

Homeshare

Key facts for Policy Makers



Homeshare: time for the UK to catch up?

In Homeshare, someone who needs some help to live independently in their own home is matched with someone who has a housing need and can provide a little support. This kind of arrangement appears to happen informally with some frequency. Homeshare is an attempt to take a naturally-occurring, mutually beneficial relationship and to facilitate it in a way that makes it safer and accessible to a wider range of people, some of whom will be vulnerable. Homeshare programmes attempt to balance maintaining the non-contractual nature of the relationship with increasing the clarity and safeguards around it.

“Householders” are often older people who own or are tenants in their own home but have developed some support needs or have become isolated or anxious about living alone.

“Homesharers” are often younger people, students, or key public service workers who cannot afford housing where they work. Or they may be unable to access council housing or living in foyer accommodation.

The Homesharer provides an agreed level of help and support to the Householder whilst living in their home for a set period of time. Homeshare is not a regulated service and cannot include the provision of personal care. Homesharers are not charged rent, but usually agree to contribute to household bills and it may be agreed that other costs such as food will be shared. Homeshare is governed by an agreement carefully worded to avoid creating a contract of employment or tenancy rights.

Homeshare arrangements rely on the successful matching of people who are both willing and able to bring something of value to the arrangement. Homeshare schemes recruit and assess participants, providing CRB checks for Homesharers. The process of matching compatible participants is crucial to the success of arrangements. Schemes then provide an agreed amount of care and support to maintain matches and deal with any concerns which arise. They support participants when Homeshare arrangements come to an end.

The participants may be charged for participating. Some schemes are entirely self-financing through charging, particularly in areas where accommodation or home support is expensive or hard to obtain. Participants who are eligible for state support for assessed social care needs may be able to use a personal budget to cover the costs of Homesharing.

There are 11 Homeshare schemes in six locations in the UK. NAAPS supports a national network of schemes. Homeshare is small in the UK but significant in many other countries.

UK pilots supported by the Department of Health and the Home Office and a number of other well-established programmes have drawn on evidence of successful Homeshare programmes abroad and have in turn contributed to a body of learning about how Homeshare can work in the UK.

Homeshare can benefit people who own or rent a home, such as:

- older people who need low level support or are anxious or isolated;
- disabled people who need support to move towards or maintain independent living;
- family carers who are struggling with isolation or who juggle work and caring.

Homeshare can benefit people who lack affordable housing, such as:

- students and key public service workers on modest means;
- people who are saving towards the cost of a house or who have debt problems;
- people at the bottom of council house waiting lists or living in foyer accommodation.

Homeshare benefits communities because it:

- provides low-level and preventative support at little cost;
- tackles housing shortages and makes better use of housing stock;
- allows key public service workers to live in expensive inner city areas;
- increases community cohesion and inter-generational contact.

Outcomes for the local economy, government and NHS include:

- reduced use of services such as residential care;
- reduced risks of falls, better health and well-being for older people;
- reduced use of fire, police and ambulance services;
- increased affordability of higher education;
- reduced pressure on housing provision;
- easier recruitment to lower paid public service jobs;

Costs of Homeshare

The costs of Homeshare are those of advertising the programme and employing one or more coordinators and administrative support staff. Some programmes recoup some or all of their costs from charges made to participants.

Evidence from the UK and overseas suggests Homeshare is often successful in urban areas where:

- there are significant numbers of older people living alone;
- property is expensive to rent or buy;
- transport links are good;
- there are significant student populations including mature and overseas students.

Homeshare can face greater challenges in rural areas where transport links are poor and employment or higher education opportunities limited. However, some new rural schemes have identified large groups of young people at the bottom of council house waiting lists or living in foyer accommodation.

Local and national policy makers and academics could consider

- promoting awareness of Homeshare within policy programmes such as personalisation, prevention and early intervention, The Big Society;
- evaluating the costs and benefits of Homeshare to the NHS, adult services, higher education, housing services and workforce development within public services;

- analysing the impact upon Homeshare arrangements of possible changes in tax, benefits and housing legislation;
- exploring how to support those people who chose to make entirely private Homeshare-like arrangements, without contacting a Homeshare service;
- exploring the possibilities for Homeshare-like arrangements which involve paying rent: these are currently not supported by Homeshare programmes in the UK (but are common elsewhere) and could carry some risks for Householders;
- developing a substantial pan-London Homeshare scheme;
- developing Homeshare as a way of making college and University more affordable, particularly in the light of recent fee increases;

The legislative and regulatory framework within which Homeshare operates is currently complex and causes a barrier to further development. At present, Homeshare can usually only be offered to people who do not have personal care needs (or who have personal care needs which can consistently be met by another service). When people develop personal care needs, their Homeshare arrangement may have to come to an end, even if it continues to be viable. For Homeshare to be safe, it is necessary for Homesharers to receive an enhanced CRB check. This is not lawfully available for all Homeshare matches, particularly where the Householder has no support needs. Vetting and Barring procedures are also unlikely to be available. People who make private Homeshare arrangements cannot access enhanced CRB checks: this should be addressed. Homesharers cannot receive any wage or consideration for the support they offer, without Homeshare falling foul of employment and minimum wage legislation. There has as yet been no exploration of how Homeshare might be affected by the increasing use of personal budgets to employ live-in personal assistants. Nor can Homesharers pay rent: Homeshare schemes need to operate in a way that avoids creating tenancy rights, because it is important to be able to bring the arrangement to a swift end if the Householder's needs change suddenly.

For more information

Details of how to set up and run a Homeshare programme are in the full version of the Homeshare guide, with a foreword by Care Services Minister, Paul Burstow MP, downloadable from www.naaps.org.uk.

For more information, email Homeshare@naaps.org.uk

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