

Cornwall Home Solutions - In house home improvement agency

Good practice themes

1. Awareness raising and outreach (including volunteer involvement)
2. Integration with health and care

Context

Cornwall is a large rural area (population 563,600) in the far South West of England. The unitary authority, Cornwall Council, was created in 2009 when the district councils were amalgamated with the county council. It is the second poorest region in Northern Europe, and 17 of its neighbourhoods are amongst the 10% most deprived in the UK.

It has a relatively high retired population, 22.9% of pensionable age, compared with 20.3% UK average. There are particular issues of cold and damp in its housing stock, as well as rising homelessness/ housing shortage, and the focus of the **Cornwall Director of Public Health's Annual Report** was the connections between health, housing and the wider environment.

Cornwall Home Solutions is the countywide in-house home improvement agency (HIA). The policy setting out the Cornwall Home Solutions offer (2016-19) is available [here](#). Key features include:

1. Interest Free Loans to fund work which exceeds the mandatory DFG ceiling of £30K or to assist with a client's contribution
2. Interest Free Loans to home owners who aren't eligible for a Mandatory DFG

3. Mandatory DFG to include cost warranties on platform lifts
4. Accessible Homes Assistance to help fund low cost work including repairs to stairlifts
5. Interest Free Loans for home owners over 60 or those who have a limiting long term illness and are vulnerable to cold and falls to reduce or remove hazards associated with excess cold and falls
6. Enable improved collaboration and integration of housing with health to facilitate hospital discharge and prevent admissions
7. Accept DFG applications to adapt void stock to enable Homechoice applicants to relocate
8. Target funding and support to wheelchair users living in unadapted properties.

The additional Better Care Fund DFG Allocation has enabled the HIA to meet the majority of presenting need for adaptations, to increase its outreach activities (including work with GP practices and hospitals) to raise awareness of its housing services offer and working in partnership to develop a Hospital Discharge Pathway for patients requiring adaptations or re-housing.

1 Awareness raising, outreach and providing accessible information about adaptations

Cornwall Council's home improvement agency, Cornwall Home Solutions, is a holistic home improvement agency service that includes provision of wider information/ advice/ support for people who have issues with their housing, need adaptations and/or to move home.

In 2015 it became a local pilot as part of the national **Silverlinks** initiative to involve older volunteers in promoting awareness of later life housing and care options, including possible home adaptations and DFG.

Cornwall Home Solutions staff involved with Silverlinks, alongside older volunteers (who usually have first- hand experience of home adaptations/ moving home), give talks and run housing information events, e.g. at older people's groups/meetings, in medical centres etc. They have also organised a number of special one off events to raise awareness, such as our **'Day in the Life'** Disability Awareness Day.

This approach ensures that more older people have information about possible housing options, including disabled facilities grant (DFG) and adaptations, and are better able to think about and plan ahead before they reach a time of housing crisis, knowing where to go for information, advice and practical help if/ when they need it.

From the perspective of the agency, the Silverlinks initiative provided an additional dimension to the HIA offer, supporting older people facing housing decisions by linking them up to an older person who has had similar first-hand experience, be that adapting their current home or moving.

2. Integration with health and care

Improved working practices between health and local authority with regard to housing has led to a number of developments:

There is now a partnership **Hospital Discharge Pathway in progress**, for those requiring either adaptations or relocation to more suitable accommodation with a direct referral route to Cornwall Home Solutions.

As part of the **outreach work** connected to Silverlinks, the Housing Solutions Officers, sometimes alongside Silverlinks volunteers, attend 'ward round' meetings at local Community Hospitals across the County to raise awareness of the housing help on offer to staff and patients. As a result they receive a wide range of referrals for housing assistance.

Means testing with regard to eligibility for DFG assistance is carried out at the earliest opportunity, often prior to the technical housing assessment by the OT, so that individuals are aware of any financial contributions/ likely grant entitlement from the start to aid decision making.

A **fast-track stairlift initiative** is in place for hospital patients who need a stairlift in their home to enable safe hospital discharge. By working with Social Care and Hospital OT's a streamlined statement of need/stairlift specification exists to enable installation within a week wherever practicable. Due to this innovation, health professionals are now able to refer patients directly to the CHS without the need to wait for involvement of hard pressed Social Care services.

Cornwall Home Solutions also assists individuals whose current home is no longer suitable but who could still live independently in the right home. By allocating DFG funds assist **with home relocation** including help with finding a suitable alternative home, assessment of possible properties by an OT, assistance with relocation costs (removals/carpets) etc). This service operates across all housing tenures.

Cornwall Home Solutions delivers housing related services that address the needs of the whole family unit and which can impact on the health and wellbeing of all parties. Hospitalisation of a family member can have a knock on effect for the wider family/ carer network.

Through its holistic advice and support Cornwall Home Solutions can ensure that 'unofficial/ unknown' carers are made aware of and assisted to claim related welfare benefits and entitlements eg; carers allowance, attendance allowance, blue badge etc, as well as advising on any housing issues.

Cornwall Home Solutions (CHS) responds to urgent referrals **from residential care homes** offering assistance to residents (especially self funders) who in the right property/ possibly with care package would be able to live independently. CHS helps to find a suitable (usually privately rented) accessible home as a short term measure and then assists with finding a longer term solution. For example, one person was able to purchase the accessible home that they were privately renting, thereby providing a long term housing solution.

Cornwall Home Solutions is undertaking a **Wheelchair Project** to look at the needs and requirements of wheelchair users over a two-year period. Results will feed into the current and future direct assistance delivered by the Housing Solutions Officers and others as well as influencing plans for new accessible and adapted housing, a review of the Allocations Policy and Choice based lettings system and related housing services for wheelchair users.

CHS is keen to partner other groups and organisations to ensure there is a coherent and joined-up housing offer for older and disabled people and those with significant health needs.'

In terms of impacts on older people resulting from their pro-active approach, CHS notes that:

- Involving older people as volunteers has helped to raise awareness about housing and care options, including DFG/equipment/relocation solutions.
- More people are now aware of the home adaptations/ housing help that they can get if and when they need it, and so less likely to only take action at point of crisis
- They are starting to hear from older people who took part in a housing options talk or workshop a year or so ago. They didn't need the help then, but have remembered what is possible and as their mobility has declined they know where to turn to and get the adaptations help that Cornwall Home Solutions can offer.
- Reaching older people in the hospital has clear benefits as they can enable some older people to return home sooner through housing adaptation help
- Maximising income has had a profound effect on independence for many older people and carers
- They have made use of the wider support networks resulting in less use of public services
- Reduced discharge waiting times, releasing number of hospital beds
- Their wider service offer improves social inclusion e.g. increased applications for blue badge's and attendance allowance/ other benefits
- They have extended older people's access to accessible housing by offering a tailored service
- They are providing a service that removes barriers to older people reaching the housing help that they need by acting on the observations of their volunteers.

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[Read the full report](#)