

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

6 DECEMBER 2011

REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING

REPORT OF HEAD OF LANDLORD SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB2196 - Supported Housing Priorities & Emerging Issues - 29 June 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides an update on the progress being made on the review of sheltered housing and seeks authority for officers to distribute a consultation questionnaire to all sheltered tenants about the future designation of the Council's housing stock. Members have previously instructed officers to undertake this review to ensure that best possible use is made of the limited supply of housing available. The report outlines the issues faced in balancing the demands from younger applicants with the wishes and needs of the existing older tenants and outlines a proposed timetable which will allow Committee to make a final decision on changes to stock designation at its next meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the informal feedback from sheltered tenants be noted.
- 2 That the second phase of the consultation exercise with the tenants in sheltered housing be approved.
- 3 That the Supported Housing Informal Policy Group be asked to consider the sheltered scheme designations and make recommendations to the next meeting of Cabinet (Housing) Committee.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This interim report discusses the review of Sheltered Housing which is being undertaken at the request of Cabinet (Housing) Committee and the Supported Housing Informal Member Policy Group.
- 1.2. A programme of informal consultation has been carried out with the existing tenants of sheltered housing, and authority is sought to proceed with the formal stage of the consultation exercise, which together with the results of an Equality Impact Assessment, will form the basis for final recommendations on stock designation
- 1.3. It is proposed that a further report be submitted to Cabinet (Housing) Committee on 1 February 2012 for final decisions on any suggested changes to designations of sheltered housing schemes.

2. THE NEED FOR A REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING

- 2.1. The population of Winchester continues to age, yet there is inconsistent demand for sheltered housing. The introduction of choice-based lettings has helped reduce the number of 'hard to let' homes, but there remains a surfeit of supply of sheltered housing over the level of demand, certainly when compared to the demand for 'general needs' accommodation. There are a number of factors which influence this, but location, accessibility and lack of facilities all contribute to the problem of low demand for certain schemes.
- 2.2. This is no doubt due partly to the fact that certain Council schemes were never designed to cater for the level of assisted living many sheltered tenants now require. Some schemes are no different in character to general needs communal flats (except for hard wired alarms) and offer no additional support facilities.
- 2.3. There is considerable unmet demand for one bedroomed accommodation from younger applicants registered for general needs housing. Members and officers are therefore agreed that there is a need to rationalise the sheltered housing stock. It is recognised of course that the Council needs to be sensitive to the needs and wishes of the existing tenants who live in our sheltered housing schemes.

- 2.4. It is intended that there should be future investment, where possible, in upgrading the facilities in the sheltered housing which is retained, so that the accommodation offered is as suitable as it can be to meet the needs of the elderly population of the District, particularly in relation to accessibility. In addition, the Council may be in a position in the future, either directly or in partnership with a registered provider, to consider new developments of purpose-built older persons' housing, including Extra Care accommodation.

### 3. TENANT CONSULTATION

- 3.1. A two-phase programme of consultation is underway with sheltered tenants. The first phase consists of discussions with groups of tenants at each scheme. The second phase will involve individual questionnaires sent to every sheltered tenant.
- 3.2. The consultation feedback will be analysed and an Equality Impact Assessment undertaken. Proposals will then be formulated to de-designate some elements of the sheltered housing stock to enable it to be allocated to "general needs" tenants.
- 3.3. The informal phase of consultation has shown that tenants in sheltered schemes recognise the challenges the Council faces in making most effective use of its housing stock. Many also acknowledge that younger people equally need somewhere to live. Some understandable concerns were expressed about the impact of younger people on sheltered tenants, including an increase in noise; reduction in security; clashes of lifestyle and a growth in visitor numbers.
- 3.4. There has also been some consistency in the view that some schemes lend themselves better to declassification than others. For example, allowing younger people to move into schemes comprising individual blocks, would be less likely to generate conflict between tenants than opening up access to 'court' style schemes with a single communal entrance.
- 3.5. A questionnaire has been prepared for distribution to all existing sheltered housing tenants. The consultation will run for a period of two weeks, with pre-paid envelopes supplied and returned questionnaires qualifying for a prize draw for a High Street Voucher as an incentive for tenants to participate.

### 4. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 4.1. Changing the designation of sheltered housing schemes could be considered to represent a substantive change in the delivery of the supported housing service, and an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will therefore be undertaken to consider how existing and prospective service users might be affected.

- 4.2. The EIA will take account of the outcomes of the tenant consultation exercise and the results will form part of the recommendations report.

5. TIMETABLE FOR PROGRESS

- 5.1. The timetable for action is as follows:

29 November 2011	Close of informal feedback gathering from sheltered schemes
6 December 2011	Interim report to Cabinet (Housing) Committee
7 December 2011	Consultation questionnaire to be sent to all sheltered tenants
13 December 2011	Equality Impact Assessment Meeting 1
21 December 2011	End of consultation period
19 – 30 December 2011	Collation of consultation results
w/c 2 January 2012	Equality Impact Assessment Meeting 2
w/c 9 January 2012	Supported Housing Informal Policy Group to consider recommendations
w/c 23 January 2012	Validation of Equality Impact Assessment
1 February 2012	Cabinet (Housing) Committee to agree amendments to scheme designations

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

7. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 7.1. The sheltered housing service supports the priorities and objectives set out in the Community Strategy and the Council's Change Plans. The review is relevant in particular to Active Communities Theme 2 to "support local people in accessing high quality, affordable housing"

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1. The re-designation of some dwellings as suitable for general needs occupation will represent a better use of the limited housing resources. It could also help to obviate the need for capital expenditure on some premises to bring them to the standards of accessibility and level of facilities necessary for sustainable sheltered housing.

- 8.2. The focussing of resources upon the stock of housing retained as sheltered will enable more to be achieved, making sheltered housing a realistic and attractive proposition for older housing applicants.
- 8.3. The offering of certain properties to general needs tenants is anticipated to minimise void times. This will benefit all tenants by generating additional rent income to the Housing Revenue Account.
- 8.4. It should be noted that changing the designation of any sheltered scheme has the potential of removing the exemption for units in the scheme to be exempt from the Right to Buy rules. However, many schemes have already lost this exemption as a result of the policy to let units to "over 40 year olds". This exemption is important for those schemes that the Council wishes to retain as true sheltered housing. However, in itself, it is not considered to be sufficient to prevent de-designation of schemes where the fundamental design and access restrictions make them unpopular for older people.

9. TACT COMMENT

- 9.1. TACT considered this issue at its meeting on 16 November.
- 9.2. TACT in general accepts that a review of Sheltered Housing is required, and of course is concerned that another Whitewings situation does not occur, at the same time accepting that the situation is not quite the same.
- 9.3. However, loss of large sums of money to the HRA account in such difficult times would be of major concern, so it is good that the Council are doing their best to prevent any further loss of revenue.
- 9.4. TACT feels that when a person decides to move into a sheltered scheme, from a home they have lived in for years, that they had often more rooms and space, they end up paying more for a smaller property, plus additional charges as well. This could be part of the reason tenants are not rushing to take them on.
- 9.5. A surfeit of supply of sheltered housing over the level of demand, has to be looked into with some urgency, hence the review, and with a high demand for general needs accommodation one would expect the situation could be resolved easily, unfortunately it appears it is not to be the case.
- 9.6. TACT knows that the Council are putting a lot of thought and effort into this review, and hope a worthwhile solution can be found.
- 9.7. TACT will be interested and involved with this review over the coming months, and look forward to the findings with interest.