



Your Guide
to Being a

Sensitive Contractor



Championing quality housing and
support for our ageing population

Contents

A guide for anyone who enters a home as part of their work.

	Page Number
Introduction	3
1 Why be a Sensitive Contractor?	4
2 Edie B's story: A Customer's Perspective	6
3 Dementia	8
4 Mobility and Sensory Considerations	10
5 Mental Health	11
6 Cultural Considerations	12
7 Hoarding	13
8 Personal Safety	14
9 Safeguarding	15
10 Sensitive Contractors' Recognition	16
11 Golden Rules – Your Removable Guide	17
Notes	18

Introduction

The aim of this guide, produced by erosh in association with Ian Williams Ltd, is to prepare contractors for working sensitively in older people's homes in any setting e.g. sheltered housing, extra-care accommodation, private retirement accommodation or in their own owned homes.

In addition to a reminder about some general guiding principles when working in anyone's home, this guide covers a range of particularly age related issues you may encounter and offers best practice guidance to help you respond appropriately to individual needs.

This guide came about as a result of demand from erosh members for something they could give to you as contractors to make you better aware of some of the additional considerations when working in the homes of older people. Some of this is common sense but, as our members suggested, unfortunately not always common practice. We have therefore put together some practical tips and good practice guidance in a handy, user-friendly format to help you to make home improvements a positive experience for older people.

You can also achieve 'erosh APPROVED' status if your staff undertake training based on this guide. This will demonstrate to stakeholders that your staff are mindful of some of the particular considerations and are aware of how to engage with older people appropriately and sensitively.

Thanks to the following for their involvement:

Amy Boothman	Ian Williams Ltd
Catherine Hinton	The Building Futures Group (Sector Skills Council for Housing)
Cheryl Whittle	erosh trustee and WFHA
Diane Buddery	Skills for Care (Sector Skills Council)
Lois Nicks	erosh trustee and Housing and Care 21
Sue Baxter	Sitra



Rebecca Mollart, *erosh Chief Executive*



As a contractor working in over 400,000 homes a year we know how important it is to complete work on time and to a high standard, but also sensitively. This is particularly important when working in older people's homes. There is a range of needs that may be encountered but little guidance is provided on the standards that should be followed by contractors. The information provided in this guide is relevant to all organisations, large and small, and for any service that may be provided. We are delighted to have been able to work with erosh and share our experiences and learning within this guide such that the quality of service provided by all contractors is enhanced.

Mike Turner, Ian Williams Ltd



1 Why be a Sensitive Contractor?



Why?

Every person is different

What makes a home?

What is the impact of what I have just seen?



It is important when planning or delivering services, we respond to the needs of each person and everyone is treated according to their unique requirements

1 Why be a Sensitive Contractor?

Guiding Principles

Treat others as you would expect to be treated in your own home: Always be polite, courteous and treat everyone with dignity and respect.

Think! Behaviour and conduct should be guided by common sense. Don't make generalisations or assumptions about groups or individuals.

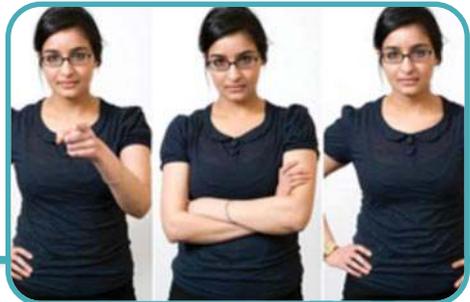
Ask: If you are not sure about anything just ask the customer. You are less likely to offend someone by asking, rather than making assumptions or guessing.

Adapt: Tailor the way you communicate to meet the needs of each customer. Ensure clear access when carrying out work and never leave any tools or equipment lying around if the customer has mobility issues.

Communicate clearly: Avoid using jargon, slang or terms of endearment when dealing with customers; what you say might have a different meaning to the other person.

Communicate effectively: It is not possible to anticipate every customer's needs but providing clear information about the work you will be undertaking and the time it will take will help customers identify any concerns before the work commences. Sometimes using visual material can help.

Some people use assistive technology to help them carry out day to day tasks. Bear this in mind if you need to interrupt the power supply at the property when carrying out work.



Signals – what could you be communicating by accident?

Finger pointing

Hands on hips

Crossing your arms

Sudden or quick movements with your arms

Rolling eyes upwards

Looking down on people

Frowning or scowling

(Being told off)

(Arrogant and unwelcoming)

(Defensive)

(Interpreted as an attack)

(Irritation or impatience)

(Belittling or implying stupidity)

(Unfriendly)

Keep everyone safe in accordance with relevant health and safety legislation applicable to your work e.g. Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

2 Edie B's Story: A Customer's Perspective

Edie B is an older lady living alone in a ground floor studio flat in a complex. Her main living area is 20'x10', with a small kitchen and shower room. She suffers with health and mobility issues, has a cat and requires a carer. During the works, she accepts that there will be upheaval but is cooperative. Notice is vital for her to plan and adjust, and find space for everything in her small flat while the kitchen is emptied and the work takes place. With only two hours' help on a Saturday it seems an impossible task but one, along with her carer, Edie B is willing to embrace.

After a surprising message 'As you know you will be getting a new kitchen', the appointment for inspection is made **but an hour before the allotted time, I receive a phone call saying the inspection will take place at the same time next week instead.**

An unnamed man in a hi-vis jacket arrives with a young man in a familiar housing association suit with a tape measure. They squeeze into my house. I ask if the kitchen can be adapted to better suit my size and reach but I am told politely 'No', insinuating that the 'soon to arrive' next tenant may have different requirements. I manage to negotiate a few things to make better use of the space and improve facilities such as a standard cooker and washing machine, and reluctantly remove an unused and expensive to run water heater – offering space for a third cupboard. **I am not allowed my choice of**

kitchen units, handles and decor – in case they do not suit the future tenant. I am told 'hi-vis' will be my liaison officer and he'll be in touch to discuss arrangements. **I am expected to empty the entire kitchen – housing my fridge and freezer in my living space, the cooker on my small table, and put washing up facilities in the shower** as there will be no hot water in the kitchen area.

I will be provided with boxes for storage, which he will deliver 2 weeks ahead of the work starting. They are going to be working from 8am – 5.30pm and the booklet suggests they prefer you stay in and be pleasant to their workforce while respecting their diversity. It can take me 10-20 minutes to wake up, getting out of bed is paced for balance readjustment and basics like trips to the loo etc. are punctuated by brief sit downs.

I hear nothing more? I phone hi-vis and **he is unable to give a start date, or tell me when the boxes are going to be delivered.** My carer and I continue planning and getting ready for the boxes. Most of our usual household chores are left undone this week. I consider the logistics of washing up in the shower - the sink isn't deep enough so I need to purchase a plastic jug to get water from the sink. I decide to get some disposable plates and cutlery to minimise washing up on the high backed chair I will install in the shower to house the washing up bowl and drainer. I am not going to be able to shower throughout the process. **There are going to be so many trip hazards I am going to have to wear my pendant alarm throughout.** **I am fed up of playing telephone tag. I've been promised a 10 days' written notice**

but still there is no sign of the promised planning visit – where is my kitchen prince?

I get a phone call – they are going to start on Monday! Hi-vis arrives bearing bendy boxes that don't stack and I only have 2 hours' help within the few days' notice. But I told him I would be ready. **I am dismayed about three weeks without my kitchen and bathroom. I have a chair and radio amidst the boxes and will be confined to the space by my bed while the workmen are there. It will be cold with the workman using my patio doors for access.**

The kitchen door is being taken off its hinges and I'm concerned about my cat going exploring. It is suggested the workman can store boxes of tins and dried

food outside during the day.

The workmen arrive. They are courteous and considerate, laying a plastic runway over my carpet and forewarning me about the noise which can't be avoided. There is an issue with missing plans but they manage the small space with jigsaw puzzling skill and the units are good quality. The majority of works are finished ahead of schedule, barring the large hole left in the wall for the social housing labelled extractor fan which is in transit. But **at one point there are seven trades people in my studio flat altogether. The foorer arrived one day disguised as a random passer-by with no ID – he didn't know he needed it** – a risk, but I let him in as I so wanted this to be over.

I'm exhausted with all the comings and goings and

looking forward to the reprieve whilst waiting for the extractor fan to arrive, and at least I can get my kitchen (and the rest) back and return to normal meals and rests to get my diabetes and M.E. realigned. I have a fresh new kitchen in time for Christmas.

The extractor is finally installed but now the painter needs to come back. Like the prince he is, hi-vis has promised he will wield a paintbrush himself if all else fails.

Throughout the process, with regular visits from my site officer I have also had my dangerous step, soon to be replaced with ramp, addressed, a new grabber and my electric heaters, albeit at short notice with more disruption, tested.

I look forward to the peace and serenity of my island life again.

Edie B's story tells of the saga surrounding the installation of her new kitchen, for which is she is both excited and grateful. Although pitted with high and lows, there are some clear examples of excellent and poor customer service and the story gives us insight into the impact renovation works have on customers.

- Give sufficient notice of when works will be carried out
- Keep in mind the potential impact on the customer of any changes to the agreed schedule and give plenty of notice if changes cannot be avoided
- Ensure one person is responsible for all communications with the customer
- Keep the customer's discomfort to a minimum e.g. keeping outside doors closed, allowing breaks for the customer to eat, rest etc
- Keep the customer informed about who is working in their property and why

3 Dementia

HELP!

“Dementia describes a set of symptoms that may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language. Dementia is caused when the brain is damaged by diseases, such as Alzheimer’s or a series of strokes.

Dementia is progressive, which means the symptoms will gradually get worse.”
(The Alzheimer’s Society)

Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia - up to 80% of all cases - although there are other forms of dementia which affect people differently.

Dementia isn’t a natural part of ageing. It occurs when the brain is affected by a disease.

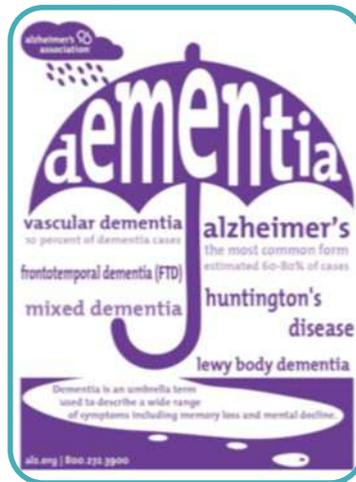
Most people with dementia are over 65 years of age, but dementia also affects younger people. When a person with dementia finds that their mental abilities are declining, they often feel vulnerable and in need of reassurance and support.

You may find their behaviour confusing, irritating or difficult, leaving you feeling stressed, irritable or helpless. By learning to understand the behaviour of customers with dementia you will find it easier to stay calm and respond positively to any challenges that arise.

To become a Dementia Friend go to:
www.dementiafriends.org.uk



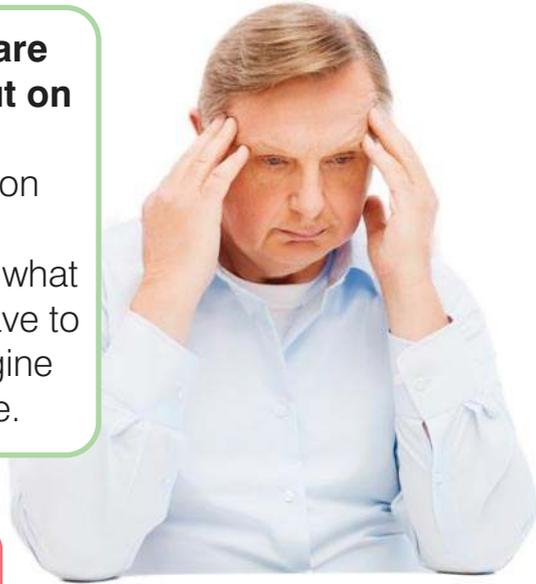
- › Offer understanding and reassurance.
- › Allow the customer to take their time.
- › A friendly smile – put them at ease!
- › Respect – address them as well as their partner/ carer.
- › Use appropriate body language.
- › Listen carefully.
- › Provide visual guidance: write down or use photos.
- › Beware of the environment.
- › Aggressive behaviour may be part of the customer’s illness: speak clearly and calmly, check their understanding and make sure they know you mean them no harm. Reduce distractions and ensure only one person speaks at a time.
- › Find out in advance if someone has dementia – ask for advice on the customer’s individual needs.
- › Introduce and complete one task at a time.
- › Communicate regularly so the customer knows who you are and why you are there.
- › Ask for specialist dementia awareness training.



For more information go to:
www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiaguide

3 Dementia

How does it feel when you are trying to read something out on the phone, whilst in a place with loud music? This question demonstrates distraction and competing stimulation. This is what people living with dementia have to contend with all the time. Imagine experiencing this all of the time.



44% of dementia sufferers receive a diagnosis – the rest are never diagnosed

80% of people in care homes have a form of dementia or severe memory problems

2/3 of dementia sufferers live in the community, one third live in a care home

TOP TIPS for talking to a customer with Alzheimer's or Dementia

- 1 Minimise distractions**
- 2 Make sure they can see you clearly**
- 3 Keep eye contact**
- 4 Speak clearly, calmly and slowly**
- 5 Don't raise your voice**
- 6 Keep things simple**
- 7 Keep communicating**

4 Mobility and Sensory Considerations



HELP!

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) defines a disabled person as someone who has physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities. The different types of impairment are broad and can include physical, manual dexterity and mobility problems, sensory impairments, chronic illness, learning difficulties, emotional or behavioural problems.

The extent and symptoms of the problem will vary from person to person and will affect the way they live their lives and the support they will need.

In the home and when getting around, people who are blind or have sight loss may rely on other senses such as hearing and sense of touch to work out where things and places are.

For more information about sight loss go to: www.rnib.org.uk

For more information about hearing loss go to: www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

For more information about disability generally go to: www.scope.org.uk

- ▶ Identify in advance customers with additional support needs – so specialist support can help you carry out your work as smoothly as possible.
- ▶ If you have concerns that a customer may need support, pass this information back to your manager who will alert the client.
- ▶ Do not park in disabled parking spaces.
- ▶ Ensure clear access when carrying out work.
- ▶ Never leave any tools or equipment lying around.
- ▶ People who are blind or have sight loss rely on memory or touch to work out where things are in their homes. It will cause a problem if anything is moved without their knowledge.
- ▶ For people with some sight loss, turning off or dimming the lights can cause a problem.
- ▶ People who are hard of hearing may be startled by sudden drilling or banging in their homes unless they are told about it. They will also be unaware if you have left the property even for a short period unless you have told them.
- ▶ Deaf people who use British Sign Language usually have English as a second language. Writing things down won't always help. Be prepared to use gestures to communicate or contact your manager so an interpreter can be arranged.

5 Mental Health

HELP!

Mental Health is *“the emotional and spiritual resilience which enables us to enjoy life and survive pain, suffering or disappointment. It is a positive sense of wellbeing and underlying belief in ours and others dignity and worth. It is influenced by our experience and our genetic inheritance.”*

(World Health Organisation)

Remember that mental health problems are ‘invisible’ and you cannot always tell just by looking at someone if they have a mental health problem

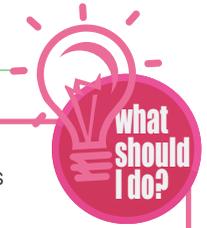


- ▶ Although a customer may have a relative or carer supporting them in their home, it is important to communicate with the customer directly. The relative or carer will support them as necessary.
- ▶ People with certain mental health problems may also have specific communication needs, for example you may find you need to repeat information or ask questions in a different way.
- ▶ Aggressive behaviour may be part of a customer’s illness: speak clearly and calmly, check their understanding and make they know you mean them no harm. Reduce distractions and ensure only one person speaks at a time.
- ▶ Don’t stare, react suddenly, whisper to others or keep them wondering.



For more information about mental health go to: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

6 Cultural Considerations



- › Find out in advance
- › Some women and some men might not feel comfortable being alone in the house with a stranger for a number of reasons.
- › **Be flexible** about appointment times so a friend or family member can be there if necessary. Always carry identification and introduce yourself by name.
- › Some cultures do not accept women in positions of authority – so may not accept information from a female Resident Liaison Officer. Always respect others cultural values when communicating.
- › Be mindful about the way you address customers and ensure you are professional and courteous.
- › Where a customer has identified themselves as Miss, Mrs, Ms or Mr you should address them as such. It is better to ask than guess. Any forms of discrimination, even if not intentional is illegal and completely unacceptable.
- › Where a customer speaks English as a second language, or doesn't speak much English, you may need to change the speed at which you speak or how you phrase things, or you may need to call your manager to arrange for an interpreter.
- › **Body language** is different in other cultures. For example, in some cultures it is disrespectful to shake hands or make eye contact. Don't be offended if a customer's body language appears rude or is unfamiliar to you.
- › In some cultures it is common for extended families to live together. Some homes will therefore be busy places and you will need to be extra clear about where you will be working and communicate this.
- › In some cultures it is usual to remove your shoes. If you cannot do this for PPE or health & safety reasons then explain this and be sure to wear plastic shoe covers.
- › **Respecting faith:** some customers practice their religions in their homes or rituals like washing before prayer. People may have rooms or parts of the house which are only used for prayer or worship. They will need to access certain parts of the homes at certain times and access to a water supply.
- › In some customers homes it's not acceptable to touch or move items of religious importance - always ask a customer before moving any items in a property. If you need to bring tools and materials in, agree a place to store them before you start work.

Don't refer to the customer with a particular characteristic; e.g. Muslim woman



Religion is often linked to ethnicity or culture, but this isn't always the case and we can't assume that because a person is of a particular ethnicity, that they hold particular beliefs or values

For more information about diversity and cultural considerations go to:
www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights

7 Hoarding

HELP!

People who hoard usually acquire a large number of items which they then have difficulty in discarding.

People hoard because they believe that an item will be useful or valuable in the future. They may feel it has sentimental value, is unique and irreplaceable, or too big a bargain to throw away. They may also consider an item a reminder that will jog their memory, thinking that without it they won't remember an important person or event. Sometimes they can't decide where something belongs, so it is better just to keep it.

Be aware that what, on the surface, appears to be a pile of rubbish, is often the hoarders most prized possessions.



- ▶ Be aware of signs/causes for concern.
- ▶ Report anything that makes you feel uncomfortable or something that doesn't feel quite right - no matter how small.
- ▶ If you feel you cannot work safely because of the hoarding, report your concerns immediately.
- ▶ Don't enter a property at all if you don't feel safe to do so.
- ▶ Record and report your observations.

Many people have large collections of items – the difference between collection and a hoarding problem can be whether these objects are accessible and can be used

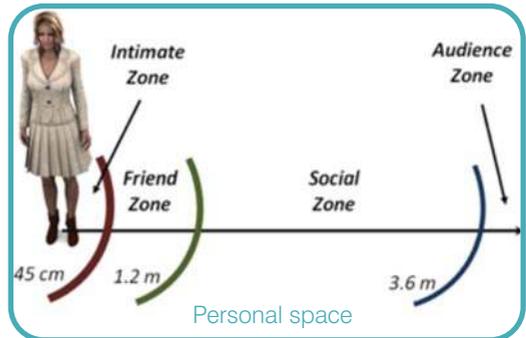
8 Personal Safety

Keeping Safe

- ▶ Always let colleagues know where you are going and avoid lone working.
- ▶ As you enter into a property assess the placement of yourself and the customers; think 'Person Objects, Place' (POP).
- ▶ Always explain the works and align expectations – use visual material and be honest about the time it will take.
- ▶ Leave doors to rooms open.
- ▶ Be professional and polite at all times.
- ▶ Stay confident, calm and professional: your behaviour can escalate or diffuse a situation.
- ▶ Be aware of what is going on around you.
- ▶ Report any concerns as soon as possible when you are safely away from the property.
- ▶ Look! Can you see any safety risks e.g. empty alcohol bottles, syringes?

Stay **SAFE**:

- S** Step back – think rationally what your response might be
- A** Assess (using POP model – Person, Object, Place)
- F** Formulate an exit plan – the best route if you need to leave in a hurry
- E** Evaluate options – be clear what your choices are and leave if you do not feel safe



People are often triggered into aggression by small things – for example being embarrassed in front of friends or other people or thinking they are being ignored

9 Safeguarding

HELP!

Safeguarding is protecting vulnerable adults or children from abuse or neglect. It also means making sure people are supported to get good access to health care, stay well and have full and happy lives.

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act defines a vulnerable adult as a person who is or may be in need of community care services because of their:

- › poor physical/mental health
- › learning disability, physical disability and/or sensory impairment
- › age
- › short or long term illness
- › misuse of drugs or alcohol
- › lost capacity to make decisions

Older people are often seen as an easy target and are less likely to identify abuse themselves or report it for fear of the consequences.

It can also be a person who is unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against serious harm or being taken advantage of, even if they live independently or without services.



- › You have an important role in spotting problems that might have been missed.
- › Be aware of any signs/causes for concern.
- › Call the emergency services if there is a genuine emergency.
- › Pass on any concerns however small they seem.
- › Report concerns/raise an alert to the provider.
- › Make a record of what you have noticed or has been disclosed to you as soon as possible (explain how you will report the disclosure and don't promise confidentiality).

Never work in a property where there are children but no adults present and never ask or allow a child who is present who appears to speak more English than their parent or guardian to interpret for you

For more information about adult safeguarding go to:
www.housinglin.org.uk/About HousingLIN/HASAA

10 Sensitive Contractors' Recognition



erosh APPROVED Status

If you would like to go a bit further in demonstrating your commitment to making home improvements a positive experience for older people, your staff can undertake training based on this guide and delivered by our partner, Sitra. We can then badge you with 'erosh APPROVED' status which will indicate that your staff working in older people's homes are mindful of some of the particular considerations and are aware of how to engage with older people appropriately and sensitively.

Please contact erosh at info@erosh.co.uk if you are interested in this option.

Joining erosh

You might also be interested in becoming a member of erosh. This will give you access to a whole range of information about housing and support for older people as well as opportunities to attend our network meetings held regularly throughout the UK.

For more information about erosh and joining go to: www.erosh.co.uk/join-erosh/

11 Golden Rules – Your Removable Guide

Task	Golden Rule	What could the customer be thinking?
Making an appointment	<p>Do I know who I am visiting? What is their name and what do they prefer to be called? What needs do they have? Do they know why I/we are coming? How long will the work take? Do they need to move things or prepare? Do I need to call anyone else about the visit? Use plain English and speak clearly</p>	<p>I might have a carer I might not have parking at my house I might have medical needs during the day or appointments I can't miss I don't know who you are, what work you are going to do and I am worried I can't hear the door I might not be able to get up to answer the door I don't have a mobile phone I can't lift anything to move it I don't want people to have my keys I have medical equipment which needs electricity</p>
Pre-arrival	<p>Where am I going to park? Do carers need to visit who may require the parking? Do I have the right equipment?</p>	<p>I need easy access to my car My carer is coming to give me lunch and they won't be able to park</p>
On arrival	<p>Sign in (sheltered scheme) Show proof of identity (photo with a date) and say who you are Wear your uniform Be mindful about the way you address customers and ensure you are professional and courteous</p>	<p>I don't know who this person is? Do they look trustworthy and professional? Are they pretending to be someone else? Why are they being rude to me?</p>
During works	<p>Be respectful, polite and courteous Don't swear or use offensive language Wear over shoes or take your shoes off Keep your work area separate and safe Ensure access routes are clear Never leave tools or equipment lying around Ask permission to move furniture Ask a customer to move breakable or valuable items Don't use the toilet without permission Don't use a radio or customers telephone Don't smoke Use your own power wherever possible Keep noise and dust to a minimum Keep the key code secure (sheltered scheme) Keep the customer informed especially if you are going to switch services off Never be left alone with children Don't accept a key to the property or leave doors open Keep the home secure while you are working</p>	<p>You wouldn't walk on your own carpet with muddy boots on I navigate around my home using the furniture – please don't move it! What if I trip over? I can't see you properly I can't remember why you are here You have left the door open You now know my key code I wonder if I can pop out while they are here to keep an eye on the children When are they going to switch the water/gas/electric off?</p>
Before leaving the house	<p>Tidy up Tell the customer you have finished and are leaving If a return visit is needed explain clearly why and when Remove all tools and equipment Sign out (sheltered scheme)</p>	<p>I didn't hear you leaving I don't know why you didn't finish the job What can I or can't I use? I really need to have my lunch now</p>





Notes

A series of 18 horizontal light green bars stacked vertically, providing space for handwritten notes.



Useful sources of help and information:

Action on Elder Abuse	www.elderabuse.org.uk
Action on Hearing Loss	www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk
Alzheimer's Society	www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiaguide
Equality & Human Rights Commission	www.equalityhumanrights.com
Housing & Safeguarding Adults Alliance	www.housinglin.org.uk/AboutHousingLIN/HASAA
RNIB	www.rnib.org.uk
Scope	www.scope.org.uk



Championing quality housing and support for our ageing population

www.erosh.co.uk

T: 0333 011 5804

E: info@erosh.co.uk



[@erosh_uk](https://twitter.com/erosh_uk)

Sponsor:  ion williams