

Sheltered housing providers *protect* residents from abuse and neglect

Tuesday's *File on 4* feature [Sheltered from Harm](#) (23 January, 2018) was trailed with the strapline "who protects the residents of sheltered housing schemes from abuse or neglect?" In the vast majority of cases, the simple answer is sheltered housing providers. But this was not the impression left by the programme.

The first couple of minutes presented a positive picture of sheltered housing (which provides low levels of support to enable older people to live independently, and serves a different purpose from residential care) that the vast majority of residents and their families and friends would recognise. However, it went on to focus on a tragic case of a resident who had died in her apartment some weeks before being found. A second case, where a sheltered housing warden had conned a resident out of money was shocking but highly unusual. A third case, where one resident sexually abused another, also very distressing but again untypical, highlighted the 'patchwork of regulation' and responsibilities.

Of course, sheltered housing providers should be held to account, learn lessons, or face the consequences when these rare cases occur. We would also welcome improved regulation in the sector, just as we have done in the past. Local authority oversight attached to the Supporting People funding system has mostly disappeared, together with the funding. Our members adhere to nationally recognised good practice and many sheltered housing providers sign up for voluntary quality assurance programmes such as that run by the Centre for Housing and Support (CHS).

Your programme was wrong to imply that these cases were typical. Although, two participants, a family member and a barrister, suggested these cases were common, no evidence was offered to back them up. Instead data about the thousands of 'safeguarding' referrals of self-neglect and other forms of abuse in sheltered housing was presented as though proof of neglect by providers themselves. This is not the case.

- Our members are *identifying* and *reporting* more cases of abuse due to improved staff training, systems and reporting of safeguarding concerns to local authorities.
- In the vast majority of cases, reports of abuse of sheltered housing residents are made *by* sheltered housing providers, usually housing associations and local authority housing departments.
- A 'safeguarding' referral is made when there is a concern that someone is being abused or neglected. Over the last couple of years, the largest category, 'neglect', has been expanded to include 'self-neglect'. Our members have formal systems to report cases of hoarding and other forms of self-neglect, and are making more referrals to local authorities. People that once could be overlooked by social services are now receiving more attention and structured support.

The statistics are too crude to give us the whole picture (and incorporate supported housing for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues, as well as short-term accommodation e.g. refuges and hostels), and it is likely that any increase in the number of safeguarding cases is evidence of better reporting rather than a growing wave of actual abuse and neglect. And as the programme pointed out, figures are not available to indicate levels of abuse in owner-occupied housing or residential care.

So, we thank you for giving a voice to the most vulnerable sheltered housing residents and their families. But to suggest sheltered housing schemes are unsafe places where abuse and neglect flourish is a disservice to a sector which provides high quality support every day to hundreds of thousands of older people.

Editor's note:

Erosh champions good quality sheltered and retirement housing by

- *Demonstrating the health and social care benefits and cost savings of sheltered and retirement housing and support for older people*
- *Making sure sheltered and retirement housing promotes promote empowerment, independence and choice and involves older people in the design, delivery and development of services*
- *Ensuring sheltered and retirement housing and support services are affordable, accessible and inclusive, and meet both current and future needs*
- *Making sure staff are appropriately trained, and comply with professional standards and good practice*
- *Promoting sheltered schemes as hubs for all older people in communities to combat social isolation and loneliness*

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