

Fall Prevention for Social Housing Tenants

Summary Report

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Introduction to Falls

Falls are the biggest cause of accidental injury in the home, resulting in 80% of the hospital admissions for accidental injury to people aged 65 and over. They cost the NHS around £2.3 billion annually and impose an immeasurable burden on society through physical and psychological harm.

National statistics suggest that one in three over-65s, and one in two over-80s, will experience a fall each year. The number of people seriously affected by falls is set to rise as people live longer and populations age.

Trent & Dove

Based in East Staffordshire, Trent & Dove are a social housing provider with approximately 6,300 affordable properties including 4 sheltered housing schemes. Around a quarter of Trent & Dove customers are aged over 60.

Project Conception

Inspired by RoSPA's Fall Fighter campaign, the project aimed to increase awareness of the risks and consequences of falls in older people living in Trent & Dove properties and support them to implement personal prevention measures to reduce their risk of experiencing a fall. This aim was achieved through two main workstreams: educational sessions for customers, staff and community groups; and home visits to help customers identify and address hazards.

Fall Fighter Sessions

RoSPA Fall Fighter training materials were adapted and delivered in face-to-face sessions to Trent & Dove staff, customers, and at community groups. The sessions involved a presentation and informal discussion about falls, the risks and control measures. Running the sessions in-person was beneficial in tackling the stigma often attached to talking about falls, and boost engagement and accessibility.

Fall Fighter sessions empowered 181 attendees to identify and address fall hazards in their homes. Frontline staff were equipped to utilise their existing customer contact points and refer customers to the project. Attendees gained direct and indirect benefits from the sessions, as they could apply the risk reduction tips themselves and pass their learning on to family and friends.

Fall Prevention Home Visits

All customers aged over-60 were sent a postal introduction to the Fall Prevention Project inviting them to book a fall prevention home visit. Visits were also offered by referral from frontline Trent & Dove staff. Inclusive contact methods and reaching customers without relying on internet access was

a key focus during the project. The free visits were conducted by a dedicated Customer Health & Safety Advisor (CHSA) appointed to deliver the project.

Support available from Trent & Dove, Local Authority, NHS and third parties was catalogued prior to visits so a range of existing services could be signposted according to customer need. Home visits involved health and lifestyle questions and a room-by-room check for fall hazards. Check sheets were used to structure the conversation, introduce risk factors, and ascertain the customers current level of control. A framework based on the customer's responses helped identify additional controls where necessary, with a focus on using existing services and customer-led actions. Tailoring measures to individual circumstances and involving customers in decision making improved acceptance of the measures.

Concepts of risk management were introduced during visits, enabling customers to identify and address domestic hazards and respond to any future near misses. Support was also provided for issues beyond fall prevention which arose during the visit.

Once completed, the paper check sheets were left with tenants promoting ownership of the advisories and knowledge sharing with friends/relatives/carers. A photograph of each sheet was taken, and the data securely compiled. Customer profiling data was also collected including age, fall history, use of mobility aids, the type of property occupied, the extent of level-access, and number of bedrooms.

161 customers received home visits from the CHSA between September 2022 and May 2023. These were to houses, general-needs flats, bungalows, and sheltered scheme flats. 55% of customers visited had had a fall in the 12 months before their home visit, in excess of the NICE annual national averages. 60% were reliant on a mobility aid including sticks, scooter, walker, and crutches.

Advisories

Advice given during the visit was categorised based on the check sheet sections:

- A total of 242 individual advisories resulted from the health and lifestyle check sheet. The dominant category was the need to exercise (or increase daily activity levels).
- A total of 262 environmental advisories resulted from the room by room check sheet. The dominant categories were the need for grabrails, handrails and additional bannisters, and the poor condition of flooring (which encompassed the risks associated with rugs and mats).

All advice categories divided into individual and environmental risk controls are shown below.



Environmental advisories resulted in 86 property repairs/adaptations for Trent & Dove at an average cost of £63.13 per property.

Analysing the customer profiling data associated with the highest number of advisories revealed gaps in fall risk control for specific customer groups:

- Customers who had fallen in the 12 months before their visit were generally given more advisories than those who had not. This suggests that fallers were living with more uncontrolled fall risks, or their fall history had caused vulnerability which warranted a greater level of risk control than was in place.
- Older customers were generally given fewer advisories, which was largely due to better control of environmental risks.
- The level of environmental risk control varied more widely than that of individual risk. Fewest environmental advisories resulted from visits to scheme flats which are designed with many fall risk controls in place.

Evaluation of Impact

To evaluate the impact of visits, a telephone survey took place at least 3 months after the visit allowing time for advisories to be implemented and the effects to be felt. 98 customers took part, and they were asked a set of 5 questions with Yes/No/Unsure responses. The number of falls they had experienced since their visit was recorded and general comments and feedback were also noted.

A huge 69% reduction in falls was measured across all respondents to the survey (calculated by extrapolating the number of falls since the visit and comparing them with the falls experienced in the 12 months before the visit).

Customers suffering most falls before their visit measured the greatest reduction. When surveyed, 85% of customers who were previously fallers, had not fallen since their visit. Scheme tenants were amongst those experiencing the greatest reduction in falls highlighting the importance of individual risk control in reinforcing the effectiveness of pre-existing environmental controls.

In addition to fall reduction, customers reported other clear benefits. 90% of all respondents knew more about fall prevention after their visit; 91% felt safer at home and 73% felt less likely to have a fall at home. All survey question responses are shown below.



Though there was a link between feeling safer at home and having had a repair or property adaptation, not all customers who reported feeling safer had had one. The additional customer comments suggest that feeling safer might also be related to having a member of Trent & Dove staff visit the property, being more knowledgeable about risk management or addressing concerns aside from fall risk.

Other feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Over half of respondents used the opportunity to express their gratitude for the visit and taking the time to explain fall hazards and options for control. Customers said they felt cared for and found it helpful to share issues they might not have otherwise reported - these included suffering loneliness and social isolation, a tree in dangerous condition, and a bird's nest in loft space which had gone unnoticed due to the customer's sensory impairment. Taking opportunities to provide early intervention on repairs boosts customer satisfaction and probably provides long-term cost savings.

The project resulted in other 'added value' outcomes, including:

- Early intervention on physical, psychological, and safeguarding issues.
- Establishing positive relationships with customers.
- Enabling customers to access a range of health and wellbeing support.
- With support, customers are likely to be better able to care for themselves and the property.
- Supporting customers to obtain financial support for example Disabled Facilities Grants
- Starting conversations about suitability of larger family homes enabling customers to make timely and well-informed decisions on their health and housing.

Recommendations

Clear recommendations based on the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in this project are:

- Target older customers or those who are suffering most falls to gain the greatest reduction in falls. Other indicators of risk perception like moving into scheme flat make useful targeting criteria.
- Tailor fall prevention advice to customer circumstances and introduce risk management concepts to reinforce control.
- Provide in-person visits to improve relationships with customers and take opportunities to provide early intervention on a variety of physical, psychological, and safeguarding issues.
- Signpost customers to appropriate health, wellbeing, and financial support services. Network with community partners to improve the scope of services.
- Remove barriers to information sharing to empower customers in making timely, well-informed decisions.
- Make property adaptation policies clear and communicate them to customers to encourage downsizing when appropriate.
- Reframe falls at home as avoidable - raise awareness of their causes and encourage people to take action to prevent them.