

6 October 2016		ITEM: 7
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Sheltered Housing Decommissioning – Update		
Wards and communities affected: Tilbury Riverside & Thurrock Park	Key Decision: Yes	
Report of: Dawn Shepherd – Housing Strategy & Quality manager		
Accountable Head of Service: Richard Birchett, Interim Head of Housing		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

In February 2015 Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted and endorsed a programme of decommissioning of sheltered housing properties within the borough.

The decision followed a detailed review and analysis of sheltered accommodation and a full consultation with residents during 2013 -14

Seven schemes were potentially identified for decommissioning due to their lack of desirability and/or fitness for purpose. These were brought to Housing Overview & Scrutiny in a report dated 16 July 2014.

Subsequently, it was agreed in a further report in February 2015 that the decommissioning should be carried out in two phases.

This report outlines the progress on phase one of the decommissioning programme and identifies how the department will take forward the rest of the decommissioning programme

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Members note the report and endorse the approach to further decommissioning of the remaining units/schemes identified in the February 2015 report.

1.2 That Members consider the options for using void properties during the decommissioning period

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 On 15 February 2015 Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted and endorsed a programme of decommissioning of sheltered housing properties within the borough.

The decision followed a detailed review and analysis of sheltered accommodation and a full consultation with residents in 2013-14

The review also identified a new sheltered housing model and the introduction of service charges.

- 2.2 Seven schemes were potentially identified for decommissioning due to their lack of desirability and/or fitness for purpose.
- 2.3 It was agreed that a phased approach would be taken and that Phase 1 would incorporate the decommissioning of three schemes - Langland Close, St Cedds Court and Chichester Close.
- 2.4 The programme would be carried out in a very sensitive and supportive manner. Tenants would have the option to move with the assistance of a dedicated officer; no tenant would be forced to move but those who did would receive a disturbance payment to cover the cost of removals, new furnishings etc.
- 2.5 Phase 1 has now been completed and the outcomes are provided below.
- 2.6 Phase 2 provides for the decommissioning of Alexander Road, Dunlop Road, Montreal Road and Newton road – all in Tilbury. The reasons for decommissioning these blocks and planned approach are provided below.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Although seven schemes were initially identified for decommissioning in the July 2014 report, it was agreed that a phased approach be used to ensure minimal levels of void properties.

Phase one involved three schemes and at each scheme sheltered tenants were offered the following options:

- to remain in the blocks with a mobile sheltered service
- to remain as a general needs tenant
- to move to an alternative property

- 3.2 Langland Close & Nottage Close – Corringham – a scheme consisting of 4 x three storey blocks with 11 properties in each. The schemes are separated by a major road and have no lift.

Following consultation with tenants in the block it was decided to decommission the two Nottage Close blocks first. This is now completed and the blocks are used for general needs tenants.

- 3.3 St Cedds Court – Whitmore Avenue, Grays – a mixed scheme with 34 sheltered flats on the ground floor and general needs accommodation above (studio flats and three bedroom maisonettes).

One tenant is still being assisted to move but receives a mobile sheltered service whilst waiting for a suitable property. The block is now used for general needs tenants.

- 3.4 Chichester Close, Aveley – consists of two blocks of 4 flats which are close to the sheltered schemes at the Sycamores and New Malting's but separated completely. The flats have no lifts and there have been technical issues with the building

Future plans for the decommissioned blocks have not yet been agreed. Due to the technical issues with the building this is still under consideration.

- 3.5 The following outcomes have resulted:

	Tenants who remained with a mobile service	Tenants who remained as general needs tenants	Tenants who moved to alternative accommodation	Tenants still waiting to move	Total
Nottage Close	4	6	12	0	22
St Cedds Court	9	3	21	1	34
Chichester Close	1	3	4	0	8
Total	14	12	37	1	64

- 3.6 Langland Close

Although initially identified as a scheme for decommissioning, Langland Close has subsequently been used to accommodate tenants moving out of the Nottage Close scheme.

To date 5 properties have become void and been advertised. There have been an average of 20 people bidding for each property and therefore it is not recommended that any further decommissioning of this scheme is undertaken at this time.

The four other schemes identified within the original report in July 2014 have now been considered and the following recommendations are made:

3.7 Alexandra Road and Dunlop Road, Tilbury

This scheme consists of 10 blocks of 4 flats

- 20 x ground floor flats (2 in each block)
- 20 x 1st floor flats (2 in each block) with no lift

The flats were identified for decommissioning because they have been consistently hard to let to sheltered residents due to the lack of lift to the 1st floor. The properties would require major works to achieve DDA compliance.

3.8 Montreal Road and Newton Road, Tilbury

This scheme comprises of 4 blocks of 8 flats

- 16 x ground floor (4 in each block)
- 16 x 1st floor (4 in each block) with no lift

Tenants have access to the communal hall at Crown Court but it is a distance from the flats which are situated in the middle of general needs properties and isolated from the other properties within the scheme. Again, the lack of lift to the first floor make the accommodation unsuitable for sheltered residents.

3.9 Many sheltered tenants at the above Tilbury schemes have expressed an interest in the new scheme due to be built in Calcutta Road which is a HAPPI scheme specifically designed for older residents. There will be around 35 properties.

The Calcutta Road scheme would be subject to a local lettings plan, in line with the Council's existing Housing Allocations policy, since it provides a new build development within an existing Council Housing estate. The local lettings plan allows 75% of all 1st lettings to secure Council tenants living within a designated boundary, who meet the required criteria i.e. no rent arrears or other outstanding housing charges, no tenancy breaches and who pass a transfer inspection.

Interested tenants will be advised of the above and given the option to wait for the Calcutta scheme to be developed, however it is not anticipated that this will be completed before March 2018.

3.10 Whilst the Calcutta scheme would be available to residents of the decommissioned properties under the local lettings plan, there will only be around 25 properties which will qualify. Therefore there is no guarantee that everyone who wishes to move to the Calcutta Road scheme can be

accommodated and people will be prioritised in line with the Local lettings plan.

The local lettings plan states:

Where there are more tenants expressing an interest than properties available, tenants will be prioritised according to the amount of time they have lived consistently within the designated boundary. (Housing Allocations Scheme, Annex 6 s3.4)

Tenants will be advised of this and supported in making any decision to wait or move to an alternative property.

- 3.11 Tenants who do not wish to wait for the Calcutta Road will be given the option to move to alternative accommodation or remain in their current property but without a sheltered service in the future.

In summary the following three options will be available to tenants

Option 1 – to move to alternative accommodation

Option 2 – to remain in their current property until the Calcutta Road scheme is available and, providing they meet the local lettings criteria, to be given priority under the local lettings plan (subject to the clause stated above at 3.10)

Option 3 – to remain in their current property without the sheltered housing service – however the service would continue until the Calcutta Road scheme was open.

- 3.11 Due to the time scales involved, it is anticipated that this second phase of decommissioning is likely to take up to three years.

The Council will continue to provide a supportive and sensitive approach to the decommissioning whereby no tenant would be forced to move from their current home.

A dedicated officer will support tenants with the decommissioning process offering advice and assistance, including prioritising applications and assisting with bidding as necessary.

In line with the 1st Phase of decommissioning, home disturbance payments of up to £1700 will be paid to tenants who wish to move, to assist with removals, reconnections, furnishings etc. Home loss payments would not be paid – these are only required when it is compulsory for tenants to move and tenants will have the option to remain.

- 3.12 It is intended that Tilbury blocks will be used for general needs tenants following decommissioning. During the decommissioning period

consideration need to be taken as to how the empty properties will be used. The following options are possible and Members are asked to consider which approach should be taken:

Option 1 - General needs tenants could be allocated any empty properties as they arise. This will negate any rent loss or ASB issues with empty properties however, it may not be a popular option with sheltered tenants who will find themselves living with general needs tenants

Option 2. - Any empty properties could remain empty until the decommissioning is complete; however this will impact the rent collection and could incur HRA losses to the Council of up to £240,000 over a two year period – see financial implications below

Option 3. – Empty properties could be let to general needs tenants but in a very sensitive manner which is carefully managed – for example only to tenants over the age of 50. This may lead to some properties still remaining empty but will provide accommodation for older residents who do not meet the sheltered criteria.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Phase 1 of the decommissioning has been achieved. In order to complete the decommissioning programme phase 2 needs to be implemented. It is believed that a very fair approach will be taken towards the process with as little stress and impact to tenants as possible.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Full consultation took place and was fed back in the Housing Overview & scrutiny report in July 2014.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Julie Curtis**
HRA and Development accountant

If the decision is taken not to fill void properties there is potential for rent loss. Empty properties during the decommissioning period will impact rent loss. A typical rent is around £85 per week. Whilst it is impossible to determine how the decommissioning will run, if we assume that decommissioning takes 2

years and that 25% of properties are decommissioned each year then the potential rent loss is around £80k in year one and £160k in year two.

Home disturbance payments are likely to be paid at up to £1700 per moving tenant. If all 72 tenants moved, the maximum amount paid over the period would be £122k.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Martin Hall**
Housing Solicitor / Housing Team Leader

The implementation of fixed term tenancies from April 2017 will impact tenants who transfer to alternative properties, however continuing secure tenancies can be issued to tenants who are required to move by the Council.

Whilst changes to the Council's tenancy policy have not yet been finalised, it is likely that older tenants will be given longer term tenancies.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development & Equalities
Manager**

Decommissioning has the potential to seriously impact the lives of older people living in these properties. It is anticipated that through the sensitive and supportive approach taken we can reduce the impact this may have.

An impact assessment has been completed and is attached at Annex 1

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Housing O & S report – Sheltered housing review, 16 July 2014
<https://thurrockintranet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s1369/Sheltered%20Housing%20Review.pdf>
- Housing O & S report – Sheltered housing decommissioning – next step, 18 February 2015

<https://thurrockintranet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s2449/Sheltered%20Housing%20Decommissioning%20-%20Next%20steps.pdf>

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

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