced working towards these goals; others will require

partnership working with a diverse range of stakeholders and partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Despite these challenges, we will continue to build on the success of the Housing Executive over the past five decades to ensure we can enhance the lives of our older customers and ensure that our communities are sustainable now, and in the future.

Throughout this strategy we have indicated the high level objectives we hope to achieve over the period of the strategy and the importance of delivering these whilst being cognisant of the challenges we will all face throughout its lifecycle.

We will provide regular updates and publish how well we are doing in responding to these housing related issues that could impact on older people now, and in the future. We are confident that through our own expertise, and, working with a range of partners and stakeholders, we will achieve our objectives and improve housing and associated services for older people across Northern Ireland.



Professor Peter Roberts, Chair



Clark Bailie, Chief Executive

## Equality Statement

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Housing Executive to comply with Section 75 (1). This states that, in carrying out our function, we are required to have due regard to promote the equality of opportunity between various groups, including 'age'.

This strategy has been Equality Screened and a copy of this can be made available on request.

# 2.0 Our Vision for Older People

**Our vision is ‘to enable older people to live as independently as possible with dignity; with opportunities and options to meet their housing needs; and to be supported to engage and participate in community life to create vibrant sustainable communities.’**

## Why developing an Older People’s Housing Strategy is important

The general trend of population projections indicates that the population of Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly older and based on NISRA 2019 mid-year estimates, over 65s now make up almost 17% of the total population. Northern Ireland’s 85 and over population continues to grow and at mid-year 2019 is estimated to be 37,700, an increase of 2.7% since mid-year 2018. Over the last decade the population aged 85 and over has grown by 9,000 people (30.3%).

It is now projected that, by 2043, the number of people aged 85 years or older will more than double to over 77,900; and by 2028, the number of people aged over 65 years is projected to outnumber those aged under 16 years of age.

This increase in the number of older people is attributed to improving standards in healthcare, while at the same time, there has also been a marked downward trend in births. However,

these key demographic trends present some fundamental societal challenges with continuing pressure on public services to provide care and support for a growing, older population but with a declining working age population, even allowing for potential new entrants through migration. This raises significant issues, including labour availability and resourcing, especially government’s ability to raise funding through taxes paid by those in work. The World Health Organisation’s (WHO) ‘World Report on Ageing and Health’<sup>1</sup> stated that “*failure to adapt to demographic change will result in high costs to society*”. Greater investment in areas such as age-friendly environments have demonstrated a range of benefits to the individual in terms of health, skills and knowledge, mobility, social connectivity, financial security and personal dignity, safety and security. These in turn may generate positive returns to society in terms of the individuals wellbeing, workforce participation, social and cultural contribution and social cohesion.

In recent years, the challenges that will arise as a result of an ageing population are increasingly being recognised across various sectors of society in Northern Ireland. There is an acknowledgement that society needs to be able to meet the needs and aspirations that older people have, now, and in the future, in order for them to carry on living to their fullest potential. In 2020, the WHO endorsed proposals for the ‘United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)’.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/333702/AFEE-tool.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/333702/AFEE-tool.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing> - The United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) is an opportunity to bring together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector for ten years of concerted, catalytic and collaborative action to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live.

At the time of developing this strategy, a number of key reports, conferences and seminars at both local and a national level have focused on the challenges of an ageing population from housing and planning perspectives. COVID-19 has highlighted this impact on older people in particular (perhaps more than any other group), and this has underlined the importance of housing appropriate to the individual's needs in a connected, vibrant and sustainable community.

Our Older People's Strategy is also based on, and aims to complement, the themes detailed in the Executive Office's 'Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2022'<sup>3</sup> which is designed to "make a real difference to the quality of life of older people and to enable as many people as possible to enjoy the benefits and rewards of life for as long as possible".

Recognising this shift in demography, the Housing Executive commissioned research to support and inform our decision making in relation to how we can best plan and deliver appropriate housing for older people in Northern Ireland. This research was published in late 2019. In addition to this, in tandem with developing this strategy, we have consulted both with the Housing Executive's Consultative Forum on Equality and with senior representatives from the office of the Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland.

In 2016, the World Health Organisation (WHO) produced a report aimed at policy-makers and planners to develop age-friendly policies and interventions across the physical environment, transport and housing.<sup>4</sup> The WHO report notes that whilst the development of age-friendly environments primarily focuses on the needs of older people, there are simultaneous benefits for other age groups.

*"For example, barrier free physical environments will ultimately benefit parents with prams, well designed*

*homes can be more easily adapted to meet people's needs as they age and being part of a vibrant, connected and safe community will ultimately benefit all tenants and residents regardless of their age"*<sup>5</sup>

This is perhaps more pertinent now as a substantial number of families contain four living generations, and, for example, a 65 year old may now provide support and care not only for their parents, but also for their grandchildren.

## What our Strategy aims to achieve

Our Strategy takes into account the changing demography of Northern Ireland, including that of our own tenant profile, and aims to ensure that the services, policies, initiatives and activities that the Housing Executive delivers consider and meet the needs of our ageing population.

## Partnership Working

We are focused on improving and positively impacting a range of housing related services. We do however, recognise that addressing these challenges cannot be carried out by the Housing Executive acting alone and we will continue to work with existing partners and stakeholders to maximise and complement our contribution to improving services for older people where we can. This includes statutory and voluntary organisations, health and social care trusts, local councils and community planning partners. There is a huge opportunity to build on this and we believe that through a partnership approach, resources can be directed more effectively, organisations can work more collaboratively, and outcomes can be more meaningful.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm/active-ageing-strategy.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/333702/AFEE-tool.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/333702/AFEE-tool.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/333702/AFEE-tool.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/333702/AFEE-tool.pdf?ua=1)

We have developed our Strategy, and high level action plan, for a five year planning horizon covering the period from 2021/22 – 2026/27. Each year we will update and publish a more detailed annual action plan, based on a realistic assessment of our progress in the previous year and to take account of any new or emerging trends. We will baseline, track our services, and measure any improvements against a range of our services that are directly or indirectly targeted at older people. This includes the opportunity to conduct more research if deemed appropriate.

The Strategy also seeks to knit together the range of existing activities that we currently deliver for older people and outlines our plans to develop and deliver new services and initiatives under four broad themes.

## Defining an ‘older person’

Older People are not a homogenous group and there is no stereotypical older person. Indeed, some people aged 60 years or older may be fitter, healthier and more active than many people younger than them.

The concept of ‘old age’ is therefore not simple or straightforward, with various organisations, charities or government departments all citing different definitions of ‘old age’.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) use both 65 and 85 years of age as key milestones when reporting on demographics and population projections. The Housing Executive’s annual Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey reports on tenants within both the 60-64 age range and the 65 years or older age range. Recently published Housing Executive research captured housing needs, aspirations and preferences of those aged 55 years or older.

## “Older People are not a homogenous group and there is no stereotypical older person.”

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The social housing waiting list (Common Waiting List) data categorises applicants aged 60 years or older as ‘elderly’. The Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland considers 60 years or more as the defining criterion for an ‘older person’ and in Northern Ireland social benefits such as free bus travel and concessions on public transport commence at 60 years of age.

Whilst there would not appear to be a commonly accepted or universal definition of an older person, for the purposes of this strategy we will use 60 years or older when we refer to an ‘older person’. However, this will be applied flexibly to allow the strategy to use a wide range of sources across a number of definitions. Indeed, when planning for the future, it is pertinent to look at the range of research and demographics available, including those who have not yet reached the ‘older’ or ‘elderly’ milestones of 60 years plus, or 65 years or older. Those who are aged 55 or older are within the ‘active ageing’ category and may be considered as part of future demographic need.

## How will we know we were successful?

By the end of the Strategy period, we will have:

- explored a range of housing options for older people, leading to better planning decisions in relation to new models for the future;
- supported people to remain in their homes where appropriate;
- provided support and assistance to help older people to live with dignity in an attractive and safe home and community environment;
- gained a better understanding of the needs of our older customers and continued to develop and deliver a range of housing advice and services to meet those needs;
- built on existing, and provided new opportunities for older people to participate, shape and become actively involved in their communities;
- worked with partners and stakeholders to design and deliver more and better integrated services;
- analysed population trends on an ongoing basis to ensure that our services have kept pace with demographic changes;
- measured and tracked how well we have delivered our activities over the period of the strategy through regular progress updates; and
- identified further areas for research, as necessary.

## Introduction

Northern Ireland is an ageing society with almost one in six people aged 65 or older according to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) 2019 mid-year estimates. This number has increased by almost 25% in the last 25 years. The number of those aged 85 years or older has shown an even more dramatic increase and is projected to more than double by 2043 to almost 80,000.

Many older people have spent large portions of their lives working and contributing to the

development and improvement of Northern Ireland across all sectors. Some continue to work while others have made invaluable 'community contributions' by raising their own families, and, in many cases, supporting children and relatives through, often unpaid, care or childcare support.

Many also contribute significantly through volunteering, involvement in charities and by being active in the community across a range of initiatives and activities. In financial terms older people in Northern Ireland are estimated to contribute the equivalent value of some £25 billion to the economy over the next 50 years through volunteering, caring, childcare, replacement parenting and working.<sup>6</sup>

There are, however, a number of significant challenges that face older people including deteriorating health with conditions such as dementia, or through disability. One of the greatest challenges that we face as a society is ensuring that there is an adequate supply and choice of safe and secure housing appropriate to the diverse needs of an ageing population, with good transport links and infrastructure in place to create and sustain vibrant communities.

Of course ensuring an adequate supply of suitable housing is not only about building or securing more units of accommodation, as many people wish to remain in their own home. It is very much a societal issue and requires co-operation and partnership working across a range of government departments, statutory bodies, charities and volunteers along with input from older people. We work and will continue to work with a range of organisations in order to maximise the impact that we can have at a grass roots level on our estates and within our communities, as well as with statutory bodies and government departments at a strategic level.

Our strategy not only outlines new high level objectives specifically for housing it also aims to bring strands from our other strategies together, setting out our services for older people and our high level actions for the years ahead. See Appendix 1 at the back of this document for details.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.copni.org/news/2014/september/older-people-in-northern-ireland-set-to-contribute-247-billion-to-economy-over-the-next-50-years>

## Housing Executive Research

In 2018 the Housing Executive commissioned research entitled ‘Older People: Housing Issues, Aspirations and Needs’. The purpose of this research was to support and inform decision making in relation to appropriate housing for older people in Northern Ireland, through qualitative insights on the views of internal Housing Executive Stakeholders (16 respondents), external stakeholders (21 respondents) and older people themselves (57 respondents). Older people were grouped into three broad cohorts. Those aged 55-69 years, those aged 70-84 years and those aged 85 years or older.

The primary aims of the research were to:

- explore the needs, aspirations and preferences of different cohorts of older people in relation to housing options;
- identify planning actions by housing providers and representative organisations in order to meet the future housing needs and aspirations of older people;
- collate data on what existing accommodation is available in relation to the distribution of the older people population across Northern Ireland; and
- ascertain levels of future housing need in relation to the same.

A number of findings and recommendations were presented. Some of these were specific to housing and others are much broader and would require exploration by the appropriate bodies are dependent on a number of critical factors including funding and partnership working across a range of agencies, however broadly represent the views expressed from the sample size of respondents through the qualitative research outlined above.

The research findings have been used to help shape and inform this Strategy. Details of the research can be found on our website at [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk). Other research that helped to inform this Strategy included The All Party Parliamentary Group Report on Decent and Accessible Homes for Older People<sup>7</sup> and the World Health Organisation’s report on ‘Creating age-friendly environments in Europe – A tool for local policy-makers and planners’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/politics-and-government/all-party-parliamentary-group/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/creating-age-friendly-environments-in-europe.-a-tool-for-local-policy-makers-and-planners-2016>

# 3.0 Strategic Context

In writing this document there are a number of strategic factors to be taken into account including the Draft Programme for Government (2016/17 – 2020/2021), The Executive Office’s Active Ageing Strategy, our own Corporate Plan, other government legislation, demographics and other societal issues.

## Draft Programme for Government 2016-21

The Draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2016-21 provides the highest level strategic document of the Executive Office in Northern Ireland. The draft Framework contains 12 strategic outcomes which set a clear direction of travel and enable continuous improvement on essential components of societal wellbeing.

At the time of writing, The Executive Office launched an eight week formal consultation on the 25th January 2021 on the new draft Outcomes Framework for the Programme for Government. The new draft Framework sets out nine ambitious Outcomes aimed at making a real and positive difference to people’s lives. A number of these relate to both older people and housing related issues. When finalised, we will factor these recommendations into our annual action plans where appropriate.

## Active Ageing Strategy 2016-22

The Executive Office’s Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2022 aims to transform attitudes to, and services for older people. It aims to increase the understanding of the issues affecting older people and promotes an emphasis on rights, value and contributions as

opposed to needs, costs and burdens. There are five strategic aims - Independence, Participation, Care, Self-fulfilment and Dignity. Again, housing related services have a key role to play in the realisation of these. The outcomes that we can help to influence are:

- Suitable warm housing;
- Promoting community safety and tackling fear of crime;
- User-friendly information;
- Address isolation and loneliness;
- Participation of older people in decision making and the provision of services;
- Support and promote the health and wellbeing of people as they get older;
- Training and leisure opportunities; and
- Respecting older people’s dignity.

In late 2019 the Department for Communities conducted a Mid-Term Review of the Active Ageing Strategy to measure progress against the Strategy’s aims and identify what has been delivered against the action plan. The Housing Executive, along with partners, has contributed positively, to a number of these to date including the delivery of the Affordable Warmth Scheme, the Social Housing Development Programme (including wheelchair housing and housing for older people), the Supporting People Programme, and reducing the time it takes for major adaptations to our tenants’ homes to be completed.

# Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations

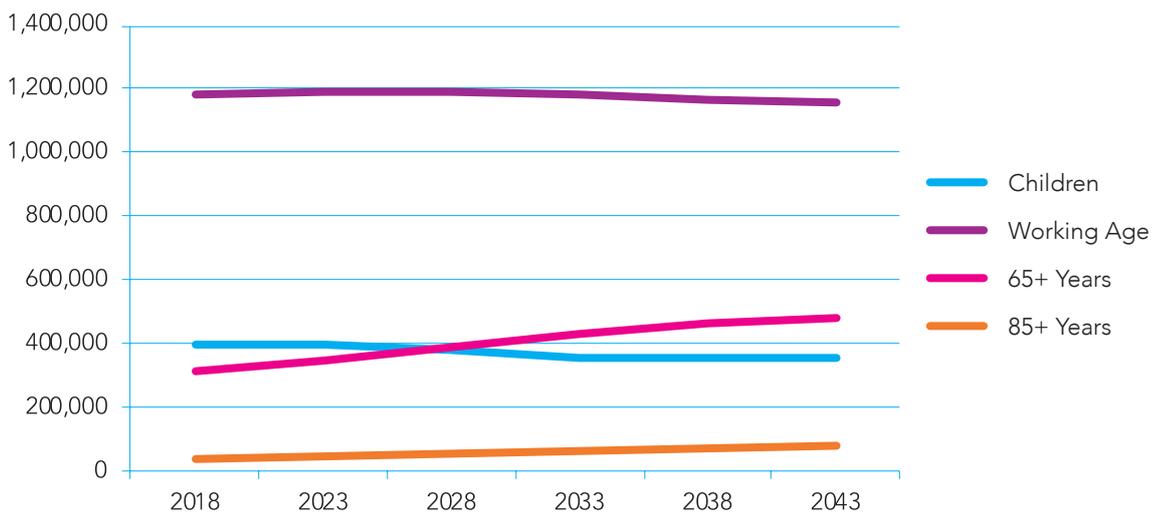
In December 2020, the Department for Communities (DfC) published a Consultation Outcome Report setting out the way forward for the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations. Proposal 20 stated that “*Specialised properties should be allocated by a separate process outside the Selection Scheme*”.

This proposal will proceed as per the consultation and aims to ensure the best use of this scarce resource by ‘ring fencing’ these properties, to help reduce waiting times for those needing specialised properties. We will initiate a sector-led review prior to any implementation. It is not yet known what changes may be involved for applicants or for current systems and procedures as these would be dependent on the outcome of the review. We will consider any implications this may have, particularly for older people and where appropriate factor this into future action plans.

## Demographic Changes

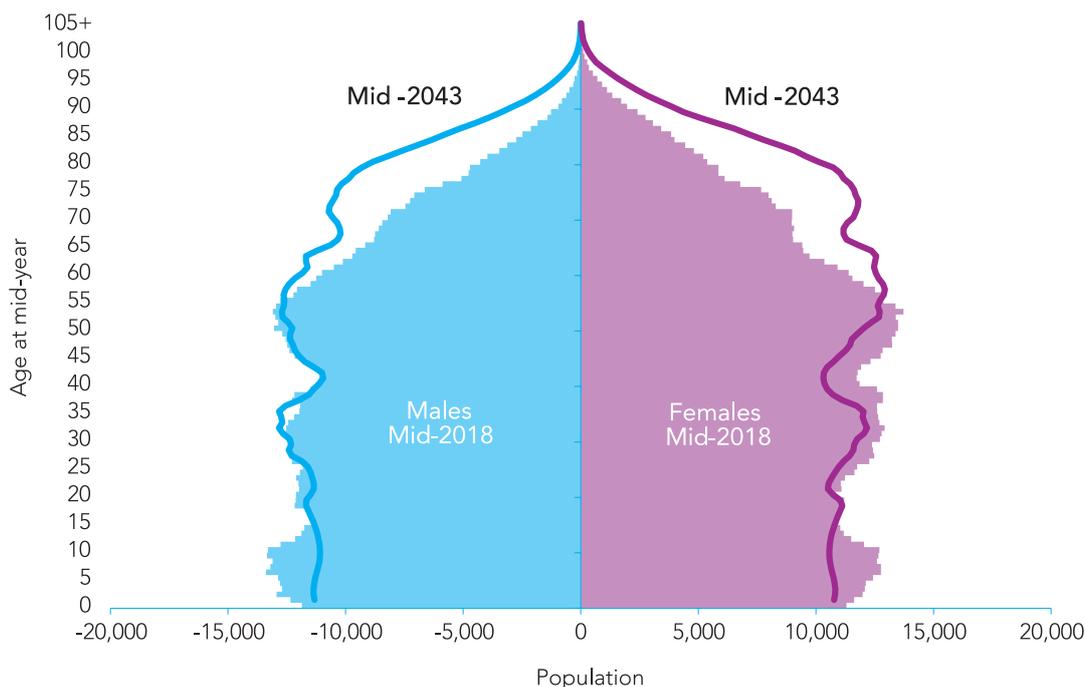
As previously outlined the population of Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly older. Based on NISRA’s 2018 population projections the general trend of our older population (65 years or older) is projected to surpass the number of younger people in Northern Ireland for the first time by 2028.(Chart 1).

**Chart 1: Northern Ireland population projection from Mid-2018 to Mid-2043**  
(Source: NISRA)



The 'population pyramid' (Chart 1a, below) depicts the estimated population of Northern Ireland in mid-2018 by gender and by 5 year age brackets and also depicts the projected demographics of Northern Ireland in 2043.

**Chart 1a: Population Pyramid projections, 2020 – 2043**  
(Source: NISRA)



The blue (male) and purple (female) bars indicates the current estimated population and the blue and purple coloured lines highlight population projections in 2043. There is projected to be a reduction in younger people as a whole, a reduction in working age females and an overall increase of people over 65.

Whilst living a longer life is an indicator of improved living standards, improved lifestyle and greater access to quality healthcare services, there are key issues that impact on housing and caring for an ageing population. While it is projected that a greater number of older women than men will be living alone in 2043, the 'gender gap' is projected to lessen in the next 25 years. This is due to life expectancy changes between males and females, and could influence individual's choices for future housing to accommodate their different needs.

It should be noted that projections are subject to change due to a range of other factors which can affect projections

**Chart 2: Northern Ireland Projected Percentage Change 2018 – 2043 for those aged 65 years and 85 years or older. (Those aged 85 or older are a subset of those aged 65 or older.)**  
 (Source: NISRA)



Chart 2 (above) shows the most recent projected percentage change of those over 65 and the projected numbers of those against the 2018 baseline. Whilst the percentage of those aged 65 years or older is steadily increasing, the percentage of those aged 85 or older, (a subset of those aged 65 or older) indicates a general trend of percentage growth in this age group.

**Chart 3: Northern Ireland projected percentage of population 2018 - 2043 for those aged 65 years and 85 years or older**  
 (Source: NISRA)

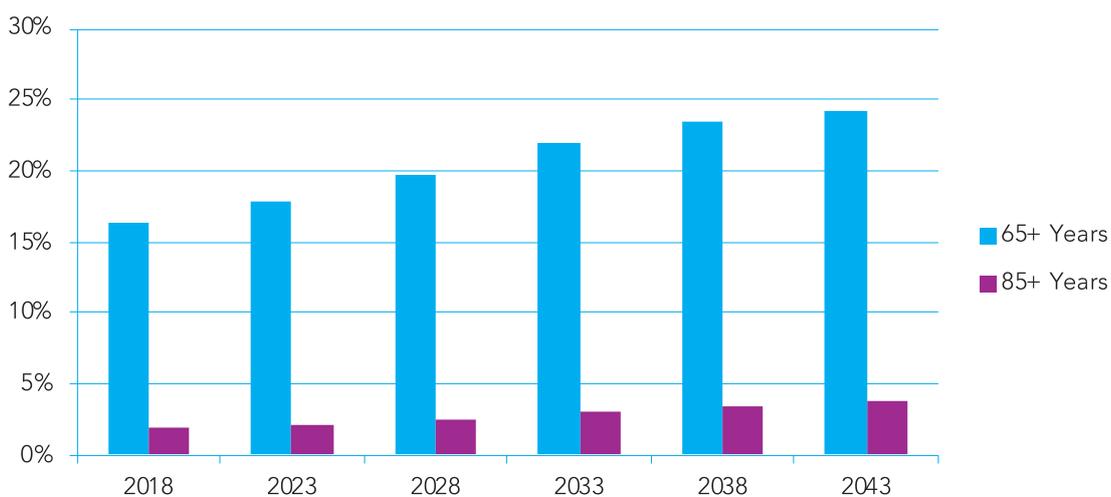


Chart 3 shows that by 2043 it is projected that almost one quarter (24.2%) of the total population will be aged 65+.

Demographic projections are useful when planning for the future. Projections and numbers can vary widely at a local level. Analysing and understanding these can help inform the adequate supply and delivery of housing related services for the future. The following table depicts trends of people aged 65 year or older over time broken down by Local Government Districts (LGDs).

Some observations based on the most recent projections (2018) include:

- By 2043 it is projected that all but one LGD (Lisburn & Castlereagh) will see a decrease in the number of younger people within the LGD between 2018 and 2043;
- By 2043 all but four LGDs (Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon, Lisburn & Castlereagh, Mid-Ulster and Newry, Mourne & Down) will see a decrease in the number of working age people within the LGD;
- By 2043 all LGDs will see an increase in the number of older people within the LGD; and
- Across Northern Ireland as a whole, it is projected by 2043 the number of younger people and working age people will reduce while the number of older people is projected to increase.

**Table 1: Projected Population Changes by LGD, 2018-2043**  
(Source: NISRA)

Local Government District (LGD)	Age Bands	2018	2030	2043
<b>Antrim &amp; Newtownabbey</b>	0-15 Years	29,787	26,775	25,138
	16-64 Years	89,070	89,551	85,747
	65+ Years	23,635	30,593	36,314
<b>Ards &amp; North Down</b>	0-15 Years	30,139	26,743	24,970
	16-64 Years	96,970	95,009	89,673
	65+ Years	33,755	43,220	48,923
<b>Armagh, Banbridge &amp; Craigavon</b>	0-15 Years	48,166	47,011	47,450
	16-64 Years	133,113	142,656	147,888
	65+ Years	32,811	44,546	55,532
<b>Belfast</b>	0-15 Years	68,023	63,522	59,695
	16-64 Years	223,776	221,465	214,544
	65+ Years	50,078	61,291	70,235
<b>Causeway</b>	0-15 Years	28,372	25,311	22,316
	16-64 Years	89,772	84,780	76,741
	65+ Years	26,102	34,892	41,257

Table continues

Local Government District (LGD)	Age Bands	2018	2030	2043
<b>Derry &amp; Strabane</b>	0-15 Years	32,807	29,904	27,089
	16-64 Years	95,495	90,487	82,716
	65+ Years	22,377	29,359	34,311
<b>Fermanagh &amp; Omagh</b>	0-15 Years	25,356	23,381	21,608
	16-64 Years	71,902	70,265	66,775
	65+ Years	19,577	26,221	30,779
<b>Lisburn &amp; Castlereagh</b>	0-15 Years	29,126	29,258	29,697
	16-64 Years	90,303	97,142	101,945
	65+ Years	24,952	33,967	42,032
<b>Mid &amp; East Antrim</b>	0-15 Years	26,785	24,508	22,910
	16-64 Years	85,948	83,646	79,167
	65+ Years	26,040	33,257	38,091
<b>Mid Ulster</b>	0-15 Years	34,248	32,999	32,492
	16-64 Years	92,079	97,275	98,665
	65+ Years	21,065	28,934	36,820
<b>Newry, Mourne &amp; Down</b>	0-15 Years	40,701	38,681	37,722
	16-64 Years	111,506	113,846	112,867
	65+ Years	27,805	38,495	47,086
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	0-15 Years	393,510	342,340	351,087
	16-64 Years	1,179,934	1,211,875	1,156,728
	65+ Years	308,197	404,775	481,380

## Housing and Homelessness Applications for social homes

At March 2020 there were around 38,745 applicants on the social housing waiting list grouped under six broad household size headings of: Single; Small Family; Large Family; Small Adult Family; Large Adult Family; and Elderly. An 'Elderly' applicant is classified as being 60 years or older.

- Of the total applicants, around 6,056 (16%) are elderly;
- 4,261 of these (70%) are deemed to be in Housing Stress (statistics are a point in time);
- During the twelve months up to the end of March 2019, 988 (15%) allocations were made to elderly applicants;
- There were 260 allocations (26%) made by the Housing Executive; and
- The remaining 728 (74%) were allocated by the Housing Associations.

During the 2019/20 year, there were 16,802 homelessness presenters across all of Northern Ireland:

- Of these, 2,237, or approximately 13% of presenters were older people (Elderly category 60+); and
- The majority of these presenters were granted Full Duty Applicant (FDA) status<sup>9</sup>.

Of those in the Elderly category who presented to us as homeless, the tenures that the highest percentages are likely to originate from are:

- Private Rented Sector (28%);
- Owner Occupied tenure (26%);
- Housing Executive Tenants (20%) and;
- Others (26%) (which includes Sharing, Housing Association Tenants and Hospital).

The main reasons for the 1,371 older people who were accepted as homeless were:

- 'Accommodation Not Reasonable – Physical Health Disability' (88%);
  - 36% were owner occupiers;
  - 28% were from the Private Rented Sector; and
  - 26% were Housing Executive tenants.

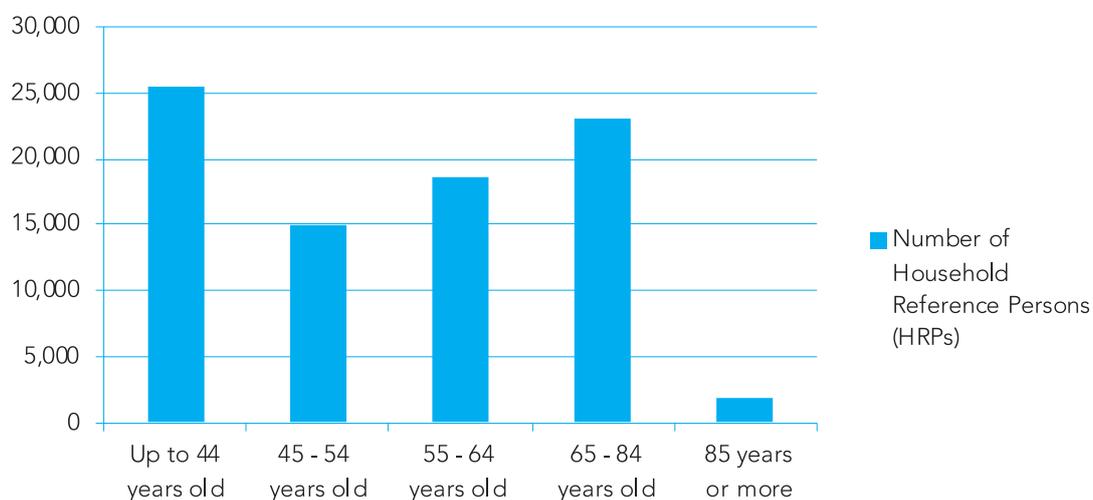
<sup>9</sup> A Full Duty Applicant is a person to whom the Housing Executive owes a duty under Article 10 (2) of the Housing (NI) Order, 1988 to "secure that accommodation becomes available for his / her occupation".

## Housing Executive Tenant Demographics

We are a Landlord with a stock of around 84,600 homes and our stock includes a range of house types from standard 3 bedroom accommodation, bungalows, apartments (including Tower Blocks) to Labourers Cottages.

Almost 59,000 Household Reference Persons (HRPs)<sup>10</sup> in our properties are aged 45 or older. This accounts for almost 70% of all our tenancies. Chart 4 below sets out the age ranges of these tenants.

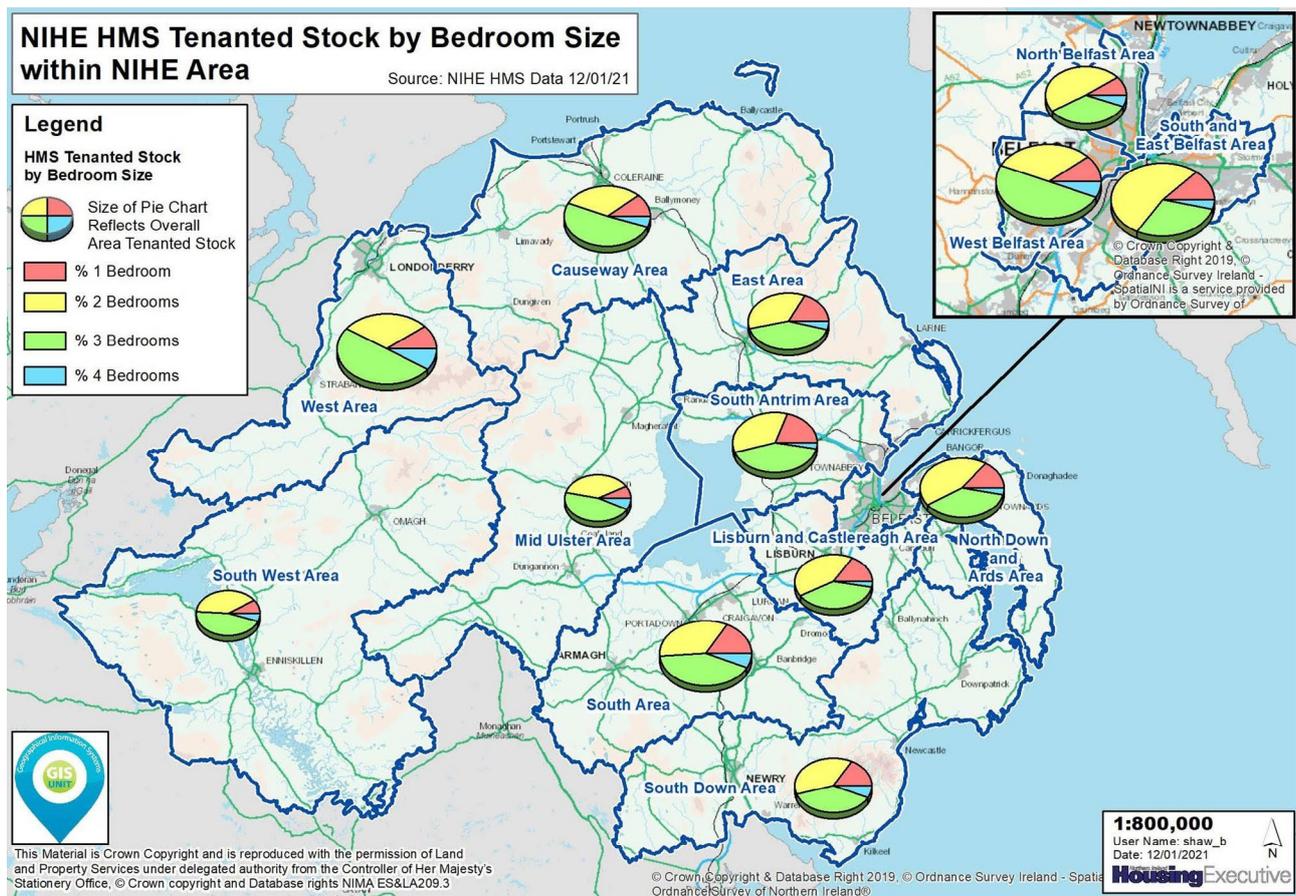
**Chart 4: Data showing age profiles of Housing Executive tenants by age bands**  
(Source: 2019 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey)



<sup>10</sup> Household Reference Person (HRP) The HRP is generally the member of the household who owns or pays the rent or mortgage on the property.

Map 1 below depicts percentage of stock, by bedroom size across our 13 Areas. The size of each pie chart reflects the overall stock of each Area and each segment reflects the percentage of overall stock, by bedroom size in that area. It should be noted that we have a number of properties with more than 4 bedrooms; however we concentrated on only those up to and including 4 bedrooms.

**Map 1 – Housing Executive tenanted stock breakdown by area and number of bedrooms**  
(Source: Housing Management System)



The map above does not include housing association properties. Housing Associations provide over 36,000 social homes throughout Northern Ireland, many of which are for older people. Details can be found at [www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/housing-associations](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/housing-associations).

## Housing Supply

For many years, provision of housing was, to a large extent, focussed on family housing, although more latterly smaller units of accommodation have been built in both the private and social sectors. The Housing Executive is responsible for planning and managing the Social Housing Development Programme, however, new social homes have been built exclusively by Housing Associations since 2002. Housing Association stock includes a range of elderly type accommodation, for example Sheltered, Category 1 and 1 bed units. The Housing Executive responds to draft Local Development Plans and details can be found under Theme 1: Planning for the future.

With an ageing society and smaller household sizes (2.54 based on mid-year 2016 NISRA data and projected to reduce to 2.42 in 2041), it is important to note the long term investment in housing (properties can last for 70 plus years) and to ensure that there are flexible sustainable housing choices that meet the needs of this changing demography.

Research conducted by Retire Easy found that one third of respondents listed downsizing as one of their planned future options in order to release an average of 33% of their capital. This however, is only a potential option in the owner occupied sector and currently these schemes are not widely available in Northern Ireland.

Co-Ownership is Northern Ireland's regional body for shared ownership and a registered housing association regulated by the Department for Communities (DfC) and a charity registered with the Northern Ireland Charities Commission.

At the time of writing, Co-Ownership are designing a product aimed at those over 55 years of age who are in a home which may be too big or in need of repair and who wish to move to a home which is more suitable for their needs. Once launched, this may provide a new and more widely available product in Northern Ireland for older people.

## Community Involvement

Tackling loneliness is an important societal issue, as published statistics show that lonely people are more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease and depression. Around 3.6 million older people in the UK live alone, of whom 2 million are aged 75 years or older. It is estimated that 1.9 million older people often feel ignored or invisible.<sup>11</sup> Research has also shown that up to 50% of disabled people will be lonely on any given day.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst there are many definitions of loneliness, it is widely accepted that loneliness is an individual's negative perception of the quality or quantity of their social relationships.<sup>13</sup> Loneliness can affect people of all ages. Being older does not increase the likelihood of experiencing loneliness, however being older may amplify the effect of the factors that can increase the risk of feeling lonely<sup>14</sup>.

The Housing Executive has a long history of effective and practical engagement with our communities, especially in communicating with what are sometimes described as 'hard to reach' groups of people. We already have community strategies operating in our estates and we feel that it is important to tackle loneliness and promote integration and participation of not just older people but people of all ages and backgrounds. We have included details of our strategies along with links in Appendix 1.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/loneliness/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/the-facts-on-loneliness/>

<sup>13</sup> Vasiliki Tzouvara et al., *A narrative review of the theoretical foundations of loneliness*, *British Journal of Community Nursing*, Vol 20, No 7, July 2015

<sup>14</sup> Age UK, *All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life*, September 2018, p2; Maïke Luhmann and Louise C. Hawkey, *Age Differences in Loneliness from Late Adolescence to Oldest Old Age*, *Developmental Psychology*, 23 February, 2016

As housing providers, we recognise and have put in place a range of measures to help older people as their health and support needs change over time. We have responded to this both in fostering vibrant and sustainable communities as well as administering and delivering a range of initiatives to support people in their homes, both in the social and the private sectors. These include our grants service which provides funding for adaptations for those in the private sector, the modifications we make to our own properties, the housing support services funded through our administration of the Supporting People Programme, and providing funding for the development of social enterprises and community based initiatives which support, promote and enable community participation.

Adaptations to homes, either major or minor adaptations such as hand grab rails, showers or ramps have a key role in promoting independence, preventing falls and injuries, improving mental and physical wellbeing, and supporting our tenants to stay in their homes and in their community. This can sometimes be in response to a significant event in a person's life but research suggests that it may be beneficial to provide adaptations before such a health crisis occurs.

We have a programme of work to help our tenants, however, demand is likely to increase as evidenced by demographic projections. Increasing demand may impact on the services and resources we direct to them and any funding associated with this going forward.

## Summary

The ageing population in Northern Ireland will pose significant challenges for the future design and delivery of many essential services, including housing. Good planning for the future is key to ensuring that the decisions we make in relation to older people are sustainable and flexible to support the wide ranging choices, aspirations and needs for an ageing population. We recognise that some people wish to remain in their family homes, either on their own, with their carer, or with family support, for as long as is practical. Where this is the case, we will support independent living as best we can through many strands of our work. This includes:

- Grants (such as Disabled Facilities Grants in the Private Sector);
- Grants for Warm Homes and Boiler Replacements (subject to funding);
- Adaptations to our own stock;
- Maintaining and improving the fabric of our buildings through our energy efficiency programme and planned maintenance schemes; and
- Maximising the use of floating support and using assistive technology where appropriate.

Staying, however, is only one option. For others, who are no longer able to remain in their homes or have a desire to move or downsize, it is essential that we, along with our partners, explore new models and ways of delivering housing for an increasingly ageing society.

These could include a range of options for those interested in this type of housing, such as smaller level access properties in all tenures, sheltered accommodation, retirement villages or Extra-Care style housing. Extra-care housing allows residents to maintain their independence if they wish, but also offers on-site health and social care

assistance, if required. A new model of housing currently in development in Northern Ireland is Cohousing. Cohousing communities are intentional communities created and run by their residents. Each household has a self-contained, private home as well as shared community space. These can be apartments, houses, rented or owner occupied and residents actively cooperate in the planning of the project and in maintaining its shared resources when up and running.

As new models of housing delivery emerge for older people, better understanding these options, and providing advice and assistance will allow us to offer an enhanced service for our customers.

**“As new models of housing delivery emerge for older people, better understanding these options, and providing advice and assistance will allow us to offer an enhanced service for our customers.”**

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This should be supported by a range of community based initiatives that promote inclusion and participation for older people, allowing them to remain connected to their community, remain active, and feel safe and secure, as well as protecting and promoting their self-fulfilment and dignity.

The Housing Executive has an opportunity to help support an ageing population through the right planning, policies, services and programmes it delivers. Many of these, however, cannot be delivered solely by the Housing Executive and will require partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders, ongoing research and engagement, as well as ensuring we are responsive and adaptive to any changing government policy, strategy direction or legislation that may arise during the course of this strategy.

# 4.0 Older People's Housing Strategy

Our Older People's Housing Strategy aims to address some of the issues outlined in the context section that are within our remit, while for others we will work in partnership and promote our work through our Community Planning role as a statutory partner. We have forged close relationships with councils, recognising the value in collaborative working on areas of mutual interest in urban and rural areas across Northern Ireland as a more efficient use of resources. This is essential within the context of constrained public sector finances.

## Delivering the Strategy

A house alone is not enough to support the needs of people as they age, and with this in mind we have developed four high level delivery themes.

These are:

- Planning for the Future (Exploring Housing Options for Older People and Supporting Independent Living);
- Promoting and Maintaining People's Dignity;
- Providing Housing Advice for Older People;
- Promoting Participation.

We will report on how well we are performing against our high level objectives to enable us to understand if our interventions and actions have helped to address the needs of Northern Ireland's older population over the period of the Strategy. We will publish the results on our website.

## Managing Uncertainties

We recognise that in setting out a plan for the five year term of the Strategy there are a number of uncertainties that may impact on the delivery of the Strategy.

In a statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 3rd November 2020, the then interim Minister for Communities Carál Ní Chuilín set out her plans to address housing challenges in Northern Ireland. Central to the Minister's plan to increase the supply of social housing and reduce housing stress the minister outlined her intentions for the Housing Executive.

The Minister's statement set out plans to change the classification of our landlord business to a 'mutual' or co-operative classification so that we may borrow and reinvest in our stock, including for building new homes.

The statement also set out that "*The Housing Executive Regional Authority will remain accountable to a publicly appointed Board, and continue to remain under the oversight of an Executive Minister, meeting objective housing need in an Equality and Human Rights context*".

Our Regional side of the business<sup>15</sup> is funded almost entirely through government grant. Budget restrictions may have implications for some of our services.

At the time of writing we await further information on the Minister's statement.

**“We have a real opportunity to effect change and support older people in a tangible and meaningful way”.**

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Our plans need to be flexible to allow for changes that may arise over the life of the strategy such as a change in the housing market, government policy or priorities. Despite this uncertainty we will remain focussed on providing effective housing solutions, services and options for our older customers.

It is through the Housing Executive's unique position as the Regional Housing Authority for Northern Ireland and as one of the largest social housing landlords in the UK, that we have a real opportunity to effect change and support older people in a tangible and meaningful way.

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<sup>15</sup> Regional Services role is to work strategically in housing across Northern Ireland in supporting a range of stakeholders to create successful places and communities. Regional Services deliver a range of functions including research, assessment of housing need, delivery of the social housing development programme and the Supporting People programme. In addition, Regional Services deliver a range of grant initiatives to address fuel poverty and housing disability adaptation and we are the Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland.

# Theme 1 - Planning for the Future

Under ‘this theme we have identified two objectives. These are:

1. Exploring Housing Options for Older People; and
2. Supporting Independent Living.

## 1. Exploring Housing Options for Older People

As previously documented, demographic changes are important for future planning for new homes.

- Older people 60+ (230,000) live in almost one third of all homes (2016 House Condition Survey);
- 78.2% live in Owner Occupied sector; 7.5% in Private Rented sector and 14.3% in social housing (2016 House Condition Survey);
- Older people were slightly less likely to live in properties with some level of disrepair (2016 House Condition Survey);
- The 65+ age group is projected to reach 481,000 by 2043, an increase of 56% (NISRA);
- People aged 85+ is set to increase by 106% by 2043 (subset of 65+ group) (NISRA).

Our recent research highlighted the existing accommodation options for older people in Northern Ireland. There are three main types of accommodation for older people across all tenure types:

- Mainstream housing;
- Specialised housing (this can include sheltered housing, assisted living or retirement villages); and
- Residential care (this includes residential homes with meals and personal care, nursing homes with 24-hour nursing care and specialised care homes e.g. dementia care).

Our most recent House Condition Survey in 2016 results show the property types that older people (60+) live in across all tenures is:

- 29% live in bungalows;
- 24% live in terraced housing;
- 19% live in semi-detached;
- 20% in detached housing; and
- 8% live in flats or apartments.

Our research showed that there are a sizable number of older people living in properties that are larger than their needs.

- 70% of respondents lived in single person households;
- The majority (58%) were in the owner occupied sector with 41% of participants in the social sector;
- Only 33% of respondents lived in a one bedroom property, 20% live in two bedroom properties, 32% live in three bedroom properties and 15% of respondents live in homes with four or more bedrooms;
- 16% of respondents have a stair lift/mobility aid or cannot access the rooms upstairs; and
- 26% of respondents have difficulty in accessing any outside space around their property.

Our research<sup>16</sup> also found that:

- Location was a factor that can limit options and choice and people's appetite to move;
- Older people prefer to remain within a relatively narrow radius (5 miles or less) of their current accommodation. The importance of linkages to family, friends and local services and amenities was clear. This preference is prevalent across the wider social rented sector, but particularly with older people. Given the population projections this preference may pose challenges to and have an impact on the planning and delivery of a range of housing models and any services in place to support these. For example, transport links, public services and infrastructure;

- To date, there has been minimal development of specialised older people's housing for either owner occupation or private rental in Northern Ireland, but housing of this type, such as gated schemes for over 55s, is increasingly being developed by private developers for purchase or private rental elsewhere. These have been shown to be very popular.

If more choice of smaller suitable properties were available both in urban and rural areas this would provide an opportunity to free up larger properties in all tenures for families. In planning for the future, it is also important to consider the needs of the rural older population who are more likely to live in dwellings with higher levels of disrepair, fuel poverty and higher repair costs<sup>17</sup> and are more likely to fail to meet the Decent Homes Standard<sup>18</sup> than those in urban areas.

## Housing for Older People – Planning Issues

It is likely, given the demographic trends and increased demand for care, the need for other solutions will grow. There are increasing numbers with complex disabilities living in domestic settings. Housing Associations already cater for identified wheelchair need in their social housing planning applications. However, demand from people with a disability who wish to own their own homes, or rent privately, cannot readily be met, as there is no requirement for market housing to provide wheelchair accessible homes.

The Housing Executive encourages council planners to incorporate, within the emerging Local Development Plans, a requirement that all new build housing should meet Lifetime Home standards, with a proportion built to wheelchair standards. Lifetime Home standards were developed to ensure that homes are accessible

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Health-and-welfare/housing-and-older-people-issues-aspirations-needs>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Working-With-Us/Research/House-Condition-Survey>

<sup>18</sup> A decent home is one that is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities. A decent home meets the following four criteria: Criterion a: It meets the current statutory minimum standards for housing. Criterion b: It is in a reasonable state of repair. Criterion c: It has reasonably modern facilities and services. Criterion d: It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

and inclusive, to support the changing needs of individuals and families at different stages of life.

In addition, we support requirements in development plans to include housing mix policies in new residential development which can provide appropriate housing for different household groups, such as families and older people.

During 2020/2021 we commenced a Strategic Housing Market Analysis of Northern Ireland's Housing Markets. The first phase, which is nearing completion, was for the Belfast Metropolitan and Derry and Strabane Housing Market Areas. The analysis will include key economic, demographic and housing data, as well as attempting to project future need at the appropriate geographic level to inform Local Development Plans and enable policy makers to have a full understanding of the dynamics of each Housing Market Area. The first phase is due for publication during 2021.

We also support sustainable transportation policies within the emerging LDPs to encourage walking, cycling and accessible public transport to promote healthy lifestyles, minimise climate change and to improve connectivity for those who do not have access to a private car, including children, disabled people and older people. We support the integration of transport and patterns of development, which reduce the need to travel, as well as being more sustainable.

There have been some recent examples of alternative housing options for older people in Northern Ireland. An increase in desirable, accessible housing options will enable older people to move allowing 'active stock management', to release housing to meet need and demand from younger households and families. Wheelchair accessible housing and housing to Lifetime Homes standards will allow older and disabled people to feel safe and secure, and to be fully integrated within the residential community.

## Intermediate Housing for Older People

The Department for Communities recent consultation on Affordable Housing suggests a key target group for affordable housing is active older people:

“Active Older People – demographic change is expected to result in a growing demand for housing that is designed to meet the needs, expectations and aspirations of older people. For this group, housing that is easy to maintain and is fit for purpose as they age, and is within or close to their current neighbourhoods is likely to provide an attractive product. Housing which conforms to the HAPPI principles could fill this key gap in the market, but additional assistance may be required to help some individuals within this category to transition to these more suitable homes.”

More detail on the HAPPI principles can be found on page 28 of this document.

## Extra-Care Housing

Given the links between age and deteriorating health, there may be an increasing demand for specialised suitable housing provision for some older people. A rapidly ageing population will place significant demands on pressured health and social care services. Research<sup>19</sup> carried out noted that while some forms of housing such as sheltered accommodation may initially meet the residents' requirements it may be increasingly difficult to sustain the tenancies of very frail elderly (those who increasingly require healthcare and support) as they age and who may require more intensive support. This includes their tenancy, health and support needs as well as their levels of community participation and general happiness.

19 Tinker, A, Kellaheer, L., Ginn, J. and Ribe, E. (2013) Assisted Living Platform – The Long Term Care Revolution, London: King's College London. Reproduced by the Housing Learning and Improvement Network

‘Extra Care’ Housing is housing accommodation for older and vulnerable people that both allows residents to maintain their independence if they wish, but also offers on-site health and social care assistance, if required. Whilst there are some communal facilities, accommodation is self-contained and has its own front door. Some Extra Care facilities also offer wider benefits to the residents and the local community including the reduction in the need for health and social care services, better stock management of housing in local areas and the reduction in hospital bed occupancy rates (as evidenced through examples in Great Britain where it is much more established). This model however is relatively new to Northern Ireland.

## “we will explore new models of accommodation and housing related support services for a range of older people...”

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Local integration within a community setting is a key consideration when developing ‘Extra Care’ facilities to ensure that residents are supported and enabled both by the physical environment and wider community and societal environment they are situated in.

In other jurisdictions ‘Extra Care Housing’ has been utilised to meet the health and social care needs of elderly and other vulnerable people and has demonstrated that the number of hospital bed days utilised by older patients could be cut both through admission/readmission and through earlier discharges. Potentially this may free up hospital beds for other patients which can result in savings to the public purse.

This can have wider positive impacts on the housing market for example, freeing up larger family homes and better matching properties to the needs and preferences of individuals. We will explore the practicality of this option in the Northern Ireland context further in the coming years.

## ‘Hub and Spoke Models’

‘Hub and Spoke’ models can offer services and facilities to the wider community, as well as to residents of the scheme. This means that a range of services including housing support can be provided from a central point over a defined geographical area to people within the surrounding community.

These are often based at existing sheltered housing schemes (the hub) and could extend services (spokes) offered to meet the needs of the growing older population. If a scheme has adequate facilities, and providing there was sufficient demand, other services could be added to benefit older people. These could include community health services on a permanent or ad hoc basis, personal and domestic teams based at the scheme and working in the wider community, housing support, occupational therapy and opportunities for recreational activities.

We will explore new models of accommodation and housing related support services for a range of older people including the potential and feasibility of ‘Extra Care’ style or ‘hub and spoke’ principles for housing, for older people in Northern Ireland.

The Housing Executive has robust housing needs assessments in place such as monitoring and analysing data for ‘Elderly’ (60+) people from the social housing waiting list, those in housing stress, homelessness presenters and those who have been allocated properties. This information is used to develop the Social Housing Development Programme for new social housing which considers the needs of Older People.

Our research noted potential areas of latent demand and the types of property supplied. Latent demand is hidden housing need in areas of low housing stock or low housing turnover. We also carry out ‘latent demand testing’ specifically in rural areas.

However, at a broader level, beyond the high-level data provided by the House Condition Survey, there

is less evidence on the extent to which the existing housing stock, especially in the private sector, can successfully meet the needs and aspirations of an ageing population. We know that in the private sector there are more older households than the social or private rented sectors. Older, pre-1919, dwellings are more prevalent in the private sector and of the 7% of occupied dwellings that failed the decent homes standard in 2016 the types of households more likely to live in these properties were those with older household reference persons and those with lower income households.

## Accessible Housing

There are different models of accessible housing which includes a range of options and homes that have been adapted.

To aid planning for the future, we are developing an 'Accessible Housing Register' (AHR) which will provide us with better knowledge of social homes that have been adapted or bespoke properties and act as a planning tool to assist with the identification of unmet need.

**'Lifetime Homes'** standards were developed to ensure that homes are accessible and inclusive to support the changing needs of individuals and are designed to create better living environments for everyone from raising children to coping with illness or reduced mobility later in life. The development of these standards is especially important in the context of an ageing population and can prevent the need for costly and disruptive adaptations and also enable independence and provide greater choice for more people, for longer.

In addition to the 16 criteria required for 'Lifetime Homes', the Department for Communities also requires 9 additional criteria in grant aided social housing developments which include factors such as level access, potential for the enlargement of car parking spaces, outward opening of certain doors, capacity for turning a wheelchair, and access within kitchen areas and WC.

**Wheelchair standard homes** support independent living and may also reduce the need for costly adaptations. In the social sector we plan for Wheelchair Housing which is primarily designed to aid independent living for people with a physical disability and those who need a wheelchair for day to day mobility.

**Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)** are managed by the Housing Executive. The design of accommodation and the availability of financial support to adapt the home to meet occupants' changing needs enables people, including older citizens, to remain comfortably in their own homes with as much independence as possible. (DFGs, like most grants, are subject to annual funding and means testing of applicants).

In 2019/20 we approved grants of almost £30m across all sectors, including £10.8m on 1,119 Disabled Facilities Grants in the Private Sector.

## Designing for the future

Better design of housing is linked to independence, happiness and the general wellbeing of people. The design of the built environment can have a significant impact on older people and the design should create an enabling environment that gives people independence, choice, allows them to maintain their lifestyle and contact with the wider community. Design should also facilitate the efficient delivery of care and enhance the quality of life for the residents.

Improved design in relation to space, lighting, balconies and manageable outdoor space, ventilation, room to move and good storage have particular relevance to older people's housing which needs to offer an attractive alternative to traditional family homes. In short, cleverly designed models of housing that work for older people, work for everyone else, and would allow people to remain in one place.

These homes also need to be able to adapt over time to changing needs. Many older people have adult children living at home and may require space for family support or care-givers as they age. Incorporating good design principles such as the **‘Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation’ (HAPPI)** principles could make a meaningful difference to the lives of many older people and their families.

### What are the HAPPI Principles?

- Generous internal space standards;
- Plenty of natural light in the home and in circulation spaces;
- Balconies and outdoor space, avoiding internal corridors and single-aspect flats;
- Adaptability and ‘care aware’ design which is ready for emerging telecare and tele-healthcare technologies;
- Circulation spaces that encourage interaction and avoid an ‘institutional feel’;
- Shared facilities and community ‘hubs’ where these are lacking in the neighbourhood;
- Plants, trees and the natural environment;
- High levels of energy efficiency, with good ventilation to avoid overheating;
- Extra storage for belongings and bicycles; and
- Shared external areas such as ‘home zones’ that give priority to pedestrians.

We are currently working in partnership with the Department for Communities (DfC) and Radius Housing to deliver a pilot new build scheme in Newtownabbey, incorporating 14 two bedroom, 3 person units, based on HAPPI design principles. (This development also includes 6 two bedroom, 3 person lifetime homes). The Housing Executive will work with the Department to evaluate the success of this pilot and identify any future implications for the Housing Association Design Guide when the 14 new HAPPI style units have been completed and allocated. (Completion is anticipated in April 2022).

Where appropriate, better design will also be complemented by assistive technology. Assistive technology spans walking aids to more complex and advanced digital solutions that can assist with a range of tasks such as opening doors, turning on lights and using household appliances. With many people wishing to maintain their independence and stay in their homes as long as possible, assistive technology can have a part to play in helping manage complex health conditions and enable older people to live with dignity and combat social isolation. We have supported assistive technology through our grants function and will continue to do so where appropriate. Examples of assistive technology grants include automatic doors, buzz entry systems, and rise and fall sinks/baths.

Planning, and building new homes continues to be a key issue for the wider social sector, including older people. We will continue to influence the planning aspect to ensure that new homes and communities are sustainable and will support the changing demography of our society through our new build programme.

Many of our tower blocks house older people, some of whom have lived there for a long time. We will need to consider the impact that the removal of some tower blocks may have on these particular individuals, their housing requirements, and any impacts or disruption to their sense of community and belonging that they may encounter.

We, along with partner agencies, should raise awareness of the range of options available to older people, including newer models of provision, for example, retirement villages, and existing models of provision such as sheltered housing. This would allow older people to be more informed of their choices and options.

Planning for the Future – High level Action Plan			
Exploring Housing Options for Older People		Lead Department	Target Date
1.	We will seek to influence Lifetime Homes being adopted into the general housing stock in the private sector.	Regional Services	By 2026/27
2.	We will explore new models of accommodation and housing related support services for a range of older people including the potential and feasibility of ‘Extra Care’ style or ‘hub and spoke’ style principles for housing, for older people in Northern Ireland.	Regional Services	2023/24
3.	We will work with partners to incorporate better design principles into the specification for the delivery of future housing schemes and evaluate the feasibility of reconfiguring existing schemes to meet the needs and demands of older people.	Regional Services	2021/22 onwards
4.	We will ensure that the Social Housing Development Programme is reflective of assessed need over the duration of the strategy.	Regional Services	2021/22 onwards
5.	Where appropriate, we will explore reconfiguring current provision of our stock.	Asset Management	2021/22 onwards
6.	We will launch our Accessible Housing Register (AHR) and work with partners to continuously enhance and improve our understanding of adapted or bespoke stock.	Regional Services/ Asset Management	2021/22
7.	We, along with partner agencies, should raise awareness of the range of options available to older people, including newer models of provision through our housing options service.	Housing Services	Annually
8.	Through the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP), we will continue to influence the planning aspect of new social homes to ensure that new homes and communities are sustainable and will support the changing demographics of our society (including older people).	Regional Services	Annually
9.	We will explore and maximize the role assistive technology may have in enhancing housing options for older people.	Asset Management/ Housing Services/ Regional Services	Annually
10.	We will carry out research as required.	Regional Services	Annually

## 2. Supporting Independent Living

Many older people have spent significant portions of their lives in the same home, raising their families and making friendships and connections in their local community. They often have significant emotional ties with their home and are understandably reluctant to leave their current accommodation. We have many services that help people to remain in their own home for as long as is possible and if they are able to do so, for example our grants and adaptation services. We recognise that with an increasing ageing population, many people will have increased health and mobility problems and require at least some element of support to help stay independent in their home for as long as possible.

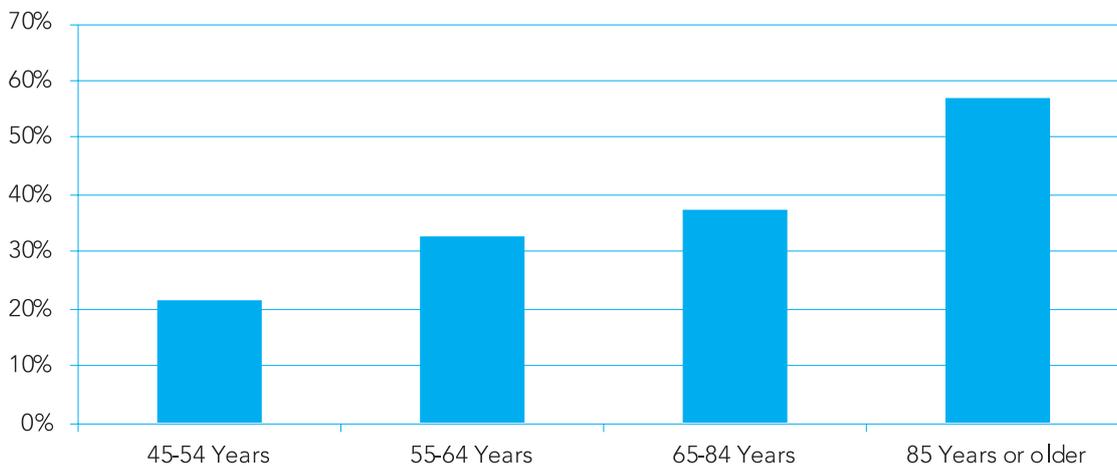
### **According to the Northern Ireland Health Survey (2017/18)<sup>20</sup>,**

- 14% of the population have reported a fall in or around the home in the last two years;
- older respondents were more likely to have experienced a fall; and
- The likelihood of a fall increased from 19% for those aged 65-74 years to 31% of those aged over 75 years.

The percentage of Housing Executive tenant “head of households”, who report a long term health problem, illness, or disability increases to almost 70% for those aged 55 or older. In addition to this, the percentage who require mobility aids such as sticks, crutches and zimmer frames increases dramatically as they age as shown in Chart 5.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/health-survey-northern-ireland-first-results-201718>

**Chart 5: Data showing percentage of Housing Executive tenants, by age, who require mobility aids indoors or outdoors.**  
 (Source: 2019 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey)



For our tenants, based on the data from our 2019 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey, the older the tenant, the more likely they are to have been in the property for more than 5 years and the happier they are with our service.

Overall tenant satisfaction is 92% for those aged 65-84 years of age and this increases to 94% for those aged 85 or older;

Overall satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a place to live for those aged 65-84 years of age is 96% and this increases to 97% for those aged 85 years or older.

Based on recent Housing Executive research which was cross tenure, although a relatively small sample size, it was noted that the majority of older people wished to remain in their current accommodation without having to move at all later in life. Those aged between 55-69 years old were particularly determined to do so. The research noted that older people aged 85 years or older who lived in supported sheltered accommodation schemes stated that they had made a move as a result of declining health and that it was their preference to remain in their own home.

The greater use of grants and Floating Support may provide a cost effective alternative to having to move into social housing or having to stay in hospital due to inadequate housing to move back to.

## Grants and Adaptations

For those vulnerable people (including older people) who prefer to remain in their homes, we administer a variety of grants and adaptations to support them both in the private sector and for our own tenants.

For our tenants, where an occupational therapist from the appropriate Health & Social Care Trust makes a recommendation, and depending on its feasibility, we undertake bespoke adaptations to our own stock. These are often complex adaptations and extensions (external and internal) and may include bedroom or bathroom extensions, provision of ground floor WC and/or ground floor showers, level access showers, access ramps and specialist baths and toilets. We have reviewed our major adaptations process and are aiming to reduce the time to deliver these.

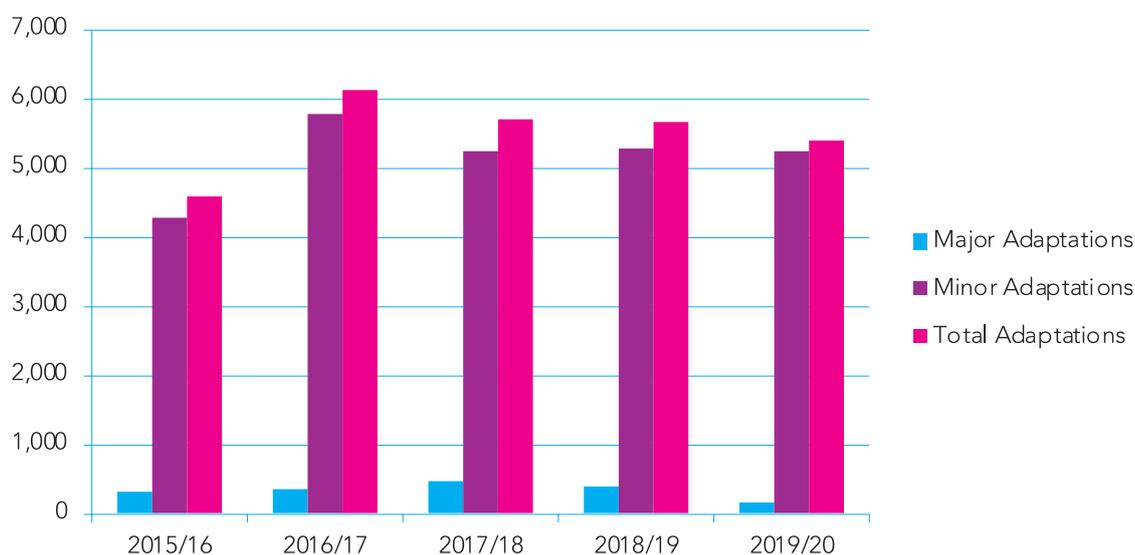
Minor adaptations, such as handrails and widening of footpaths and alterations to lighting, can be installed without the need for a referral to Health and Social Care. In the last three financial years we have carried out almost 17,000 minor and major adaptations.

Housing Associations also provide this service to their own tenants, funded by a 'Disability Adaptation Grant' which is included within the wider Social Housing Development Programme budget. During 2019/20 the Housing Executive approved 1,159 DAG claims (1,150 minor and 9 major).

We also administer a Disabled Facilities Grant which funds adaptations for homes in the private sector for a person with a disability and is based on the recommendation of an Occupational Therapist. This is available to owner occupiers, landlords or private tenants. Customers may qualify if there is a person with disabilities living in the house and the work is recommended by an Occupational Therapist. Work recommended may include improved access to bathroom, living room or bedroom, adding extra bathroom facilities or adapting/upgrading lighting or heating systems. Depending on individual financial circumstances, homeowners and private landlords may need to make a contribution to the cost of the work. In recent years we have redesigned this service to improve the customer experience. However, it can still be a lengthy process. There are some capacity issues that would need to be explored along with other improvement models which could assist in reducing the time taken for improvements to be completed.

We will explore the feasibility of innovative housing options to further enhance our major adaptations process.

**Chart 6: Number of Housing Executive major and minor adaptations 2015/16 – 2019/20**  
(Source: Adaptations Team, Housing Executive)



There are health impacts for people living in poor standard homes and their ability to live independently. An estimate on some of the costs of poor housing for the NHS in England has been suggested at £1.4 billion per year.<sup>21</sup> ‘Poor housing’ refers to dwellings that have at least 1 of the 26 Category 1 hazards (scoring over 1,000 on the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) scale). Homes in the private sector and homes that were built pre-1919 are more likely to have at least 1 Category 1 hazard.

- In addition to this, the savings to the NHS from addressing excess cold is projected at £848 million; and
- The savings to the NHS in addressing fall hazards are £425 million for first year treatment costs.

We commissioned a report to model the cost of poor housing in Northern Ireland as measured by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Although not implemented in Northern Ireland, the HHSRS is a risk based system that identifies defects in dwellings and evaluates the potential effect of any defects or deficiencies on the health and safety of occupants, visitors, neighbours or passers-by.

This report based on the 2016 House Condition Survey data identified that the cost of poor housing to society has been estimated at approximately £401m per year.<sup>22</sup> The most common hazards identified were falls on stairs, falls on level surfaces, and excess cold. These are also more likely to impact older people who may be more frail, susceptible to cold, and more likely to require assistance when walking in or around the home.

<sup>21</sup> British Research Establishment (2016) *The full cost of poor housing*. Available at: <https://www.bre.co.uk/news/New-BRE-Trust-report-shows-poor-quality-homes-in-England-cost-the-NHS-14bn-per-year-and-wider-society-186bn-1161.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/HCS-2016-Additional-Reports/The-cost-of-poor-housing-in-Northern-Ireland-2016>

The analysis calculated that the average cost to reduce 'Category 1' hazards present in nearly 70,000 properties in Northern Ireland was approximately £4,366 per dwelling with a total cost of approximately £305 million for the whole stock. However, if 'up front' improvements were completed to mitigate the hazards in housing, this could save the NHS £39.5m per year.

## **“Poor housing can negatively impact on other elements of health and wellbeing such as anxiety, depression and loneliness.”**

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Minor adaptations may be a relatively low cost and effective way to allow people to remain in their current homes and communities. However, the uptake of these often happens after people have suffered a health crisis or a fall. It has been suggested that improving the design of different forms of adaptations and assistive technology may help to reduce the perceived stigma associated with them<sup>23</sup> and may work towards reducing ageist attitudes towards various forms of assistance. This could make these interventions more attractive to users and could increase the uptake of this form of assistance before a health crisis or fall occurs.

Poor housing can negatively impact on other elements of health and wellbeing such as anxiety, depression and loneliness.

We have recently made an appointment to the vacant Housing and Health Liaison Officer post. This role provides specialist advice and expertise on housing and health issues for people with complex needs and/or adaptation services for people with disabilities. The officer will work with housing and health bodies and a range of relevant stakeholders aiming to help realise effective and efficient housing solutions

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/appg/appg-for-ageing-and-older-people---report-on-decent-and-accessible-homes-for-older-people.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/fe20bf26-1bae-43e9-8025-2d85ed841cf6/the\\_role\\_of\\_sheltered\\_housing\\_in\\_northern\\_ireland\\_and\\_future\\_issues\\_published\\_september\\_2012\\_.pdf.aspx](https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/fe20bf26-1bae-43e9-8025-2d85ed841cf6/the_role_of_sheltered_housing_in_northern_ireland_and_future_issues_published_september_2012_.pdf.aspx)

<sup>25</sup> Fuel poverty has also been measured using the Low Income High Costs (LIHC) indicator, a household is considered to be fuel poor if: They have required fuel costs that are above average (the national median level); Were they to spend that amount, they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

## **Sheltered Housing**

Research noted that sheltered housing (Category 2), mainly built in the 1970s/1980s, continues to be a popular housing option for many older people<sup>24</sup>. Some of the reasons that people had moved into sheltered accommodation was because of deteriorating health, reduced mobility, the death of a partner, as a result of adult children not living nearby to support them or through personal choice. This type of accommodation also provided safety, security and companionship, which was important to the residents. It was also noted that there was a lack of other affordable and suitable options which would suit their finances at that stage of their life.

Supporting People currently provides funding to 335 Sheltered Accommodation schemes for the provision of housing related support for older people and for many this has proven to be a popular housing solution. Previous research was carried out in 2012 on sheltered accommodation.

## **Energy Efficient Homes**

Older people are more likely to be impacted by fuel poverty. Based on information in the 2016 House Condition Survey (for all tenures), under the 10% definition of 'fuel poverty':

- 38% of households headed by an older person (75 years or older) were in fuel poverty and 34% of older households were 'fuel poor'<sup>25</sup>;
- 31% of households that were headed by a retired person were in fuel poverty;
- 27% of those who were permanently sick/disabled or looking after family/home were also in fuel poverty; and
- Older people also tend to live in older, less energy efficient homes.

Fuel poverty is influenced by three factors: a person's income, the price of fuel and the thermal efficiency of their home. Whilst we signpost customers to increase benefit uptake, we cannot influence a person's income or the price of fuel. However, we recognise the need to improve thermal comfort and reduce energy costs for older people through a range of initiatives, including oil buying clubs<sup>26</sup> and through administering the Northern Ireland Energy Advice Service. Fuel poverty levels have reduced from 42% in 2011 to 18%<sup>27</sup> in 2018, reflecting the levels of investment in energy efficiency across all tenures in Northern Ireland. It should be noted that this analysis was calculated at a point in time when fuel costs were less expensive.

As the Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland we have a statutory duty to promote energy efficiency and advice to all Northern Ireland householders. The Northern Ireland Energy Advice Service (NIEAS) was brought in house by the Housing Executive in April 2020. This is a free and impartial advice service open to all Northern Ireland householders as the only 'one stop shop' for energy advice and signing posting of available energy grants.

This service can be accessed through phone, online forms and email. If necessary, customers can receive a ring back. With the refreshed Northern Ireland Energy Advice Service we are able to provide free impartial advice that will help people save money on their energy bills and reduce their carbon footprint.

In 2019/20 across the private sector, our Grants Department managed approximately £13.8m of work to 4,755 homes through the Department for Communities Affordable Warmth Scheme. Following a public consultation there are a number of changes proposed to the scheme. When implemented, they should more effectively identify and help those households most at risk of fuel poverty. An additional £1.4m was invested

in 2,161 privately owned homes to install new energy efficient boilers through the Department for Communities Boiler Replacement Scheme. Subject to funding, we will continue to deliver a range of energy efficiency measures to private sector households and help owner occupiers replace old central heating boilers through the Boiler Replacement Scheme.

We continuously strive to improve the fabric and the thermal efficiency of all of our tenant's homes through investments, such as, installing better and more efficient heating systems, double glazing, insulation and cladding schemes undertaken as part of our Landlord role.

As the Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland our role is to consider best practice and seeks to support improvements in home energy efficiency across the entire housing stock in the region. This is an important role which will gain in strategic importance in the coming years as climate change issues move up governments' agendas. In response to this we will develop a climate change strategy that will help shape the way we work, services we deliver and opportunities to improve how we operate beyond our core services, and, we will also develop a standalone energy strategy for our own stock.

## Floating Support

Our Supporting People Programme provides housing related support to over 19,000 vulnerable customers across Northern Ireland each year. Customers can be supported in a number of ways including through Floating Support. Floating Support assists people that need housing related support to maintain independence in their own home, for example, through decluttering services, befriending schemes and through providing advice on benefit maximisation. A key customer group within the Supporting People programme is older

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Community/NI-Energy-Advice/Oil-Buying-Clubs>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/1f9e55a1-66c2-46b7-bf92-9ee192ce355f/estimates-of-fuel-poverty-northern-ireland-2017-and-2018-revised.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf>

people. Supporting People's budget for 2019/20 was £72.8m and last year 12% of this budget was directed at supporting older people (55+).

Floating Support provides short-term accommodation based support (up to two years, although this is currently under review by the Department for Communities) to assist those who need housing-related support.

A review of Supporting People by the then Department for Social Development (DSD) noted that the Floating Support Model plays a key role in early "intervention and prevention" and recommended that the Housing Executive progress opportunities to extend the Floating Support service as a cost effective way of meeting need. During 2019/20 we continued to prioritise floating support as a mechanism for promoting early intervention and support to enable independent living within a home setting.

At the time of writing this Strategy there are 13 Floating Support services for older people in Northern Ireland. Trend analysis of need and gaps in service provision identified gaps for Floating Support and as a result we have identified four geographical areas with 200 new floating support places to be delivered. These areas are;

- Newry;
- Lisburn, Downpatrick and Ards;
- Moyle; and
- Limavady, Derry / Londonderry and Strabane.

Some of these additional services are also based within areas with a high rural population and may help support rural customers remain within their homes and communities.

We have committed to ensuring a minimum spend of Supporting People programme funding through floating support at and have aimed to increase this incrementally to 16% in 2020/21 subject to budget.

Through our Strategic Needs Assessment we have produced an evidence-based assessment of need for housing support services to inform future planning for the Supporting People Programme. This is currently with DfC for considerations and its findings will inform our new Supporting People Strategy which aims to direct and coordinate our activities for some of our most vulnerable customers, including older people.

## Assistive technology

Assistive Technology has a key role to play in enabling older people to remain at home and also improve their living conditions. Given the availability and relatively low cost of some 'plug and play' assistive technologies, this can now be seen as a viable and realistic solution to support some people to remain in their homes or to tackle loneliness and social isolation.

In 2018 we launched an Assisted Living pilot scheme which aimed to improve the flexibility, mobility, social interaction and security for a pilot of 18 households with elderly, disabled or vulnerable tenants. We used technology for communication and control of smart devices including lighting, power sockets systems, thermostat and monitoring devices for the benefit of the elderly living alone.

Evaluations of the pilots are being carried out from a number of perspectives. Occupational Therapists will evaluate from a customer perspective, the social enterprise who supplied the equipment will evaluate from an installation, training and support perspective and the Housing Executive will evaluate the project from a research perspective.

We will consider the findings of these evaluations and consider if assistive technology can have a greater role to play through our work in sustaining and supporting tenancies, reducing fear of crime for older people and even supporting tenants manage health conditions such as dementia.

Planning for the Future – High level Action Plan			
Supporting Independent Living		Lead Department	Target Date
1.	We will explore other methods of construction for our major adaptations process and consider the benefits this may have for older people.	Asset Management	2021/22 onwards
2.	When delivering our planned maintenance programme and response maintenance service we will take the needs of our older tenants into account to ensure the home meets their needs, where possible.	Asset Management	Annually
3.	We will deliver an enhanced major and minor adaptations service to support independent living for our customers, including older people. We have a commitment through our Corporate Plan to reduce end to end times for the major adaptation process.	Asset Management	Annually
4.	We will use a variety of methods to promote our Disabled Facilities Grants process and again we have a commitment in our Corporate Plan to aim to further improve end to end times for our Disabled Facilities Grants for our customers, including older people against an agreed performance baseline.	Regional Services	Annually
5.	Subject to funding, we will continue to administer a Boiler Replacement and Affordable Warmth grant schemes to benefit a range of our customers, including older people.	Regional Services	Annually (subject to budget)
6.	We will aim to reduce Fuel Poverty through partnership working for our oil buying clubs and through providing energy advice and assistance.	Regional Services	Annually
7.	We will maximise the use of Floating Support for older people and will increase the number of floating support services for older people where appropriate, subject to available funding.	Regional Services	2020/21 onwards
8.	We will explore the use assistive technology has to play in supporting independent living and sustaining and supporting tenancies.	Landlord Services	Annually
9.	Consider and respond appropriately to the findings of the Strategic Needs Assessment, which will outline the needs of Older People in the short to medium term for services we deliver.	Regional Services	2021/22 onwards

# Theme 2 - Promoting and Maintaining People's Dignity

One of The Executive Office's Active Ageing Strategy's strategic aims is 'Dignity' with an outcome that states "*Older people's dignity and human rights are effectively safeguarded.*" The concept of dignity for older people is often associated with the compassionate care by people with the right skills and knowledge to care for them and who do not patronise, objectify or ignore their rights.

Alongside this it is also about enabling the person to feel valued, independent, safe, secure and supported in their home, community and wider society and ensuring that any services we design, manage or deliver support this.

It is, however, important to note that older people are not a homogenous group and have the diversity of needs and characteristics of society as a whole and therefore the principles of dignity apply irrespective of age and are applicable to all society.

People of any age can experience a variety of housing issues that can have a detrimental impact on their physical and mental health. Issues such as homelessness, affordability, fear of crime/anti-social behaviour and domestic violence if not addressed can have long term impacts on the physical and mental health of individuals. These housing related issues can also disproportionately affect older people who may be more vulnerable and may be socially isolated, without a support network or with

a disability. These may be further compounded by a number of age related issues such as dementia or frailty.

We will continue to provide services and assistance to uphold and maintain the dignity of our customers and tenants through the range of services we deliver for all customers, as well as those specifically aimed at our older customers. We will do this through a range of methods including:

- Contributing to the physical and built environment in managing our homes and delivering the Social Housing Development Programme;
- Providing support to vulnerable older people;
- Delivering our housing management policy and procedures; and
- Exploring and delivering new models and services for older people.

We interact with older people on many levels including visiting them in their homes. In addition to those housing services we provide, we are also very conscious of our safeguarding duties and we work in partnership with a wide range of public, statutory and voluntary organisations to ensure that we fulfil these duties to their fullest. We have a safeguarding policy in place.

## Supporting People

Supporting People (SP) plays a key role in promoting, enabling and protecting the dignity of vulnerable people and as outlined in Theme 1, helps people to live independently in the community or in a range of sheltered or supported accommodation options. The SP programme has four key thematic groups which are Older People, Disability, Homelessness and Younger People.

The SP Programme is delivered through a wide range of delivery partners, including statutory bodies, housing associations, private sector companies and voluntary and community organisations.

We work with all our partners to maximise the outcome for each customer to:

- help them develop domestic/life skills;
- establish social contacts and activities;
- gain access to other services;
- set up and maintain a home/tenancy; and
- find other accommodation and maintain the safety and security of the dwelling among other things.

We will continue to explore a range of accommodation based support models for older people such as ‘Hub and Spoke’ or ‘Extra Care’ style models to ensure that older people have the appropriate care and support in place, when they need them, to allow them to live with dignity and remain as independent as possible.

To ensure that services are targeted to meet need we have produced an evidence-based assessment of need for housing support services to inform future planning for the Supporting People Programme.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.dementiastatistics.org/statistics-about-dementia/prevalence/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-us/policy-and-influencing/dementia-uk-report>

<sup>30</sup> The Household Model is a therapeutic approach to dementia care that focuses on the emotions of people living with dementia and believes that people living with dementia can thrive well in a nurturing environment which may reduce their anxiety and distress; Staff are recruited based on their emotional intelligence and there is the removal of institutional features and the ‘us and them’ approach such as staff wearing uniforms, medicine trolleys and rigid task-based routines; The Household Model aims to create “home” for those living with dementia by developing small household living, grouping people together at a similar point of their dementia experience, in a family-like environment; Homes are filled with life and colour – homes are filled with people’s life history and lived experiences; and There is greater freedom for people living in the home to do more for themselves and feel less restricted and staff have flexible more relaxed routines to support this.

## Dementia Friendly

As people live longer, more and more people are likely to develop and live sizeable portions of their lives with dementia. These changes are often small to start with but can have a severe impact on a person’s daily life and ultimately will remove their ability to live independently.

Dementia is now the leading cause of death in the UK.<sup>28</sup> There are 850,000 people estimated to be living with dementia in the UK and 38% of the population know a family member or a friend living with dementia. It is estimated that one million people in the UK will have dementia by 2021<sup>29</sup> and this is predicted to increase to two million by 2050.

New models of housing have been, or are being developed in response to this with some high-quality housing specifically for those with dementia having been developed. New ‘Household Models’<sup>30</sup> of retirement type developments are also currently being developed in Northern Ireland to provide care for those who are frail or who have dementia.

Through our work we are regularly engaging and interacting with tenants and customers in their home through some of our key frontline housing functions. Our Housing Advisors, Patch Managers and Maintenance Staff have regular and direct contact with customers who may be impacted by Dementia.

We recognise the opportunity and responsibility that we have to promote dignity for our tenants and customers impacted by Dementia. In partnership with Alzheimer’s Society we launched an award winning Dementia Friendly Pilot in the South Down Area. This Pilot raised awareness, provided training for staff and offered practical support to those and the family of those impacted by Dementia.

We established links with local Health Trusts and Dementia Navigators<sup>31</sup> and developed a referral process which enabled frontline staff to visit the tenant's homes and offer practical advice and support as well as providing a 'Dementia Friendly Pack' to encourage tenancy sustainment. The pack now includes a dementia friendly calendar clock, dementia friendly telephone internal signage, front and back door key fobs, a whiteboard and information at both a national and local level.

The success of this Pilot has now led to a full roll-out across our Landlord Services division with a large number of frontline staff volunteering to become 'Dementia Champions' and be trained by the Alzheimer's Society to deliver Dementia Friendly Workshops across Northern Ireland. By the end of 2021 our network of Area Offices will be fully Dementia Friendly.

As part of our Dementia Friendly service we will adopt a dementia friendly approach to our Response Maintenance service which will incorporate dementia friendly design minor adaptations as well as providing the opportunity to note any outstanding issues or repairs in the customer's home when our Dementia Champions and Maintenance Officers visit. Dementia friendly design for minor adaptations includes contrasting colours for toilet seats and grab handrails (for better visibility), options of glass fronted kitchen cupboards and dementia friendly lever taps are all examples of dementia friendly design options currently offered as part of the scheme.

We will continue to develop this approach and further increase awareness and our understanding of dementia across our network of local offices to support independence and dignity for tenants who are impacted by dementia and evaluate the impact of this.

## JAM (Just A Minute) Card

JAM Card's allow people with a learning difficulty, autism, dementia or communication barriers to tell others that they need 'just a minute' discretely and easily. We commenced this pilot in our North Regional Office across a broad range of our functions and will continue to roll this out. We will provide training and roll this in across the organisation. Once completed, it will tag the organisation as a 'JAM friendly' organisation. This service is for all of our customers including older people.

In addition to this communication support scheme, through our Equality and Safeguarding team, we provide a range of communication support services for many of our vulnerable customers on request in the office or on the phone. These include telephone and face to face interpreting, large print, braille translations and audio conversions

## Fear from Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

Whilst the majority of our estates are safe and popular places to live, we recognise that nuisance and anti-social behaviour are real issues that impact on communities and individuals.

Fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is a key concern, particularly for our older customers and tenants and can have serious detrimental impacts on older people. These include loneliness and social isolation, impact negatively on mental health and confidence and also impacts upon their right to enjoy their home and their tenancy.

In Northern Ireland, thousands of homes in the social housing sector have been designed and built to crime prevention standards set by Secured by Design (SBD), the UK's official police security initiative which has the specific aim to reduce crime and help people live more safely.

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<sup>31</sup> Dementia Navigators are based in all five Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) in Northern Ireland. Their role is to provide vital information and support – This can be face to face or over the telephone. They can also provide vital signposting to other services to ensure people living with dementia can live as full a life as possible.

They work to improve the physical security of buildings using products, such as doors, windows, locks and walling systems that meet the SBD 'Police Preferred Specification' security requirements as well as ensuring the design and layout of roads and lighting help create a safe and secure environment.

The Department for Communities (DfC) requires Registered Housing Associations seeking to undertake new build, major rehabilitation and re-improvement schemes using Housing Association Grant (HAG) funding to meet SBD's standards.

We offer a high-quality community safety service for our tenants, customers and communities. We adopt a case management approach which is consistent for all our diverse client groups and does not focus on any one specific group or type of anti-social behaviour.

In January 2021 we launched our new Community Safety Strategy 2020-2023 which includes considering the needs of an ageing population. The Strategy aims to tackle fear of crime issues for those older groups and will support projects that will tackle the fear of crime and social isolation and will promote intergenerational engagement and activities.

The Community Safety team fund a number of initiatives to a range of groups, agencies and partnerships across Northern Ireland. Currently a number of these funded initiatives are specifically aimed at reducing the fear of crime for older people or keeping them safe in their homes.

There is no specific allocated budget or targeting initiatives for various customer groups and services may change on an annual basis.

## **“We offer a high-quality community safety service for our tenants, customers and communities.”**

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We will aim to reduce feelings of loneliness, reduce feelings of isolation and reduce feelings of vulnerability and connect our tenants and customers to their local communities and services by addressing ASB through initiatives such as a 'Good Morning' telephone service.

Over the last number of years and in conjunction with other organisations, we have contributed to the funding and delivery of Good Morning Services. The main aim is to befriend older and vulnerable people with a morning telephone call to help those who are isolated but can also provide reassurance and the ability to talk to anyone about feelings of vulnerability, loneliness and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Analysis was carried out on the Social Return On Investment (SROI) for our 'Good Morning Down' project which indicated for every £1 spent, social return on investment amounts to £4.61. We will regularly analyse the range of anti-social behaviour complaints across all categories to help shape our services going forward.

<b>Promoting and Maintaining People's Dignity – High level Action Plan</b>			
		<b>Lead Department</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
1.	We will explore new models of accommodation and housing related support services for a range of older people, including the potential and feasibility of 'Extra Care' style or 'hub and spoke' style principles for housing, for older people in Northern Ireland.	Regional Services	2021/22 onwards
2.	We will carry out and explore pilots that may assist older people to be supported in their home.	Landlord Services/ Regional Services	Annually
3.	We will continue to increase awareness and understanding of dementia across our network of local offices.	Landlord Services	2021/22
4.	We will adopt a dementia friendly approach to a number of our services including response maintenance and adaptations.	Landlord Services	2021/22 onwards
5.	We will provide communication support to all our customers, including older people, when they request it.	Corporate Services	Annually
6.	We will work with a range of partners and statutory organisation's to deliver a high quality Community Safety Service (which includes the needs of an ageing population based on demographic trends) that addresses hate crime and anti-social behaviour in our estates.	Housing Services	2020/21 – 2023/24
7.	Subject to funding we will continue to deliver and fund a range of community safety initiatives specifically targeted at older people where we can, as well as continuing to deliver intergenerational projects.	Housing Services	2020/21 – 2023/24
8.	We will regularly analyse the range of anti-social behaviour complaints across all categories to help shape our services going forward.	Housing Services	Annually
9.	We will maximise the use of Floating Support for older people and will increase the number of floating support services for older people where appropriate, subject to available funding.	Regional Services	2020/21
10.	We will deliver a new Supporting People Strategy 2021/22 – 2023/24 which includes a focus on an older people thematic group.	Regional Services	2021/22 – 2023/24

# Theme 3 - Housing Advice for Older People

One of the Housing Executive's key statutory responsibilities is to provide housing information and advisory services. This advice and information role is embedded within a wide range of our functions and services and is not just limited to our core housing advice service. We extend this advice to support and enable our older tenants and customers to maximise their income, sustain their tenancy and advise of the full range of services we offer. A wide number of stakeholders, charities and agencies provide services for older people and it may be useful to identify where these are, the type of services that they provide and the geographical areas these services operate in. In addition, this information should be communicated and made available to our staff, stakeholders and our customers.

**“We have been aiming to effectively engage with housing customers to understand their individual needs and provide them with quality housing and support services.”**

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Based on information in the 2016 House Condition Survey, 86% of those aged 55 years or older own their own home outright and some will have a reasonable level of income. Many older people, or those approaching the 'older' group, do not wish to move from their current home and community they live in. Many may own a valuable asset such as their family home, however due to their income bracket, they may be excluded from financial support for some grants or entitlement to benefits and therefore may have limited options to either move or be supported to remain in their homes by virtue of being 'asset rich, cash poor'.

Following the redesign of our frontline housing services and the development of the Housing Advisor and Patch Management roles, we have been aiming to effectively engage with housing customers to understand their individual needs and explore their housing options by taking a case management approach to provide them with quality housing and support services. For older customers, these options may fall broadly under offering advice to stay in their current accommodation, or advice to support them to move. We offer, provide or administer a range of services both to help people to remain, or to enable them to move.

## Support to stay

We have already outlined some of the services that we offer to tenants and customers to remain in their current accommodation. These options include:

- Managing a grants and adaptation process that allows customers and tenants to increase the accessibility and functionality of their property;
- Our Accessible Housing Register will provide us with information to allow us to plan, allocate and inform our customers;
- Assistive technology which may play a key role in allowing people to remain independent, safe and secure as well as potentially reducing social isolation;
- Floating Support services;
- Energy conservation and advice; and
- Our ongoing funding and partnership working with a range of statutory and community organisations such as Floating Support or through our work in addressing fear of crime for people.

## Support to move

The preference of many customers is to remain in their current home, as previously outlined, and for our tenants their overwhelming preference is to remain in their current homes. Based on our 2019 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey, almost 94% of those aged 65-84 years of age believe their home is the right size for them with between 2% and 4% of tenants feeling their house is either too small or too big. However, some tenants and customers may wish to move from their current accommodation. Barriers for older people wanting to move from their current accommodation are:

- A lack of affordable alternative options across all tenures and the financial barriers that exist in moving tenure were noted;

- Unfamiliarity or uncertainty with the Private Rented Sector as a tenure choice;
- Many people only make the decision to move when they face a health crisis. Planning ahead is key to enable people to make planned and considered choices before they are forced to move;
- Ensuring clear, impartial and accurate advice, particularly for specialist services with financial or legal implications is also a key consideration. We need to consider the specific needs of customers in rural areas where there is a lack of appropriate and size specific accommodation and reduced choice;
- Practicalities with the physical move and starting up a new home in any sector were also noted as challenges facing older people wishing to move;
- Of the 'oldest' respondents in the Housing Executive's recent research, those who lived in supported sheltered accommodation recognised that they had no longer been able to remain at home and needed assistance for cooking and cleaning to being able to get out and about;
- In the owner occupied sector, there is a perception that options are limited to releasing equity in their properties but there is a reluctance to give up a family home. Many wish to retain capital in their homes and do not want to change tenure. The nature of existing equity release schemes is that they can be difficult to understand and many people may still be in negative equity having bought or re-mortgaged their homes during the property boom in the early to mid-2000s.

## Barriers to moving in later life

As noted in the previous section, the practicalities of moving, downsizing or ‘rightsizing’ are barriers to people moving. Research conducted on older people moving home<sup>32</sup> noted that this is an exhausting process physically and emotionally at any age, particularly for people who may have less energy, poorer health and may feel overwhelmed by decluttering family homes. This is compounded by the fact that people may not consider housing options for later life and often look towards this when they are 75 years or older or are forced to do so, but may be less capable.

For our tenants, the Housing Selection Scheme provides scope to apply for a transfer or mutual exchange (depending on circumstances), however, the challenges associated with moving and decluttering still remain. There are examples of organisations in Northern Ireland who do provide support to older people for moving home, such as decluttering and packing, however this is not offered on a large scale throughout Northern Ireland. Greater availability and development of these types of services may be useful for older people who do wish to move.

## Tenancy Sustainment

Customer support is everything we do to help our customers prepare for, look after, afford, maintain, enjoy and achieve a sense of well-being in their homes, and to prevent the tenure of that home from coming to a premature end. This support may be delivered directly through specific landlord activities, or part of wider organisational programmes which empower customers to manage their own housing situation. The successful outcome of this support is tenancy sustainment.

Many tenancy sustainment initiatives span across the range of services we deliver including assessing and allocating housing need, tackling fuel poverty, major and minor adaptations, community involvement and through our social enterprise programme.

Our Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy 2019-22 was published in 2020 and provides more detail on our planned activities to support customers remain in their homes. The accompanying action plan details a number of actions that will directly benefit our older customers and tenants across the five pillars of the strategy. The five pillars are Housing Support; Money Support and Budgeting Advice; Employment Support; Proactive and Responsive Support for At Risk Customers; and Neighbourhood and Community Support.

In addition to the above, we will continue to provide money support and budgeting advice by delivering our ‘Making Your Money Work’ service to improve the ability of our tenants and other customers to manage money well both day to day and through significant life events and to handle periods of financial difficulty. We will continue to promote access to Money Advice and Debt services and establish links with the Consumer Council and other advice sector organisations and work together on pilot projects and innovations. We have recently appointed regionally based Financial Inclusion Managers who can help tenants with a range of issues including performing benefit checks to make sure they receive everything they’re entitled to; to help create budgets and provide impartial advice to reduce their debt, resolve any benefit issues and help make the most of their income.

We will provide housing support, information and advice in varying formats to engage different target audiences including older people. We will aim to target loneliness and social isolation for older people in the communities we serve.

<sup>32</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/370/37008.htm#footnote-222>

## Social Enterprise

The Social Enterprise Plus Strategy 2020-2024 builds on the success of our previous Social Enterprise Strategy by helping to support the development and sustainability of local communities. A key objective is to create opportunities for social enterprises to deliver outcomes which impact positively on the local community which will in turn transform and improve people's lives and wellbeing. Social enterprises can play a vital role in sustainable job creation, in facilitating social integration, providing local services that meet many social needs and mobilise community resources to develop innovative local solutions.

Our Social Enterprise Team currently fund a number of services which both directly and indirectly benefit older people in a number of ways. Through our first Social Enterprise Strategy 2015-18, investment of £1.4 million supported a wide range of initiatives including a women's centre where our funding assisted in the purchase of a kiln and moulds leading to cross community work taking place with senior citizens. We also provided funding to several groups for sewing machines to establish local social enterprises, keeping alive the local skills of needlework and dress-making. These low cost, high impact initiatives are beneficial both to the individual but also in their wider impact of creating vibrant and sustainable communities.

We will continue to explore options for social enterprises to practically support and assist older people in the local communities beyond the remit of our standard tenancy agreement.

Over the life of our last Social Enterprise Strategy, we aided the establishment of almost 90 social enterprises and the creation of more than 150 new jobs as well as providing training opportunities for over 1,800 participants as well 940 volunteering opportunities, many of these benefited older people. An independent external evaluation of the programme also found that for every £1 invested during our first strategy, there was a £5.02 value of the social return. Our new Social Enterprise Strategy 2020-24, once launched, will continue our work in partnership with local communities in a 'ground up' approach to identify and develop new or expand existing social enterprises and services.

## Providing Housing Advice for Older People – High level Action Plan

		Lead Department	Target Date
1.	We will further develop our Housing Advice service to provide better information and support services for older people.	Housing Services	Annually
2.	In order to better understand the range, type and number of services available for older people we will continue to communicate these on our website as an information source.	Housing Services/ Regional Services/ Corporate Services	2021/22 onwards
3.	We will deliver a range of money and debt advice services for our customers and tenants (including older people) to maximize their incomes and support them in their housing choice.	Housing Services	Annually
4.	We will provide housing support, information and advice in varying formats to engage different target audiences, including older people about key housing related issues.	Housing Services/ Regional Services/ Corporate Services	Annually
5.	We will work to overcome digital barriers for our tenants.	Housing Services	Annually
6.	We will work with communities to identify, develop and maximise the impact of our Social Enterprise services that benefit older people.	Housing Services	Annually

# Theme 4 - Promoting Participation

Engaging, enabling and empowering communities has been at the core of what we do as an organisation and we will continue to involve tenants, residents and leaseholders to make improvements in their estates that can benefit everyone socially, environmentally or economically.

Our Community Involvement framework is firmly embedded within our communities and we connect our tenants, residents and leaseholders through our various Housing Community Networks and also through our hard to reach groups. Our Community Involvement Strategy also promotes and encourages those within the communities we serve to get involved and help shape our services. Across the various tiers of the Housing Community Network, older people are strongly represented in holding us to account, scrutinising our services and providing a key role between the Housing Executive and the communities and tenants we serve. We will continue to support and encourage this.

As the COVID-19 pandemic became apparent, our local offices were at the forefront in mobilising quickly, working with key stakeholders and local communities to best understand and respond to the challenges, provide support and communicate key messages. The Emergency COVID Fund was critical in supporting over 200 community groups to deliver practical help in our communities. Over 800 calls were made each week by Patch

Managers to ensure our older and vulnerable tenants were supported and our funding of Good Morning Services was critical in identifying those who required practical assistance and support and provided comfort and reassurance to others.

The Housing Executive is embedded at the heart of many local communities and we will continue to support, engage and aim to promote participation in community life for all customers, including older people.

## Loneliness

Preventing loneliness and social isolation is key to supporting and enabling people to live active and fulfilling lives. The role of tackling loneliness is embedded within many aspects of what we do.

As previously noted, loneliness is an individual's negative perception of the quality or quantity of their social relationships. Loneliness is popularly associated with ageing and the various life events that older people experience such as retirement, ill health or bereavement, however recent research has found that loneliness can affect people of all ages. The Office of National Statistics has noted that almost 10% of people aged 16-24 were "always or often" lonely<sup>33</sup> and that this was three times higher than people aged 65 or older.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10#main-points>

In 2019, a House of Commons briefing paper titled ‘Tackling Loneliness’<sup>34</sup> was published and outlined characteristics that have been potentially linked to an increased risk of loneliness. Some of these groups include people who are retired, have been widowed, have a long term disability, are not part of a social organisation or now live alone, particularly if they have been used to a busier home.

Loneliness can have a severe detrimental impact on people’s health:

- The impact of loneliness can be as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day;<sup>35</sup>
- Loneliness is associated with depression, sleep problems, impaired cognitive health, heightened vascular resistance, hypertension, psychological stress and mental health problems;
- The Northern Ireland Health Survey 2017/18 noted that up to 13% of those over the aged of 65 felt lonely ‘all or most of the time’;
- Researchers have put a financial price on the “epidemic of loneliness”, estimating it costs £6,000 per person in health costs and pressure on local services<sup>36</sup>; and
- However the London School of Economics study of older people says that for every £1 spent in preventing loneliness there are £3 of savings in health costs.

Loneliness is increasingly being recognised as a societal problem by national and local government and we have a number of planned initiatives and activities to help address this for our tenants and customers. This was reflected in a recent report by the ‘Campaign to End Loneliness’.

## Staying in Touch

We recognise that using digital services is not the preferred method to contact the Housing Executive for many customers. Some presently lack the access, tools or desire to use technology such as the internet or computers. We will continue to communicate with these customers in more traditional ways, including through telephone, written and face to face contact. Across all Housing Executive tenancies, 60% of respondents have access to the internet at home. Our 2019 CTOS shows that the older a HRP was, the less likely they were to have access to the internet at home or elsewhere.

Research<sup>37</sup> has demonstrated clear benefits for increasing older customer’s digital capability where we can. The use of technology for enabling social contact and participation can be very successful providing adequate support, reassurance and assistance is made available for those who require it. The internet can be used as a method for increasing and maintaining social contact, but can also provide more choice and options for recreational activities such as booking holidays and trips, accessing movies and books as well as reading or learning opportunities. We will provide opportunities and information to increase digital capability for those who want it, however we also recognise the potential challenges and risks for some vulnerable customers using online services.

We will continue to work with partners in order to increase participation and address social isolation. One example of this is the ONSIDE project, a cross border community support service to support disabled people (including those with a learning, physical, mental, sensory or multiple disabilities) who are socially isolated. We have partnered with Disability Action Northern Ireland, Supporting

<sup>34</sup> <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8514/CBP-8514.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland/information-advice/health-wellbeing/loneliness/>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.lse.ac.uk/business-and-consultancy/consulting/assets/documents/making-the-economic-case-for-investing-in-actions-to-prevent-and-or-tackle-loneliness-a-systematic-review.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Research/Evidence\\_Review\\_Technology.pdf?dtrk=true](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Research/Evidence_Review_Technology.pdf?dtrk=true)

Communities and the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) to deliver this cross border project. This project will use assistive technology, develop personalised ongoing social isolation and health programmes and create a regional digital disability community which will highlight disability health and focused wellbeing services and community asset and engagement opportunities. We will monitor and evaluate the impact and benefits of this project on an ongoing basis. The ONSIDE project is planned to benefit 2,400, of which 1,700 will be in Northern Ireland, some of which will be older persons.

We will continue to support and develop a range of intergenerational projects where we can which increase participation among older people in the community and benefit both older and younger people in a number of ways through our community networks, social enterprises and community safety initiatives.

## Community Participation

We have a number of community involvement and participation forums which allow customers to help inform and shape our services as well as holding us to account. We operate a number of tiers of our Housing Community Network across all areas and alongside Disability Action we operate our Disability Forum. Our Rural Residents Forum operates across our local offices and aims to identify and address specific rural housing issues. We recognise the importance of these mechanisms to better understand, engage with and deliver services.

We acknowledge the importance and value of a range of other community based initiatives such as community gardens, allotments and tea dances that we fund as ways for older people in our communities to increase ways that they can participate, engage and enjoy the later years of their life. Community gardens and allotments have a key role to play in allowing our older tenants to remain active and healthy as they age as well as helping

prevent loneliness and promote participation and intergenerational opportunities. We will continue to be informed and guided from the ground up for community based services and initiatives directed at older people.

In early 2020 we also teamed up with SPRING Social Prescribing<sup>38</sup> to support vulnerable tenants with their health and wellbeing with a Social Prescribing project being piloted in the Derry City and Strabane District Council Area. Social Prescribing is a community-led health initiative helping people improve their health and well-being by connecting them to sources of support within the community. SPRING helps people suffering from depression, anxiety, loneliness, chronic pain and other health and social issues to access the help and services they need to improve their health and wellbeing. To date we have invested over £25,000 as part of our homeless prevention work.

Based within local communities our Men's Sheds and Hen's Sheds provide opportunities for people, including older people to meet new people and make new friendships. In addition to this they provide the opportunity to break isolation and reduce loneliness for older people within our communities. Many of these sheds provide opportunities to bring people together, promote social inclusion and intergenerational learning.

The Housing Executive supports a number of initiatives that can encourage older people to lead more active and healthier lives. Through our Social Enterprise programme, we recently funded Hanwood Gym in East Belfast £25,000 from the Social Enterprise programme to update its gym equipment so that it can attract more users and offer GP referral programmes and other fitness courses to benefit local residents, particularly older people both in terms of healthy ageing, but also in terms of community participation.

A recent independent evaluation of the Social Enterprise Strategy indicated that it positively affects (according to participants) partnership

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.springsp.org/>

working, collaboration, social isolation and resilience and brings the potential for accessing more affordable local services. For example, 82% of participants identified reduced social isolation, 85% identified increased social resilience and 85% identified increased health and mental well-being (mental, emotional, physical and social) as a result of engaging with or participating in a social enterprise which had been supported by the Housing Executive.

Through our planning and placeshaping role we also influence and help shape the neighbourhood characteristics to increase physical amenities and transport linkages for the benefit of older people and to plan for the future delivery of services for

sustainable communities. The delivery of age-friendly initiatives and policies can simultaneously benefit other population groups. Good transport linkage and infrastructure and safer, barrier free environments can benefit those with children or mobility issues and help to support intergenerational opportunities and engagement which will ultimately benefit older people now, and in the future.

Promoting Participation – High level Action Plan			
		Lead Department	Target Date
1.	We will provide opportunities for older people to increase their digital capability.	Housing Services	Annually
2.	Through our Community Involvement functions, we will encourage older people to develop, shape and inform the services and opportunities that we provide for them to enable them to participate, engage and enjoy the later years of their life.	Housing Services	Annually
3.	We will work with partners in order to increase participation and help address social isolation/loneliness.	Housing Services	Annually
4.	We will continue to support and develop a range of intergenerational projects through community networks, social enterprises or community safety initiatives.	Housing Services	Annually
5.	We will continue to work with others to support existing and develop new healthy ageing initiatives.	Housing Services	Annually
6.	We will continue to be informed and guided from the 'ground up' for community based services and initiatives directed at older people.	Housing Services	Annually

# Appendix 1

## List of Useful Documents/ Web Pages

Housing Executive Corporate Plan 2021 under development – see website for updates.

[Housing Investment Plans](#)

[2018 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey Main Report](#) and [2018 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey Summary Report](#)

[Housing and Older People: Housing Issues, Needs and Aspirations](#)

[2016 House Condition Survey](#)

[Homelessness Strategy 2017-22](#)

[Community Involvement Strategy 2018-23](#)

[Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy 2019-2022](#)

[Social Enterprise Plus Strategy 2020 - 2024](#)

[Supporting People](#)

Rural Strategy & Action Plan 2021 – 2025 under development – see website for updates.

[Home Energy Conservation Authority Report](#)

[Annual Report 2019/20](#)

Please note this is not an exhaustive list.

Please refer to our website at [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk) for more information.

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