



Scheme of Community Support for Older People

SOCIAL POLICY REPORT

November 2005

Scheme of Community Support for Older People

1. Introduction

This Comhairle Social Policy Report discusses issues relating to the Scheme of Community Support for Older People which operates under the aegis of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA). The report is based primarily on feedback from the network of Citizens Information Services around the country.

The primary function of Comhairle is the provision of information, advice and advocacy in the broad area of the social services. Comhairle also has a number of other functions including:

“To support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and to highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services”

In carrying out this function, Comhairle relies heavily on feedback, based on social policy reports, on the needs and experiences of users of the Citizens Information Centres (CICs) and Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS). CICs and CIPS report queries with a social policy dimension to Comhairle where they are analysed and used as the basis for policy submissions and reports. During 2004, the CICs registered almost 650,000 queries and the CIPS almost 73,000. Of these queries, 1,649 were deemed by CICs and CIPS to have social policy implications and were reported to Comhairle in separate social policy records. These were queries where it was considered that the service available fell short of what was needed or appropriate in the particular situation. This feedback covers a broad range of social policy issues that arise when citizens try to access services and information about services.

Part of this feedback relates to the experience of older people in accessing services appropriate to their needs. Not surprisingly, security in the home emerges as a significant component.

2. Focus and Operation of Scheme

2.1 Purpose of Scheme

The purpose of the Scheme of Community Support for Older People is to encourage and assist the community's support for older people by means of a community based grant scheme to improve the security of its older members. The scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA).

Funding can be provided for:

- q window locks, door locks and door chains designed to strengthen points of entry to the dwelling;
- q security lighting;
- q the once off cost of installing socially monitored alarm systems¹;
- q smoke alarms.

The Scheme of Community Supports for Older People (CSOP) was established in the mid -1990s in response to a spate of burglaries on the homes of older people. The scheme was based on the concept of contact with people at local level. For this reason the funding was provided to voluntary and community organisations rather than grant-aiding individuals so as to assist and stimulate broader community support for older people. A 1999 Review of the Scheme² noted that; “the use of community groups has allowed the Scheme to tap into a large, cheap source of energy and goodwill. Groups visited during the project have worked hard to implement the Scheme and their knowledge of local conditions and people have allowed for a sensitivity of approach” (p.25)

2.2 Eligible Groups/Organisations³

Voluntary and community organisations working with or providing support for older people can apply⁴ to participate in the scheme. The following criteria apply to applicant organisations:

- Ø Any local voluntary or community-based organisation, especially those working with or providing support for older people, can apply to the Department for funding under the scheme.
- Ø Before applying the applicant organisation should satisfy itself that it has the capacity and is in a position to meet the conditions associated with the administration of the scheme set out in the Departmental Guidelines.
- Ø The organisation should be well established in its local area and must be able to demonstrate a track record of voluntary and community activity in its application.

¹ A socially monitored alarm system is an alarm that can be activated by the user. Upon activation a person in a centre is contacted who communicates with the user and may inform a contact close to the user who can come to their aid. The user generally wears a pendant which has a button on it to activate the alarm.

² Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (1999), *Review of the Scheme of Community Support for Older People*.

³ A list of organisations/groups funded under the scheme in 2004 is available at www.pobail.ie or by contacting the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

⁴ The application form and guidelines may be downloaded from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs website, www.pobail.ie or by contacting Voluntary and Community Supports, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Dún Amhrigin, 43/49 Mespil Road, Dublin 4. Telephone: (01) 6473237 / 6473239 / 6473021.

While priority is given to organisations with a focus on the needs of older people, applications are welcomed from local community organisations with a background in providing support for other vulnerable groups in their community who wish to extend their activities to include the needs of older people.

In 2003, 392 organisations catering for a total of 8,769 people were funded under the scheme. The amounts of grant allocated to organisations ranged from €135 for an organisation to organise security for 1 person to €300,000 to an organisation dealing with 935 persons.

2.3 Eligible Persons

The scheme is open to people aged 65 and over who have a genuine need for assistance under the scheme. Individual applications must, however, be made through a local voluntary organisation and the following criteria apply:

- Individual applicants should reside within the group's geographical area of operation.
- The voluntary/community group must satisfy itself as to the eligibility of each applicant by visiting the applicant in his/her home
- Applications from individuals residing outside the group's area of operation should be referred to the appropriate group for the area in which they live. Where doubt arises as to the appropriate group the DCRGA should be contacted for advice.
- Where the individual is unaware of the group operating the scheme in their area the person should contact DCRGA for advice.

2.4 Maximum Grants Available

The maximum funding available to any one organisation/group is €30,000. The maximum grants available to individuals are as follows:

- Ø €300⁵ in respect of socially monitored alarms;
- Ø €150 in respect of physical security equipment;
- Ø €150 in respect of security lighting;
- Ø €50 in respect of smoke alarms.

2.5 What is not covered

Funding is not available for conventional intruder alarms under this scheme. Neither are annual monitoring fees or maintenance fees associated with alarm systems covered under the scheme.

⁵ The Department has noted in the 2005 Guidelines that, based on previous year's applications, quotations for socially monitored alarms can be sourced from as low as €250.

Where socially monitored alarms (or security equipment) previously installed under the scheme are broken or defective and are outside the guarantee period, a limited amount of funding is available towards the cost of replacement. However, it is emphasised that replacement of alarm units which remain fully functioning, will not be considered simply because of their age or because of claims of obsolescence by the supplier. The Departmental Guidelines stipulate that each case for an alarm replacement is assessed on its own merits and decided on in the context of available resources. Groups are advised to supply a separate list of all such cases indicating when the previous alarm (or security equipment) was supplied and the reason for its proposed replacement.

Some voluntary/community organisations have drawn attention to the fact that emergency lighting (which comes on when mains supply is down) is not covered under the scheme.

2.6 Equipment and Suppliers

The Departmental Guidelines state that participating voluntary/community groups should deal only with reputable suppliers with a proven track-record and an ability to operate to best industry standards. Applicant organisations are required to submit to the Department, two quotes from proposed suppliers for the socially monitored alarms, (the quotes should be in respect of competing products from separate manufacturers). In the normal course of events the lowest quote should be accepted and, where it is proposed to accept a higher quote, the group is required to state in the application the reasons for this decision.

Groups are advised to ask suppliers to precisely state the guarantee period applicable to their units. "A considerable warranty period with new equipment should be sought. This should be a significant factor in choosing a supplier". It is also stipulated that alarms should correspond to appropriate safety standards and be equipped with an anti-lightning device and that physical security items should be durable quality industry standard fittings.

Participating groups are advised to ensure that the process of selection of the supplier is fair and transparent and that no conflict of interest occurs or is likely to occur. It is stipulated that "in no circumstances should groups work on the basis of client lists received from equipment suppliers. This may result in exclusion of the group from participating in the scheme".

2.7 Administrative Matters

The scheme is advertised once a year and organisations that meet the criteria are allocated finances in accordance with their application. There is no provision for retrospective funding.

2.7.1 Tax clearance procedures

The Government's Tax Clearance procedures apply to all grants allocated. These procedures mean that groups must give their tax number, give the name of the tax office dealing with their affairs and must certify that their tax

affairs are in order. Applications are not accepted from groups who do not quote their tax number. For grants over €6,350, a current tax clearance certificate must be submitted with the application. Groups recognised as Charities by the Revenue Commissioners are exempt from the requirement to produce a tax clearance certificate.

2.7.2 Accounting for Grants Awarded

Detailed accounts of expenditure, in respect of all grants awarded, are required by the Department. The grants must be spent and accounted for within 6 months of the receipt of the grant and any equipment or alarm systems should be installed and operational by that time. Successful applicants are asked to submit a list of individual beneficiaries and any variations between this list and the list submitted with the original application must be explained.

Applications are not considered from groups who have failed to submit accounts or reconciliation of expenditure in respect of previous grants.

3. Operation of the Scheme

3.1 Funding

The scheme has been running each year since 1996 and has supplied alarms and other security items to many older people - over 8,500 individuals benefited from the scheme in 2003 alone. Since 1997, some €30.72 million has been allocated under this scheme. The scheme evolved over the years and peaked in the late 1990s. Since then there has been a reduction in funding as demand has gradually lessened and demand has evened out in the years 2001 to 2004. This reduction in demand is likely to be partly due to the fact that over the years more people had their security needs met by the scheme. Another reason might be the fact that more people are acquiring conventional home security systems. The table below shows the trend in expenditure on the scheme during the period 1997 to 2004.

Table 1: Details of Funding under Scheme of Community Supports for Older People

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of groups</i>	<i>Amount (€million)</i>
1997	839	€6.13
1998	1,020	€6.34
1999	619	€3.77
2000	571	€4.03
2001	461	€2.68
2002	432	€2.67
2003	392	€2.86
2004	426	€2.24

3.2 Changes in Administration of the Scheme Introduced in 2004

Initially, the scheme covered 50% to 90% of costs of work carried out. Groups could apply for funding up to €300,000. In many instances 90 per cent of the cost was covered. Following a review of the scheme by the Department of

Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in 2004, certain key changes were introduced. The 90% limit on funding was abolished and replaced with individual maximum grants in respect of various scheme elements. The levels were fixed on the basis of grants sought and paid by the Department in the previous year. Following the review, provision was made for grants for smoke alarms for the first time.

A further stipulation of the 2004 scheme was that 2 quotations must be obtained from different manufacturers for socially monitored alarm systems. The aim of these measures was to encourage competition between suppliers in the interest of ensuring value for money both for taxpayers and for individual applicants.

A further result of the review was that funding to each participant voluntary organisation was reduced to €30,000. In previous years a small number of organisations had received sums of up to €300,000 but the vast majority of applicants were small community based voluntary groups which received average amounts under €10,000. The purpose of this change was to re-focus the scheme on local community groups and to redirect resources towards smaller groups which are more likely to have direct personal links and ongoing contact with older people in their area and who are therefore better placed to understand and appreciate their needs.

The changes introduced in 2004 are regarded by the Department as having no implications for the overall funding available for the scheme⁶.

3.3 Administrative Changes

The administrative changes which resulted in the scheme being transferred from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in June 2002 may have had some bearing on the scheme. Under DSCFA it was administered through its 10 regional offices and these may have been in a position to have a more hands on approach than the current Department which does not have a similar network of offices. An advantage of centralised administration, however, is that it enables the Department to have a better overview of the scheme.

3.4 Variations in Take-up

Dependence on local voluntary and community organisations has resulted in variations in the take-up of the Scheme between different areas. The 1999 Review noted that, in some areas, no local group has become involved and, in others, local groups have a small number of volunteers. "There is some evidence that, in urban areas, it is middle-class areas which have a higher take-up rate" (p.26).

3.5 Targeting

⁶ Communication to Comhairle from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The Task Force on Security for the Elderly, which reported in 1996, recommended that funding under the scheme be targeted at those most in need. However, in practice the scheme has, in effect, become a universal one catering for all persons who have a genuine need.

“The nature of local groups means that they find it difficult or impossible to exclude people who meet the eligibility criteria for the Scheme. Targeting of funding to date has therefore been poor.” (Review of Scheme, 1999, p.26).

3.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

The 1999 Review concluded that there was a low level of monitoring of expenditure under the Scheme, both from a financial and from a policy evaluation perspective. The Task Force on Security for the Elderly Report (1996) had recommended that “the operation of the scheme and its effectiveness should be evaluated on an ongoing basis” (p.28). The 1999 Review noted that “Groups do not currently compare practices in implementing the Scheme from one area to another. Considerable scope exists for such a recording of “best practice” in order to generate learning for all areas”. (p.27).

The 1999 Review concluded that improvements to the Scheme could be made on a number of fronts including the targeting of publicity, the provision of crime prevention information, the regulation of socially monitored alarm systems installation and monitoring companies and the provision of expertise to local groups to help older people choose appropriate security equipment. None of these recommendations have been introduced to date.

3.7 Voluntary and Community Organisations

The delivery of the scheme is totally dependent on voluntary/community organisations. They are required to identify those in need of assistance, to make the application, administer the grant in accordance with the criteria set out by the Department and organise the acquisition, delivery and installation of the various security items. Since many local groups have a low level of administrative expertise and resources, administering the scheme presents significant challenges and difficulties (see 4.2.6 and 6.7 below). Some organisations contacted by Comhairle during the course of preparing this report expressed strong reservations about their continuing involvement in the scheme.

4. Evidence from Citizens Information Centres (CICs)

CIC users throughout the country regularly seek information and advice about their entitlement to security support systems and devices. A number of policy issues arising from such queries have been identified by CICs.

4.1 Monitoring Charges

A recurrent issue raised by CIC users refers to the absence of funding for the ongoing monitoring cost of social alarms. People feel that they cannot afford and /or are unwilling to pay such costs, which are seen as another drain on their social welfare pension. In some instances people expressed a strong

view that the State should pay the monitoring cost as part of the overall package of care and support in the community. This was seen as a relatively small price to pay to facilitate people staying in their own homes. It was noted that some people had been strongly advised by a Public Health Nurse to get a socially monitored alarm but were unwilling to do so because of the ongoing monitoring charge.

An 81-year-old pensioner called to Longford CIC. He had just received a bill of €80 for annual payment for a security alarm, which was installed for him a year ago on the recommendation of the Public Health Nurse. He had paid 10% of the installation fee with the balance paid by under the Scheme of Community Support for Older People.

This man was unaware that he would continue to be liable for a yearly charge. He told us that he had been a farmer all of his life, is now a pensioner, lives alone and has a Medical Card. He has been hospitalised on a number of occasions in recent years and for a spell of 4 months this past year. Even so he is still managing quite well living alone and feels he is not a burden on the community health services.

He feels that people like him who have worked hard all their lives should at this stage be able to continue living in their own home with the benefit of a fully subsidised security system.

A woman in receipt of an Old Age Pension sought information from Dundalk CIC about personal security alarms.

The Information Officer contacted the local community group that administers this grant under Community Supports for Older People Scheme. They noted her details and advised that they would contact her soon and do an assessment of her security needs, including windows and door locks. The woman was delighted as her home had been broken into recently and it had left her feeling very vulnerable and frightened.

It was explained how the personal alarm system works and the cost of the yearly maintenance service. The lady was shocked that she would have to pay an annual maintenance charge and expressed the view that she was a pensioner on a small income and this charge would be another expense that she would have to find money for. She is trying to stay in her own home for as long as possible and it would certainly cost the State a lot more to keep her in a nursing home.

She wondered - why bother with a 'half free scheme' when it would cost so little extra to keep elderly people safe in their own homes.

4.2 Extent of Scheme

4.2.1 Scheme confined to people aged 65 years and over

The fact that the scheme is confined to people aged 65 years and over has been highlighted as an issue by a number of CICs. It is pointed out repeatedly that there are other vulnerable people in the community for whom there is no equivalent provision. Typical cases identified are people with disabilities in receipt of social welfare payments and living on their own. Such people complain to CICs that they would like to have a socially monitored alarm and security devices fitted to their homes but cannot get any state assistance.

There also appears to be an issue of equality of access in that in some areas some people with disabilities can get an alarm. This may arise when the original recipient no longer needs the alarm. The community/voluntary organisation involved may then pass the alarm on to another person in the community whom they believe to be vulnerable e.g. a person with a disability living alone. The new recipient may not satisfy the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht criteria and may not be over 65 years.

A woman called to Sligo CIC. She is living on her own and is feeling vulnerable. She is a widow and is in receipt of Invalidity Pension. She has been very ill recently and required a lengthy hospital stay. The lady would like to have an alarm for her personal safety and have security measures fitted in her home.

The difficulty is the woman is aged 54 and thus not entitled to grant aid under the current scheme which is confined to people aged 65 or over. The information worker asked: "Could these type of cases be assessed on their own merits?"

Comhairle Central Information Team

"We have had calls from a number of people in relation to the following issue. Older people living alone can get access to personal security systems. Vulnerable people with disabilities aged under 65 living alone can not. The current Security for Older People Scheme should be amended to include vulnerable people with disabilities. This is all the more necessary as more people with physical and developmental impairments are encouraged to live in the community and use independent living services. At the moment some people with disabilities can get access to a second-hand alarm, if there is spare capacity, usually as a result of the death of a number of people over 65 in a geographical area.

4.2.2 Lack of Provision for Security Alarms

Several CICs report older people stating that they feel very insecure in their own homes but cannot afford a conventional general house alarm system (e.g., Phonewatch).

An 83-year-old woman who called to KARE CIS had been recently burgled for the first time in 55 years of living alone. She was now very fearful but could not afford an alarm system for her home. Although there is a grant scheme in operation for security for the elderly, for small devices and lights, social alarms etc. there is no grant or assistance available for help with the cost of an overall household security alarm.

Over the Winter months we (Thurles CIC) have had numerous enquiries from older people regarding security systems, particularly house alarms. Under the Scheme 'Community Support for Older People' funding is not available for the installation of conventional intruder alarms. We have found an increased demand, particularly from those living in rural areas, for such alarms but the cost is prohibitive for a great number of people. The information worker notes: "It is essential that house alarm systems be included within this scheme so that elderly people can be reassured regarding their personal security in their own homes".

We have had queries regarding funding towards fitting full house alarms and many are disappointed that this is not available. One of the factors that should be taken into account in the Security for Older People scheme is the expectation of the elderly person regarding what is provided through this scheme (Northside CIC).

4.2.3 Emergency Lighting

Another shortcoming of the scheme identified by CICs is that the installation of Emergency Lighting (which would provide temporary lighting when mains power failed) is not covered. It was noted that in the case of a house fire or a power failure such emergency lighting would be a significant factor in the case of an older person living on his/her own.

4.2.4 Difficulties with Application Procedures

A key issue identified by CICs is that voluntary/community organisations operating the scheme have difficulty in processing applications and in one instance asked the CIC to stop telling people about the scheme as they could not handle any more applications. In other instances the CIC involved referred to long delays in people having their applications for security devices under the grant scheme processed.

We have had a number of elderly people calling to the centre who have experienced long delays in processing their applications for security devices under the Scheme of Community Support for Older People. In some cases, clients have not received any assistance due to lack of funding (Navan CIC).

A number of CICs referred to the fact that applications for grants are only processed once a year (usually September). This means that if a person requires an alarm in October, s/he has to wait over a year before s/he has any chance of getting it.

A woman who called to Carlow CIC is applying now (end of November 2004), which means her name will not go forward until September 2005. She will not have an alarm installed until February or March 2006. "Community groups should be allowed to apply for funding four times a year and in this way no person would have such a needless wait for this basic security. The scheme for the pendant alarms needs to be reassessed and clarified".

“Elderly people apply during the year but the money does not come through until December. People are left waiting until after January to get these installed. It is during the dark Winter months that these alarms are most needed” (Clondalkin CIC).

CICs also note that the application forms are difficult to fill in. Many older people do not like signing forms and giving personal details to local voluntary agency personnel.

4.2.5 Information

A number of CICs referred to a lack of information about which organisation administers the scheme in a particular area. This lack of information was seen as a general issue in relation to older people knowing what services and supports were available to them.

4.2.6 Other Issues

The following issues also emerged in discussions with CICs:

- Ø Voluntary/community organisations find it difficult, especially in rural areas, to get tradespersons or professionals to do small security-related jobs such as the installation of locks etc.
- Ø Voluntary/community organisations are becoming disillusioned with what they perceive as an unnecessary level of bureaucracy and ‘paperwork’ involved in applying for and administering the scheme.
- Ø The fact that there is no funding available for repairs results in voluntary/community organisations having to use other funds for this purpose.
- Ø A common feature referred to was that of pendants not being used by their owners as intended, which would suggest a lack of consultation and/or ongoing support.

5. Older People in the Community: Security and Safety

Increased longevity means the number of older people in the population has been increasing in recent decades and is expected to continue in the foreseeable future. Recent population projections (NCAOP⁷ 2004) show that the number of persons aged 65 years and over in Ireland is projected to increase from 11 per cent of the population in 2002 to 15 per cent of the population in 2021. It is projected that the number of older people living alone will also increase substantially. By 2021 there will be 211,000 older people living alone representing just over 30 per cent of all those aged 65 and over.

⁷ National Council on Ageing and Older People (2004), *Population Ageing in Ireland: Projections 2002-2021*, National Council on Ageing and Older People, Dublin.

Recent research⁸ shows that a significant minority of older people (some 50,000) have minimal social contacts and a limited social network. People in this group are likely to have few supports, may be very isolated and may be in poor health. The report also noted that the most likely older people to experience higher levels of loneliness and social isolation are 'the oldest-old', single or widowed women, those educated to primary level only and those in the lower social classification.

The fear of being attacked in their own homes and not being able to call for help is a constant pre-occupation for many older persons living alone in both urban and rural settings. Fire also continues to be a major hazard for many older persons living alone. Research carried out with older people in one Health Board Community Care area in 2002⁹ found that home and personal security was an important concern. However, very few had an actual alarm system and only a small proportion of respondents had a personal pendant alarm. Half of those living in their own homes indicated that they would like to have the device installed and would welcome the provision of panic buttons in the house.

With respect to smoke alarms, the 2002 research noted that there appeared to be quite a few houses without them. The researchers noted that a number of homes had open fires which accentuated the need to ensure adequate alarm systems. The fact that some older people had difficulty in checking batteries in smoke alarms on a regular basis was noted. For example, one respondent reported trying unsuccessfully for a number of weeks to get someone to look at her smoke alarm on her upstairs landing, which she was unable to access. The study concluded that this a simple preventive issue, which should be addressed as part of an overall system for basic maintenance and security in older people's homes.

Older people's well being is likely to be affected at least as much by their perception of their level of personal safety as by their actual experience of crime. Sensational media coverage of violence against older people may contribute to feelings of vulnerability¹⁰.

The key question that arises for older people themselves, for concerned relatives and neighbours and for housing and health authorities is whether the ownership of an alarm adversely affect contacts with neighbours, calls from relatives and visits from social services personnel. While the underlying rationale for involving voluntary and community organisations in the administration of the Scheme of Community Supports for Older People is to build on and consolidate ongoing contact with older people, it is not at all clear to what extent the scheme has achieved this objective.

⁸ National Council on Ageing and Older People (2004), *Loneliness and Social Isolation among Older People*, Report no. 84.

⁹ See Social Innovations Ireland (2003), *Elders in Irish Society: Beyond the Dismal Scenario*; Longford Community Resources (2001), *Needs of Older People in County Longford*.

¹⁰ National Council on Ageing and Older People (2001), *Crime; Ageing in Ireland Fact File No.11*.

6. Addressing the Issues

6.1 Security and Alarm Systems for Older People: General Principles

The following principles should apply in the provision of alarm, communication and security systems by voluntary and statutory groups:

- (i) Alarm and security systems are a key component in ensuring that older people can remain living independently in their own homes. This factor should be fully taken into account in both the allocation of resources to, and the method of delivery of, all State-funded community support schemes.
- (ii) Alarm and communication systems should not replace person-to-person services and contacts with older people.
- (iii) It should be verified before installation that the older person (as distinct, for example, from a relative or a Home Help) actually wants a social alarm and is prepared to use it.
- (iv) Detailed explanation should be given to the older person on how the system works assuring them that confidentiality will be respected.
- (v) Detailed guidance in the technical operation of the system should be provided.
- (vi) Specific training should be provided to voluntary groups who provide security devices to older people, to make them aware of the needs and concerns of older people.
- (vii) Follow-up information and services should be provided to older people who acquire security devices through the grants to voluntary and community-based organisations.
- (viii) Regular servicing of systems should be carried out.

6.2 Extent of the Scheme

The 1999 Review referred to the fact that “many local groups feel the eligibility criteria should be changed to include people over 60 and people with disabilities” (p.26). The evidence from CICs cited in this report points to ongoing concern about the fact that the scheme does not cover vulnerable people with disabilities who are under 65. The issue takes on greater significance in the context of increasing numbers of people with physical and developmental impairments being encouraged to live in the community and to use independent living services.

The Department of Health and Children, the Health Services Executive and Local Authorities should take full cognisance of the role of security systems in the provision of suitable housing for people with disabilities.

6.3 Application Procedures

The current method of application and funding allocation means that voluntary groups working with older people cannot deal with unforeseen circumstances. Even if they can make funds available out of their own resources, there is no provision for retrospective grant aid.

If the current system is to remain in place, provision needs to be made for contingency funding throughout the year so that when an unexpected urgent need arises an application could be quickly processed.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs should work with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to explore the possibility of including the Scheme of Community Support for Older People as an additional element in the Households Benefit Package. The advantages and disadvantages of this method of delivery would need to be clearly identified before any decision was taken on the matter.

6.4 Information

Detailed information on alarm and security systems should be provided as part of a comprehensive Aids and Information Service for Older People in each community care area. This information should be available in a manner and at a location which is easily accessible to older persons and their carers. There is a need for an active promotion campaign in relation to the Scheme of Community Support for Older People and the grants available. This should occur at two levels:

- (i) The availability of the grant should be much more widely publicised throughout the year than is currently the case. Local media should be extensively used for this purpose.
- (ii) The names of organisations administering the grant at local level should be widely circulated and publicised. Mechanisms need to be developed at local level for this purpose.

An overall assessment of need should identify all available services – an older person may refuse the services but they should do this with the knowledge of their availability.

6.5 Partnership Approach

Since voluntary and community organisations are at the hub of delivering the scheme, there would appear to be a need for much more joint working between the Department and the voluntary/community sector in relation to the scheme. In particular, there is a need to examine ways in which what are perceived to be unnecessarily complex application /administrative procedures might be adapted.

6.6 Integrated Service Provision

The 1999 Review referred to the fact that, despite the Scheme having important health benefits, “only a minority of local groups perceive Health

Board support as good". (Review of Scheme, 1999, p.27. The Review also concluded that there appears to be poor links to local authorities. This was seen as particularly relevant in the case of older people living in local authority houses. (Review of Scheme, 1999, p.27).

The Scheme of Community Support for Older People should be part of a comprehensive and integrated package of community supports for older people. This does not appear to be the case at present. The Health Service Executive, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Local Authorities need to develop much stronger collaborative mechanisms at local level in order to deliver a fully integrated package of services at local level.

Voluntary/community organisations evidently have a key role to play in delivering such packages but can only do so effectively where there is better co-ordination among the statutory agencies at local level. The following options should be explored as part of a more integrated approach:

- (i) Provision could be made at design stage for the installation of high quality alarm/communications systems in all social housing for older persons.
- (ii) Greater attention needs to be given to the installation of active communication systems (where, for example, vulnerable older persons would be contacted on a regular basis) in contrast to the passive-type system activated by the older person at a time of crisis.
- (iii) The possibility of establishing greater integration between the Special Housing Aid Scheme (administered by the Health Services Executive) and the Scheme of Community Support for Older People should be explored.

Specific commitments in relation to services for older people in the 2001 Health Strategy have not been implemented. The proposed co-ordinated action plan to meet the needs of ageing and older people should be put in place. Commitments in relation to clarifying entitlements to community care services and an integrated approach to care planning for individuals need to be implemented. The provision of appropriate security and alarm systems should be part of comprehensive care packages for older people in need of services.

6.7 Involvement of voluntary/community organisations

The policy of administering the scheme through voluntary/community organisations needs to be re-assessed to establish if the original intent of facilitating ongoing contact with vulnerable older persons is being met. The key question here is whether the current system in practice:

- (a) facilitates greater contact with older people: and
- (b) guarantees that all those in need are identified.

While paying the grant directly to individuals would be more difficult administratively from the Department's perspective (for example, ensuring that the work is carried out in accordance with applications), a direct payment method may give the individual more autonomy. Community and voluntary organisations would obviously continue to have a pivotal role in disseminating information about the scheme and in assisting people with getting the necessary work done.

6.8 Coverage

It is not at all clear that the current system ensures coverage right across the country. This is a matter for concern which needs to be addressed. A detailed analysis of coverage should be instigated to identify any areas in the country that have not been included in grant allocations to date. This task would need to be done in conjunction with Public Health Nurses. Provision of the service should be co-ordinated to ensure coverage in all areas of the country.

6.9 Carrying Out Installations

The difficulties experienced by voluntary and community organisations in getting people to actually undertake security installations might be helped by making specific provision for such work under Community Employment Projects and the Rural Social Scheme.

6.10 Assessment of Need

As part of an overall assessment of need and risk, provision should be made for an assessment of all safety issues (as well as security) relating to the homes of vulnerable older people, e.g., fire hazards, floor coverings and ability to summon help in case of an emergency.

At present, there is no comprehensive assessment of need for community care and support services. The only assessment of need, which is carried out for older people is in relation to admission either to a public long stay place or in connection with the nursing home subvention. Older people may not apply for services because they do not know about them. The assessment should include housing need as well as medical and social needs. The involvement of local authorities will be necessary to achieve this.

6.11 Integrated Alarm/Communication Systems

Ongoing research should be carried out on the development of integrated alarm and communication systems older persons at risk. The Health Services Executive in partnership with the Local Authorities could explore the possibility of developing an integrated alarm and communication system which would embrace and link-up all older persons at risk in both public and private housing. Such an integrated approach would seem to be in the interests of good management, efficiency and the provision of a more effective service to older people at risk.

6.12 Security Alarms and Tax

The possibility of re-introducing Tax Credits for the provision of alarm systems in the homes of vulnerable older persons should be examined. Such a

provision would provide an incentive to people with taxable income, e.g. sons or daughters of older people at risk, to help with the cost of the installation.