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## Supporting people to ‘age-in-place’

Northumbria University academics are sharing their expertise in an innovative project to help older people live independently in their own homes for longer.

The Quality Homes for Older People project is being delivered by North Tyneside Council and its preferred bidder, Solutions 4 North Tyneside – a consortium of three companies, Equitix, Miller, and Keepmoat. It will transform accommodation for older people by providing over 900 apartments across 10 new and 16 refurbished sheltered housing schemes in the borough.

Northumbria University is helping ensure its success by working with the

council to redesign the way that sheltered housing services and agencies support older people to remain in their own homes.

The new housing schemes will feature in-built technology and state-of-the-art design features. The buildings are designed to be lifetime homes with energy efficiency and sustainable design principles embedded throughout. The sheltered housing schemes have been designed to be flexible and aim to adapt with a person to meet their needs.

Alongside the building refurbishment and rebuild plans, Northumbria University academics have collaborated to design an innovative service model across the council's housing service that involves joint working and new partnerships with adult social care services, community health services and voluntary sector organisations, to proactively improve and maintain tenants' health and wellbeing.

The ambitious project is part of a series of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) between Northumbria University and North Tyneside Council's Quality Homes for Older People, funded by the Technology Strategy Board, the Department of Health and the Economic and Social Research Council. The North Tyneside Homes team is working with Professor Glenda Cook, Professor of Nursing, Dr Cathy Bailey, Research Fellow in International Ageing, and Dr Emma Barron, KTP Manager, from Northumbria University. Jo Rose, an expert in wellbeing and working with vulnerable and older people, has been appointed as the KTP Associate and Project Manager.

Earlier KTP's with the Council saw Northumbria academics, Dr Geoff O'Brien and Prof Bob Giddings, work on designing and assessing the proposed rebuilds.

The KTP is a timely response to the recent White Paper on public health that transferred primary care responsibilities for older people to Local Authorities. The paper identified a need to shift from 'crisis care' to an approach that positively impacts on ageing-in-place. It called for a multiagency 'reablement' strategy, which incorporates assistive technologies, to help tenants maintain independence and control over their lives and achieve an on-going sense of wellbeing.

Cllr John Harrison, North Tyneside Council's cabinet member for Housing and Environment, said: "This is not just about creating a home but about investing

in people's health and wellbeing. Giving people a quality environment that supports their independence and enables them to live their lives how they want.

“The knowledge transfer partnership between the council and the university will help us provide accommodation that is more flexible in meeting an individual's needs, so they can continue to live in familiar surroundings with the many friends they make, even as their needs change.

“The combination of a vibrant living environment, adapted through good design, the use of the latest technology and additional support means tenants continue to have control over their lives while also having a happier and more independent old age.

Professor Cook, Professor of Nursing at Northumbria University, said: “This is an exciting opportunity to work with North Tyneside Council, which is an organisation that has a strong commitment to the health and wellbeing of the older population. The project builds on recent government focus on partnership, decentralisation and localism – exemplified in the ‘Ageing Well’ programme - encouraging local authorities to improve services for older people.

“In addition the project will build on key strengths within Northumbria University in relation to Gerontology and a keen commitment to users' involvement to inform service developments. It also opens up new potential to evaluate and implement assistive technologies of international relevance.”

Executive Dean, Professor Kath McCourt, added: “This is an ambitious project that will put North Tyneside Council at the forefront of services for older people. The ageing-in-place strategy will bring about significant cost savings through associated reductions in moves to residential care and fewer unplanned admissions to hospitals.”

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