

CABINET

17 September 2003

PROPOSED PILOT PROJECT TO ALLOCATE 'DIFFICULT TO LET' GROUND FLOOR  
SHELTERED FLATS TO CERTAIN TYPES OF 'HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS'

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF HEALTH AND HOUSING

Contact Officers: Ken Kershaw Tel No: 01962 848340; Luke Bingham 01962 848298

RECENT REFERENCES:

Housing Performance Improvement Committee: 12 November 2002 Report HO5.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report details the Council's successful policy to tackle 'difficult to let' first floor sheltered accommodation by allocating it to persons in housing need but below pensionable age.

It concludes that the approach should be extended to include certain types of homeless households who would otherwise have to reside in temporary accommodation including unsatisfactory and expensive bed and breakfast accommodation.

Schemes for inclusion, post the evaluation of a Pilot Project focusing on Colson Close, Winchester and Harwood Place, Kings Worthy, are to be those previously identified as suitable and listed in Appendix 2. These are Schemes where the Council is regularly experiencing high percentage of vacant ground floor flats and it has been the practice to allocate first floor accommodation to non pensioners.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That a pilot scheme be undertaken at the Schemes at Colson Close, Winchester and Harwood Place, Kings Worthy where ground floor “hard to let” sheltered accommodation is made available for temporary use by homeless persons considered suitable for this type of accommodation by the Director of Health and Housing.
2. That an evaluation of the pilot project be undertaken by the Housing Performance Improvement Committee before consideration is given to extending the approach to the other sheltered schemes listed in Appendix 2.
3. That the vacant former Scheme Managers’ flats at the above Schemes be allocated on a secure tenancy basis to families of a suitable size.
4. That any future implications for staffing be referred to Personnel Committee or Cabinet as appropriate.

## CABINET

17 September 2003

### PROPOSED PILOT PROJECT TO ALLOCATE 'HARD TO LET' GROUND FLOOR SHELTERED FLATS TO CERTAIN TYPES OF 'HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS'

#### REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF HEALTH AND HOUSING

##### DETAIL:

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Sussex Street Hostel Informal Member Officer Working Group expressed concerns at the increasing use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in assisting homeless persons and the inevitable escalating costs to the General Fund. This at a time when the Government has set targets for reduction of the use of B & B for homeless families.
- 1.2. Arising from their discussion on the alternatives to B & B Members were interested in gauging the potential of extending and/or adapting its highly successful initiative in tackling 'hard to let' sheltered accommodation in the future to include homeless households.
- 1.3. The purpose of this report, therefore, is to bring Cabinet up to date with the scheme as well as proposing its further extension to include the homeless, with the specific aims of maximising this key element of housing stock to meet actual need, as well as avoiding substantial rent loss, and escalating B & B costs to the General Fund.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1. Report HO2576(HM) of the 5th September 1996 drew Members' attention to the issue of supply and demand for sheltered accommodation and the problems associated with tackling the issue of 'difficult to let' sheltered housing.
- 2.2. Dislike of bedsits, shared bathrooms, location and access to facilities are some of the reasons for schemes becoming difficult to let. Although they might have been acceptable and popular when they were built, they are no longer, as older persons now expect higher standards, and are more inclined to exercise their right to choose where they live.
- 2.3. Some schemes were badly sited and were at distance from shops, transport and other amenities. Rural areas posed special problems where there did not appear to be enough older persons in the surrounding area to fill the schemes.
- 2.4. Other reasons were over provision of sheltered housing in the area (Stanmore), the high cost of service charges at some schemes and most importantly the growing emphasis by Government on Community Care and Supporting People in their own homes.
- 2.5. Frequently only a part of a scheme proved 'difficult to let' such as first floor flats when a scheme lacked a lift. There were, however, often a combination of those factors listed above at work.

- 2.6. It was, therefore, proposed that difficult to let sheltered units, usually first floor accommodation without the service of lifts could be let to single persons in housing need over 45 years and without resident children. It was recognised that the protection from the right to buy, which generally applies to sheltered schemes, would no longer apply to the sections that were made available for let in this way.
- 2.7. Recognition was, however, given to the fact that although some long term vacancies would continue to occur within the Council's relatively new sheltered stock, where all dwellings situated above ground floor are served by lifts, such schemes should not be included within any project.
- 2.8. Such accommodation was deemed by Members to be appropriate and adequate in meeting the future needs of the District's ageing population (see Appendix 1 for a list of those schemes identified for retention as sheltered stock).
- 2.9. Before embarking upon such a policy, the Committee was advised that there were a number of issues which would have to be resolved.

### 3. Pilot Project

#### (1) Sample Schemes

- 3.1. It was suggested that an exercise of this type and size demanded a cautious approach and could not be accomplished overnight.
- 3.2. Approval was granted to the pilot project with a sample of schemes which initially commenced with Penton Place, Highcliffe and The Valley, Stanmore, and over time could be extended to other schemes but excluding those listed in Appendix 1.

#### (2) Tenant Selection Process

- 3.3. If Officers were to avoid potential problems arising from the perceived incompatibility of lifestyles amongst the older and younger tenants they would require delegated authority to apply discretion in the allocation process; ie. to avoid what might be described as insensitive lettings.
- 3.4. Approval was granted for the Officers to depart from the purely housing need criteria for allocation purposes and to apply greater flexibility in lettings of this nature.

#### (3) Staffing Issues

- 3.5. With the passage of time recognition was given to the fact that the balance of ages and dependency levels of residents in such schemes would shift with an increasing proportion of fit, younger tenants occupying first floor accommodation.
- 3.6. The continued presence of resident scheme managers in such schemes would therefore no longer be necessary.
- 3.7. As a result of the initiative, the pattern of the Council's sheltered housing service would change, with some scheme managers living 'off site' and covering more than one scheme, but with a similar number of clients within their charge, spread over, say, 2 or 3 schemes, all within reasonable travelling distance.
- 3.8. The standard of service would not, however, be compromised with the advance of systems for two way speech communication between older tenants and the Community Alarm Service, Mobile Scheme Managers could be dispatched in

emergencies and in any event mobiles were already covering nights, weekends, holiday and sickness periods.

#### 4. Tenant Consultation

- 4.1. Members were alerted to the fact it would be necessary to conduct tenant consultation exercises amongst those scheme residents who would be affected by the changes.
- 4.2. The likely results of the consultative meetings were fairly predictable, ie. opposition to the proposals based upon perceived problems created by the presence of younger neighbours.
- 4.3. Members were concerned about lost rental and service charges arising from leaving flats vacant. The consultation revealed that those concerns were shared by a number of tenants. Generally tenants expressed a measured acceptance of the proposals.
- 4.4. Approval was granted by Members to proceed even where tenant dissatisfaction with the proposals was recorded. Members' considered that 'If flats were occupied the Council would be receiving the appropriate rent and persons in housing need would have a home'.

#### 5. Current Position

- 5.1. Since embarking upon the initiative at Penton Place and The Valley sheltered housing schemes in December 1996, 66 first floor flats have been let in 11 sheltered housing schemes as detailed in Appendix 2 to this Report.
- 5.2. In fact, at Albert Court only one flat is occupied by an older person who was over 60 years of age at the commencement of tenancy. Even the former Scheme Manager's flat is let to a general needs housing applicant.
- 5.3. To achieve such numbers and apply sensitive allocation policies, it was necessary in November 2000 to increase the 'pool' of potential residents by lowering the age limit from 45 years to over 40 years of age for single persons, and to extend the scheme to childless couples within this age band.
- 5.4. Mention must, however, be made that over the last 6 years no account has been taken of the vacant ground floor flats contained within these schemes which are, in turn, becoming relatively difficult to let nor the former resident scheme managers' accommodation where posts have not been refilled by the management section.
- 5.5. The true extent of the problem relating to 'hard to let' ground floor sheltered housing within these schemes has, however, been partially 'masked'. In attempting to overcome the problem, and increase lettings and avoid rent loss, a solution has been found by committing excessive numbers of vacant ground floor sheltered flats to the Homes Mobility Scheme.
- 5.6. Local Authorities participating in the Homes Mobility Scheme are normally required to dedicate 1% of their total annual vacancies to the scheme. In Winchester's case this amounts to no more than 4 or 5 dwellings per year. During the last financial year, 22 sheltered flats were let to older persons from outside the District wishing to move closer to friends and relatives of which 8 were located on the ground floor in the schemes listed in Appendix 1.

- 5.7. At the same time, however, the Council is having to resort to unsuitable and expensive B & B accommodation to help local homeless families.

## 6. Tenant Selection Process

- 6.1. The relaxation of the allocation policy has proved relatively successful in the avoidance of conflicting lifestyles. Only two significant problems have arisen during the six years of operation. One has been satisfactorily resolved, the other continues to be monitored by the Housing Management section.

## 7. Staffing Issues

- 7.1. As highlighted earlier in this Report, as a result of the decision to allocate 'difficult to let' first floor flats in sheltered housing to single persons and childless couples, opportunities have arisen to 'down size' the resident scheme manager element of the service.

- 7.2. Progressively over the 4-year period there has been the withdrawal of certain resident scheme managers from the service. They have, in turn, been replaced by peripatetic scheme managers with responsibility for more than one scheme but confined to schemes within an acceptable radius of their homes. Other schemes, particularly rural bungalow developments, are now covered by Mobile Scheme Managers.

## 8. Tenant Consultation

Whilst the Council has been steadily 'scaling down' its sheltered housing service it has continued to listen to residents' concerns. In this way, it has been possible in the main to provide reassurance to customers that the changes have not been to their detriment and do make sound business sense.

## 9. Future – 'Variation on a Theme'

### Proposed extension of the Programme – Pilot Project to allocate 'hard to let' ground floor sheltered flats to homeless households

- 9.1. It is fairly obvious from the foregoing information that much of the current provision of sheltered housing is not achieving the desired results.
- 9.2. Often a combination of factors contribute to the schemes being difficult to let: design, location, over-provision and the impact of the growing number of ways in which older persons can be enabled, with appropriate support, to remain in their own homes.
- 9.3. The physical nature and layout of many of the schemes means upgrading is not a feasible option. In such cases, therefore, it is important the Council should explore how the accommodation might continue to be used to re-house other customers in need.
- 9.4. The suggestion put forward is that Cabinet gives its consideration to increasing the supply of appropriate temporary accommodation to homeless households by using the 'hard to let' ground floor sheltered housing flats in those schemes listed in Appendix 2 where first floor flats are currently occupied and continue to be allocated to General Needs Housing applicants.

- 9.5. It should be noted, however, that the current exemption from the 'right to buy' for sheltered schemes will progressively cease to apply. This is because it is likely that there will no longer be clearly identifiable parts of each scheme that can be separately identified as being solely used as sheltered accommodation. The protection from the 'right to buy' will cease to apply as the new letting approach is implemented. However, given that the accommodation is currently difficult to let then the balance of advantage is that the schemes are brought back into full use.
- 9.6. As with the initial policy initiative, a sensible approach would be to pilot the concept within a couple of sheltered housing scheme developments before proceeding across the board.
10. Sample Schemes
- 10.1. From a managerial standpoint it is suggested that in selecting schemes for inclusion in the Pilot Project the Council avoids those sheltered housing schemes located on the Highcliffe and Stanmore housing estates.
- 10.2. Although long term ground floor vacancies exist in these schemes, Officers would not wish to compromise the ongoing Community Planning exercises which are nearing completion on the respective estates.
- 10.3. It is proposed, therefore, that the Pilot Project be focused on the Colson Close, Winchester and Harwood Place, Kings Worthy sheltered housing schemes.
- 10.4. Ground floor flats within both these schemes have and still do present problems for the Housing Needs Section in letting. In Harwood Place, two of four ground floor flats have been vacant for a combined period of over 5 years and the resulting rent loss from long term vacancies in that Scheme alone (excluding service charge) is estimated to be approximately £25,000.
11. Resident Selection Process
- 11.1. Annually the most frequently recorded reason for homelessness is the result of either parents, relatives and/or friends evicting the household. 21% of cases accepted between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002 fell into this category. In most cases, the eviction is a result of the frustration felt by parents of younger families who experience delay in obtaining accommodation through the Joint Housing Register.
- 11.2. The composition of this type of homeless household is normally either pregnant female (with or without partner), single parent with one child and couple with one child. There were 36 such cases in 2001/02.
- 11.3. Had such households been assisted with mainstream housing through the Joint Housing Register, then (depending upon the age of the child) they would have been offered a 1 bedroomed flat which may well have been above ground floor but similar in type, size and layout to the vacant sheltered flats.
- 11.4. It is to this client group of homeless persons that the Officers would turn in the selection of occupants for the vacant ground floor flats in sheltered stock.
- 11.5. There would be no intention to consider homeless persons who had intensive housing management and support needs for such accommodation. The purpose built supported housing projects would be the appropriate type of accommodation

for this client group, or specialist schemes run by the Council's voluntary partners in the social housing sector.

- 11.6. Should Members wish to include the vacant former resident scheme managers' flats in the project, Officers would widen their consideration to homeless families comprising households with 2 or more children of different sexes as the dwellings offer 3 bedroom accommodation. Both the Colson Close and Harwood Place former Scheme Manager's flats are vacant and have been so since 19 October 1998 and 12 November 2002 respectively. It is recommended that these properties should be let as secure tenancies for permanent occupation.
- 11.7. Needless to say, Officers would still need to continue to enjoy the freedom to apply greater flexibility in the choice of potential residents if the initiative is to stand the same degree of success as the letting of the first floor flats.

## 12. Staffing Issues

- 12.1. Operationally, the introduction of the proposed pilot project at Colson Close, Winchester and Harwood Place, Kings Worthy, should be relatively straightforward as both schemes share the same peripatetic scheme manager, who resides at and manages the Penton Place Sheltered Housing Scheme, Highcliffe.
- 12.2. The postholder's understanding and support to the original initiative has been adequately demonstrated by her willingness and commitment to vary her role in line with the letting of first floor flats to non pensioners which was initiated in her own scheme and subsequently extend to the other two schemes proposed for inclusion in the Pilot. The Scheme Manager has been fully consulted about these proposals. She is happy to be part of the process on the basis that she will be given the opportunity to transfer to another sheltered housing scheme when a suitable opportunity arises.
- 12.3. Over time it is anticipated that schemes may gradually evolve to become general needs provision. If this occurs it will inevitably result in the eventual withdrawal of the peripatetic scheme managers' service. Any proposal to extend the pilot project beyond the two schemes identified in this report will be referred back to Cabinet. It is anticipated that any such extension to the project would have consequent management issues, including implications for staffing, which may also require a report to Personnel Committee as well as consultation with UNISON.
- 12.4. The Housing Management section will need to declare its policy in relation to its current supply of sheltered stock deemed inappropriate to meet the predicted higher level of care needs demanded by an increasing, ageing, frail and dependant population. Those schemes are listed in Appendix 2 where long term letting difficulties have been established over the last 6 years.
- 12.5. It may be asserted that changing the use of the whole scheme, as proposed in this Report, for other groups such as general needs applicants and/or homeless, is far less problematic than remodelling or demolishing obsolete sheltered stock and finding new homes for existing tenants, as well as job losses for those engaged in managing the schemes.



### 13. Tenant Consultation

- 13.1. There is a statutory requirement to consult with those tenants affected by any proposed changes to their service. The primary objective is to gauge the tenants' reaction to the idea of young persons with children living as neighbours, as a solution to the problem of difficult to let accommodation, and of providing good standard permanent accommodation for homeless people.
- 13.2. Based upon past experiences, it is anticipated that there will be expressions of discontent with the proposals. In such circumstances, it will be the Housing Management section's task to carefully explain the proposals. By sensitively managing the process, tenants may feel they can accept the proposals, particularly if the proposals have the firm backing of local Members and TACT.
- 13.3. The simple message to be conveyed to tenants is that prolonged void periods mean less rental income to the Housing Revenue Account resulting in either a reduction in housing services or an increase in rents to make good the shortfall. In either event, it is in the tenants' own interests to support the project.
- 13.4. Perceived problems of conflicts of lifestyle can by experience be shown to be imaginary rather than real, but it is impossible to guarantee problems will not arise.
- 13.5. There will, however, be a significant difference between the occupancy status enjoyed by the proposed homeless residents to that of their neighbours.
- 13.6. Unlike their neighbours who are 'secure tenants' and therefore enjoy certain statutory rights, the homeless residents will be granted a 'Non Secure Tenancy'. Non secure tenants enjoy less protection than secure tenants. In the eventuality of serious problems occurring, the housing management officers' prospects of obtaining possession orders through the Court should prove relatively straightforward.
- 13.7. Consultation has taken place with the residents of Colson Close and Harwood Place. Generally, the reaction of residents to the proposals was quite favourable. The primary concerns were i) to ensure that allocations are handled sensitively to try to ensure compatibility of incoming tenants; and ii) that any management issues which do arise are dealt with promptly and effectively. Memoranda outlining the results of the consultation are attached as appendices 3 and 4, and follow-up letters to the residents as appendices 5 and 6.
- 13.8. In accordance with the Council's practice, TACT have been consulted on the proposals, and their comments are included at paragraph 15 below.

### 14. Conclusions

- 14.1. Although the report does not advocate a change in the former Housing Committee's strategy in dealing with 'hard to let' sheltered accommodation considered appropriate for more general needs housing use, it does propose its extension to certain types of homeless households, so as to avoid the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 14.2. The intention would be to limit the approach to those schemes listed in Appendix 2 where a high percentage of voids have been, and continue to be, experienced.

- 14.3. Having obtained the support of the staff member affected, the tenants and UNISON, the aim would be to pilot the scheme at Colson Close, Winchester and Harwood Close, Kings Worthy and report back with an evaluation of the project to a future meeting of the Housing Performance Improvement Committee
- 14.4. The more popular town centre schemes with modern facilities (lifts, etc) including those which service the larger rural communities, ie. Bishops Waltham, Wickham, Denmead are such a valuable resource in meeting the predicted future needs of the elderly that their status as designated sheltered schemes should not be compromised.
- 14.5. It would be incumbent upon the Housing Management section to revisit the appropriateness of their current designation, after the results of the comprehensive Public Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey scheduled for later in the year.
15. TACT COMMENT

TACT welcomed the presentation on this paper, given by officers, at their meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> August and make the following comments:

*Tenant Selection* - The tenant selection process will require a vetting procedure which is capable of detecting and eliminating all foreseeable problems if TACT are to continue to support these proposals with reasonable confidence.

*Non-Secure tenancy agreement* – TACT are concerned about partners and children of non-secure tenants causing problems, and were pleased to have reassurance from officers that the tenancy agreement would be based on that used for the Sussex Street Hostel tenants and will take this factor into account.

*Staffing Issues* – In order that tenants of sheltered housing may have the ability to contact staff 'out of hours' for the active supervision of these proposals a procedure using Central Control must be planned and widely promoted.

*Housing Benefit* – tenants living in sheltered housing, paying service charges must be confident and have the right to a standard of service we can feel proud of. They are elderly tenants. The issue of who receives Housing Benefit is not an issue – the standard of service is!

*Extra Resources* – making these innovative proposals work smoothly and successfully may well demand extra resources. TACT acknowledges they could relieve pressure of escalating bed & breakfast costs. They may help in meeting targets for reducing bed & breakfast homeless families. They will take pressure from the General Fund. TACT require members to accept they must not just transfer the cost from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account – innovation must demand more than this.

*Preferential transfer arrangement* – TACT request that Members consider preferential transfer arrangements for secure tenants in the pilot scheme where they feel that the new arrangements are not working.

*Colson Close and Harwood Place* – when TACT write Colson Close and Harwood Place we are reminded these are the homes of elderly and vulnerable men and

women – your tenants. We implore Members, Officers, TACT members to keep this in mind. This is *our* ultimate irreconcilable dilemma – proceed with caution.

## 16 UNISON Comment and Responses

- 16.1 A query was raised over whether or not the Scheme Manager will be expected to act as a mediator if things go wrong? The intensive housing management service provided will deal with such issues. However, there are likely to be occasions when scheme managers, mobile wardens or Central Control operators will encounter situations which they will need to report.
- 16.2 It was pointed out that the pilot project would lead to a gradual change in the tenant profile of the schemes. The question was raised as to at what point will scheme managers cease to supervise the schemes? Future management arrangement arrangements will need to reflect changes in demand from sheltered tenants and the availability of Supporting People funding. It is worth noting however that, in the case of Colson Close and Harwood Place where the policy of letting to over 40's is currently in operation, the scheme manager service is already provided by a peripatetic scheme manager.
- 16.3 There are no anticipated changes in the contracts or rates of pay for any scheme manager staff. Should the need arise for any changes in the future, full consultation will take place with UNISON in the usual way.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

### 17 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 17.1. The proposals accord with the principles of making best use of all available resources.

### 18. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 18.1. The objective will be to implement the proposals within existing staffing resources and budgets. However, the consultation exercise in the remaining schemes and the future management issues arising from the proposals will clearly impact upon officers engaged in the management section.
- 18.2. The letting of the 'ground floor flats' in the identified sheltered housing schemes will maximise rental income to the Housing Revenue Account and will avoid unnecessary expenditure for Bed and Breakfast accommodation on the General Fund.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

## APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Schemes to Meet Future Demand

Appendix 2: Schemes capable of being included in proposals

Appendix 3: Results of Consultation at Colson Close

Appendix 4: Results of Consultation at Harwood Place

Appendix 5: Letter to tenants at Colson Close

Appendix 6: Results of Consultation at Harwood Place

Appendix 1Schemes to Meet Future Demand

<u>Winchester</u>		<u>No. Units</u>	<u>Year Built</u>
Chester Court		36	1972
Danemark Court		35	1989
Eastacre, Weeke, 3 bungalows, 33 flats		36	1987
Godson House		34	1970
Hyde Gate		25	1975
Hyde Lodge		38	1985/89
King Harold Court		32	1986
Lawn House (City Centre)		36	1970
Matilda Place (2½)		19	1989
Mildmay Court (City Centre)		35	1984
Richard Moss House		48	1990
Simonds Court, Abbots Barton, 18 bungalows, 11 flats		29	1972
Victoria House (2½)		25	1984
	Total -	428	
<u>Rural Settlements</u>			
Normandy Court, Wickham	Group 2	36	1984
Greens Close, Bishops Waltham, 12 bungalows, 24 flats	Group 3	36	1981
Spring House, Colden Common	Group 4	36	1980
Chiltern Court, New Alresford	Letting Group 5	24	1981
Makins Court, New Alresford, 13 bungalows, 16 flats	Group 5	29	2001/02
White Wings, Denmead	Group 6	36	1984
	Total -	625	

Appendix 2

Albert Court	23	1984
Colson Close	20	1974
New Firmstone Road, Winnall	20	
Old Firmstone Road, Winnall, 16 bungalows, 8 flats	24	
Penton Place, Highcliffe	36	1973
The Valley, Stanmore	36	1973
Airlie Corner, Stanmore, 10 bungalows, 7 flats	17	1956
Bartholomew Close/Saxon Road	21	1963
Drummond Close, Stanmore, 9 bungalows, 25 flats	34	1964
Lisle Court, Stanmore, 5 bungalows, 16 flats	21	1967
Harwood Place, Kings Worthy Group 7	38	1978
	290	

Appendix 3**HOUSING SERVICES****MEMO**

**TO:** Cllr Ann Craig; Cllr Sue Nelmes; Alan Rickman (TACT)

**FROM:** Steve Tong

**CC:** Cllr A. De Peyer; Brian Whitfield; Cyril Gilbert-Wood (TACT Chairs); Bob Merrett; Ken Kershaw; Luke Bingham

**DATE:** 21<sup>st</sup> July 2003

**RE:** Hard to Let Flats at Colson Close

---

Luke Bingham and I attended the coffee morning at Colson Close this morning to consult with the tenants on the possibility of letting "hard to let" flats at the Scheme. There were 10 tenants and one prospective tenant at the meeting along with Scheme Manager June Curran and Ward Member Anthony De Peyer.

Luke outlined the issue of certain schemes where it is proving difficult to find applicants for vacant flats. This leads to rental income being lost and is a waste of accommodation, particularly bearing in mind the number of people on the Council's Joint Housing Register. Colson Close was one of two Schemes identified as potentially suitable to participate in a pilot project subject to the views of the existing tenants.

As these are one bedroomed flats, Luke explained that they would be likely to provide accommodation either for single people, or, on a short-term basis, for a single person or couple with a small child. Occupation would be on a non-secure basis. The former scheme manager's flat has 3 bedrooms, and therefore lends itself to letting to a family with the appropriate number of children. In this case this would most likely be a secure tenancy for long-term occupation.

The responses from those who spoke at the meeting were broadly favourable. There was an acceptance of the fact that the Council's housing accommodation should be fully occupied as far as possible. Furthermore there was generally a welcoming of the possibility of younger people (including children) living at the Scheme. There were reservations expressed about careful selection of appropriate applicants and some worries over enforcement of tenancy conditions (e.g. in event of loud parties). A particular concern was for the dangers for young children of crossing the road to get to school.

In the main, those who attended the meeting welcomed the proposal. It was agreed that all tenants will receive a letter and be invited to raise concerns etc.

Steve Tong                      Supported Housing Manager

**HOUSING SERVICES****MEMO**

**TO:** Cllr Ann Craig; Cllr Sue Nelmes; Alan Rickman (TACT)

**FROM:** Steve Tong

**CC:** Cllr D. Hiscock; Brian Whitfield & Cyril Gilbert-Wood (TACT Chairs); Bob Merrett; Ken Kershaw; Luke Bingham

**DATE:** 6<sup>th</sup> August 2003

**RE:** Hard to Let Flats at Harwood Place

---

A coffee morning was held at Harwood Place on 23<sup>rd</sup> July to consult with the tenants on proposals for letting "hard to let" flats at the Scheme. The meeting was well attended by tenants, with a number of other people in attendance; these included Cllr Dominic Hiscock, TACT Chair Cyril Gilbert-Wood, Scheme Manager June Curran, TA Chair Paul Bungay, Area Housing Manager Kate Mooge and Central Control Manager Lyn Curtis. Luke Bingham presented the session.

The content of the presentation was similar to that given at Colson Close on 21<sup>st</sup> July.

There was a lively discussion following Luke's presentation. A number of questions were put and answers given on a range of issues. It was explained that despite every effort to identify sheltered tenants, there was a persistent problem of long-term voids. The tenants accepted that the Council has a duty to let its accommodation, especially bearing in mind the number of people on the Housing Register. There were concerns expressed over the presence of younger people and children on the Scheme. However, it was broadly accepted that, by sensitive allocation decisions, and through careful management, it should be possible to integrate general needs tenants into the Scheme. There were similar reservations expressed as at Colson Close about effective enforcement of tenancy conditions to deal with noise etc, but overall tenants appeared satisfied that the situation could be managed.

In general terms, whilst there were reservations, the overall feeling from the meeting was that this proposal would be viable, providing careful selection of tenants and careful management. It was agreed that a follow-up letter would be sent to all tenants outlining the proposed changes and inviting any representations.

Steve Tong

Supported Housing Manager



Appendix 5

All Residents  
Colson Close  
Winchester  
Hampshire

Your Ref:  
Our Ref : LB/hp  
Enq to: Mr Bingham  
Ext. No: 2298  
Fax No: 01962 848139  
E-mail: lbingham@winchester.gov.uk

14 August 2003

Dear Resident

**Meeting with Residents on the 21 July**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who attended the meeting at Colson Close on 21 July 2003. For those of you who were unable to attend, this letter should help clarify the issues discussed, namely the vacant units at your scheme and the future of the ex-scheme manager's accommodation.

Vacant Units

As you are no doubt aware, there are properties at Harwood Place that have remained vacant for a number of years because they have proved extremely difficult to let. This situation is not unique, other sheltered schemes within the Winchester District also have long term vacancies.

A number of years ago you endorsed a policy whereby the City Council offered first floor vacancies to carefully vetted persons over 40 years of age. This policy has been a great success and has enabled those who would otherwise still be on the waiting list for accommodation to be re-housed. However, this failed to tackle the problem presented by vacant ground floor properties.

Consequently the purpose of the meeting on the 21 July was to discuss a proposal to extend this approach, both in terms of removing the age constraints and widening proposals to cover vacant units at both ground floor and first floor level.

Feedback from the meeting was positive with residents understanding the need for a practical approach to alleviate this problem. However, there was a general request that Housing Services continue with the policy of carefully vetting applicants.

Scheme Managers Accommodation

With fewer and fewer elderly persons wishing to move to Harwood Place, there has naturally been a decline in the number of residents needing the service of a full time residential scheme manager. In response to this decrease in demand you now have a peripatetic scheme manager, who looks after several sheltered schemes.

Therefore, discussions at the meeting on the 21 July also covered future usage of the ex-scheme managers flat located above the common room. Here the proposal to use it as general accommodation was met with a positive response from residents who again recognised that morally and financially there is little to be gained from allowing a property to remain empty.

A summary of my visit incorporating the feedback I received from those present at the meeting will now be formalised within a committee report. This report will also include comments from tenant representatives on TACT (Tenants and Council Together). Elected Members will then make a decision on the future use of these vacant units as outlined within this letter.

If you wish to discuss this matter further or have any other queries or comments please do not hesitate to contact me on the above extension number.

Yours sincerely

**Team Leader (Housing Management)**

Appendix 6

All Residents  
Harwood Place  
Kings Worthy  
Winchester  
Hampshire

Your Ref:  
Our Ref : LB/hp  
Enq to: Mr Bingham  
Ext. No: 2298  
Fax No: 01962 848139  
E-mail: lbingham@winchester.gov.uk

14 August 2003 Dear Resident

**Meeting with Residents on the 23 July**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who attended the meeting at Harwood Place on 23 July 2003. For those of you who were unable to attend, this letter should help clarify the issues discussed, namely the vacant units at your scheme and the future of the ex-scheme manager's accommodation.

Vacant Units

As you are no doubt aware, there are properties at Harwood Place that have remained vacant for a number of years because they have proved extremely difficult to let. This situation is not unique, other sheltered schemes within the Winchester District also have long term vacancies.

A number of years ago you endorsed a policy whereby the City Council offered first floor vacancies to carefully vetted persons over 40 years of age. This policy has been a great success and has enabled those who would otherwise still be on the waiting list for accommodation to be re-housed. However, this failed to tackle the problem presented by vacant ground floor properties.

Consequently the purpose of the meeting on the 23 July was to discuss a proposal to extend this approach, both in terms of removing the age constraints and widening proposals to cover vacant units at both ground floor and first floor level.

Feedback from the meeting was positive with residents understanding the need for a practical approach to alleviate this problem. However, there was a general request that Housing Services continue with the policy of carefully vetting applicants.

Scheme Managers Accommodation

With fewer and fewer elderly persons wishing to move to Harwood Place, there has naturally been a decline in the number of residents needing the service of a full time residential scheme manager. In response to this decrease in demand you now have a peripatetic scheme manager, who looks after several sheltered schemes.

Therefore, discussions at the meeting on the 23 July also covered future usage of the ex-scheme managers flat located above the common room. Here the proposal to use it as general accommodation was met with a positive response from residents who again recognised that morally and financially there is little to be gained from allowing a property to remain empty.

A summary of my visit incorporating the feedback I received from those present at the meeting will now be formalised within a committee report. This report will also include comments from tenant representatives on TACT (Tenants and Council Together). Elected Members will then make a decision on the future use of these vacant units as outlined within this letter.

If you wish to discuss this matter further or have any other queries or comments please do not hesitate to contact me on the above extension number.

Yours sincerely

**Team Leader (Housing Management)**