



# Housing Research Report

## *Living Independently*

*A Study of the Housing Needs  
of Elderly and Disabled People*

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tenancy or licence agreement. In the survey, information was collected on the number and type of different specialised units of accommodation for elderly people owned and managed by each organisation. By contrast, all of the data on the number of units of specialised accommodation for non-elderly disabled adults comes from the existing stock data on Housing Investment Programme returns supplied annually to the Department of the Environment by local authorities<sup>8</sup>. The following sections of this chapter use this information to present a profile of the nature and extent of the specialised stock and compare provision with assessed need. Before doing so, however, it is worthwhile briefly examining the different types of specialised housing for elderly and disabled people.

### *Types of specialised housing provision for elderly and disabled people*

2.4 First of all, it is important to point out that the specialised housing options available for elderly and non-elderly disabled people differ considerably. The former group are mainly covered by specialised housing options for all elderly people, such as sheltered housing. Non-elderly disabled adults are housed in forms of specialised housing, such as wheelchair housing, which are mostly provided to meet their housing needs only.

2.5 Having said that, there are *four* main types of specialised housing provision for elderly people. These are:-

*Category 1 accommodation* – contains specially-designed units of accommodation for elderly people of the more active kind. Communal facilities such as a common room, a laundry room or a guest room may also be provided, although these are optional;

*Category 1.5 accommodation* – is broadly similar to Category 1 housing, but it must have an alarm system and warden support. No communal facilities are provided in this form of accommodation;

*Category 2 accommodation* – are schemes with units of accommodation for less active elderly people. They must have a resident or non-resident warden and a system for calling him or her. Communal facilities such as a common room, a laundry room or a guest room must also be provided;

*Category 2.5 accommodation* – these are also known as either ‘very sheltered’ or ‘extra care’ schemes. They are for frail elderly people and have more provision or a greater level of care than Category 2 schemes. They may, for example, provide meals, extra wardens, care assistants and additional communal facilities such as special bathrooms, sluice rooms etc.

<sup>8</sup> In the absence of primary research data on wheelchair and mobility housing/housing adapted for disabled people, HIP1 returns for 1 April 1993 are the best available source. It should be noted, however, that this may significantly undercount the amount of mobility housing/housing adapted for disabled people. It should also be pointed out that, according to the rules for completing the HIP1 form, mobility housing should not be included in these figures. It is extremely difficult, however, for local authorities to separate mobility housing from all housing specially designed or adapted for use by disabled people in their stock. It is highly likely, therefore, that most, if not all, of stock built to mobility standard is still included in HIP figures. Annual returns collected by the Housing Corporation from registered housing associations (HAR10/1) also contain information on the stock of wheelchair dwellings but not mobility housing/housing adapted for disabled people. The exclusion of the latter form of provision prompted the decision to rely only on HIP1 data.

**Table 2.20 The current regional stock of subsidised Category 2 accommodation compared with assessed need (grossed-up figures)**

DoE Region	1. No. of Cat. 2 units	2. No. of elderly households	3. 1. as a % of 2.	4. % of 9,000 elderly households requiring OSH	5. % difference i.e. % of households in 2. with unmet need
South-East	49,449	818,385	6.04	3.0	+3.04
South-West	35,178	591,747	5.94	1.0	+4.94
London	38,023	735,802	5.17	1.7	+3.47
Eastern	44,828	627,418	7.14	2.3	+5.44
West Mids	28,228	586,016	4.82	2.0	+2.82
East Mids	31,329	431,705	7.26	2.7	+4.56
North-West	50,143	778,430	6.44	3.1	+3.34
Yorks & Humberside	27,549	571,859	4.82	2.6	+2.22
Northern	24,019	285,764	8.41	3.1	+5.31
England	328,746	5,427,127	6.06	2.4	+3.66

2.52 There is evidence of a significant over-supply of ordinary sheltered housing both nationally and in each region. For England as a whole, there are almost 4 units per 100 elderly households more than estimates of assessed need would suggest are required. For some regions – South-West, East Midlands, Eastern and Northern – this figure goes up to 5 units in excess of assessed need, but for others – Yorkshire and Humberside and West Midlands – it is lower at 2 and 3 units in excess of demand. Not all of the units counted in the national survey will be easy to let, there is growing evidence that many schemes have difficulty finding new tenants because of problems associated with their location, non-self contained accommodation and low-grade communal facilities (Barelli, 1992, Micallef, 1994). A proportion of most providers' stocks of ordinary sheltered housing is now quite old, having been constructed in the early 1960s, and needs renovation to ensure its continued use. Some allowance might be made, therefore, for possible reductions in the numbers of Category 2 sheltered housing units presented in Table 2.20 for these reasons. It is extremely doubtful, nevertheless, that this would significantly close the gap between supply and demand at the national and regional levels. It should be borne in mind, however, that this study did not specifically look at the balance of supply and assessed need for specialised housing at the local level.

**Table 2.21 The current regional stock of subsidised Category 2.5 accommodation compared with assessed need (grossed-up figures)**

DoE Region	1. No. of Cat. 2.5 units	2. No. of elderly households	3. 1. as a % of 2.	4. % of 9,000 elderly households requiring VSH	5. % difference i.e. % of households in 2. with unmet need
South-East	2,943	818,385	0.36	0.8	-0.45
South-West	2,064	591,747	0.35	1.2	-0.85
London	2,776	735,802	0.38	1.5	-1.12
Eastern	1,789	627,418	0.29	0.5	-0.19
West Mids	2,185	586,016	0.37	1.5	-1.13
East Mids	758	431,705	0.18	2.0	-1.82
North-West	1,137	778,430	0.15	0.7	-0.55
Yorks & Humberside	761	571,859	0.13	2.6	-2.47
Northern	369	285,764	0.13	1.3	-1.17
England	14,782	5,427,127	0.27	1.3	-1.03

2.53 In contrast to ordinary sheltered housing, there appears to be a shortage of very sheltered housing at both national and regional levels. For England, there is roughly a shortage of 1 unit per 100 elderly households. With the exception of the North-West, northern regions – Northern, Yorkshire and Humberside, East and West Midlands – seem to have a significantly greater shortage of Category 2.5 accommodation than southern regions – South-East, South-West, London and Eastern. This reflects, to a large extent, the current regional bias in the provision of very sheltered housing towards southern regions, in that some northern regions have very small amounts of very sheltered housing. It is also, however, probably a reflection of the greater numbers of households with an assessed need for very sheltered housing in Yorkshire and Humberside and the East Midlands.

2.54 One way of providing very sheltered housing is to up-grade ordinary sheltered housing with the addition of care staff and enhanced communal facilities. Several examples of this type of conversion were included in research the Department conducted on very sheltered housing in the late 1980s (Tinker, 1989). This study showed that up- grading schemes gradually by giving additional help to residents as soon as their level of physical and/or mental dependency warranted it rather than moving them on, could be successful. It may be, therefore, that one approach to overcoming the shortages of very sheltered housing would be to up-grade some under-used or surplus ordinary sheltered housing stock. This would probably require, however, significant capital and revenue investment both in terms of improving standards of accommodation and in the level of care and support services provided.

2.55 Finally, it is also possible to compare estimates of need for specialised accommodation by non-elderly disabled adults with current levels of provision of subsidised wheelchair and mobility housing/housing adapted for disabled people. Caution should be exercised, however, with these estimates – produced