



COWAN COURT

SECTOR

Extra care housing

COUNTRY

United Kingdom

LEAD ORGANISATION

The care home [Cowan Court](#), in contact with Housing Europe, the European Federation of Public, Cooperative & Social Housing

CONTACT

Stephen Clark, Housing Planning and Performance Manager,
stephen.clark@midlothian.gov.uk



DESCRIPTION

In 2013, the local council of Midlothian, Scotland, had to close an elderly care home. It was then decided to use this context as an opportunity to change the way care was provided to older people in the area. In order to pursue more cost-effective approaches to housing and social care, the local council made the decision to turn to an “extra care housing scheme”.

A working group was set up to discuss all the practical aspects of this initiative, in cooperation with prospective residents. The group involved members of the local council interested in the project, academics from the University of Sterling who provided technical support and advice on how best to implement the project, and different services providers.

The objective was three-fold: providing a type of housing and care services that did not previously exist; responding to high demand and long waiting lists for elderly care homes; and contributing to the global goal of enabling people to live longer in an independent setting. The project mainly targets people over 65, with a particular focus on people with specific needs and people with lower incomes who cannot afford private market rental housing. Rent in extra care housing schemes is indeed cheaper than in the private sector; in Scotland, the average cost of rent is circa £320 per month (depending on the care services required), whereas it reaches £650 per month in the private sector.

These discussions resulted in the construction of Cowan Court, a residential complex of 32 flats adapted to older people with specific

physical and mental care needs. Flats were also designed to accommodate spouses, partners or siblings. The objective is to enable older people to live autonomously in their apartment as long as possible. Care and support staff is present on the site 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Therefore, they are familiar with all the residents and their health conditions and can respond with flexibility to any problematic situation.

The design of the buildings was thoroughly thought through, with support from the University of Sterling: corridors are wide enough to be accessible for wheelchairs; clear signage and memorable images and colours are used to help residents – and especially those suffering from dementia – to easily identify where they are in the building; and sufficient lighting is ensured for residents with deteriorating eyesight. There is also a garden and outdoor gym exercise equipment. Moreover, all steps are taken to ensure that Cowan Court is able to welcome external visitors. There are plenty of parking places, a common area with a lounge, restaurant and café, and even a hairdressing salon.

The total cost of the development of the project was £6.1 million, financed by the Scottish Government, the local council and, for the most part, rent revenue.

A SOCIAL INVESTMENT APPROACH

For the Cowan Court project social investment is understood as a commitment to enable people to live

independently in their apartment, while receiving the health care support they need. Cowan Court also adopts a long-term view, taking into account the fact that people's needs are going to evolve and that the facilities must therefore be flexible enough to adapt to these changes. In this sense, the project also endorses a preventive approach. It can be considered a viable alternative to hospitalised care.

Social inclusion is another important principle of the project. The complex was designed in such a way that it would not contribute to ghettoisation. Cowan Court is not far from a home for young people, and everything is done in order to attract external guests and families to the Cowan Court facilities. These contacts are very important for the residents, as they feel that they are part of a wider community.

In terms of empowerment of users, it is worth mentioning that all residents played a crucial role in the early stages of the development of the proposal, giving their opinions on its design.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

One very significant achievement that must be mentioned is that Cowan Court is now a self-sustained project that is financed by rent revenue alone. A small surplus could even be used in conjunction with a loan from the Government to invest in new housing facilities to be built in the future. This is even more remarkable since, as explained above, rent at Cowan Court is much more affordable for people with

lower incomes than rent in the private sector.

Together with the financial sustainability of the project, the quality of service provision is another essential aspect, especially given the social investment approach endorsed by the initiative. A satisfaction survey of residents was conducted, and demonstrated an overwhelming level of satisfaction. A [2015 care inspection report](#) also indicated a positive view of the staff and management team, presenting them as "being committed to delivering a high standard of care and support to tenants."

LOOKING FORWARD

It is hoped that the extra care housing scheme will become a benchmark for local authorities wishing to change the way care services are provided to older people. It represents a shift away from institutionalisation to an approach that pays more attention to people's desires and needs.

In order to achieve the objective of replicating the project in other locations in the future, the question of financial resources needed at the start of such initiatives will have to be tackled. Public authorities have an important role to play in this regard.