

# **Final Report and Recommendations arising from the scrutiny review of the Homeshare Scheme.**

## **Membership:**

Councillor Sally Kenny (Chair)

Councillor Laxmi Attawar

Councillor Suzanne Grocott

Councillor Joan Henry

Mr Saleem Sheikh

## Recommendations

1. Adult Social Care to identify and work with a local homeshare scheme which the council could endorse and make referrals to where appropriate.
2. Adult Social Care to work with local voluntary organisations to identify how they make best use of Homeshare schemes.
3. Adult Social Care to lead on raising awareness of an approved Homeshare scheme amongst council frontline staff.
4. Adult Social Care to promote the Homeshare scheme on the Merton Council website and its publications.
5. Public health team to promote the approved Homeshare scheme amongst GPs and to look for opportunities within other local projects.

## Introduction

The Homeshare scheme brokers a relationship between older people who have a spare room with a younger person. This is in exchange for around ten hours of support with tasks around the home. As Merton currently does not operate any schemes of this nature, Councillors decided to consider the potential for residents. The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel recognised that Homeshare could offer solutions to a number of challenges which the council is facing.

The Homeshare scheme contributes to the Council's commitment to early intervention and prevention as the best way to maintain health and wellbeing. Homeshare helps those who fall below the criteria for social care support and have moderate needs. This can not only improve quality of life for those in this category but also may delay the need for critical care.

Having support at home can help to tackle loneliness and help older people maintain independence and stay in their own homes for longer, rather than go into residential care. For the homesharer it also offers much needed affordable housing in London.

Senior officers within the council also agreed that the opportunities presented by Homeshare should be looked at in detail.

## **Background on Homeshare scheme**

Homeshare is a reciprocal arrangement that matches older people with a spare room, who also have low level support needs, with a younger person, student or public service worker who needs accommodation and is able to provide additional care.

For the homeowner this will mean help with tasks such as shopping, cooking and cleaning. This helps older people to remain in their own home, keep their independence and feel more secure with live-in support. In return, the homesharer will receive cheaper accommodation as well as a chance to provide support to someone, which can be personally enriching.

The organisations that run this scheme fall under the “Shared Lives Plus” umbrella. Homeshare schemes recruit and assess participants, they provide DBS checks and regular monitoring of both parties. They support participants when Homeshare arrangements come to an end, or in some cases, break down. Some organisations work with families to support successful outcomes. Key components of the organisation include:

- Homeshare is governed by a carefully worded agreement to avoid creating a contract of employment or tenancy rights.
- Homesharers do not pay rent but will contribute to household bills and food costs.
- Homeshare is not a regulated service and cannot include the provision of personal care.
- Organisations are required to sign up to agreed quality standards.

## **Potential benefits of Homeshare for Merton**

This task group believes that the current and projected demographic changes in Merton would be beneficial for a scheme of this nature, whilst the task group accept it will have a small scale impact, the Homeshare scheme has the potential to support a number of the council’s priorities:

### **Ageing population and increase in people living with long term conditions**

The population in Merton is ageing: the number of people aged 65 or over is projected to increase by 13% (from 25,200 in 2017 to 28,400 in 2025). One of the key concerns is the increase in older people living alone. Alongside the many benefits of having older people in the community, it also brings the challenges associated with caring for people living with multiple long term conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, mental health conditions, and dementia. Although Homeshare cannot provide personal support, it can work alongside domiciliary care and carry out the tasks that could otherwise mean people could no longer live independently and would need residential care or longer stays in hospital<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the overall health of people aged 65 and over in Merton is better than

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<sup>1</sup> Merton Story 2016

the England average, therefore there is likely to be a higher demand for those who require moderate support. <sup>2</sup>

### **Loneliness and social isolation**

Loneliness and social isolation has been identified as being as detrimental to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. This issue was found by a previous scrutiny task group review on '*Tackling loneliness and social isolation*' to be a problem in the borough. In Merton there are an estimated 5,900 people aged over 75 living alone. Many would like more social contact; with around 40.4% of users reporting that they had as much social contact as they would like (2015/16). This is significantly lower than the average for England (45.4%), although similar to the average for London<sup>3</sup>. Homeshare set out an agreement for when the homesharer will be in the home to provide that much needed social contact through sharing meals or watching television. In addition the homesharer is usually required to sleep at home for the majority of the week.

### **Preventing falls amongst older people**

Having a homesharer can assist with identifying hazards around the home as well as carrying out potentially dangerous tasks for an older person such as gardening, lifting or climbing up a ladder. In 2015/16 Merton had 757 emergency admissions for injuries due to falls among people of aged 65 years & over. Falls are the leading cause of older people being admitted to hospital as an emergency<sup>4</sup>.

### **Dementia**

The task group was informed that homeshare arrangements have been set up for people who are diagnosed with varying levels of dementia. An estimated 1,686 older people (65 years and over) have dementia in Merton; and 74.4% have received a formal diagnosis. This is higher than both the London (71.1%), and England (66.4%) averages<sup>5</sup>.

There is a high level of housing need among Merton residents, access to suitable affordable housing is difficult. The demand for social housing far exceeds supply. Merton's social housing stock is amongst the lowest in London at 14% of total stock. The London average is around 22%. The Homeshare scheme can offer a much needed respite from the housing crisis. Key workers can access cheaper accommodation in London which can help with longer term plans to save for a deposit to rent or buy a property.

### **Considering a delivery model for Merton**

The task group discussed the possibility of managing an in-house Homeshare scheme. They discussed this with the manager of the Maintaining Independent

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<sup>2</sup> Merton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2015

<sup>3</sup> Merton Story 2016

<sup>4</sup> Merton Story 2016

<sup>5</sup> Merton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2015

Living Team at the London borough of Sutton. He highlighted that significant resources are needed to run the scheme, particularly in putting in place the relevant safeguards and ensuring background checks are carried out. The success of the placement involves identifying the right match and managing the relationship between the homeowner and sharer.

The task group agreed that setting up a scheme of this nature would put significant pressure on resources. They agreed that identifying suitable candidates and signposting people to existing provision would be preferable.

The Adult Social Care Commissioning Manager at Merton agreed with the task group that it is an area in which the council would benefit if it had greater involvement. Merton is not in a position to provide in-house homeshare services especially given that local services already exist in the community.

### **Potential Homeshare Scheme in Merton –Task Group’s issues and concerns**

On the surface this scheme seemed to offer a win-win situation but the task group wanted to look at the proposals in detail given that it involved vulnerable residents. Task group members identified a number of concerns about the scheme.

They were concerned that the relationship between the homeowner and sharer presented a number of problems, such as what happens when disputes arise.

Given that the scheme is not subject to the Care Quality Commission inspection regime, councillors also wanted to reassure themselves that vulnerable residents would not be put at risk.

The task group discussed their concerns with the directors and founders of Share and Care, an organisation that falls under the Homeshare umbrella. The task group was told that they self regulate and adhere to codes of practice. They are recognised as a reputable organisation and receive referrals from GPs, social workers and other local councils.

Share and Care arrange about 150 matches a year. The matching process takes place on a practical level, e.g. they look for people who have the same interests and hobbies. They aim to find out as much as possible about how they live to provide a good match. In London there are a significant number of people who want to be sharers.

Share and Care also work closely with the family to arrange a share, so that the families of the homeowner play an important role throughout the process. Families can refer relatives to the scheme, and find peace of mind having the homesharer providing support to their relative.

The directors said that young people who were attracted to the scheme tended to be key public service workers, those who wanted to save for a deposit to buy a property. Ages can vary as the scheme also attracts middle age people who may for

example have gone through a divorce and are making a fresh start. The homeowner may have varying levels of dementia and benefit from support such as sharing meals, practical help with cooking cleaning and shopping. This scheme can work alongside formal social care support.

It was highlighted that some professions can find it more challenging to participate into the scheme such teachers who may need a break during the summer months and nurses who work shifts. The homeowners often request stable regular company during the evening.

The task group were informed there is a monthly charge to the Homeshare agency. The average cost for the homesharer is £160.00 a month and for the householder, £120.00 a month. There is also a potential loss in welfare benefits including the council tax single person's discount. Tenants in social housing may need consent from their landlord before participating in the scheme.

**Share and Care Homeshare** was set up in 2006. The organisation is based in Wimbledon but offers services nationally. They are currently running sixty homeshare arrangements across the UK. They carefully screen and match sharers with older people and maintain contact with both parties to ensure the relationship works smoothly. The longest share has been running for seven years.

### **Promoting homeshare schemes**

The task group met with the Adult Social Care Commissioning Manager to discuss the role Homeshare could play. He agreed that there is definitely a gap in the market for this type of service. It is suitable for those who have moderate to substantial social care needs and may not meet the council's criteria for support. Important tasks such as shopping and cleaning are no longer provided as part of the adult social care package. People can begin to decline if they cannot manage with everyday tasks. Therefore this scheme has a preventative role and can help people to maintain independence in their own homes for longer.

The council could use its resources to advertise Homeshare, through avenues such as My Merton, a magazine that is sent to all households in the borough and Merton-I, (the council's online portal). It will also be important for frontline staff to be aware of the scheme and be able to refer people as the opportunity arises.

The council is a community leader working in partnership with a wide range of organisations. It also holds a depth of knowledge about the borough which can be useful when promoting schemes such as this. The council can also be used to help to broker a relationship with other organisations. As a respected partner it can help to identify the best approach and role for partner organisations. It can help to build the trust in the Homeshare scheme. Faith communities could also play an important role in referring people to a scheme.

The voluntary and community sector also work closely with the local communities they serve and will be essential in identifying suitable people for Homeshare

schemes. Recent correspondence<sup>6</sup> with Age UK Merton, Wimbledon Guild and Merton Seniors Forum, found that all of these organisations are aware of these schemes but have limited involvement with them. However they were enthusiastic to learn what provision is available.

Before the council is able to signpost to a local organisation it will need to carry out some rigorous checks to see how their scheme works. Senior council officers will need to see a successful track record and an operating model from a potential existing scheme.

### **Recommendations**

1. Adult Social Care to identify and work with a local homeshare scheme which the council could endorse and make referrals to where appropriate.
2. Adult Social Care to work with local voluntary organisations to identify how they make best use of Homeshare schemes.
3. Adult Social Care to lead on raising awareness of an approved Homeshare scheme amongst council frontline staff.
4. Adult Social Care to promote the Homeshare scheme on the Merton Council website and its publications.

The task group discussed ways to ensure the borough was supportive and had a conducive environment for Homeshare schemes. The directors of Share and Care told the task group that one of the biggest issues they face is homeowners losing their council tax single persons discount. The task group asked if this would be the case in Merton and what options would be available in this situation. The Head of Revenues and Benefits said that residents would lose any single person discount that had been awarded and could also lose out on council tax support (which is means tested) if they have someone moving into their property.

Under the council tax legislation the council can introduce any discount it wishes to so in theory could grant a discount in these instances. Any local discounts like this would have to be funded by the council.

A similar issue could arise in relation to social housing as taking in an additional person could have an impact on tenancy rights. The Head of Housing need told the task group that every housing association tenant will have a tenancy agreement which will set out the conditions of that tenancy. Housing Associations cannot deny

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<sup>6</sup> Scrutiny officer conducted desk top research on behalf of the task group and contacted the organisations by email and held telephone conversations.



a tenant letting out a room in the tenant's home but the implications for a social housing tenant might lead to a reduction in housing benefit and council tax benefit if they have someone living with them.

The directors of Share and Care said they are lobbying councils to ask for exemptions, for example the homesharer could be regarded as a carer. They highlighted that the scheme provides long term benefits to councils.

The task group believes there is an important role for GPs in promoting Homeshare. Merton is currently participating in a social prescribing pilot as a means of enabling primary care services to refer patients with social, emotional or practical needs to a range of local, non-clinical services, often provided by the voluntary and community sector. They could refer people to Homeshare as part of this scheme or within the wider cohort of local people who may benefit.

#### **Recommendations**

5. Public health team to promote the approved Homeshare scheme amongst GPs and to look for opportunities within other local projects.

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