

UK Housing Awards 2008

Outstanding Achievement in Northern
Ireland: Winner



Fold Housing Association: Barn Halt Cottages



Summary

Barn Halt Cottages opened in January 2007 as a result of partnership working between Fold Housing Association, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Northern Health and Social Services Trust. The scheme is an innovative supported housing project which aims to maximise choice and independence. The client group - frail elderly with complex needs (requiring more than 10 hours care per week) - has clearly flourished since moving to the scheme in terms of lifestyle choices and enhanced social networks.

The project comprises of 26 units of accommodation with an attractive mix of two bed and one bed provision. Tenants can access the spacious surroundings by their own front door which links to the external corridor or by an internal spinal corridor running through the scheme. Assistive technology and telehealth which monitors vital signs have proved invaluable in sustaining an unobtrusive and independent lifestyle which has decreased dependency levels within the supported environment.

The design of Barn Halt Cottages mirrors that of old-style railway cottages which integrates neatly into the community and adjacent railway line. For the tenants who live there this brings a sense of the past and a sense of belonging.

What did you set out to achieve?

Through careful years of planning the scheme identified many goals and objectives from each of the three partner organisations. The main aim of the project is to promote independence whilst creating a home for life in embracing a new model of service delivery of care and support.

Barn Halt Cottages set out to be a place where tenants feel at home and much effort has gone into design, layout, décor and furniture which has successfully embraced a homely atmosphere. We wanted to create a visually pleasing style and design which both our tenants and the citizens of Carrickfergus would be proud of. We wanted to create a building which maximised available and innovative funding streams such as Housing Association Grant, Northern Ireland Housing Executive Supporting People, Housing Benefit funding and Social Services input.

Most importantly, Barn Halt Cottages was created with the aim of being an outstanding alternative to residential care. For the Health and Social Care Trust the scheme was seen as an excellent opportunity to effect large economies of scale through centralisation of care delivery, thus the project has been a successful model for the Trust in terms of cost savings in care delivery and runs parallel with the Trust's ultimate aim to replace residential care with the Barn Halt model.

It must be emphasised that in terms of care and support the scheme aimed to break from the traditional delivery model to a more innovative and personally tailored approach. A team of support workers ensures all tenants are fully supported and these Fold staff work alongside their Trust colleagues who deliver a domiciliary model of care both to the general community and the scheme itself. Thus, the ultimate objective of reducing care hours in the community and supporting people to remain independent has been achieved.

How were these aims and objectives met?

The answer to this question is that the stated aims and objectives have been met and this can be measured through both documented and anecdotal evidence. Thus in essence the project is working and delivering on a number of objectives.

The project has made a significant difference to the peoples' lives, which is evident through tributes paid during Christmas celebrations in 2007, during which one by one tenants have expressed their gratitude and their delight in being in a scheme which had given them back a meaningful and fulfilling life.

The scheme has clearly promoted independence which is reflected in low vacancy rates. In one instance a lady with no speech as a result of a stroke moved into our scheme from an inappropriate placement in residential care. This lady rediscovered her social skills and lifestyle choices and was able to integrate back into the community – her family is indebted to us.

We have given the right choice and independence to people with mild learning disability who have never had accommodation of their own before. We have witnessed huge changes in their demeanour, happiness and character.

The scheme continues to attract many visitors and health professionals seeking to emulate its design and service model delivery. Much publicity has been given to the external finishes in that the cottages do bring back a sense of the past on the site of the old railway halt.

Other Health Trusts wishing to build supporting housing schemes are directed to Barn Halt Cottages by the Supporting People Team. This confirms the Northern Ireland Housing Association's commitment to the scheme. Similarly Health Trusts are keen to emulate the scheme through the clearly evidenced centralisation of care delivery and economies of scale.

What challenges did the project face, and what lessons were learned?

The key challenge to be faced was that of integrating a vulnerable client group into the community. Many of our tenants moved from statutory residential care settings and institutional dwellings. Such a challenge has to be met through careful phasing in of new tenants with the more able moving first and the more vulnerable moving in a final phase.

Much multi-disciplinary networking, planning and communication took place to ensure as much information on tenants was carried over. Not only did such liaising ensure that the care and support needs of tenants would be met but that their likes, dislikes and individual tastes would be catered for.

Beyond the challenge of such integration into the project was that of the allocations process. An allocations panel was established at an early stage well in advance of handover. The panel which consisted of Fold, the Health Trust and Northern Ireland Housing Executive officials spent dedicated time in agreeing allocations for the scheme such was the demand and interest shown in the project.

Some concerns were raised at the design stages about the delivery of support and care services since both were line managed and delivered by different organisations. Key questions were what is the fundamental difference between a care and support task and what happens when a care task is required and only support staff are present?

Through careful education of scheme staff and joint training and

familiarisation initiatives, this difficulty was overcome. We now fully appreciate the importance of team building, team working, information sharing and multi tasking even if it is outside the scope of one's job description.

We are proud to state that Barn Halt staff and Trust Staff are a fully integrated team who work in harmony to the evident full benefit of our tenants.

How was the success of the project measured?

The success of Barn Halt Cottages has been measured and evaluated extensively by way of both formal and informal methods. Formal methods have included a baseline assessment of our tenants before they moved to the scheme. This process is currently progressing and is being carried out jointly by the Northern Trust and the University of Ulster. Most tenants have by now reached the target time for review of one year's residence in the scheme. Early indicators are very positive in terms of the impact the project has made on our tenants lives.

All Fold's other supported housing units and housing-with-care schemes are due to be surveyed in September of this year. This year Fold will be using external consultants for the first time to produce tailor made satisfaction surveys for each of our schemes. We are confident of high satisfaction rates within Barn Halt Cottages.

Informal evidence includes the interest shown in the scheme by the general public, the Health Trusts and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The project has held a number of open days which have been well attended with many compliments and expressed wishes to come and live at Barn Halt Cottages. Health Trusts and Housing Associations seeking to build new supported housing schemes are being directed to fully explore the Barn Halt model.

Other informal methods involve ongoing liaison meetings with Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Northern Trust. These meetings are always positive. Also informal liaison meetings between the Trust staff and Fold staff enhance partnership working in support of the scheme.

Tenants offer feedback through suggestion boxes, tenants meetings and to the support workers directly.

Other factors which influence the success of the scheme are turnaround figures for relets, staff retention levels and general motivation levels of staff. All these elements are positive.

What were the key positive outcomes?

The main positive outcome of the scheme is that it has created opportunities for people to live on their own in their own home for the first time in their lives.

Examples include a gentleman with mild learning difficulties in his mid-sixties who had lived with his mother all his life. The transformation in this man has been remarkable and the constant smile on his face is a reminder of what Barn Halt Cottages has done for this man. Another two gentlemen had lived in institutional care all their lives, they were totally overjoyed at the prospect of living independently. One of these gentlemen is blind and has settled beyond anyone's expectations. Several tenants have moved from residential care placements back into the community of Barn Halt Cottages. This is a reversal of the norm where a person will generally move from supported housing into residential care.

Another key outcome is that the scheme has made a significant difference to the lives of frail older persons who were previously vulnerable in terms of physical health, mental health, social isolation and social environmental factors. Such persons are now living independently, making their own choices about their own lifestyles. They have regained control of their lives and are supported to do so. Opportunities for social interaction exist through an extensive social activities and outings programme.

A further outcome is that of health awareness and health promotion. This service is delivered centrally into the scheme through community links and involves self monitoring of vital signs, exercise programmes, therapeutic and sensory activities.

Assistive technology has proven to be very beneficial in provided unobtrusive monitoring in a totally dignified manner. Devices such as wandering alarms, fall detectors, help lines, pendants and speech units operate to ensure our tenants can remain safe and independent at Barn Halt Cottages.

How did the project demonstrate positive practice in equality and diversity?

Barn Halt Cottages demonstrates positive practice in equality and diversity largely through allocations and administration procedures and policies. All Fold policies are equality centred and subject to regular review. This ensures and reinforces equality of access to all Fold services and fully embraces cultural differences and diversities.

Allocations to the scheme are made in agreement with our aforementioned partners through an allocations panel. Such allocations must be made within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's common selection scheme. This scheme prides itself in its record on allocations in that it has never been proven to be discriminatory on the grounds of religion, age, culture or ethnic background.

Fold Housing Association is also bound by the Department of Social Development to embrace to complete NICORE forms for each new tenant. This document records details of (amongst other information) religious and cultural backgrounds and is used by the Department to statistically analyse

and predict social housing trends.

Fold staff come increasingly from a range of cultural and diverse backgrounds and Barn Halt Cottages is no exception to this. Fold's ethos is to integrate all cultures and diversities into the activities of all our schemes. Fold encourages and supports cross community initiatives and will often permit the use of its facilities to community groups. This enforces the sense of community in our projects and provides a further social networking opportunity for our tenants.

The make up of the community is changing and this is seen particularly in local schools where there are a far greater number of pupils from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Barn Halt Cottages facilitates interactive visits by these schools to the scheme which our tenants especially enjoy.

What elements of the project could be replicated by others?

Health Trusts and Registered Social Landlords are being directed to the scheme as the definitive model for supported housing. Hence the scheme has hosted many visits by Health, Housing and Government Officials. Frequently such visitors leave with a desire to have such a scheme replicated within their own locality. The main features of the project which attract most interest in duplicating are space provision, architectural design, décor, equipment, assistive technology and most importantly service delivery in terms of care and support packages tailored to meet our tenants' individual needs.

Health professions are particularly keen to embrace such a service delivery because the model works. Care provision costs are reduced, time spent caring is reduced and health and care services can be better focused and centralised. Health Trusts are particularly interested in reduced capital build costs achieved through partnership working. The people who live at Barn Halt Cottages are tenants and enjoy all the benefits and rights of a registered social landlord tenancy, including mixed funding streams.

Fold is the leading provider of assistive technology in Ireland and the scheme incorporates a plug and play facility which enables full use of the latest technology. Health Trusts are very keen to utilise this facility and are impressed with the use of Telehealth (vital signs monitoring), wandering alarms, movement sensors, panic alarms and door alerts. All such measures assure an individual's independence and dignity in an effort to create a home for life.

Barn Halt Cottages incorporates the history of the community and its design reflects this in the provision of a magnificent old-style railway platform outside the social room. Prospective providers are keen to duplicate this local theme and the sense of belonging it brings to our tenants.

How does the project contribute to wider organisational objectives?

The ethos of the scheme is to provide an independent lifestyle for tenants who have choice and opportunities which were previously denied for various reasons. There are several examples where choice is an expectation of our service standard.

All tenants have their own front door linking to the community and a back door linking to a spinal corridor within the scheme. All bungalows are furnished, decorated and carpeted in accordance with the tenants' tastes. This creates an individualised environment reinforced by space provision for personalised memorabilia and artefacts.

Support is drawn upon by choice of the tenants. Care is delivered on a tailored flexible individualised model; it is not regimented nor forced upon the tenant. Care provision is aimed at those in need at a particular time.

Communication methods ensure tenants are fully aware in order to make informed choices about aspects of daily living within the scheme. Tenants participate in the decision making processes of the scheme through tenants meetings, suggestion boxes and daily interaction with support workers. Integrated into the scheme are facilities such as the social room, four coffee docks, a hairdresser's salon, guest rooms and an assisted bath. Another project of particular note is the "everybody online project" where a computer is provided for tenants use and this project helps to develop older persons and vulnerable people's confidence through mastering new skills and improving communication.

Independence is totally supported through imaginative and innovative technology which effectively gives tenants choice to come and go as they please despite differing levels of physical and mental capacity.

How will the project continue to have a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable people?

In order to ensure a continual positive impact on the lives of vulnerable people Barn Halt Cottages has a continual process of evaluation which provides a pathway of support for our vulnerable adults. This is done mainly through careful support planning processes which entails regular review to ensure tenants are accessing all possible services to protect any vulnerability.

Aside from the formal processes such as support planning and domiciliary care planning, other methodology is employed to ensure a fulfilling life for vulnerable people. Fold is in process of rolling out an overall satisfaction survey conducted for the first time by external consultants tailored to meet the expectations of each of our scheme. In relation to Barn Halt Cottages there will be a dedicated section of the questionnaire given to impact issues on vulnerability levels pre- and post-allocation. This will undoubtedly provide the

continuous improvement to lifestyle quality of our vulnerable tenants. This survey will be completed on an annual basis and runs parallel with a University of Ulster and Northern Health Trust baseline assessment carried out post-allocation to one year's tenancy duration for completion imminently.

People have chosen to live in our scheme largely because of vulnerability issues caused by physical or mental health concerns or social environmental reasons. The scheme is recognised as a solution to such vulnerabilities and this is reflected in low turnaround rates of bungalows, high acceptance rates, a growing waiting list and ever increasing interest shown by similar vulnerable people at our open days.

The impact of assistive technology on the lifestyle choices of our vulnerable tenants has been immeasurable and these choices will continue to be met through an integrated design which can fully accommodate the latest technology.