Evidence review – Housing and social care

Executive summary

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Introduction
This review was commissioned by the Skills for Care’s Workforce Innovation Programme which explores how people’s care and support needs change and how the workforce has to adapt to meet the challenges that change can present.

The key questions that the evidence review aimed to address with reference to the social care workforce in a range of housing settings were:

- What are the current reported practices to support workforce intelligence, planning and development?
- What works, and what does not work, in current practice to support workforce intelligence, planning and development?
- What are the key characteristics of effective practice in workforce intelligence, planning development?
- Is there any relevant international evidence?
- What are the gaps in the evidence base?

The focus for this review has been areas where the social care workforce are involved in or affected by services that are housing related, and so has concentrated on supported housing, assistive technology and housing support services, as well as aids and adaptations. The review discusses the breadth of services covered by these terms and the range of population groups who are potential service users.

The full review is available from Skills for Care (www.skillsforcare.org.uk).

Methodology
The review followed the Civil Service rapid evidence assessment methodology1. Having formulated the questions to be addressed by the review and developed a conceptual framework, inclusions and exclusions criteria were agreed. Articles published in 2002 or later, relevant to the review questions were included. Studies were excluded if they were not relevant, for example: health focused; institutional settings such as care homes; related to children and young people rather than adults.

A wide range of databases, web-sites and grey literature were searched and screened, using search terms related to care and support, housing, and workforce, staff and training. Experts in the field were also asked to identify relevant studies. After screening of abstracts and assessment of full texts, 54 full texts were included in the synthesis for the review.

1 http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/resources-and-guidance/rapid-evidence-assessment/what-is
Results
Overall the amount of evidence in the area of housing and the social care workforce was disappointing, and there was limited connection between workforce approaches and the impact and outcomes for service users.

The majority of evidence was from research studies which draw on staff and service user interviews and questionnaires, and tended to focus on particular types of services or population groups. There were some evaluations of individual services as well as of national programmes. There were a small number of literature reviews, often leading to or informing research studies.

The range of population groups covered by the review and the differing service models meant it was not always possible to compare like with like, however five broad themes were identified:

Access to services
The review found access to services for service users was a commonly identified issue generally falling into one of three strands: lack of knowledge or understanding of specific service models and what they can offer in terms of delivering outcomes for population groups; attitudes to risk and the appropriateness of particular service models for people with support needs; access to aids and adaptations, and delays in assessments.

There was good evidence that:
- Insufficient awareness of housing and housing related services amongst social care staff will impact on how easily service users can access them.
- Attitudes to risk and capacity amongst professionals will impact on access to services.

There was limited evidence that:
- Attitudes of professionals to carers and how to respond to their concerns will impact on access to services.
- Lack of understanding of the complexity of needs often associated with housing need can impact on access to services.
- Approaches to changing attitudes or improving knowledge need to take account of the environment professionals are working in, and the pressures they face.
- Reviewing the role and tasks performed by occupational therapists could improve access to assessment for aids and adaptations.

Cross sector working
Housing for vulnerable groups is by its very nature a service which will involve a number of agencies and professionals including social care, housing, health, and environmental health. Its effectiveness will often depend on the quality of cross sector working to support individuals, and this was an issue picked up in a number of studies.
There was good evidence that:
- Housing need is often associated with a complex range of support needs, and requires a cross sector response.
- Lack of cross sector working impacts on the effectiveness of services.

There was limited evidence that:
- Integrating occupational therapists within housing departments improves outcomes for service users.

**Housing support roles**
A number of studies looked at the factors which impact on the effectiveness of newly emerging “crossover” roles which sit across housing and social care boundaries, as well as considering more established roles such as occupational therapists.

There was good evidence that:
- There can be a lack of clarity around roles particularly as they evolve over time; training and management practice needs to reflect actual roles rather than perceived or historic roles.
- The relationship between housing with care managers (and their staff) and residents will impact on the quality of life of those residents.
- Housing support roles often sit across health and social care boundaries, or play a strong co-ordinating role across sectors.

There was limited evidence that:
- Housing support workers can suffer from not being part of a professional group, particularly in terms of how they feel they are perceived by other professionals.
- Access to specialist supervision may support workers who are working with service users with complex needs.
- No particular model of housing with care is better than others in terms of boundaries between housing and care staff roles and responsibilities.

**Training**
Evidence on the training needs of the workforce in this area generally focused on specific services, such as housing with care or assistive technology, or specific population groups, such as adults with a learning disability.

There was good evidence that:
- Housing with care staff need training in areas such as communication, community development, dementia, etc., as well as more functional skills.
- Front line housing staff need training so as to be able to recognise mental health issues including dementia, communication with people with mental health issues, and the range of specialist services available to support them.
• Housing support staff working with people with learning disabilities need training around the shift to person centred support rather than care, and to promote social inclusion.
• A wide range of front line staff need training in assistive technology, its potential, and how to support service users to use it effectively.

There was limited evidence that:
• Housing with care managers have similar training needs as care home managers and/or home care managers.
• Housing staff working with learning disability service users need training in communication skills and training.
• Acceptance of the potential of assistive technology services may be linked to a culture change for staff in terms of taking a holistic approach to an individual and enabling rather than caring for them.

Recruitment and retention
There was limited evidence around recruitment and retention for this diverse sector, and a number of studies suggested that a comparison with the wider social care sector may be applicable.

There was good evidence that:
• There are issues with high turnover within the housing with care sector.

There was limited evidence that:
• There is a connection between terms and conditions, and particularly low pay, and turnover rates in housing with care services.
• There is no connection between particular service models and staff turnover issues.

Conclusions
The evidence base in this area is perhaps surprisingly weak, although particularly with the housing with care sector there appears to be increasing recognition that a sector wide approach to workforce development and planning would be helpful, potentially extending to the private retirement housing market. However, it was possible to identify a range of evidence about effective and ineffective practice, and where the gaps in the evidence base exist. The findings have implications for future workforce development in terms of social care professionals, as well as for related roles such as occupational therapists and the varied housing support role.

For more information on our current work programme contact:
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