

CHAPTER 1 - ORGANISATION, METHODOLOGY & CONSTRAINTS

1. Scale

The development of a county-wide assessment of provision is one of only a small number of such surveys undertaken in England. It is the first to use the methodology employed in this review and the scale of coverage has provided both advantages and disadvantages in assessing the large volume of data collected. Over a period of time, we believe the more detailed information held by individual providers will be of great value in ensuring sheltered housing in the County meets the needs of older people and works within the broader service, support and care systems being developed in Cambridgeshire.

2. Methodology

2.1 Starfish

All eighteen sheltered housing providers were invited to undertake a full and comprehensive review of their sheltered housing stock and service using the Starfish appraisal method. Eight providers (Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Hereward Housing Association, Huntingdonshire Housing Partnership, Granta Housing Society, Cambridge Housing Society, Housing 21) accepted this invitation. These providers own approximately 85% of the schemes and 82% of the sheltered units across the county. The overview of the results form the basis of chapters 3 and 4 and we have incorporated data, analysis and observations gathered from other sources into these chapters as appropriate.

The Starfish toolkit is designed to help providers appraise services in a structured and comprehensive way, ensuring that decisions about their future are founded on sound assessments. It is a self-assessment method, with inputting required from a range of staff (including scheme managers, their managers (level 1), their managers (level 2), property managers, finance managers and human resources managers. Objectivity is built in through the breakdown of each main heading into sub-headings, each requiring evidence to back up the assessment of that aspect of the service into one of 4 grades or levels (e.g. fully met, almost met, partially met, not met). The overall grade for that sub-section is then determined from the results of the component questions (e.g. A yes definitely, B yes reasonably well, C no not really, D definitely not).

There are 5 main components to the Starfish approach:

- Strategic viability
- Service quality

- Physical viability
- Logistical viability
- Financial viability

2.2 Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework (QAF)

All 18 sheltered housing providers have had aspects of their service reviewed using the QAF with self-assessments cross-checked against validation visits (chapter 3 and Appendix 2).

2.3 Survey of scheme manager service

The steering group decided that Starfish appraisals omitted some key information regarding the scheme manager service and a separate email survey was conducted of the eight core providers (chapter 3).

2.4 Focus groups with older people in Cambridgeshire

The consultants proposed to the steering group that, in order to ascertain views of current and future residents of sheltered housing, focus groups were conducted. Five focus groups took place – 3 with those living in sheltered housing and 2 with those not living in sheltered housing (chapter 5).

2.5 Community alarm services

An overview of the alarm service in Cambridgeshire was sought and comprised two elements:

- An email survey with housing providers in the county to establish the type of service received from their current social alarm centre
- A telephone survey with the social alarm centre used by providers in Cambridgeshire (chapter 6).

All providers of sheltered housing taking part in the review and the Social Alarm Centres used by them were invited to take part in the research.

2.6 Strategic review

As part of the review work was undertaken to set it within a broader strategic context about the future of sheltered housing within current thinking about whole system planning and service redesign for older people. This work included:

- Working with the Steering Group at its meeting on 10 October 2003 on the national context, and on linking housing into the vision and values

work being carried out by social services and health as part of their integration planning. This is reflected in the vision for the future set out in chapter 7

- Preparing a paper for the strategy discussion at the Steering Group Meeting on 5 December on the future role of sheltered housing
- Holding a follow up meeting with 3 members of the Steering Group – Nick Abbey, David Poole and Hugh Gault – on 29th January 2004 on where sheltered housing fitted within the broader agenda about the redesign of services for older people in Cambridgeshire

The results of these discussions are set out in chapter 7.

3. Constraints and omissions in the methodology and consequent adjustments

3.1 So far as we are aware, the Starfish toolkit has not been used in this way before, i.e. to compare providers with each other. Its original and intended purpose was to enable individual providers to appraise their individual schemes in an objective way. It was not primarily intended or designed for benchmarking between providers and we have therefore had to design and provide the 8 participating organisations with a custom made spreadsheet, as this was not included in the toolkit. The benchmarked results set out and discussed in chapters 2 to 4 are therefore just the “tip of the iceberg” of the data gathered. Individual providers hold huge amounts of detailed and often fascinating qualitative data which was not passed onto us and cannot therefore be reflected in this report - we urge them to value and utilise that information internally as much as the quantitative overview results of this report.

3.2 Our usual practice when conducting Best Value reviews of sheltered housing is to carry out a sheltered stock appraisal survey of each scheme, and a survey of tenants’ dependency levels and care and support services provided. The Starfish methodology has provided a useful “can opener” to individual providers to explore issues in more detail and a basic benchmark for broad comparisons of stock and service provision.

3.3 The Starfish framework for assessing quality of service (chapter 3) excluded reference to some aspects of the scheme manager service as stated above paragraph 2.5. We therefore asked providers for supplementary information, the results of which are incorporated into chapter 3.

3.4 The section on property viability (chapter 4) is based on an agreed “ideal property” but the guidance included for that section did not refer to the Housing Corporation’s new descriptions of sheltered housing as these had not been

produced when the Starfish toolkit was published. We therefore asked providers to conduct a supplementary survey of their stock, using the new 'draft' descriptions. The results of this are incorporated into chapter 4 paragraph 6.

3.5 The section on financial viability (chapter 4) caused difficulties due to the different accounting mechanisms of councils, LSVTs and RSLs

3.6 There were some technical problems for providers regarding inputting the data into the Starfish spreadsheets. There were a number of errors and unnecessary restrictions in the blueprint spreadsheets that providers completed. As the blueprints were protected it was not possible to remedy these errors and, following advice from Starfish consultancy, we guided providers on how to work round these problems.

4. Conclusions regarding methodology and constraints

The combination of methods for this joint Best Value and Supporting People review has been unique and positive. All those involved have had to focus on extensive amounts of detail while continuing to see “the big picture”. Providers now have rich qualitative and copious quantitative data on their sheltered housing service. The amount of time involved in compiling this information will be justified through a range of internal uses for at least the next two years. The benchmarking data provided by the Starfish and Supporting People methods is of immediate use in shaping county wide strategy as subsequent chapters will demonstrate.