

Since Better Housing Briefing 6 ("[Meeting the sheltered and extra care needs of black and minority ethnic older people](#)") first came out in March 2008 there have been some significant influences on the ability of housing providers to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic older people, and the ability of black and minority ethnic older people to access services that might better meet their needs. Better Housing Briefing 19 ("[Meeting the supported housing needs of black and minority ethnic communities](#)"), published in December 2011 highlighted policy changes (including the proposed housing benefit changes, the non-ring fencing of the supporting people budget) and the potential impact these could have. As noted (Jones and Bignall, 2011):

"The current financial strictures facing local government, and the non-ring fencing of the Supporting People budget, mean that meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic communities through ethnically specific supported housing, whatever the target group (older people, people with mental health problems, and so on) will become increasingly problematic."

If the provision of black and minority ethnic specific accommodation is more problematic, then solutions are needed. One solution is to look at meeting minority needs within more general specialist accommodation for older people. Some will have been living in such accommodation anyway, given the lack of alternative housing solutions (such as accommodation targeted specifically at their particular ethnic group) and/or of their own choice, and many housing providers are now looking to cater for the needs of specific minorities within a non ethnically-exclusive setting.

One problem with such approaches can be that they fail to adequately address the specific needs of black and minority ethnic older people (such as dietary needs, proximity to community or religious buildings. See, for example, Jones, forthcoming). While ethnically-targeted design features may be admirable, they do not necessarily directly address the needs of the minority group within the majority-ethnic housing scheme: they may look good; they may make people feel more "at home", but is that enough?

In terms of accommodation designed to be ethnically mixed, Adactus Housing Association's Hibiscus Court in Whalley Range, Manchester (a 37 flat scheme built in 1990 and located in an area with a large African-Caribbean population) is an example of an effective mixed ethnicity scheme. Just over half of the tenants are white, and the majority of the remaining tenants are African Caribbean. A range of activities are provided (including bingo, a "chippy" night, clothing parties and gospel evenings). Tenants are consulted regarding the activities they would like to see in the scheme, and whilst some activities may be of more appeal to specific groups (such as dominos to African-Caribbeans), they also tend to attract non-participants as well for the sense of "camaraderie". The staff team contains both black and minority ethnic and white staff and inter-ethnic relations amongst the tenants are felt to be good. Most tenants share a common language, removing any problems relating to "language barriers" that may exist in schemes in which the tenants lack a common language.

With regard to meeting specific minority needs within otherwise "majority" settings, the CHS Group have opened a 40 unit extra care scheme in Cambridge (Richard Newcombe Court), which includes eight dispersed units targeted towards Chinese older people. The Association worked closely with the community (whose needs had been identified via the City Council) to develop the scheme, which incorporates a number of design features which should be particularly attractive to Chinese older people but which should not be off-putting for non-Chinese.

At the time of writing these had not all been taken up by Chinese older people but the Housing Association's aim was to retain the target of eight. Although there are no Cantonese-speaking staff members, with the exception of one cleaner, a number of measures are being taken better to meet the needs of Chinese residents:

- Job adverts encouraging Chinese-speaking applicants and/or applicants who would be willing to learn Cantonese
- Support from families and the Chinese community more widely
- Cantonese language training for staff (with practice assistance from Chinese residents).

Despite these positive measures (and the fact that the scheme was only opened in April 2011) a number of issues will need to be addressed:

- The need to raise awareness amongst the Chinese community (including their representatives) of what exactly the scheme offers and who is eligible for it
- The need for accurate and consistent translation of disseminated information
- The need to identify sufficient and suitable applicants

In 2008, Guinness Care and Support developed a 55 flat very sheltered scheme (Lincoln Gardens) in Lawrence Hill, Bristol, which includes 11 flats (grouped together but over four separate floors, rather than forming a separate wing) designed to meet the needs of Muslims. Although the design features would be particularly attractive to members of that religious group, depending on levels of demand they do not need to be used exclusively for Muslims. The scheme also has Somali staff although additional interpreters are sometimes needed. As per Colliers Gardens and Simons House levels of demand for extra care accommodation are felt to be low within the target community which has been reflected in their low take-up of the accommodation available.

The Chinese residents of Richard Newcombe Court and the Somalis residents of Lincoln Gardens tend to be at the lower end of the "care need" spectrum and appear to require low-support sheltered accommodation rather than extra care. If associations are aiming for a specific allocations target, this incompatibility between the care level of accommodation and care needs of residents poses a number of questions:

- Should providers accept applications from those with lower levels of need simply because they are in a target category?
- Are there sufficient numbers of people in the target community with higher level needs? If so, how can you attract them to the scheme?
- If extra care is not deemed appropriate, how can their needs better be met?

These are questions that housing providers attempting to meet the needs of an increasingly ethnically diverse older population will have to address.

References

1. Jones, A. (2008), Meeting the sheltered and extra care needs of black and minority ethnic older people - Better Housing Briefing 6, Race Equality Foundation, London.
<http://www.better-housing.org.uk/sites/default/files/briefings/downloads/housing-brief6.pdf>
2. Jones, A. and Bignall. T (2011) , Meeting the supported housing needs of black and minority ethnic communities – Better Housing Briefing 19, Race Equality Foundation, London.
<http://www.better-housing.org.uk/sites/default/files/briefings/downloads/housing-brief11.pdf>
3. Jones, A. (forthcoming), One Size Fits All? - Meeting the needs of Black and minority ethnic older people in mixed ethnicity accommodation for older people, Centre for Community Research, Birmingham.

All links accessed 23/03/2012

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