

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

1 FEBRUARY 2012

REVIEW OF DESIGNATION OF SHELTERED HOUSING

REPORT OF HEAD OF LANDLORD SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB2265 (HSG) - Review of Sheltered Housing - 6 December 2011

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report proposes re-classifying some of the housing stock currently designated as sheltered. It summarises the outcome of the tenant consultation, reports on the outcome of the Equality Impact Assessment process and takes account of consideration of the issues by the Supported Housing Working Group. The proposed revisions to scheme designations seek to make best use of the limited supply of council housing, whilst ensuring that the needs of older people are adequately catered for and that the authority can target investment more effectively to ensure that the retained sheltered housing provides good quality suitable accommodation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the recommended designation of properties as suitable for letting as sheltered or general needs accommodation shown in Appendix 1 to the Report be adopted.
- 2 That vacancies within those schemes proposed for de-designation but which are currently occupied exclusively by older people, be promoted initially as suitable for those aged over 60 years, but made available to general needs applicants if they prove hard to let.
- 3 That the policy of letting specified properties to applicants aged 40 years or over be discontinued, and all such properties be re-designated as suitable for general needs applicants, subject to 4 below.

- 4 That in respect of the five schemes referred to in Paragraph 3.3 of the report, lettings be restricted to persons aged 60 or over, and delegated authority be given to the Head of Landlord Services to remove this restriction in the light of future demand from such applicants.
- 5 That for the purposes of this exercise delegated authority be given to the Head of Landlord Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Landlord Services to determine a definition of “Hard to Let” properties
- 6 That the Head of Strategic Housing be authorised to extend the advertising period where required for sheltered housing to allow sufficient time for tenants who rely on support from visitors to make bids.

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE1 FEBRUARY 2012REVIEW OF DESIGNATION OF SHELTERED HOUSINGREPORT OF HEAD OF LANDLORD SERVICES1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report discusses the outcome of the review of sheltered housing which has been undertaken by officers and the Supported Housing Informal Member / Officer Working Group. The Committee is asked to make a decision on how properties currently used as sheltered housing should be reclassified.
- 1.2. A two-stage consultation programme has been undertaken with the existing tenants of sheltered housing, and Members are asked to take account of this, along with the results of the Equality Impact Assessment (summarised in Section 5 of this Report), in coming to a decision.
- 1.3. The review has been carried out in response to the need to consider competing demands for council housing and the unsuitability of some of the older persons' accommodation to meet the needs of an ageing population in the long-term.
- 1.4. Further background to the review was given in two previous reports referred to in the 'Recent References' section above.

2. THE RATIONALE FOR DECLASSIFYING SOME SHELTERED PROPERTIES

- 2.1. The Council faces a number of challenges over best use of housing stock. The demand for housing continues at a significant level. There are currently 4416 households registered for rehousing, including 650 applicants over the age of 65. The table below (extracted from the Hampshire Homechoice Managers' Report – January 2012) shows the spread of demand for homes according to the number of bedrooms required

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5bed	Total
Winchester	2764	1364	277	11	0	4416

- 2.2. The officers who are responsible for dealing with the re-letting of vacant properties report that the response rate to advertisements for one-

bedroomed sheltered flats is significantly lower than the response rate on an equivalent general needs flat.

- 2.3. The housing stock dedicated to older people varies in terms of its suitability for this client group. The Council has a number of purpose-built schemes which offer good accessibility within the flats and communal areas, a safe and secure environment and communal facilities. Other properties, however, are less suitable due to there being no lift access to upper floors, lack of communal facilities etc. There are no proposals to change designations of any older persons' bungalows.
- 2.4. As well as adding to the number of units available for letting to general needs applicants, another objective in declassifying some sheltered properties is to enable capital resources for property improvements to be targeted more effectively at the retained schemes to make them more 'fit for purpose' in meeting the needs of older people. Proposed improvements are likely to include items such as provision of lifts, new communal facilities and improvements to security arrangements and assistive technology.

3. PROPOSALS FOR DECLASSIFICATION

- 3.1. Appendix 1 shows a summary of the sheltered housing stock with recommendations on future use of the accommodation within each scheme and Committee is requested to endorse these proposals. Albert Court has been included for completeness as, whilst it has no sheltered tenants remaining, it has never formally been de-designated.
- 3.2. It is recommended that the current practice of offering certain vacant dwellings to applicants over the age of 40 years should be discontinued. It is proposed instead that schemes should be classified as suitable for occupation exclusively by people aged over 60 years or alternatively let to general needs applicants. This will provide greater clarity for applicants, tenants, officers and Members.
- 3.3. Within the group of schemes proposed to be opened up to general needs applicants, there are five schemes which are currently occupied exclusively by older people, but have characteristics which make them less suitable for long-term use by that client group. The five schemes are Monks Road; King Alfred Place; Bartholomew Close; Simonds Court and Chester Court. Factors including remoteness from other services, the requirement to climb stairs or steep hills and lack of communal facilities all contribute to the uncertainty over their suitability. Scheme attributes are shown for information at Appendix 2.
- 3.4. For these five schemes, measures are being investigated by officers to allow for a longer period of advertising, giving a better opportunity for bids to be submitted by or on behalf of older people in housing need. This reflects one of the outcomes from the Equality Impact Validation reported below. Taking that into account, along with the wishes of the existing tenants, it is proposed to restrict lettings at these schemes to

older people in the short-term and whilst that remains sustainable. Officers will monitor demand for vacant flats within these schemes and if future lettings generate little or no demand from older applicants in housing need, then properties may be deemed suitable for advertising to general needs applicants.

4. TENANT CONSULTATION

- 4.1. A comprehensive consultation programme has been undertaken with all the Council's sheltered tenants. This involved face-to-face meetings in the common rooms at each scheme, followed by a questionnaire sent by post to every sheltered tenant.
- 4.2. A total of 696 consultation questionnaires were sent out of which 416 were returned. (59.8% response) The response rate from each scheme is shown below:

Airlie Corner	7	Blanchard Road	6	Chester Court	20
Chiltern Court	10	Danemark Court	19	Drummond Close	6
Eastacre	19	Firmstone Road	16	Godson House	20
Greens Close	11	Harwood Place	5	Hyde Gate	11
Hyde Lodge	21	King Alfred Place	3	King Harold Court	19
Lawn House	16	Lisle Court	5	Makins Court	18
Mildmay Court	20	Normandy Court	19	Penton Place	11
Richard Moss House	24	Simonds Court	17	Spring House Close	25
The Valley	10	White Wings Hse	7		

- 4.3. From the returns received, 289 (61%) tenants felt that the age limit in sheltered housing should remain at 60 years, compared with 113 (39%) who felt the age limit should change or who had no preference. 52 % of respondents considered that opening up sheltered schemes to general needs applicants may help those on the waiting list. In relation to the questions on the choice-based lettings system, 264 respondents (70%) said they do not have a computer, although of the tenants who answered the question only 32% felt unable to apply for rehousing through Hampshire Homechoice.
- 4.4. A further consultation exercise is currently underway with the 650 applicants over the age of 60 registered for rehousing in Winchester on Hampshire Homechoice Register. This consultation deals with two service areas, seeking to understand applicants' housing aspirations and to ascertain their degree of confidence and accessibility in managing the bidding arrangements under choice-based lettings.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. The process of removing the sheltered designation from parts of the housing stock constitutes a significant change in practice, and has therefore been subjected to an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

- 5.2. The EIA has been submitted to a validation panel comprising of relevant officers [Head of Organisational Development; The Council's Equalities Consultant; Head of Customer Service; Head of Corporate Communications and Housing Projects Coordinator] where it was agreed, subject to clarification being obtained on how a property is defined as 'hard to let'. Final validation will be completed once the required clarification can be submitted. The outcome of the validation process is shown in the remainder of this section of the report.

Impact Assessment – Key findings and Mitigating Measures

- 5.3. The changes proposed to the service were impact assessed over two meetings in December 2011 and January 2012 and this was validated on 18 January 2012. The key findings of the impact assessment were as follows.
- 5.4. The assessment found that there were potentially several positive impacts of the proposed changes:
- Improved mix of households more representative of the community, leading to improved participation by all groups and fostering good relations.
 - Improved facilities at those schemes which remain sheltered.
 - Possibility of improved community feel for existing residents with more diverse mix of households within scheme.
 - Increased housing availability for younger, single households.
 - Increased housing availability of units protected by entry systems for people escaping domestic abuse.
 - Increased housing availability for people on low income and benefits.
 - Improved options for those with caring responsibilities and improved support networks for those who require care.
 - Wider spectrum of housing options for older persons.
- 5.5. Possible negative impacts were identified as follows, along with mitigating measures:
- Increased competition for vacant sheltered units. This would be as a consequence of the reduced availability of sheltered units – but impact should be minimal in that units removed from sheltered supply would be those that were unpopular.
 - Increased competition for units of re-designated schemes. Officers assessed that older persons may be disadvantaged if they are interested in a particular scheme, as they will face increased competition from all age groups bidding for units currently restricted

to over 60's only. However, those schemes re-designated are those which are currently hard to let.

Younger households will benefit from increased availability of units of accommodation suitable for smaller households. People wishing to escape domestic abuse could benefit from the availability of units with increased security through door entry schemes and greater proportion of residents on site.

Again the impact is likely to be minimal as these units were not popular with older people and mitigated by the introduction of an interim level of housing between fully sheltered and general needs.

- Lifestyle clashes. It is worth noting that in the experience of the officers, lifestyle clashes, antisocial behaviour and noise (which tenants often raise as the route of their concerns about letting to younger tenants) are equally possible from tenants aged over 60. It was clear from the meetings that tenants' concerns were based on a lack of awareness of the measures available to officers to tackle problems of this nature.

The Validation Panel wanted to highlight the positive progress which has been made in the Council's approach to responding to anti-social behaviour. The Tenancy Services Team are more able to respond effectively to complaints of this nature through the development of working protocols with partners such as the Police and other agencies and utilising the tools available to manage tenancies such as introductory tenancies. Raising awareness of these developments is important, along with an understanding that it is possible to deal effectively with one of the main concerns raised through the consultation.

- Security concerns. Through the consultation, tenants expressed concerns about security of the schemes by opening up them up to under 60's. If the changes were to result in issues regarding security, these would be addressed through the estate improvement programme.
- Tenants with dementia. The Validation Panel felt that it would be tenants with disabilities who would be most affected by the proposed changes. For some groups (those with sensory impairment, physical disabilities) there would be benefits through improved facilities at the schemes which would remain sheltered and where funding would improve the facilities available such as internal hearing loops and lifts.

For others (such as those suffering from dementia or mental illness) at the schemes re-designated, the change would be more unsettling. While there is always the option to move to one of the improved schemes and discussions have taken place to allocate a higher banding under Hampshire Home Choice (HHC)

to ensure tenants can move quickly, it is understood that moving in itself could be stressful and cause confusion for those with conditions such as dementia.

In recognition of the needs of tenants with dementia, it is hoped that tenants who are at risk of experiencing additional stress as a consequence of this condition would be able to benefit from the introduction of the specialist provision currently being considered by Winchester City Council, in partnership with Hampshire County Council Adult Services. This could entail them being offered a place in a scheme designed to support the needs of those with dementia. This would enhance the support already available through the support planning process.

- Definition of Hard to Let - The Validation Group asked that a definition be established as to what constitutes 'hard to let' with reference to those schemes which could be re-designated by the Head of Landlord Services on this basis. (The adoption of Recommendation 5 will allow a suitable definition of what constitutes a property being Hard to Let. This will enable the EIA to be finally validated)

The Group proposed that Cabinet (Housing) Committee approve a measure to extend the advertising period to allow sufficient time for tenants who rely on support from visitors to make bids. This would allow decisions on de-designation to be taken with a greater degree of confidence that the scheme is hard to let and older people would not be significantly disadvantaged as a result.

6. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS AND CONSEQUENTIAL MATTERS

- 6.1. Where applicable, a letter will be sent to the tenants of the affected schemes to advise them of the change in designation of their scheme. The letter will explain the background to the declassification and offer the opportunity for older tenants to move to alternative sheltered housing schemes if they wish to do so. Because of the nature of the changes, no tenant would have to leave their property unless they wished to do so, as effectively the proposals seek to derestrict occupancy controls, rather than add new restrictions.
- 6.2. It is proposed that the changes in designation should take effect as soon as possible. However, officers will need to consider whether any existing tenants have expressed a wish to move to another scheme before offering a vacant flat to a general needs applicant.
- 6.3. Under the rules governing Right to Buy, certain sheltered schemes and properties are excluded and tenants are not permitted to buy such properties. The rules relate to groups of dwellings which are particularly suitable (given their location, features, etc.) for occupation by elderly

persons, which have habitually been let to elderly persons, and which have a resident warden or non-resident warden with call-out facility and a common room (i.e. “sheltered schemes”). Designating some schemes as general needs will therefore mean such group schemes where the exemption currently applies will now lose the exemption and RTB applications may be received for these properties. For those schemes in which some properties had already been let to non-sheltered tenants, the Right to Buy exemption had already been lost. However no properties have so far been sold under these provisions.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

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

- 7.1. The provision of sheltered housing and this review of the service supports the principles set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council’s Change Plans. It contributes significantly to the Health & Wellbeing and Inclusive Society agendas.
- 7.2. The proposal to re-designate some properties as suitable for letting to general needs applicants responds to Active Communities Theme 2 to “support local people in accessing high quality, affordable housing”.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1. Changes in the arrangements for funding council housing will offer the Council the opportunity to carry out improvements to its housing stock, including sheltered housing. By identifying the properties most suitable for retention as sheltered, expenditure can be most effectively targeted and used to upgrade those premises which best meet the needs of older people.
- 8.2. Through increasing the number of flats available for letting to general needs applicants, the Council will be making better use of its housing resources to meet the demand from younger people for an affordable home.
- 8.3. The offering of additional properties to general needs applicants is expected to generate higher demand for certain properties, helping to minimise void times and increasing the flow of rent income to the Housing Revenue Account.

9. TACT COMMENT

- 9.1. TACT has not had the opportunity in one of its meetings to comment upon this final report. However, TACT and the Sheltered Housing Forum have representation at the Supported Housing Working Group where these issues have been discussed in some depth.

APPENDIX 1 Recommendations on Designation of Sheltered Housing
Stock

APPENDIX 2 Scheme Characteristics

Proposals for Remodelling

CAB2289 (HSG)
Appendix 1

FULL SHELTERED SCHEMES			Total Units No < 60		GENERAL NEEDS
Total Units	No. Sheltered				
49	49	Richard Moss House	24	24	Albert Court
38	38	Hyde Lodge	21	18	Colson Close
36	35	Danemark Court	39	29	Harwood Place
36	34	Godson House	37	23	Penton Place
34	34	Mildmay Court	29	13	Firmstone Road (Flats)
37	37	Normandy Court	8	5	Airlie Corner (Flats)
38	37	Greens Close (inc. Blanchard)	17	7	Lisle Court (Flats)
33	32	King Harold Court	37	21	The Valley
40+12(FW)	51	Makins Court	28	15	Drummond (Flats)
18	15	Hyde Gate	25	7	Chiltern Court
37	36	Spring House Close	2	1	St. John Street
36	31	Eastacre	35	0	Chester Court
19	18	White Wings House	8	0	Monks Road
37	36	Lawn House	13	0	Simonds Court (Flats)
<u>500</u>	<u>483</u>	<u>Total</u>	14	0	Bartholomew Close
483	Flats retained as sheltered		8	0	King Alfred Place
		BUNGALOWS	<u>349</u>	<u>163</u>	<u>Total</u>
25		Pine Road	349	Flats made available to General Needs	
39		Springvale			
16		Stoney Lane			
27		Northfields			
18		Southbrook Cottages & Meadow View			
25		Wonston Close			
57		Bungalows @ Firmstone (16) Airlie (10)			
		Drummond (9) Lisle (5)			
		Simonds (17)			
207	Bungalows retained as sheltered				

Scheme Characteristics

Scheme Name	Parking Provision	Communal Entrance	Communal Facilities	Use of Communal Facilities	Vacant Staff Property	No's of Adapted Properties (as 2008)	DDA Compliant Status
Airlie Corner	3 spaces. Possible space for extra parking in green area.	Individual access to flats. Access to communal garden is limited.	Lounge/kitchen. guest room garden/patio. Washing line area is very neglected.	Limited use of lounge. Some flats access the washing area through the lounge. Guest room not used.	Currently let to general needs family.	None	Communal adaptations maybe required.
Bartholomew Close	Street parking only.	Block entrance system.	None	N/A	N/A	1 (over bath shower plus stair lift to upper floor).	Compliant.
Chiltern Court	6 spaces.	Block entrance system.	Lounge, Kitchen, toilets, guest room.	Regularly used by internal & external agencies.	Currently let to general needs family.	1 (<i>lower access shower</i>)	Communal adaptations maybe required.
Colson Close	6 spaces	Block entrance system	Lounge, kitchen, toilets, guest room, concrete garden.	None	Currently let to Stonham HA	1 (<i>lower access shower</i>)	Communal adaptations maybe required.
Drummond Close	8 spaces additional parking program underway	Individual front doors.	Lounge, kitchen, guest room, toilets, concrete garden.	Limited use	Currently let to general needs family.	2 (<i>lower access showers</i>)	Communal adaptations maybe required.
Firmstone Road- Lower (No's 3-51)	Street parking only.	Individual front doors.	Lounge, kitchen, office, toilets.	Limited use	Currently let to Stonham HA	None	Communal adaptations maybe required.
Firmstone Road- Upper (No's 24-62)	Street parking only.	Individual front doors.	Lounge, Kitchen, toilets.	None	Currently let to general needs family.	3 (<i>lower access showers</i>)	Communal adaptations maybe required.

Scheme Name	Parking Provision	Communal Entrance	Communal Facilities	Use of Communal Facilities	Vacant Staff Property	No's of Adapted Properties (as 2008)	DDA Compliant Status
Harwood Place	10 spaces.	Block entrance system.	Lounge, kitchen, guest room, toilets, office, communal drying areas.	Limited use	Currently let to general needs family.	3 (2 lower access showers 1 over bath shower)	Communal adaptations maybe required.
Hyde Gate	7 Spaces	Block entrance system	Lounge, kitchen, guest room, toilets, communal garden	Regularly Used & shared with 3 other schemes	Currently let to Stonham HA	None	Communal adaptations maybe required.
King Alfred Place	Street parking.	Block entrance system.	Communal garden/patio area.	N/A	N/A	1 (lower access shower)plus stair lift to upper floor.	Compliant
Lisle Court	5 spaces, (3 currently disabled)	Individual access to flats.	Lounge, kitchen, office, communal garden/washing area.	Limited use	Currently let to general needs family.	2 (lower access showers)	Communal adaptations maybe required.
Monks Road	Street parking.	Block entrance system.	Communal enclosed garden.	N/A	N/A	None	Compliant
Penton Place	14 spaces	Block entrance system	Lounge, kitchen, guest room, toilets	Used by Basic Banks	Currently let to Stonham HA	8 (5 lower access showers 3 over bath showers)	Communal adaptations maybe required
Simonds Court	9 spaces. Space for extra	Block entrance system	Lounge, kitchen, guest room,	Limited use	Currently let to general	5 (4 lower access showers)	Communal adaptations

Scheme Name	Parking Provision	Communal Entrance	Communal Facilities	Use of Communal Facilities	Vacant Staff Property	No's of Adapted Properties (as 2008)	DDA Compliant Status
	parking		laundry, toilets,		needs family	1 over bath shower)plus stair lift to upper floor	maybe required
St Johns Street (Chester Court)	Street parking.	Block entrance system	None (use main scheme)	Limited use	None	None	Yes
The Valley	7 spaces, Possible space for extra parking.	Block entrance system	Lounge, kitchen, office, communal garden/washing area.	Limited use	Currently let to general needs family.	12 (9 lower access showers 3 over bath showers)	Communal adaptations maybe required