

## Housing and 'floating support': a review

In recent years housing associations have been able to provide intensive housing management support to people living in self-contained housing through a funding mechanism known as 'floating support'. The Housing Corporation, Housing for Wales and Scottish Homes provide revenue funding on the basis that tenants are assumed to have short-term support needs; when they no longer need it the service 'floats' off to someone else while they remain living in their property under general housing management. A review of this type of support found:

- f** There is increasing interest amongst housing associations in providing support to people living in ordinary self-contained accommodation.
- f** Organisations used the term 'floating support' to refer to a wide range of situations, not solely those using the floating support funding mechanism.
- f** Floating support schemes encompass a wide range of people - from young care-leavers to frail older people.
- f** Housing support workers found it difficult to separate out intensive housing management from other support tasks.
- f** Helping tenants to access other services was an important part of the role of housing support workers.
- f** No English or Scottish schemes reviewed were able to provide housing support using solely Special Needs Management Allowance or Special Needs Allowance Package. In Wales, SNMA levels were higher making it easier to develop schemes.
- f** There was some uncertainty about how the funding mechanisms of community care related to that of floating support and concern about whether 'spot purchasing' on the part of care managers may undermine the financial viability of housing support services.
- f** There was concern about whether the housing benefit system would continue to support service charges.
- f** The researcher concludes there is a need for:
  - greater clarity between the role of housing support and that of social services assessment and care management;
  - consideration of the provision of floating support services to people who have long-term and/or increasing needs for housing support;
  - consideration of the housing support needs of people living in other tenures than housing association tenancies.

## Introduction

'Special needs' housing has been increasingly questioned in recent years. This concept assumes that the needs of some people can only, or will best, be met by accommodating them in 'schemes' which bring together housing and support, such as group homes or hostels.

Housing associations have been major providers of 'special needs' housing. Now, however, there is increasing interest in enabling people who need support to live in ordinary, self-contained housing. 'Floating support' projects are one way of doing this.

## What is floating support?

The narrow definition of floating support is tied to the funding procedures laid down by the Housing Corporation, Housing for Wales and Scottish Homes. Revenue funding is provided on the basis that support (in the form of intensive housing management) is transferable between properties, according to the tenants' needs. A Special Needs Management Allowance (or Special Needs Allowance Package in Scotland) 'floats' between properties: tenants are assumed to have short-term needs for intensive housing management; when they no longer need it, the support (and its funding) 'floats' off to someone else while they remain living in their property and it passes into general housing management.

The funding bodies' definition of intensive housing management includes all the usual housing management functions, together with additional support to enable the tenant to access the benefits and services they require. Intensive housing management aims to enable someone to maintain their tenancy by making sure that they get the support they need to live independently in the community.

The review found that the term 'floating support' was also used to refer to situations which did not conform to the narrow definition. These included innovations where: support was tailored to individual need but was long-term and did not 'float' off to another property; the floating support was not funded by SNMA/SNAP but by statutory or charitable grants, often on a pilot scheme basis; the support provided was wider than intensive housing management support, including for example personal assistance.

Housing associations had five main reasons for developing floating support schemes:

- to support people moving on from a special needs scheme into general needs accommodation to prevent a breakdown of the tenancy;
- as an alternative to traditional special needs housing schemes;
- for those in general needs accommodation who develop a need for intensive housing management support;
- as part of general diversification as development opportunities for housing associations decrease.

The review looked at a variety of organisations operating floating support schemes (within both the narrow and broader definitions) and encompassing a

wide range of people - from young care leavers to frail older people. Many policy and practice issues were raised and these were also looked at in the wider contexts of changes in the housing association sector, the implementation of community care, demographic changes, etc. These *Findings* are confined to a summary of the issues raised by housing managers interviewed about their experiences of running floating support schemes.

## Issues raised by organisations running floating support schemes

Discussions with housing managers revealed a number of concerns.

### ***The role of intensive housing management support***

One manager said 'How do you define individual needs within a job description? You can't separate out housing management from other support tasks.' Much of the role of housing support workers involves a form of service brokerage, enabling people to get access to the different services to meet their particular needs. However, tenants often have immediate needs which do not fall within the definition of intensive housing management support: housing support workers often find themselves in situations where someone needs personal assistance, counselling or other forms of assistance and they are the only ones around to provide it.

Some housing managers reported great difficulties in helping their tenants get access to social services' assessment and care management systems and found themselves providing support which should really be purchased by care managers. Moreover, while housing support workers undoubtedly often perform a valuable task in helping people to access other services (and sometimes co-ordinating these services), this service brokerage role potentially duplicates that of care managers. Most of the housing support schemes looked at had their own assessment forms; these often covered areas similar to social services' own assessment procedures.

Housing association managers expressed concern that housing support workers were 'propping up a [community care] system which is collapsing'. Key issues raised include:

- how housing support services relate to the assessment and care management systems operated by social services authorities and how co-ordination can be improved;
- whether housing support services are filling in the gaps left by statutory agencies and, if so, whether this is appropriate.

### ***Is the funding mechanism flexible enough?***

The revenue funding mechanism for floating support assumes that it is delivered for a short period of time at the beginning of a tenancy. However, organisations running floating support schemes find that some people have long-term support needs. One manager said, 'There's a tension between the origins of floating support and the reality: initially we thought that a measure of the success of the scheme would be how many people no longer required

support. Now we find that many people referred to us will always need support.'

Another point of view was that 'The trouble with floating support is that it assumes that those involved are at an early stage of their tenancy and have decreasing needs for support.' If this is the assumption, then such schemes will not address the needs of, for example, older people and people with HIV and AIDS. Both these groups may need increasing levels of support and many will not wish to move.

An important issue is therefore:

- Can the floating support funding mechanism meet the housing support needs of people who have increasing, rather than decreasing, needs for support? If not, how can such support be funded?

Another element of inflexibility concerns the fact that, inevitably, the SNMA/SNAP funding mechanism is only available for housing management support within the housing association sector. One organisation, which provides support to women moving on from women's aid refuges, said: 'We would like to offer the support we can provide to local authority tenants but we can only get funding for this for housing association tenants.'

There is no reason to assume that a need for the kind of support defined as 'intensive housing management support' is confined to housing association tenants. Indeed, a need for help with the practicalities of moving into a new home, and diminishing, continuing or intermittent help with ensuring that housing expenses are paid, that a dwelling is kept in a reasonable state of repair, that behaviour does not create neighbour disputes, that benefits are claimed and services accessed, and so on, can be found across tenures and across the 'care/client groups' into which people are pigeonholed.

Important issues for future consideration include:

- To what extent do some people living in local authority, private rented or owner-occupied housing need intensive housing management support? To what extent are these needs being met? What funding mechanisms are available to provide intensive housing management support within and across the different tenures? What funding mechanisms need to be developed to support such schemes?

### ***The funding of flexible intensive housing management support***

None of the floating support schemes looked at in England or Scotland were able to provide their housing support service solely using SNMA or SNAP. Other sources of funding were: service charges paid for through housing benefit, grants from statutory agencies, charitable funding, 'top-slicing' of general rental income. In Wales, on the other hand, SNMA levels were higher and, for a variety of reasons, it has been easier to develop floating support schemes.

Staff/tenant ratios for the services looked at

varied from 1:5 to 1:30. It is not clear whether these variations are a result of differing levels of support needs amongst tenants or whether they are more related to funding criteria and limitations.

Organisations often have to put together complex and insecure financial packages because SNMA/SNAP funding levels are not high enough.

The implementation of community care raises possibilities and difficulties for housing as management support. One manager said, 'We don't know whether the service we provide could be or would be purchased by social services care managers. We're wondering whether this is a source of funding that is potentially open to us but that we're losing out on.' Yet another manager said, 'We don't want to get into the care management system, or any other form of spot purchasing, because this would make our funding situation too insecure. We would rather rely on a block grant.'

These two comments illustrate some of the uncertainties created for the funding of housing support services by the introduction of the care management system under the 1990 community care reforms. On the one hand, care managers with devolved budgets are able, in theory, to purchase the kind of support services that each individual is assessed as needing. On the other hand, if this is the only way of attracting the social services funding made necessary because SNMA/SNAP is not sufficient to fund a housing support service fully, housing organisations may be subject to a great deal of financial uncertainty.

One housing association senior manager emphasised that it was necessary to have both block funding and spot-purchasing. 'You need spot-contracting for providing additional and varying levels of support but no organisation could provide this flexibility unless there was the basic structure there in the first place - the staff, the line management, administrative back-up, and so on.'

Some housing associations expressed a concern about the future of the housing benefit system. 'The use of housing benefit is problematic and the future insecure,' said one manager. An estimated 25-30 per cent of gross rent in supported housing is made up of service charges which are eligible for housing benefit. The Government is introducing new regulations concerning rent levels in the private sector and has commissioned research on service charges.

Uncertainty about whether housing benefit will cover the additional costs of providing intensive housing management support may restrict further innovation in the area of floating support and offset the other factors which would otherwise bring about an increase in floating support schemes.

Key issues concerning the funding of intensive housing management support include:

- What kind of financial relationship between purchaser and provider is the most conducive to providing responsive, flexible intensive housing management support?
- What kind of funding mechanism will create the greatest opportunities for the development of innovative, flexible and responsive ways of providing housing support?

## Conclusion

'Floating support' schemes are one way of enabling people in varying circumstances to live securely in self-contained accommodation. Currently, the nature of such support and access to it are both determined by the funding structure which created this method of delivering support. A key issue is whether this method is the most appropriate and effective way of delivering support from the individual's point of view.

However, this review also raised some fundamental questions. These include:

- Where are the boundaries to be drawn in defining 'intensive housing management support' and how does this relate to other support services?
- How do we ensure that 'intensive housing management support' is available to those who need it, regardless of tenure or 'client group'?
- What kind of funding structures will promote the flexibility to be found in the best floating support schemes, in particular, the ability to provide support which 'floats' in and out of someone's life as and when they need it?

At a time when it appears that the Government and the Housing Corporation wish to encourage what has come to be known as 'floating support', it is vital that there is a comprehensive look at the performance of this funding mechanism against the aspirations of people who need support. There is also an urgent need for an assessment of the relationships between housing support services and the care management system, including their respective funding structures.

## About the study

The review was carried out by Jenny Morris, a freelance researcher. She gathered information from a wide range of 'floating support' schemes and interviewed managers from four organisations.

## Further information

A full report, *Housing and Floating Support: a review*, is published by York Publishing Services Limited (price £6.50).

## Related Findings

The following *Findings* look at related issues:

### *Housing*

- 86** Housing provision for people with health problems and mobility difficulties (Apr 93)
- 99** Shared living in supported housing (Nov 93)
- 123** Adaptations for disability (Sept 94)
- 135** Housing management, community care and CCT (Jan 95)
- 136** Housing needs of people with a physical disability (Feb 95)

### *Social Care*

- 23** Resettlement of people with learning difficulties from long-stay institutions (Jun 92)
- 30** Community care and independent living (Feb 93)
- 31** Involving disabled people in assessment (Mar 93)
- 36** Housing need and community care (Jul 93)
- 37** The effectiveness of an Independent Living Advocate (Sept 93)
- 41** Community living for people with learning difficulties (Oct 93)
- 43** Community care plans and supported housing (Dec 93)

*Housing Summary 6*, 'Financing user choice in housing and community care', is also relevant.

For further details on these and other *Findings*, contact Sally Corrie on 01904 654328 (direct line for publications queries only; an answerphone may be operating).



Published by the  
Joseph Rowntree Foundation  
The Homestead, 40 Water End  
York YO3 6LP  
Tel: 01904 629241 Fax: 01904 620072  
ISSN 0958-3084

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is an independent, non-political body which has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy-makers and practitioners. The findings presented here, however, are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.