

Moving On white paper: Is retirement living the answer to the housing crisis?

March 2023

Sanctuary Supported Living is proud to have contributed to Shakespeare Martineau's 'Moving On' white paper, which demonstrates how retirement living could be the answer to the housing crisis and alleviate pressure on the NHS.



New data analysed by the law firm, in partnership with Sanctuary Supported Living and other registered providers from across the UK, showed that people over 65 are most likely to be renting a home that is too large for their needs*.

Research also estimates that for each bedroom added to the retirement stock, two to three are released in mainstream housing, so shifting the focus from first-time buyers to last-time buyers to 'pull' people through the market will increase the number of family and starter homes available.

However, negative perceptions of retirement living are still putting the public off from making the move to better suited homes or right-sizing. In a research survey of more than 1,000 people aged over 50, the majority (59%) had no plan to, or did not know if they would, right-size one day.

Factors putting over 50s off retirement living included:

- Not wanting to live in a community of older people (28%)
- More than a quarter (26%) didn't feel it would be an affordable option for them
- 1 in 4 believed they would lose their independence if they moved into a retirement living scheme
- Almost 1 in 5 (19%) felt they'd be more isolated
- 1 in 10 believed their health would deteriorate.

Dave Shaw, Operations Director - Sanctuary Supported Living, said: “The ‘Moving On’ white paper presents the stark reality surrounding the common misconception that retirement living is the same as a care home.

“Later living schemes are built specifically for older people who want to extend their independence, offering a range of accommodation, better-suited facilities and support services to suit individual needs now and into the future.”

Substandard housing costs the NHS an estimated £1.4 billion every year and if people lived in homes more suited to their needs, it is estimated that 50,000 fewer homes would need to be built each year. However, just 7,000 retirement units are being built per year – falling short of the numbers required for an ageing population.

Louise Drew, partner and later living expert at Shakespeare Martineau, said: “A greater focus on last-time buyers could not only make better use of existing housing stock, but also help ensure people have a better quality of life in their later years.

“In addition to a shift in government focus, we would call for the Older People’s Housing Taskforce to push for a later living use class – in the same way as affordable housing – to increase intergenerational schemes and consider the full housing lifecycle.

“With proven benefits to the housing sector and NHS cost-savings, government should invest proactively in the later living sector using policy levers, planning reform and funding incentives to help market it properly to create the demand.

“Pushing for co-ordinated efforts at a top level, with master planners and developers creating links between housing associations, investment funds and local authorities, will offer greater choice to the consumer in terms of location, style and facilities.”

*In a sample size of more than 200,000 properties gathered from registered housing providers, spanning more than 200 local authorities, the data shows that the percentage of people in ‘under-occupied homes’ increased as the age of the lead tenant increased. A property was considered to be ‘under-occupied’ if it had a single tenant or couple living in a 3 bedroom+ house.