

Finding the right sheltered housing

Moving into sheltered housing is a big decision. So it's worth taking your time, doing your research and visiting potential accommodation to find the best fit. The more information you have, the more confident you'll feel when making your choice.

We've created this handy list of questions to ask when you're visiting sheltered housing providers, to help you decide.

Top tips

Bring someone with you

It's always a good idea to bring along a friend or relative, so you can discuss everything after your visit with someone who has your welfare at heart.

Take your time

Don't let anyone rush you into making a decision. This is a big step and you and your family should be given the time you need to make the choice that's right.

Don't miss out

On the other hand, do remember that someone else may make an offer on a popular leasehold property and that council/housing association offers usually have to be accepted within a specified timeframe.

Take notes

Don't forget to write things down during your visit, so you can refer back to your notes. Maybe take this document with you, so you can tick things off as you go.

Confirm contact details

Make sure you confirm the contact details of the person you are speaking with, so if you do decide to go ahead, you can contact them in the first instance.

Things to consider and questions to ask

1. Location

- Is it an area that's familiar?
- Is it close to family and friends?
- Are there amenities, such as food shops and a GP, nearby?
- Are there good local transport links, such as bus routes or train stations?

2. Size

- Is the size of the property suitable?
- If downsizing to a smaller property, you'll need to think about what to do with the furniture and possessions you can't transfer to your new home.

3. Facilities

Does the accommodation have all the facilities you need? For example, does it have:

- Suitable appliances?
- A 24-hour alarm system?
- Handrails in the bathroom?
- Allocated parking space?
- A phone line?
- Internet/Wi-Fi?
- Satellite/cable TV?

4. Pets

- If you have pets, are they allowed in the new property?
- If not, think about what arrangements you'll need to make for your pets.

5. Visitors

- Is it easy for friends and family to visit?
- Is there parking available for visitors?
- Are guests allowed to stay occasionally?
- Does the housing provide guest rooms that can be rented to visitors?
- If so, what are the charges and how are they booked?

6. Emergencies

- What happens in an emergency?
- How is the alarm system managed?
- Is the alarm call directed to local emergency services, elected family member or a scheme manager?

7. Care and support

- Make a list of your care needs and things you need help with to discuss with the manager.
- Is there any provision of personal or medical care along with the accommodation?
- Consider whether you need 'extra care sheltered housing'. It offers some assistance with personal care.

8. The manager

- Does the manager live on or off-site?
- Does the manager contact residents daily?
- Is the manager full-time or part-time?
- What hours is the manager available to meet with residents?

9. Quality of information mark

- To encourage scheme managers to provide detailed information about their facilities to potential residents and their families, the Elderly Accommodation Counsel (EAC) has developed a 'Quality of Information Mark'. It's worth checking to see if the Scheme Manager has obtained this.

10. Association of Retirement Housing Managers membership

- All management organisations registered with the Association of Retirement Housing Managers (ARHM) should follow its government-approved Code of Practice. This covers issues such as good practice in providing services, including the scheme manager service. It also states that a management organisation should consult residents on all significant issues, hold annual meetings, visit schemes at least quarterly and encourage the setting up of residents' associations. Check to ensure the Scheme Manager is a member of the ARHM?

11. Additional costs

Make sure all additional costs have been considered. It's important to take these into account alongside rent or mortgage payments when you're working out your monthly budget. Additional costs can include:

- Utilities such as gas, electricity and water.
- Service charges for things such as external maintenance, repairs and building insurance.
- Unexpected or hidden charges, for example for making conversions to the property.

12. Legal issues

- Always make sure the terms and conditions of the lease have been read and understood, before signing anything or making any decisions.
- If you are managing your own care needs, then it's a good idea to have a relative or friend check the lease with you, before signing anything.
- Find out about the options and liabilities should circumstances change. For example, incurring extra costs as a result of your health declining, or if you develop an illness or disability that requires more specialist medical care.
- Before the tenancy agreement is signed, check to see how much notice is required to leave.
- How easy it is to cancel/leave the tenancy agreement should alternative housing arrangements need to be made?
- If planning to buy, always check the lease for specific conditions about moving.
- Find out about resale values of similar properties, and any fees that may be incurred if the property is sold or left vacant.