

Care & Repair Conference 25th April 2008

Report on sessions attended

Ministerial address

Stewart Maxwell MSP, Minister with responsibility for housing established the new context in which housing and care and repair services would be operating.

The minister stated their commitment to tackling inequality for older and disabled people in communities by improving their quality of life, enabling people to live at home for longer, which will have longer-term impacts on the sustainability and diversity of communities. Through the Concordat between the Government and local authorities, a framework of 15 national outcomes has been agreed which will be translated into local priorities for action. In developing local services and priorities, local service providers have a role to play in contributing to the discussion on what these local priorities should be and how they can be resourced. Greater flexibility has also been provided to local authorities to meet these priorities by removing the ring fencing for funding. He acknowledges the anxiety about the removal of ring-fencing of funding but stressed that it was part of being able to free local resources up to meet the most pressing priorities more effectively.

Funding arrangements were also a core part of his next topic in relation to the consultation on the implementation of the Housing (Scotland) 2006 Act and in particular those aspects relating to the scheme of assistance for private owners. By providing equity in the arrangements and cutting out means testing the scheme of assistance seeks to make access to assistance for those in need in private accommodation more straightforward. The scheme of assistance will be part of a toolkit of options available to local authorities to work towards improving outcomes for residents in the private sector whose homes no longer meet their needs.

He further spoke of the need for a review of Care & Repair services across Scotland to pick up on the work carried out previously and to identify a core set of services that can be delivered across the whole of the country and to identify and promote good practice in different initiatives. Once again the purpose of this is to enable greater flexibility and add value in meeting local priorities.

Scottish Housing Act Guidance

David Blair from the Scottish Government provided more detail on the guidance that has been produced by them on the Housing (Scotland) 2006 Act focusing on the private sector in order to improve the quality of the majority of the housing stock in Scotland. He stressed that there would be a greater focus on local authorities providing advice and support and where necessary grants for works and improvements to be carried out. This was seen as part of a bigger shift in culture, breaking the link between enforcement and grant – effectively changing the question from how can I get money to repair my property to how can I maintain it? It is proposed to

provide one-stop shops, which will provide dedicated information and advice, making referrals for support and assistance where necessary.

A range of other options is also considered to be beneficial in terms of providing greater efficiency. 1) A trusted trader scheme where people can be referred and rely on the trades being provided. 2) A lending advisory unit to provide dedicated independent advice on specialist lending products to match the particular needs and resources of individuals. 3) National lending unit which would help local authorities deliver lending products and through economies of scale, managing risk and costs more effectively than a variety of local schemes and to provide the up-front funding from central funds.

In terms of adaptations, he stressed that the means testing for grant has been simplified but only for adaptations. The reasons for this are to free up resources to actually deliver the adaptations as they had found that on average people were receiving 80% of funding for adaptations. This is not to say that those who require 100% will not receive it – but this will be at the discretion of each local authority.

Function versus Form

Kate Sheehan, an independent Occupational Therapist presented a very interesting approach to delivering bathroom adaptations. Highlighting the impact that individual's surroundings have on their mental health and the links with good design, she posed the question – why should people who have to turn to state funding to meet their needs, have to put up with poor design and quality of products? She also stressed that adaptations are currently provided from limited sources with inflated costs.

Quoting relevant research that found that investing a little extra in adaptations and equipment to enable people to live independently had major positive benefits in terms of their confidence and capacity to contribute to society. In order to achieve it she stressed that there was a need to focus on what home means to our clients and to engage with them in making decisions about what items are made available, with them paying extra if needs be, in their homes.

She presented the work that she is involved in with major bathroom suppliers to develop inclusive design principles which means that they source products that are designed with the widest range of clients in mind e.g. rimless toilets which don't have awkward bits that need cleaning or sinks with wide fronts so that people can rest on the edge of them to support themselves while shaving etc. In addition, the use of different designed items can make big differences. E.g. using pedestals and sinks that were wall mounted provides greater flexibility in small spaces to turn wheelchairs and make the rooms easier to clean.

Finishing off by showing set-ups of inclusive designed bathrooms that would not have been out of place in executive apartments, she stressed that the extra effort was worth it in the long run and that through greater use of such products, greater numbers of them would be made available, choice would be improved and ultimately prices would reduce.

A Vital Contribution to Health and Social Care Policy

Amanda Britain and Grant Hughes from the Joint Improvement Team provided delegates with an overview of the work that the JIT are carrying out in relation to housing and improvements that can be made to individuals in terms of better outcomes. The JIT is a partnership established between the Scottish Government, NHS and COSLA to speed up the pace of improvements and provide practical guidance and support as well as develop understanding around particular themes e.g. telecare.

Similar to other sessions the focus was on the national outcome framework and delegates were advised that four of the fifteen national outcomes related to housing improvements provided through Care & Repair services and this recognises the fact that people are best provided for by supporting them, through a variety of sources of assistance, in their own homes. The term community support was used to describe how people are maintained at home through the use of human support services (both formal and informal carers) and other forms of support (assistive technology, smart homes, lifetime homes, adaptations).

During a discussion session, it was highlighted that the major winners in terms of maintaining people at home longer, apart from the individuals, was the health service. From a show of hands, it was clear that Care & Repair services generally do not receive funding of any sort from the health service. It was further discussed the extent to which the JIT could help facilitate a discussion at a national level to improve relations and look towards some assistance being provided by local NHS boards.

Useful links

Scottish Government National Outcomes Framework

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/13092240/9>

Research (adaptations)

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/disability/

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/811.asp>

Inclusively designed bathrooms brochure <http://www.graham-group.co.uk/en/download/LivingWorksBrochure.pdf>

Joint Improvement Team - <http://www.jitscotland.org.uk/action-areas/themes/housing.html>