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Home is important, it can make all the difference to our quality of life – but what if you’re living in the wrong type of home as you or a loved one gets older?

In a first for the East of England, a new service which offers specialist housing information and advice to older people is being rolled out by Cambridgeshire County Council following a successful 7-month pilot in South Cambridgeshire last year.

Working with EACFirstStop, a bespoke HOOP web based tool for each district is being developed which will provide links to different local partners in those areas.

HOOP (Housing Options for Older People) is designed to ensure that all older people have access to free information, advice and support to consider their housing options and where they live at an early stage to maintain independence and wellbeing.

People answer a simple questionnaire about their home and how it suits them. The answers are then used to put them in touch with local housing options (sheltered housing, extra care schemes), support services and community groups that can provide a mixture of practical support and advice.

Cllr Anna Bailey, Chairwoman of the Adults Committee at Cambridgeshire County Council, said: “We want all people to live in their own homes for as long as possible and are committed to helping them do that. People who are in their retirement years may envision staying in their long-time homes indefinitely – but this might not always be the right option for them as they get older.

“The HOOP tool encourages older people to think about how well their home suits them at an early stage before they reach a crisis and provides solutions to help them do this. This could be moving to somewhere cheaper and easier to run, more suitably designed or located and offering more human company, more security from crime and reassurance in case of an accident.”

Moving house into sheltered accommodation in Cottenham in January has made all the difference to Audrey Taylor who says she is now “just loving life”.

The 82-year-old had lived in Cottenham most of her life including 57 years in the same house with her husband. But

when he suddenly died six years ago, she felt she could no longer stay there and 18 months later moved into her son's garden annex in Histon which he had adapted for her.

However, moving away from the village where she had built up a network of friends had a serious effect on her.

"There was nobody I could really make contact with," she said. "I would sometimes go for 24 hours without seeing a human being, I would feed the birds and the squirrels - that was the only contact different to my own. I was getting very depressed.

After contacting the County Council, she had a home visit from an occupational therapist and a HOOP project worker who helped her make a home link application and secure a bungalow in Cottenham

She now enjoys going to weekly coffee mornings and regular meals at the community hall, is close to her daughter and is more mobile around her new home which has improved swelling in her legs.

"I was absolutely thrilled when they got in touch with me to say there was a bungalow for me to move into," Audrey said. "Here I can look out the window and watch the children go by to school in the mornings. The outlook is so pleasant, I can see people. I know if I went up the street there would be somebody I could talk to. I've lived here since I was 11, it has made a huge difference being somewhere that feels like home. I'm ever so happy now."

John Galvin, EAC FirstStop chief executive, said: "Last year's pilot HOOP service in South Cambs showed the benefits of having just one place to go for information and guidance on later life housing options. We look forward to working with our new partners to roll the service out across the County."

HOOP can be accessed online or by telephone and is free to us. For more information, call **0800 310 2031** or visit hoop.eac.org.uk.



Audrey Taylor with her youngest daughter Anne. She is now 'loving life' since moving house in January.

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