

## **CHAPTER 4 PROPERTY RECOMMENDATIONS: Physical, Logistical and Financial Issues**

### **1. Introduction**

The link between services and property is integral to the traditional concept of sheltered housing and is a central part of the definitions of retirement housing now being adopted by the Housing Corporation and ODPM. Within the Starfish appraisal system service viability is directly linked to the property, in as much as providers are asked “Does the *scheme* meet its aims and objectives?” Without the scheme being able to physically ensure it meets its aims and objectives, answers to this question can only be negative. However good a service, a scheme without lift access to upper floors, for example, is failing to provide accessible accommodation that can enable people to continue to live independently.

As the responses to Service issues show, providers themselves have recognised this. These links extend across the range of Property Viability headings, including financial, physical and logistical viability assessments. To gain a true picture, these issues need to be taken “in the round”. However good a scheme, if there is insufficient demand in a certain area or if a scheme is poorly located the resulting impact on financial viability cannot be addressed through purely financial measures. An overall view of the capability of the scheme, including the services it provides, are required.

We are therefore concerned that simply looking at individual areas of weakness will not lead providers to assess schemes across the areas as a whole and will produce the comprehensive picture required.

There are also issues within the financial, physical and logistical areas of the appraisal results that are inconsistent across providers. The view taken of bedsit accommodation varies from provider to provider – some see bedsits as suitable in the future, others see them as long-term liabilities.

**1.1** An overview of the responses is set out below under the three headings of physical, financial and logistical viability. Inevitably, given our comments above, there are overlaps with comments on services. Provider property recommendations are detailed after this.

### **2. Overview of Physical Viability**

Assessing the physical viability of the sheltered housing stock is a significant part of the Starfish exercise. It is reliant on data that is specific and absolute in some regards, such as size, being self-contained accommodation, provision of facilities

and amenities, as well as more subjective assessments such as condition and appropriateness. The key inputs for Starfish in this section included:

Fig. 6

<b>Is the property suited to the service provided?</b>	<b>Are the maintenance costs of the property acceptable?</b>	<b>Is the property viable without significant capital investment which cannot be met from the revenue budget?</b>	<b>Is the scheme physically viable?</b>
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The outcome of these assessments across all providers was as shown in table 20 below.

Table 20

**County Sheltered Schemes - Physical viability**

	A		B		C		D	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Is the property suited to the service provided?	32	24.6%	65	50.0%	28	21.5%	5	3.8%
Are the maintenance costs of the property acceptable?	45	34.6%	73	56.2%	9	6.9%	3	2.3%
Is the property viable without significant capital investment which cannot be met from the revenue budget?	85	65.4%	18	13.8%	23	17.7%	4	3.1%
<b>Is the scheme physically viable?</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>60.0%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13.8%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.3%</b>

This shows a very high percentage of viable schemes, if we view as viable grades A to C. This is at odds with the national picture of sheltered housing and contrasts significantly with work done by PFA and Paragon who have applied a similar survey system to over 30,000 units of sheltered housing and whose comparative figures indicate non viable schemes as in the range of 25% to 35% of the surveyed stock. It is particularly surprising that only three schemes are shown as not viable although 5 are recorded as not suited to the service provided and four require capital works which cannot be met from normal revenue budgets.

Including Band C, the results are closer to the expected norm but still remain lower than one might anticipate. The anomalies in the conclusions compared to the scoring for each factor are more pronounced here than in Band D scores. Over 21% of schemes are regarded as probably unsuitable for the service they are offering but only 13.8 are graded as Band C overall.

The range across the different providers shows these inconsistencies in most cases. We can understand that some providers may view capital works requirements as a challenge that can be overcome, and through the programme for the Decent Homes Standards may have already programmed the necessary works but this is not the case for all providers. What is difficult to resolve is the high proportion of schemes viewed as probably unsuitable to the service provided compared to the low numbers of schemes being classified as probably not viable.

A number of schemes are likely to feature one or more of the following factors - poor access, bedsitters, lack of core facilities, major building and equipment upgrades. We would suggest that individual providers undertake further analysis and assessments are made of schemes which fall into the “unsuitable to the service provided” category, both C and D.

### 3. Financial Viability

#### **Starfish Assessments**

This assessment was far more challenging to the future of the various sheltered services than the physical viability. Almost 54% of schemes were regarded as offering a service that was not, or probably not, financially viable. This was most marked in the answers to the first question as to whether the scheme generated adequate financial return. More than half, 58%, were deemed not to, or probably not to, provide an adequate return nor were they likely to do so in the future. This was not seen as an issue of unreasonable costs in anything other than a small number of schemes. This suggests views as to income are pessimistic and linked to low demands in many cases.

Table 21

#### **County Sheltered Schemes - Financial viability**

	A		B		C		D	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Does the scheme generate an adequate financial return, and will it continue to do so in the future?	45	34.6%	24	18.5%	13	10.0%	48	36.9%
Are costs reasonable when compared to similar schemes?	38	29.2%	77	59.2%	12	9.2%	2	1.5%
Is there adequate demand for the scheme?	41	31.5%	34	26.2%	40	30.8%	15	11.5%
<b>Is the service financially viable?</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>21.5%</b>

*1 provider with only 1 scheme left the second answer blank*

There was insufficient demand (Bands C&D) for some 42% of the schemes. This ranged from 26% in Cambridge City to 50% in South Cambridgeshire. Table 22 below shows the comparative LA figures

Table 22

LA	Inadequate Demand
Cambridge City	26%
East Cambridgeshire	40%
Fenland	33%
Huntingdonshire	41%
South Cambridgeshire	50%

The LA figures for financial viability overall are:

Table 23

LA	Overall Financially Unviable
Cambridge City	17.4%
East Cambridgeshire	13.3%
Fenland	33.4%
Huntingdonshire	18.2%
South Cambridgeshire	97.9%

Again, these figures are combined Band C & D results. Two results stand out. East Cambridgeshire (Hereward) shows 40 of schemes with inadequate demand but only 13% of schemes not being financially viable. South Cambridgeshire shows almost its entire service as being financially unviable.

Fenland has the most consistent results in terms of its scoring by question and final assessment.

It may also be of value to factor in some potential scenarios in respect of future levels of supporting people funding and viability, certainly in relation to financial viability. There is a degree of risk for providers whose costs are viewed by SP as either too low or too high. Assessing the impact on schemes of possible adverse funding decisions in the future is a necessary part of determining long term viability of schemes.

#### 4. Logistical Viability

The three key elements in the Starfish Appraisal for this assessment were:

Fig. 7

Can the service be provided within the staff resource available?
Does the scheme operate without difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff?
Is the scheme in feasible location?

The results for the first of these questions were fairly uniform across all providers, with the vast majority of responses being that staff resources were adequate to provide the specified service. The one exception to this was Cambridge City Council, which provided all seven schemes in Bands C& D in this section. However, Cambridge CC reported it had no difficulties recruiting staff whereas Huntingdon providers felt some 82% of their schemes *probably* had difficulty

(Band C) in recruiting and retaining staff. Only Fenland, with one scheme, made any other entries here under Band C or D.

Huntingdon would need to assess whether there are specific challenges in its local labour market or whether its terms and conditions or management structures that is creating a very localised problem.

Table 24

**County Sheltered Schemes - Logistical viability**

	A		B		C		D	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Can the service be provided within the staff resource available?	112	86.2%	11	8.5%	6	4.6%	1	0.8%
Does the scheme operate without difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff?	84	64.6%	27	20.8%	19	14.6%	0	0.0%
Is the scheme in feasible location?	82	63.1%	34	26.2%	10	7.7%	4	3.1%
<b>Is the scheme logistically viable?</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>70.8%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>22.3%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0%</b>

What is most surprising is that despite the responses under financial viability in respect of demand for schemes is that in this section, under a feasible location, few schemes are viewed as being in a difficult location. Yet location is generally regarded as one of the key factors in demand. Poor quality schemes are often successfully let by many providers because they are in a good location. Equally, a number of reasonable schemes are difficult to let as a result of poor location.

In particular we would highlight South Cambridgeshire's figures in this section. Despite viewing 50% of their schemes as probably suffering from inadequate demand, none of their schemes is regarded as being in a location that is not feasible. Location is not the sole factor in demand and the authority may have particular difficulties with oversupply, (as highlighted earlier) but scheme location may be critical in determining which schemes should be retained successfully in the future. Our subsequent comments in this report on the potential for floating services based at existing schemes may go some way to overcoming these issues as far as rural schemes are concerned. Where there are significant difficulties with a scheme, it may be that moving to floating support, allied to home care, could offer an alternative for older people living in rural communities and some schemes could be reduced in size or closed where a supply of accessible, affordable housing is or can be made available.

## 5. Internal Strategic Viability

### 5.1 Introduction

The primary data source for this aspect of the project is Starfish.

## 5.2 Part 1: Are the schemes within the organisations' strategic priorities for growth or consolidation?

### Methodology

Level 2 managers were asked to summarise their organisation's strategy for growth or consolidation under eight pre-determined headings: type of sheltered housing; scope of service; size of service; geographical location; equal opportunities and diversity; affordability; design and physical aspects; energy efficiency.

### Results

Table 25 shows a wide range of extremes of response. At one end of the scale, Cambridge Housing Society and Hereward Housing determined that all their schemes were definitely within their priorities for growth or consolidation while at the other extreme, Granta decided that their (one) scheme was not really within these priorities. In between these two positions were the other providers e.g. Cambridge City Council declaring that nearly 19% of its stock was not really within its priorities.

*We would recommend that the 4 providers (HHP, Granta, Fenland DC, CCC) with stock not really in their priority area consider stock swaps or possibly decommissioning.*

Table 25

#### Is the service within your organisation's priority areas for growth or consolidation?

	A		B		C		D	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Cambridge City Council	3	18.8%	10	62.5%	3	18.8%	0	0.0%
Cambridge Housing Society	5	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Fenland District Council	9	64.3%	0	0.0%	5	35.7%	0	0.0%
Granta Housing Society	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%
Hereward Housing	30	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Housing 21	0	0.0%	6	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Huntingdon Housing Ptnship	8	42.1%	8	42.1%	3	15.8%	0	0.0%
South Cambridgeshire DC	39	86.7%	6	13.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

## 6. Providers Assessment of Schemes under RSR

The appraisal process required providers to assess their stock under the new draft definitions of housing for older people being proposed by the Housing Corporation. Since the survey was carried out the Housing Corporation has finalised the new definitions – see Housing Corporation Regulatory Circular No:03/04, which is reproduced in Appendix 1. The earlier draft definitions used for the survey are also reproduced in Appendix 1. The final definitions are similar

to the draft definitions used in the survey, and so the survey is still of use in giving providers an indication as to where their stock will fit into the new definitions. Below we set out the respective definitions for the draft and final definitions:

- General needs housing in the draft definitions equates to Designated supported housing for older people in the final definitions in the circular
- Retirement housing with support in the draft definitions equates to Housing for older people (some special design features) in the circular
- Purpose designed housing with support in the draft definitions equates to Housing for older people (all special design features) in the circular

Not all providers chose to provide this information and it is the local authorities and LSVT providers who have responded in the main, with the exception of Cambridge Housing Society who also responded.

The results are inconsistent and in certain areas highly contradictory. Fenland has assumed 13 of its schemes will be regarded as general needs, Huntingdon 17 of its schemes, whilst South Cambridgeshire has assumed none of its schemes would be re-assessed in this way. We suggest that there is some further discussion amongst the local authorities with a view to seeking a “Cambridgeshire” perspective on this issue – not only as providers of retirement housing but also as commissioners of housing and services to older people. A common interpretation and approach across the different local authorities would be far more valuable than the current degree of discrepancy in assessment.

Table 26  
RSR Survey - Appendix 2 Summary sheet results

Landlord	General needs		Retirement hsg with support		Purpose designed hsg with support	
	No.of schemes	No.of units	No.of schemes	No.of units	No.of schemes	No.of units
Cambridge City Council	3	233	11	345	0	0
Cambridgeshire Hsg Soc.	3	94	0	0	2	71
Fenland	7	172	12	270	1	38
Hereward	0	0	27	794	5	159
Huntingdon	17	382	7	128	0	0
S.Cambridge	0	0	45	1377	0	0

## 7. The Response of the Providers: Property Recommendations within the Appraisal

### 7.1 Cambridge City Council – 14 schemes / 2 Extra Care

The City Council has taken a realistic view of the quality and therefore viability of its housing, although it has treated itself perhaps too lightly under the RSR

assessment. There are a number of bedsit schemes, including shared facilities that are of poor quality and suffer from low demand.

Given the area has a very high level of provision, the Council has no means of funding the required improvements and upgrades, it seems inevitable a programme of decommissioning is required for some schemes and the future ownership of the remaining schemes is open to question if no capital funding can be secured by the Council itself. Any review of the schemes would need to address supply generally, balance of support and care as well as the key schemes to retain / decommission.

## **7.2 Cambridgeshire Housing Society – 5 schemes**

CHS views its schemes as generally viable across all the indicators. It has a need for investment in two schemes for upgrades and improvements and has one scheme requiring significant change to convert from bedsit to one / two bed units. In each of these it has assessed the financial viability issue of meeting capital costs as a C grade and it is likely this will be most problematic issue for it to address.

However, all three schemes are in Cambridge and CHS may need to revisit its assessment of external strategic viability, given the level of supply in Cambridge and any plans that maybe developed by the City Council for its own stock.

## **7.3 Fenland District Council – 13 schemes / 1 Extra Care**

The principal issues for Fenland are around the quality of the stock – with both viable and non-viable schemes requiring capital investment – including the extra care scheme. Schemes with bedsits are generally recognised as unviable through poor demand but the Council is indicating it is consulting on services for a scheme that it regards as poor physically. Two schemes are viewed as viable despite poor demand and being financially non viable (Category C).

In the RSR assessment Fenland has shown much of its stock would fail to meet the new definitions. Given the area does not have an over supply of provision, care is needed in identifying options for the future of individual schemes as well as the preferred level of supply to meet demand from what is the most deprived of the County's older populations.

Some further and more specific analysis and assessment is needed by the Council to establish scheme viability and identify the options available. The Starfish appraisal has highlighted the need for this rather than identified the specific issues and solutions for the Council's stock.

#### **7.4 Granta Housing Society**

Granta has one scheme on which it has made property recommendations and these arise from the age of the development. It focuses on improvements that meet modern design standards and the need to convert bedsits to one bed accommodation. However, the constraints identified may make that difficult to achieve. Some form of more detailed cost / benefit analysis and options appraisal is required, particularly given the scheme is within Cambridge City. Supply is on the high side here and some thought needs to be given as to whether demand will remain sufficient. Such an assessment ideally needs to be made in conjunction with the future options for the City's own stock.

#### **7.5 HHP – 19 schemes**

As we commented under the Service section, HHP has identified a requirement to take action on all their schemes. The service recommendations included:

- Decommissioning (3)
- Remodelling (6)
- While a variety of options were cited for the remaining schemes including decommissioning, remodelling, demolishing and rebuilding or, undertaking smaller scale internal works to modernise the schemes

Accessibility and Location proved to be the two major factors in the reason for these recommendations. Property recommendations outside of decommissioning were related to changes needed to shift from bedsits to one-bed units, to add facilities or to increase the size of a scheme.

It would appear that HHP have taken a hard look at the stock and identified a number of options, including shifting the focus to higher levels of care. The main issue for HHP will be funding the changes necessary and for the local authority how the loss of supply will impact on demand and local choices for older people, given the area does not have an oversupply of stock so much as problems of location and quality

#### **7.6 Hereward Housing Association – 27 schemes / 3 Extra Care**

Hereward is generally confident in the condition of its stock. There are issues about financial viability in certain, smaller schemes. Demand is perceived to be a problem in some of these. Only two schemes are regarded as being unsuitable for the service offered and the major factor here seems to be accessibility. Although one of these schemes is limited by the configuration of the building, and therefore may be difficult to improve, the other scheme is regarded as being suitable for a lift to be added. Although there are no financial viability issues raised in respect of meeting the cost of the works, it is noted that there is currently no programme for these works.

We are aware that Hereward has increased its own internally funded Aids and Adaptations programme, but it is not clear from the information as to whether there is sufficient funding for the installation of lifts and the related works.

Despite the concerns over certain schemes, Hereward does not regard any of its schemes status under threat through the new retirement housing definitions.

### **7.7 Housing 21 – 6 schemes**

H21's property recommendations centre on accessibility issues on both category one and category two schemes. Only one scheme, a Category two located in Cambridge, is thought to require major change, where there is low demand and no lift access to upper floors.

H21 did not complete the RSR exercise but it is probable few of their scheme in Cambridgeshire would meet the physical standards required to be defined as retirement housing.

### **7.8 South Cambridgeshire District Council – 45 schemes**

We would repeat all the comments made under the Services section earlier in this report. South Cambs has a very high level of provision most of which is regarded as financially unviable - "Large amount of sheltered stock in dispersed rural locations, which all show poor financial viability." Yet the appraisal under Logistical Viability states there is no problem with the location of the schemes, despite under financial viability there being some 51% of schemes with issues around demand.

The Council is urged to re-evaluate its assessments under the various headings and seek some consistency of view. Under the RSR assessment it views all of its schemes as meeting the new definitions, despite obvious issues at some schemes in relation to bedsit accommodation, and which the Council is considering for change of use or redevelopment. At present, there seems to be limited value being extracted from the Starfish Appraisal process in determining the viability and appropriateness of current provision.

## **8. Supporting People Funding for Support in Sheltered Housing**

We were asked to comment, based on the figures available from the SP team, on the relationship of Supporting People funding to financial viability of schemes. We have carried out an analysis of the data provided and looked at this in the context of financial viability and the government's requirement to demonstrate Value for Money. We should stress that without the detailed information on

services provided by each scheme / provider we cannot provide an assessment of relative VFM nor can we, without the other relevant financial information for each scheme / provider assess financial viability in any detailed sense for any scheme.

We have sought to give an overview of the SP funding directed at support to older people and highlight the key issues we see as arising from this. In Appendix 3, we have reproduced the guidance on VFM issued by ODPM in respect of SP funded services. Clearly, the overall work on this is a requirement of the local SP managers. The figures we have for Support Charges are those from the comparative charges / VFM exercise conducted by SP officers.

The level of charges for support services shown below is for the Eastern Region - this calculation has not been done for Cambridgeshire. Data was analysed into the mean charges made by providers and the upper and lower quartile figures for both extra care and sheltered housing, which are the basis of national calculations, also shown below:

**Table 27 Eastern Region Figures**

<b>Sheltered Housing</b>			<b>Extra Care Housing</b>		
Number of Services		13,590	Number of Services		475
Mean		£15.78	Mean		£44.20
Median		£10.90	Median		£32.26
Quartiles	Lower	£5.03	Quartiles	Lower	£18.39
	Upper	£16.65		Upper	£52.85

**Table 28 The National Figures:**

<b>Extra Care</b>	
Mean	£46.48
U. Quartile	£61.66
L. Quartile	£31.37
<b>Sheltered</b>	
Mean	£13.82
U. Quartile	£17.90
L. Quartile	£6.75

Although there is a large variation of figures across the results, there are a number of key issues that arise. The larger national and specialist associations have the lowest level of support charge, generally as a policy decision by the RSLs concerned to minimise their exposure to potential risks from Supporting People as an externally allocated grant. Consequently, the figures for three of these associations active in the County are as follows:

**Table 29**

RSL	Lowest Charge	Highest Charge
Anchor	3.77	5.90
Housing 21	2.85	3.46
Hanover	3.93	4.54
Anchor (extra care)	5.71	5.88

By contrast, the major providers show the following range of figures:

**Table 30**

Provider	Lowest Charge	Highest Charge	Flat or Variable
Cambridge City	17.46	31.24	Variable
Fenland	9.35	9.35	Flat
Hereward	12.33	12.33	Flat
Huntingdon	8.79	16.41	Variable
South Cambs	13.89	13.89	Flat

**Table 31** The Extra Care / Category 2.5 Figures for all providers are:

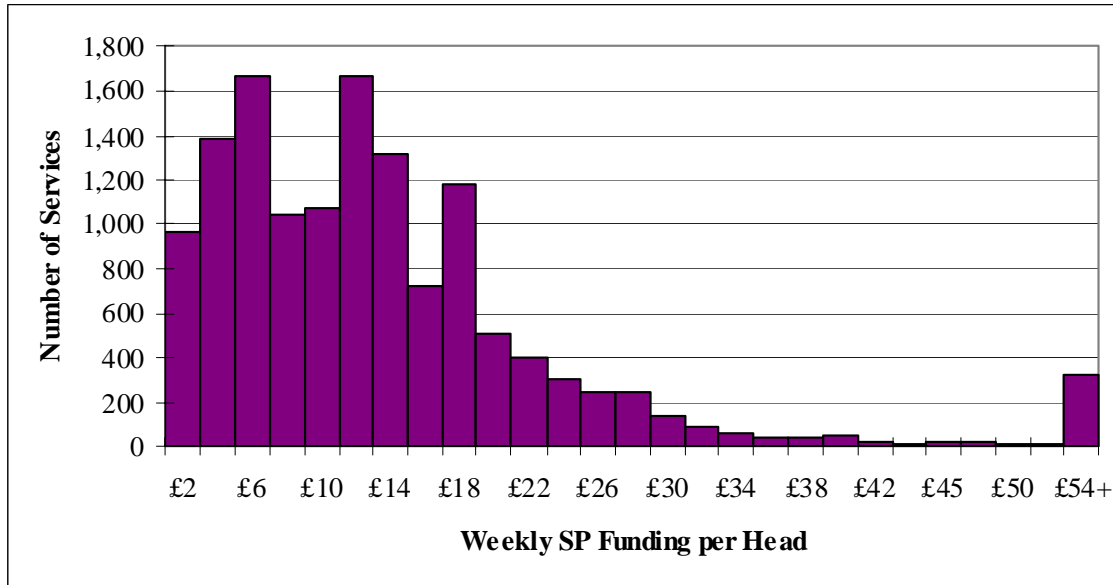
Anchor Trust - higher	£5.88	Below Lower quartile
Anchor Trust - lower	£5.71	Below Lower quartile
Fenland District Council	£3.47	Below Lower quartile
Hereward Housing Association	£25.52	Below Mean
Cambridge City Council - lower	£50.45	Above Mean, below Upper Quartile
Cambridge City Council - higher	£58.09	Above Upper Quartile

Overall, Cambridgeshire has figures for lower and upper quartiles outside the national averages for sheltered schemes, but these are still overall at a lower level than Regional figures and the National figures. It will be those schemes with charges above national, mean and median levels that will come under closest

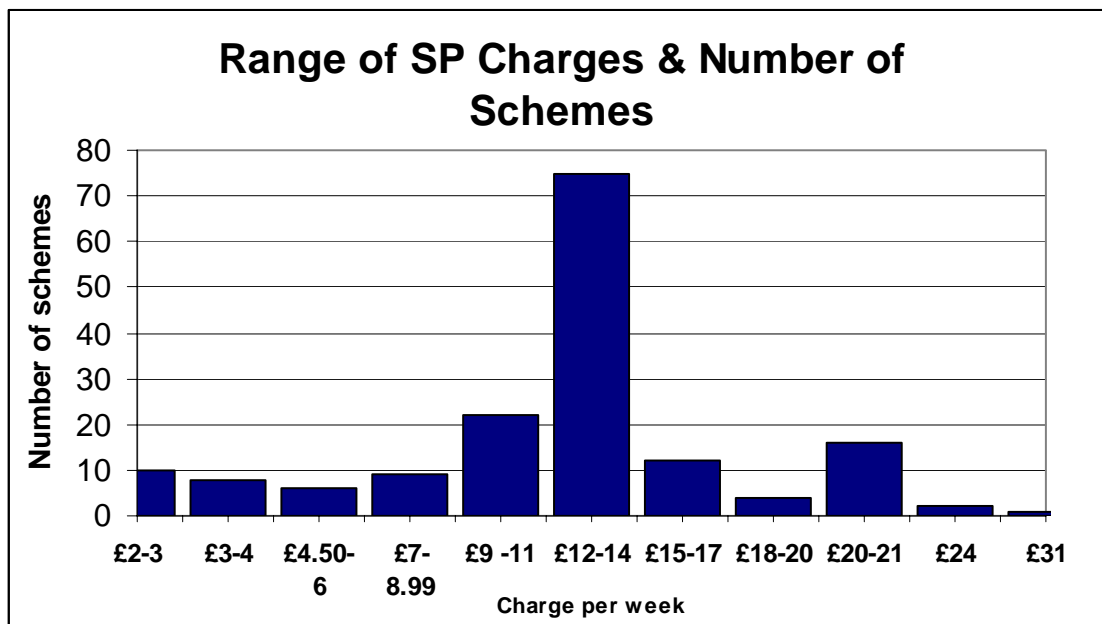
scrutiny. This may mean Cambridge City in particular facing some challenge given its current level of charges for both sheltered and extra care.

The majority of Cambridgeshire schemes are charging between £9 and £14 per week for support, with the highest concentration being in the £12 to £14 per week range.

**Chart 2 National Sheltered Scheme Figures**



**Chart 3 Cambridgeshire Sheltered Scheme Figures**



The decision by those providers who chose minimum SP levels to avoid exposure to loss of SP funding could be seen to be sensible. With a potential cut of funding of 2.5%, possibly applied across the board, Anchor, Housing 21 et al will lose the least in cash terms per scheme. Local major providers are more exposed. For example, Cambridge City, a 2.5% cut would cost the Council some £15,000 to £20,000 a year across all of its schemes. This effectively doubles as any cut will be imposed on the current level of budget, so inflation and most particularly wage inflation, will not be allowed for in new grant levels.

Described as “efficiency savings”, there is no prescribed formula for achieving these savings. An across the board cut is unlikely in most areas, so it is reasonable to assume that the cut will not be required across all of sheltered housing. However, the failure to index for inflation will require providers to find other funding or to reduce costs.

There are therefore real threats to current levels of income for some providers and for all providers in meeting future increased costs. For South Cambridgeshire, with many of its schemes already financially unviable, this will be an added pressure for the Council to address.

In the longer term it is the authorities with the highest level of charges for any / each client group that will be under closest scrutiny from central government, via the Audit Commission. All authorities will be expected to complete their own VFM reviews and above average costs will be closely scrutinised. So will schemes where costs are particularly low and this may yet prove to be a threat to those organisations that chose to offer low SP charge levels, as these are regarded as *potentially* offering too poor a quality of service to be effective.

Other pressures on charges arising from the SP reviews will be around the use of flat rate charges. This has become an increasing issue for the Audit Commission and the Housing Inspectors around service charges and will almost certainly be raised in relation to the SP services and charges. Are providers charging a flat rate of SP across all their sheltered stock confident that the service specification and level for service is identical for each of their schemes? Does the constant rate being charged reflect a constant level of VFM?

### ***Challenges & Pressures***

So, there are pressures on those providers with charges above the upper quartile, there may be pressure on providers with particularly low charges. Providers with flat rate charges may face a degree of challenge on this aspect of their charging policy.

All providers will need to assess how they will cope with no increases for inflation for quite possibly several years ahead.

All Providers will need to ensure their service specifications reflect the level of charges they are making and compare favourably with the service specification and cost of other local provision

### ***Balancing Factors***

The larger providers locally will be addressing oversupply or poor quality schemes or both in the coming few years. It is important that changes to supply are made in a context of developing services and housing options on a strategic basis, including in relation to the future allocation of SP grant.

There are options for changing the nature of services to more floating support models or of increasing the role of existing scheme based staff to also provide support to other schemes and other individual service users in local areas. Achieving this can only be done if SP grant is available. By recycling existing grant from schemes being decommissioned or where support is to be made far more targeted, this growth in services can be accommodated. However it cannot be assumed existing funding will stay with the client group, let alone the current providers.

Developing local commissioning models that are related to a county wide strategy will assist in securing this funding, if Supporting People officers are involved in the strategic process from the beginning of the process.

It will also be important for the main providers in each local authority to share service standards and service specification information, along with costing and charging information. Commercial confidentiality, often a defensive position taken by RSLs in particular, can only serve as a blockage to any of the key players locally in meeting the funding, commissioning and service challenges of supported housing for older people. Given that there is a need to increase the information available to the public about housing options for older people, transparency in rent, service and support charges is an important element in good communications.

## **9. Recommendations**

We have made specific points in the section above for each authority. Set out below are more general recommendations that the commissioners of this report need to consider. Some of these echo or repeat recommendations made under Services.

There are clear variations in the approach to this appraisal and evaluation of schemes by different providers. As a result the value of the overall assessment is undermined and a County-wide perspective is not achieved.

Within the individual local authority / provider assessments, there are a number of providers demonstrating inconsistencies of approach within their organisation. Consequently there are contradictory assessments being reached about schemes that can only prove unhelpful in developing a local strategy for future service and scheme developments.

The approach to the new definitions of retirement housing varies widely across the providers that responded.

The Starfish Appraisal system itself has a number of weaknesses, particularly in regard to relating the assessments to other, critical, local factors. This is most obvious in relation to the issues of demand and supply.

We recommend that:

- Commissioners and providers agree a county interpretation of the new definitions of retirement housing and how these are applied to their stock in order to achieve a consistent assessment (section 4.6 and Appendix 1)
- Supply figures are taken into account in assessing viability and in taking forward local plans for improvements, decommissioning and development of schemes and services. Each district will have its own circumstances, including significant variations in level of supply, to take into account in making decisions on the future of individual schemes and operational costs in certain areas.
- Some providers should consider developing more detailed and possibly less subjective assessments of their stock in order to develop more detailed stock and service options
- Service Commissioners, including housing, social services and health, develop a comprehensive strategic commissioning model for housing and support for older people that can inform local planning.
- Local authority providers consider the financial resources available to address significant stock condition issues in the light of changing standards and quantify their ability to fund the required programmes and alternative options if that funding is not possible
- Service changes, for example to change to extra care provision, are based on newly, locally defined models that will receive support from both Supporting People and Social Services and offer some guidance to providers seeking to introduce change to their stock and services

- Consideration is given to increased emphasis on floating support to older residents in non-sheltered housing, partly to overcome possible lack of supply and also to improve financial viability of schemes in more rural locations