

A lifeline for lifetime independence

Supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England

June 2023

Key findings

- Good quality adapted and sustainable supported housing plays an increasingly important role in enabling people with a learning disability and autistic people live independently at the heart of their communities.
- Of the estimated 151,000 people with learning disabilities and autistic people aged 18 years and over in England receiving paid support and care by local authorities between c.23% and c.25% (35,500 to 38,500 units) live in supported housing.
- There has been a steady reduction in those living in registered care settings but the proportion of those living with family and friends is 37% and has not greatly changed over the last decade. This indicates a potential housing timebomb that local authorities need to ensure they plan for as carers get older.
- Housing associations play a key role in providing supported housing. It is estimated that at least 80% of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England is provided by Registered Providers of social housing.

Key findings

- The average weekly rent and service charge for supported housing for people with learning disabilities/autistic people that is eligible for housing benefit is c.£225 per week for self-contained housing and c.£205 for shared housing. The estimated annual housing benefit cost is £357m.
- The sector's long-term sustainability is greatly reliant on the continued payment of higher levels of housing benefit for rent and service charges, with around 31,000 people with learning disabilities and autistic people receiving payments above normal levels.
- A rigid housing capital grant funding regime and inflexible social housing rent standard has resulted in more and more housing being funded wholly by private finance, and there is estimated to be 22,500 units with no or negligible public subsidy.
- Most supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people provides high levels of care and support. Over 75% of tenants are receiving at least 25+ hours per week of care/support and 43% receiving over 100 hours.
- The research suggests about 5,600 units of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people have been developed since April 2017. Of those surveyed the majority has been provided through private capital or leased arrangements, with only around 13.5% funded by public capital funding.
- There will continue to be demand for quality supported housing by people with learning disabilities and commissioners. Those adults with learning disabilities and autistic people requiring care and support are estimated to increase by nearly 20,000 over the next 15 years. Based on current provision supply we estimate that there will be a need for between c.1,800 and c.2,300 units per annum over the period to 2037 in England to respond to this. This will provide new accommodation for young adults in transition from children services, those needing to move from the family home as carers get older, and the continued decommissioning of registered care services and hospital settings. Over £304m of private and public capital funding per year will be needed to deliver this housing.

Introduction

The supported housing sector provides positive opportunities for people with learning disabilities and autistic people to live independently in their communities. Members of the Learning Disability and Autism Housing Network wanted to evidence the important, significant role that supported housing plays and provide an accurate current evidence base covering the scale, size, scope, and funding/cost of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.

In recent years there has been much criticism of parts of the supported housing sector particularly around some lease-based providers by the Regulator of Social Housing, campaigners and the media. We wanted to provide an evidence base that can be used to inform and influence future Government policy in relation to accommodation and supported housing, including supported housing classified as 'exempt accommodation', for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.

The approach to this research has involved analysis of existing evidence and undertaking primary research. Existing evidence in terms of the size, scale and scope of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people has been analysed in relation to:

- The population of people with learning disabilities and autistic people.
- The supply of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.
- The types of organisations providing this supported housing.
- The costs of this supported housing.

Primary research involved an online survey of providers of supported housing for rent for people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people. The purpose of the primary research was to produce an up to date and comprehensive evidence base about supported housing for rent for people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people to address the aims of the research and gaps in the secondary evidence.

Introduction

This research applies to supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England.

This summary report of Housing LIN's findings highlights the key outcomes of this research and presents our recommendations for the government. The full report can be accessed on our website.

This summary includes:

- What is supported housing?
- Population of people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people
- Summary of findings
- Recommendations



What is supported housing?

Supported housing is typically defined as a housing service where housing, support and/or care services are provided to help people to live as independently as possible. Supported housing provides homes for a wide range of people including older people, people with learning disabilities and autistic people, people with mental health related needs, vulnerable young people and people who have experienced homelessness. The scope of this research is supported housing for people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people.

Within the supported housing sector in England there is enormous variation and diversity in the types of providers, scheme characteristics and 'models' of housing and support/care. For example, a dominant model of supported housing in the late 20th century was based on shared housing, where a person has a tenancy for a room in a property and shares the other facilities e.g. kitchen, bathroom and other communal areas, with a number of other tenants and support is shared across these tenants. More recently supported housing has been developed where the model is 'clusters' of 1 bed self-contained flats within the same building, i.e. where a person has their own self-contained accommodation with support available either on site or 'visiting' the scheme.

Supported housing is primarily provided by housing associations, local authorities, voluntary sector or charitable providers. The definition of supported housing is closely linked to its treatment in relation to housing benefit regulations, specifically those referred to as 'specified accommodation' and 'exempt accommodation' which provides a mechanism to pay higher supported housing rents. The definition of supported housing as 'specialised supported housing' is also particularly relevant to supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people which under certain conditions enables registered providers to be excluded from the social housing and affordable rent regime.

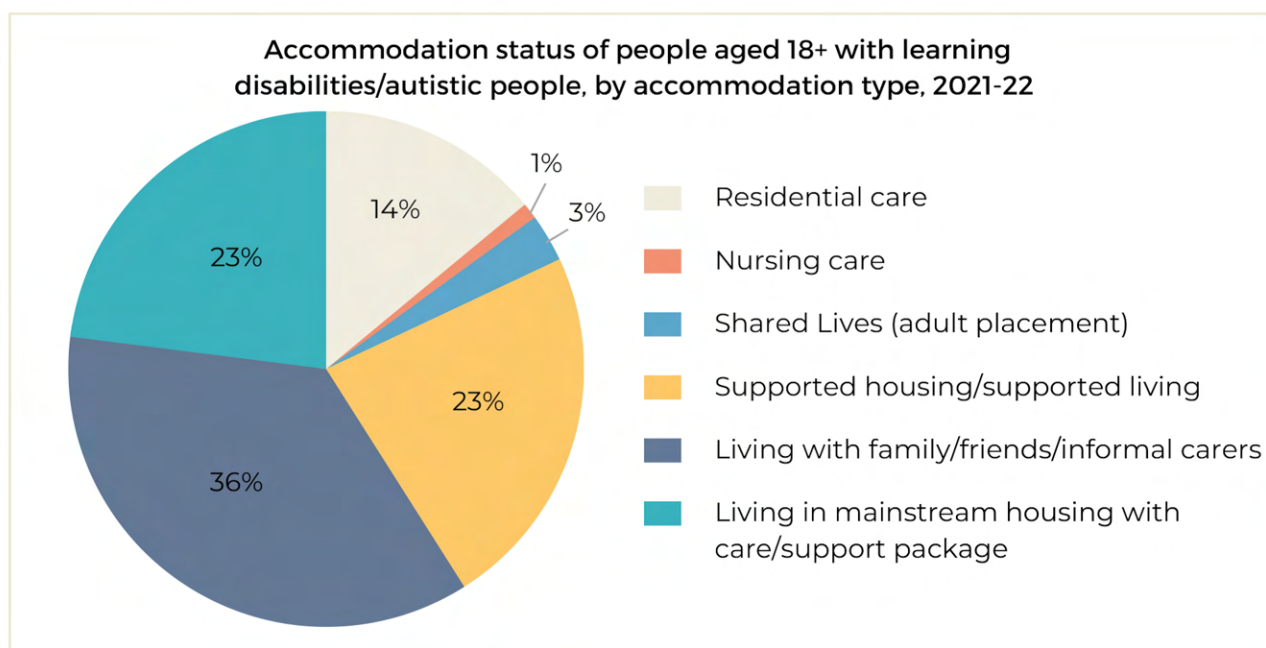


Population of people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people in England

The population aged 18-64 with a learning disability in England, is projected to increase from 1.16m in 2020 to 1.2m by 2040. The population of people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder aged 18-64 in England, is projected to increase from 340,000 to 351,000 in the same period.

The number of people with learning disabilities/autistic people in England (2021/22) receiving local authority funded care/support is 150,970. These are people who, via a Care Act assessment, are assessed by local authorities in England as being eligible to receive a care/support package funded by the local authority. For the purpose of this research this is referred to as the relevant population as this is the cohort considered most likely to be living in supported housing due to their eligibility for local authority funded care/support.

The chart below shows the breakdown of the housing and accommodation status of the relevant population in England.



The relevant population of adults with learning disabilities/autistic people is estimated to increase to c.169,500 by 2037.

Summary of findings

- The population of people with learning disabilities and autistic people aged 18 years and over in England receiving paid support and care by the local authority is estimated to be 151,000 (2020/21).
- Supported housing plays an increasingly critical role in enabling people with a learning disability and autistic people to live independently at the heart of their communities. This research indicates between c.23% and c.25% of the relevant population of people with learning disabilities and autistic people live in supported housing. The number of units of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people is estimated to be between 35,500 and 38,500 units. It is estimated that 66% of these units are shared supported housing and 34% of these units are self-contained supported housing.
- 23% of the relevant population live in mainstream housing with a care/support package. Only around 15% of people with learning disabilities and autistic people receiving care and support are now living in residential/nursing care settings. The proportion living with family and friends is 37% and has not greatly changed over the last decade indicating a potential housing timebomb as carers get older and a growing need for supported housing.
- Housing associations play a key role in providing supported housing. It is estimated that at least 80% of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in England is provided by Registered Providers of social housing.
- The sector's sustainability is predominately reliant on the continued payment of higher levels of housing benefit. 83% of all supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people is categorised in relation to housing benefit regulations as specified accommodation, either as exempt accommodation (44%) or managed properties (56%).
- In recent years lack of effective housing capital grant funding has resulted in more and more housing being funded by private finance and classified as Specialised Supported Housing. The number of units of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people classified as Specialised Supported Housing is estimated to be 22,500 units (60% of total supported housing units).

Summary of findings

- There are opportunities for better partnership working between commissioners and landlords to utilise existing supported housing. The void rate in supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people is estimated to be 10.4%.
- The average weekly rent and service charge for supported housing for people with learning disabilities/autistic people that is eligible for housing benefit is c.£225 per week for self-contained housing and c.£205 for shared housing. However, it should be noted that these figures will reflect long standing supported housing delivered when development costs and associated rents were likely to have been considerably lower than is the case currently.
- Based on the estimated minimum number of units of supported housing being 35,500, assuming occupancy of c.90% (based on the identified void rate), the annual housing benefit cost is c.£357m.
- Most supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people provides high levels of care and support. Around 75% of tenants of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people are receiving at least 25+ hours per week of care/support. About 43% of tenants are receiving over 100 hours per week of care/support.
- The research suggests about 5,600 units of supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people have been developed since April 2017 at an average cost for shared and self-contained accommodation of £158,000 per person for those providers surveyed.
- Amongst housing providers that participated in this research, that have developed supported housing for rent for people with learning disabilities and autistic people since April 2017, around 86.5% of capital funding has come from private and non-public finance compared to 8.5%, 3.5% and 1.4% of public capital funding that has come from NHS England, Homes England and local authorities respectively.

Summary of findings

- The relevant population of adults with learning disabilities/autistic people is estimated to increase to c.169,500 by 2037, an increase of nearly 20,000 people over the next 15 years. Over this period it is likely that fewer people will be living in registered care settings and with family/informal carers (particularly older carers). In this context our estimate is that between 25,800 units and 32,800 units of additional supported housing will be required by 2037 (equivalent to between c.1,800 and c.2,300 units per annum over the period to 2037). This will provide new accommodation for young adults in transition from children services requiring supported housing, those needing to move from the family home as carers get older and the continued decommissioning of registered care services and hospital settings.



Recommendations

It is vital that good quality supported housing is continued to be strategically provided through a sustained government revenue and capital funding regime with appropriate oversight to ensure quality. There are key recommendations in response to the findings outlined above.

Strategic planning

RECOMMENDATION 1

Government, local authorities, and housing providers should collaboratively plan for further development of supported housing to meet the different needs of people with learning disabilities/autistic people given that only 23%-25% of people currently live in supported housing, at least 15% of people live in residential/nursing care settings, and the number living with family and friends remains at above 35% over the last decade.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Local authorities should undertake up to date housing need assessments, including the need for supported housing, amongst people with learning disabilities and autistic people and publish a strategy for the future provision of such accommodation, every five years. Priority needs to be made to those assessed as having care and support needs and people who live with parents and carers aged 70 and over.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Local authorities to work more strategically with housing and support providers to ensure the current provision of supported housing is more fully utilised and reduce the level of under occupancy across the sector.



Housing and Support Funding

RECOMMENDATION 4

Government, local authorities, and housing providers should collaboratively plan for further development of supported housing to meet the different needs of people with learning disabilities/autistic people given that only 23%-25% of people currently live in supported housing, at least 15% of people live in residential/nursing care settings, and the number living with family and friends remains at above 35% over the last decade.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Government should commit to meeting the costs of providing support services, as distinct from care services, to people with learning disabilities and autistic people with low, moderate and high support needs who live in, or wish to live in, supported housing.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Government should strongly encourage local authorities to take a strategic view of commissioning and procurement, with 5-10 year contracts becoming the norm, moving away from many local authorities' use of short term contracting cycles. Such a shift would help provide a much more stable, sustainable business environment for providers of supported housing.

Capital Funding

RECOMMENDATION 7

There is a need to significantly increase the level of capital funding and provide feasible grant levels available through the Affordable Homes Programme and Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund from Homes England and Greater London Authority to contribute to the capital funding costs of developing supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Homes England, Greater London Authority and the Department of Health and Social Care should set annual targets for supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people from the different capital programmes and regularly publish the number and type of schemes funded through the current government capital funding programmes.

Capital Funding

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Rent Standard needs urgent reform in relation to supported housing and public subsidy, allowing payment of Homes England grant with the charging of appropriate rents above current formula rents. This would help to cover the higher actual costs of developing and managing supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people with higher support needs, compared with developing general needs housing for rent and supported housing for people with lower support needs.

Oversight and Regulation

RECOMMENDATION 10

Government, local authorities and NHS England should recognise that rents and service charges for supported housing for people with learning disabilities and autistic people represent good value for money to provide person centred outcomes, for example compared with non housing based alternatives such as care homes and hospital settings.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Whilst many housing providers welcome sector-wide oversight of supported housing quality, any new oversight regime should be proportionate and recognise that the vast majority of people with a learning disability and autistic people residing in supported housing live in “supported exempt accommodation”. The focus should be on consistent, benchmarked support and housing service measures for people living in supported housing.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Any new oversight regime should recognise the higher relative costs of providing supported housing building and services (compared to general needs housing) and the legitimate reasons for these higher costs with full transparency in terms of the costs of providing supported housing.



The Learning Disability and Autism Housing Network would like to thank the following organisations for their contribution to this research:

Advance

Care Housing Association

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Golden Lane Housing

Home Group

Look Ahead

LiveWest

Onward Homes

Progress Housing Group - Reside with Progress

Riverside

Places for People