

Search Engine Failure:

Housing and Care Advice in the North West

**The Care Act 2014 Information and Advice
A Regional Survey of Digital Resources from Local Authorities
in the North West**

SUMMARY:

Future North West's Housing Group have kept a watchful eye on the integration of housing, care and financial advice offered to older people and their carers by local authorities in the wake of the introduction of the Care Act 2014. This report outlines their investigations undertaken during September 2015, their findings and recommendations.

The Housing Group have carried out a review of all 23 top tier local authority websites in the North West as a first point of contact for older people, their families or carers who may be looking for information and advice about housing and care in later life. Using the council website's 'search' facility, key phrases such as , 'older people', 'advice' and 'housing' were explored using the following scenario:

"I have an elderly relative living in (local authority) who's not coping at home and struggling to get to the bathroom. Can you give me any advice?"

If no relevant or appropriate 'advice' was found an email request for advice was sent where this was possible.

Key Findings:

- Advice on the content of the Care Act is widely available but not about how it is being implemented.
- Information and advice is not easy to find on most Council websites.
- A number of the websites are out of date – suggesting that not all councils are maintaining them.
- Despite the question being general, many responses referred our enquiry directly to Adult Social Care for assessment. Such arrangements appear to overlook Care Act guidance that *information and advice services should cover more than just basic information about care and support and should also address the contribution of finances, health and **housing** in preventing the development of the need for care and support.*
- Where active local forums are involved in the development, the services and websites are better.
- Some councils with poor websites are known to have good services but they aren't apparent or 'joined up' with the advice available on line.
- Only one email response said they required the consent of the 'elderly relative' to accept a referral.

Our recommendations:

- Government should offer additional guidance to councils on explaining the Care Act, the use of website links, and the importance of directly linking housing services and providers into Care Act provisions, particularly those relating to prevention.
- Councils should engage with their local older people's forum or, where they don't exist, a similar body to review their website and information.
- Information and Advice needs to be more person-centred and capable of responding to questions that do not fit existing service patterns. This would assist greatly in fulfilling the remit of preventing early use of care services.

**Future North West
Housing Group**

October 2015

The Report:

Future North West Housing Group have been working on the issue of housing information and advice for a number of years and in April 2014 organised a conference in Preston, entitled 'More than Bricks and Mortar' to further explore the issue in the light of recent policy decisions by Government and implications in the media that older people are 'under occupiers' and 'housing hoarders'. Our assertion has always been that we have homes that are more to us than just dwelling places but which also enable us to live life to the full.

We have kept a watching brief on government policies such as the integration of Disabled Facilities Grant money into local Better Care Fund plans, housing options information and advice as well as reviewing local housing strategies and responding to consultations. We wanted to determine if the introduction of the Care Act had impacted on the provision of housing information and advice available in each locality.

Background to the Care Act and Information and Advice

The Care Act guidance is quite clear about the requirements of information and advice and says:

- *The local authority **must** ensure that information and advice services...cover more than just basic information about care and support ... should also address prevention of care and support needs, finances, health, **housing**, employment, .(para 3.5)*
- *Local authorities **must** ensure that information and advice covers...**housing and***
...

There is extensive reference to information & advice, including integration with housing advice; adaptations & home improvement agencies are also specifically mentioned.

Housing is extensively referenced throughout the Guidance and included in the key definitions of wellbeing and prevention.

Wellbeing is a guiding principle throughout the Act. Local authorities **must** promote wellbeing when carrying out any of their care and support functions.

Prevention is seen as critical to the vision of the Care Act. The new care and support system must actively promote wellbeing and independence and aim to prevent need, not just wait to respond when people reach a crisis point.

Home adaptations, falls prevention, handyman & telecare are cited as examples of secondary prevention (para 2.8) and adaptations/equipment as tertiary (para 2.9).

The local authority **must** provide or arrange for services, facilities or resources which would **prevent, delay or reduce** individuals' needs for care and support and should involve **housing** services (para 2.23).

In the guidance the duty is placed on local authorities to establish and maintain **information and advice** services relating to care and support for all people in its area. There are many references to housing in relation to provision of information and advice in this section:

We noted in 2.9 above that the Care Act places new obligations on authorities concerning the provision of **information and advice** (Chapter 3) and that **housing** is a key element.

Quote from the Guidance:

Integrating information and advice on housing

15.65. A local authority must establish and maintain a service for providing information and advice relating to care and support, and this must include advice on relevant housing and housing services which meet care and support needs. The authority is not required to provide all elements of this service, rather, they are expected under this duty to understand, coordinate and make effective use of other statutory, voluntary and or private sector information and advice resources within their area in order to deliver more integrated information and advice.

15.66. A person-centred approach to information and advice will consider the person's strengths and capabilities and the information or advice that will help them to achieve their ambitions. Information and advice should include services in the home that bring health, care and housing services together. This means that information and advice on housing, on adaptations to the current home, or alternative housing options or housing related services should be included. This will enable a person to choose how best they can meet or

prevent their needs for care and support. (See chapter 3 on information and advice).

15.67. A person using care and support or carer should be supported to make fully informed decisions about how to prevent or meet their needs for care and support. A local authority should make use of information and advice that is already available at local and national levels.

15.68. People's care and support needs, their housing circumstances and financial resources are closely interconnected. It is only with full knowledge of the care and support options open to them, including possible housing options and the related financial implications that people will be able to exercise informed choice. For example, some people with their families have made early decisions about moving into residential care possibly sooner than is necessary. Information and advice about the full range of accommodation/housing options and how these might be funded can contribute to more informed decision making for individuals and can extend independent living. Carers in their local population when drawing up Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, including their need to participate in paid employment alongside caring responsibilities.

Integrated housing, care and finance information and advice can help to achieve a number of shared and complementary adult social care, public health and NHS outcomes. The right information, advice and support can especially help the many older people with long-term conditions that limit mobility. Adapted bathrooms can restore personal dignity. Stairlifts can re-establish access to all the rooms of a house. A mobility scooter, and associated storage and access ramps, can help people to reconnect socially, regain independence and enhance quality of life.

From their personal experience, most people understand that their home, health condition and potential need for personal care are connected. But few understand how provision of healthcare, social care and housing related help is organised, let alone how these may be financed. The system is complex and varies by locality as well as personal and family circumstance. The Care Act brings in significant changes. Even greater numbers of people are likely to seek information and advice in order to understand the personal implications of this new system.

The need for care and health services is significantly influenced by housing conditions, whilst both housing and care options are largely determined by personal

finances, including use of any housing equity. A truly informed choice can only be made if all three elements are addressed by information and advice services. Recent research has identified common problems with information and advice arrangements, particularly on social care and support. These include:

- no integration across housing, health and care, making it much harder for individuals to navigate the system without help
- inadequate independent support and/or advocacy for those involved in assessment or other interaction with local authorities; and
- limited information and advice for homeowners/those with assets who have care and support needs.

Many callers to FirstStop, the national telephone advice line for housing, care and financial information assume that if they, or a family member, cannot cope in their current home, the only alternative is to go into care. There is little awareness of the range of possible home adaptations, equipment, telecare/ telehealth or floating support services that might assist people to live safely & well in the current home, if that is their preference, let alone knowledge of alternative housing possibilities, including supported housing.

People often know even less about finance; for example, many wrongly assume that social care will be provided free of charge to all (*Cabinet Office report 'Barriers to Choice' finding*). They do not know what financial help may realistically be available. Few will have considered other financial options such as use of housing equity eg. through downsizing, relocation or loans. Housing and care options decisions are inextricably linked to a person's income, savings and assets, hence these issues tend to be of major concern.

With 'older age' lasting from 60yrs to over 100yrs for some people, alongside a wide range of life situations and experience, there is clearly a very wide spectrum of requirements and needs for information and advice.

The ways that older people access information and advice varies widely and changes over time and as personal circumstances alter. Some people are regular users of online information, some read printed guides and leaflets, and sometimes people need to talk to someone either over the telephone or face-to-face. Information and advice therefore has to be delivered in a variety of formats, at varying levels of detail to meet a wide range of needs and requirements at different points in older people's lives.

At Future North West, our primary concern with regard to the introduction of the Care Act 2014 was whether local authorities would grasp the importance of including housing in their information and advice provision. To test this we undertook an on-

line survey of local authority websites to gauge both whether local authorities are delivering this and how they are responding to the general enquirer.

We looked in particular, at the responsibility of local authorities to provide information and advice which would cover more than just basic information about care and support but would also address prevention of care and support needs, housing and related services (para 3.5 of guidance). The Housing Group were concerned not only about cuts to funding for housing and housing support services but also the lack of integration of housing related services into the prevention and wellbeing agenda promoted by the Care Act.

We were aware that the Guidance to the Act stated that '*information and advice can help people make early choices about their **housing options** and related services in advance of a potential crisis.*'

We took this as our starting point to look at the advice that may be available to anyone whether they be an older person or a concerned friend or relative.

As a way of benchmarking the basic provision of information and advice in the North West, we created a Mystery Shopper scenario to test out each top tier authority. Given our limited resources, we chose to limit this assessment to web-based information.

We appreciate that digital inclusion is an issue for many older people with percentages of people over 65 regularly using the internet reported as 42% which compares with just 9% in 2006 but it also the case that following the Government's introduction of the 'Digital by Default' programme in 2012, more people of all ages are turning to the internet for information and advice. In 2014, the most popular reason for accessing a public authority or service website was to obtain information. Of all adults, 37% obtained information from a public authorities or service website. (ONS May 2014).

It is important to note that ONS (2014) internet use figures show that 70% of women & 53% of men aged 75+ have never used the internet. Whilst the level of internet use will continue to increase over time, there is an older cohort which is likely to never use this information source. Around 74% of people aged 55-65yrs use the internet daily, hence the 'younger old', carers, family members, professionals and friends make use of websites to find information to help themselves and others.

Care, housing and related finance are indivisible when considering living arrangements in later life. Therefore enabling older people to make fully informed

decisions requires integrated information and advice provision which straddles housing, care and finance.

- Given the great diversity of older people and their widely differing situations, capacity and resources, information and advice needs to be provided in the full range of formats - internet based, printed, telephone and face to face.
- Older people value highly independence and impartiality in the provision of information and advice. Trust in the provider is a critical consideration.

Key Findings:

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- A number of the websites are out of date – suggesting that not all councils are maintaining them.
- Despite the question being general, many responses referred our enquiry directly to Adult Social Care for assessment. Such arrangements appear to overlook Care Act guidance that *information and advice services should cover more than just basic information about care and support and should also address the contribution of finances, health and **housing** in preventing the development of the need for care and support.*
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Our recommendations:

- Government should offer additional guidance to councils on explaining the Care Act, the use of website links, and the importance of directly linking housing planners and providers into Care Act provisions, particularly those relating to prevention.
- Councils should engage with their local older people's forum or, where they don't exist, a similar body to review their website and information.
- Information and Advice needs to be more prominent on local authority websites.
- Information and Advice must be person-centred and capable of responding to questions that do not fit existing service patterns as this would assist greatly in fulfilling the remit of preventing early use of care services.

Survey Results

Care Act Survey of Council Websites for Future North West

September 2015

In an effort to gauge how local authorities in the North West are doing in relation to Information and Advice and housing options since the introduction of the Care Act, the Housing Group have undertaken a review of local authority websites. Each website was 'searched' for 'older people' to find appropriate information.

Where possible, a 'mystery shopper' approach was used via email, each given the same scenario: "I have an elderly relative living in (local authority) who's not coping at home and struggling to get to the bathroom. Can you give me any advice?" The table below outlines the relevant parts of the website and responses from each local authority.

✓ - indicates the response suggested by email


X – indicates poor response or access



indicates best results

	LA – advice offered	Notes on the Website	RESPONSES		
			Aids or OT	Care Assessment	RESPONSE OR ACCESS
1.	Cheshire East e-contact form	No easy way in to advice or support – Ageing Well is a JSNA document that highlights <i>how badly</i> Cheshire East is doing! Emailed request for advice. Subsequent search found a link to Age UK Cheshire East but nothing that directly answered my original question.		✓	X
2.	Cheshire West e-contact form	No easy way in to advice or support. Email request for advice sent. Response recommended an OT assessment.	✓		X
3.	Warrington	Warrington has a guide to support OP to live at home. Very good and easily found. Published 2014			★
4.	Wirral e-feedback on Support page	Not easily found and then only on the Care Act – no pointers to additional information – so failing. Email advice was to call Adult Social Services.			X
5.	Liverpool e-contact form	Basic webpage is busy explaining the Care Act and does include a range of information but nothing that suggested answers to my query. Fastest response to an email (2 hours) but asked me to give details of the older person or to phone the Careline (ASC access point).			X

6.	Sefton e-contact form	Has a web based directory which is well laid out but didn't really help me find an answer apart from a list of care homes and advocacy services. The email response suggested Adult Social Care would have provide me with advice so not an independent source of information.		X
7.	St Helens Email to Contact Centre	Only way to get information is to ring or email the contact centre. I emailed. Response was OK.	✓	?
8.	Knowsley	Council have a dedicated website that has lots of information about local services and includes a direct link to AskSara (advice based on your questions website). Also, linked to KnowYourCare.co.uk and is very good for this type of enquiry.		★
9.	Halton	Halton's website is relatively easy to navigate and very visual. They link into an on-line resource called 'Easy 4 U' which does an on-line assessment and then suggests solutions.		★
10.	Wigan	Wigan's website is fairly clear and there is a lot of information but much of it is old (2012 list of services and application for Supporting People – both VERY out of date).		?
11.	Manchester	Very poor and no-where to go to ask questions. Care Act information is generic so without an assessment, I can't even get to ask a question. Only way into the website is via feedback on each page.		XX
12.	Salford	Website has lots of useful information and advice. You can make on on-line enquiry and although they ask for the details of the person you are enquiring for, the form will be accepted when left blank. They also have an on-line database with a broad range of activities and services listed. Would need to check with local people if this is up to date.		★
13.	Bolton	The website has a link for older people but all they offer is Care homes, day care, meals on wheels and 'activities'. With a bit more searching I found a directory of services but it was dated 2012 so can't be up to date. To be fair they are the only authority so far with the Care Act explained with a BSL video as well as text. There is no way to ask for general advice.		X

		You have to know what you need in the first place.	
14.	Bury Email	Bury have a simple website and a directory of older people's services that included the older people's forum, day centres, Carelink and community care. They did have links to external national agencies but one suggestion, 'Counsel and Care' no longer exists. No local links. Email response suggested I contact 'CAD' to give them more information. I don't know who they are so would be reluctant to do so.	X
15.	Rochdale	Council has a page called 'My Care Rochdale' which leads you through the sorts of questions you might have and suggests a range of options and tells you how to access them and where so I didn't email.	
16.	Oldham	Oldham has a simple website but not much information. Under the banner of health and social care there was a link to a section on 'Help to Live at Home'. While the information was clear, it was only directing you to specific services – Link Centre for Independent Living. There was also a section on reablement – short term support and a link to ask for an assessment. I eventually discovered that the Link Centre for Independent Living not only provides aids but also a range of services and advice. I could email the Link Centre but chose not to.	?
17.	Tameside	Tameside have an on-line self-assessment form. It is designed to be completed by a person requiring a service so would not be accurate for our 'scenario', nor I suspect for many people who require services. At the end you can follow the request through to get an ASC assessment or click on various links. The only local one is Age UK Tameside and the rest are national organisations.	?
18.	Stockport	Stockport Council's website is a bit cumbersome when searching for older people's services. They also have a dedicated Advice and Information website – My Care My Choice with a link to a Wayfinder's service at Age UK Stockport – except the service no longer exists!	?X
19.	Trafford	Searching for 'older people' didn't bring any help. Eventually, via Adult Social Care, I found my way to 'MyWay.Trafford.Gov.UK' and this was	?

		similar to other council's service information sites. It then links to an external directory of service providers.	
20.	Cumbria Email	After much searching, I found the Cumbria Support Directory. It was hard to determine if that would give me the information I needed. It is really a signposting list. It doesn't help you very much so I emailed the Council. There's was the only email response that suggested that I would need the permission of 'my elderly relative' to make an enquiry on their behalf.	? ★
21.	Lancashire	A general search leads you to Older Peoples Services and there are only two – residential care and day time support! Even searching for 'advice' does not produce any results that are relevant. Perhaps they rely on district councils to meet that requirement BUT they are the body responsible for Adult Social Care and the Care Act so I would expect better.	X
22.	Blackpool	Struggled to find any advice or information. Closest came from the Centre for Independent Living page. By searching for 'advice' I found the Council's on-line directory Blackpool4Me which is OK but wouldn't answer my question.	?
23.	Blackburn	It was really hard to find any information on the Council website. The only advice related to Direct Payments and Care.	X



Bury Council when I tried to go back a page!