

<b>16 July 2014</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Housing Overview &amp; Scrutiny</b>		
<b>Sheltered housing Review</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Yes	
<b>Report of:</b> Councillor Lyn Worrall, Portfolio Holder for Housing		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Richard Parking, Head of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

### **Executive Summary**

At the November 2013 Housing Overview & Scrutiny committee, Members approved a report that reviewed the current sheltered housing provision and outlined options for consultation.

The review covered three issues:

1. The demand for sheltered housing stock
2. The current service model
3. How service charges could be applied

A further report in January 2014 approved a consultation methodology.

Subsequently a consultation with all current sheltered housing tenants and stakeholders was held between 3rd February and 31st March 2014.

This report outlines the results of the consultation and makes recommendations

#### **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 Note the outcomes of the Sheltered Housing Consultation in section 5 of this report**

**1.2 Maintain the current policy whereby sheltered housing properties are not generally let to people aged less than 60 years.**

**1.3 Approve the decommissioning of some hard to let and/or unsuitable sheltered housing properties, as outlined in Appendix 7**

**1.4 Approve a new sheltered housing service model as outlined in Appendix 9**

**1.5 Approve an option for future funding of the sheltered housing service as outlined in section 3 of this report**

**1.6 Publish the Consultation outcomes on the consultation website and provide the outcomes in writing to tenants along with agreed recommendations**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 At the November 2013 Housing Overview & Scrutiny committee, Members approved a report that reviewed the current sheltered housing provision and outlined options for consultation.

2.2 The review covered three issues:

- The demand for sheltered housing stock
- The current service model
- How service charges could be applied

2.3 A consultation methodology was agreed and subsequently a consultation with all current sheltered housing tenants, tenants and stakeholders was held between 3rd February and 31st March 2014.

2.4 The consultation methodology and results are outlined in section 5

## **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 There are four options for funding the sheltered housing service:

- Option 1

Charge tenants for the service – costs would be around £8 per week per tenancy

- Option 2

Do not charge tenants for the service – the service cost (approximately £550,000 per annum) would need to be met by the HRA.

- Option 3

Charge tenants 50% of the charge – around £4 per week per tenant and fund the rest from the HRA (approximately £275,000 per annum)

- Option 4

Do not charge existing tenants for the service but introduce the full charges (£8 per week) to all new sheltered tenants – i.e. no charge to tenants who are transferring to alternative sheltered accommodation

- Over the past 5 years there have been 725 new lettings of sheltered housing, of which 56% were to new tenants i.e. not tenants transferring within the stock.
- Based on this trend 5.8% of the sheltered stock is estimated to change to a new tenant every year. Subsequently the service charge could be introduced to 5.8% of sheltered tenants every year.
- Based upon these figures the total stock would be relet in just over 17 years
- If option 4 were taken the cost to the HRA would be a total of £4.5 million over 18 years as follows:-

	<b>New Tenancies paying s/c (5.8%)</b>	<b>Cumulative Total Tenancies paying s/c</b>	<b>Remaining Tenancies not paying s/c</b>	<b>Cost to HRA for non-paying s/c £</b>
Year 0	0	0	1200	499,200
Year 1	70	70	1130	470,246
Year 2	70	139	1061	441,293
Year 3	70	209	991	412,339
Year 4	70	278	922	383,386
Year 5	70	348	852	354,432
Year 6	70	418	782	325,478
Year 7	70	487	713	296,525
Year 8	70	557	643	267,571
Year 9	70	626	574	238,618
Year 10	70	696	504	209,664
Year 11	70	766	434	180,710
Year 12	70	835	365	151,757
Year 13	70	905	295	122,803
Year 14	70	974	226	93,850
Year 15	70	1044	156	64,896
Year 16	70	1114	86	35,942
Year 17	70	1183	17	6,989
Year 18	17	1200	0	0
	1200			4,555,699

3.2 A comparison of cost for the 4 options is shown below:

<b>Cost to HRA</b>	<b>Average cost per year £</b>	<b>Total cost over 18 years £</b>
Option 1	0	0
Option 2	550,000	9,900,000
Option 3	275,000	4,950,000
Option 4	253,094	4,555,699

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

4.1 Recommendation 1.1 - an extensive consultation exercise was undertaken. It is important that members are aware of the consultation outcomes.

4.2. Recommendation 1.2 - there was almost unanimous agreement from the consultation that sheltered housing should not be offered to people under 60 except in exceptional circumstances e.g. for a disabled person. Officers recognise the strength of feeling around this area and have subsequently considered other options for dealing with hard to let properties.

4.3. Recommendation 1.3 – sheltered housing tenants recognised that some sheltered properties were hard to let and/or unsuitable for sheltered housing. Appendix 7 provides detailed reasons for this and makes recommendations for the decommissioning of some of these properties.

4.4. Recommendation 1.4 –the consultation highlighted inconsistencies in the service currently being delivered to tenants. This is mainly due to the inconsistent scheme sizes and the expectations of tenants and sheltered housing officers

It is clear that the current inconsistencies cannot continue and that we need to provide a more streamlined and consistent service, with mobile working sheltered housing officers. The current and improved service models are detailed in Appendix 9. The new improved service model represents savings in excess of £200k per annum to the HRA.

4.5 Recommendation 1.5 - sheltered housing tenants made it clear that they wished to retain a service but that they were unwilling to pay for the service. The service is currently funded by the HRA. Members need to determine an

option for the future funding of the service – the options are identified in section 3 of this report.

- 4.6. Recommendation 1.6 – it is important that tenants understand that their views are valued and have been taken into account when considering the future development of the sheltered housing service. Letters should be sent to tenants outlining the results of the consultation and the subsequent decisions of members following this report.

It is also important that the Council is transparent and honest in providing the outcomes of consultation and therefore the results should be published on the Council's consultation website.

## **5. Consultation**

### **5.1 Consultation Methodology**

- 5.1.1 The structure for the consultation process was informed by the Council's Community Engagement Toolkit. The toolkit describes older people as being seldom heard and suggests that a barrier to their participation is 'organisational inflexibility to undertake involvement in a way and at a pace that suits older people'.
- 5.1.2 Subsequently all sheltered housing tenants received a letter<sup>1</sup> outlining the consultation process with an invite to an event at their scheme or another of their choice. A list of all the consultation event dates was provided.
- 5.1.3 A questionnaire<sup>2</sup> was enclosed with the letter – tenants were invited to complete the questionnaire by hand and send it back to the Council in a pre-paid envelope. It was made clear that the questionnaire could be anonymous.
- 5.1.4 Individual events were held at every sheltered housing scheme. Three or more officers attended each event and the lead officer presented the three issues for review and gave tenants the opportunity to present their view in an open forum.
- 5.1.5 The events were well attended and tenants make good use of the opportunity to air their views on the proposals and other issues around sheltered housing. There were some heated discussions, particularly between tenants with differing views.
- 5.1.6 Attendees at the events had the opportunity to discuss the issues further with officers at the end of the meeting or to make separate appointments to do so at a later date. Many took up this opportunity.
- 5.1.7 The consultation highlighted the need to review and refresh residents meetings; tenants generally felt that they had not been given sufficient opportunity to voice their opinions in the past.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1 – Letter to tenants

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

- 5.1.8 An online survey, in the same format as the questionnaire, was made available on the Councils Consultation portal. This allowed relatives and friends of tenants, and any other interested parties to comment.
- 5.1.9 All sheltered housing tenants were contacted again by a sheltered housing officer a week before the consultation close date, and asked if they would like any assistance with completing the questionnaire and/or to speak with an officer about the issues. Stakeholders were invited to attend a briefing session on 19th March to discuss proposals. However, due to lack of take up the event was cancelled and instead interested parties were invited to attend the events at sheltered housing schemes and to feedback either at the events or via the consultation portal.
- 5.1.10 Adult social care officers were presented with a briefing paper outlining the proposals and invited to feedback via the Councils consultation portal.
- 5.1.11 Sheltered housing officers attended a Local Area Co-ordinators meeting to outline proposals and take feedback.
- 5.1.12 The Sheltered Housing Forum was informed of the proposals at their meeting and invited to feedback.
- 5.1.13 A briefing paper<sup>3</sup> was prepared and distributed to all members and an evening meeting convened on 20th February 2014 to enable discussion with officers. Three members attended the meeting.

5.2 At the consultation events, a number of key messages were relayed by officers to tenants:

- It is appropriate to consider some change of use as schemes become increasingly harder to let
- Tenants who are below 55 years should be considered for accommodation in sheltered schemes, provided the age criteria is set at 45 years and over
- The new sheltered housing model will create teams of sheltered housing officers to improve consistency in the delivery of service
- The new model will be flexible to allow the council to offer tenants choices in the type of services delivered
- The proposal to reintroduce service charges is to ensure that those who use and benefit from the service should directly make a financial contribution
- Tenants who currently qualify for housing benefit will be able to apply for assistance to meet their service charge costs

### 5.3 Results

- 5.3.1 5.3.1 467 completed questionnaires (34% of the 1386 posted out) were received and the responses collated into a report

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 3 – Members Briefing – Sheltered Housing

5.3.2 594 tenants, out of a possible 1386 invitees (43%) attended the events at sheltered housing schemes. Officers transcribed comments and these were collated into a report.

5.3.3 Because consultees were able to remain anonymous it is impossible to determine the number of consultees who responded via both the questionnaire and the events.

#### 5.4 Key Findings 1 - the demand for sheltered housing stock

5.4.1 Consultees were asked whether or not they agreed with the proposal to let sheltered housing to people aged 45 years and above.

5.4.2 55% of questionnaire respondents disagreed with the proposal.

5.4.3 22% neither agreed or disagreed, or did not respond to the question

5.4.4 At the events there was almost universal disagreement with the proposal and some of the reasons given were:

- Lifestyles of younger tenants would be in conflict with older tenant
- Younger tenants were more likely to commit anti-social behaviour, have drug and alcohol issues and mental health problems
- Younger tenants could become pregnant or have young children and this would cause disruption within schemes
- Younger tenants are more likely to drive and this would increase issues with parking

5.4.5 Solutions put forward for dealing with hard to let properties included:

- Better advertising of the properties including making people more aware of what sheltered housing involves – unfortunately this solution does not address the reasons why some properties are hard to let i.e. lack of lifted accommodation above ground, no public transport, unsuitable physical location e.g. on a hill.
- Relaxing the allocations policy to allow more owner occupiers access to sheltered accommodation – currently there is a financial and local connection criteria that people must meet for any council allocation of housing
- Decommissioning or selling blocks – i.e. changing them into general use properties
- Installing lifts and improving the standard of the properties – this option is mostly impossible due to funding and practical restrictions

5.4.6 A recent project involving the use of ex-warden properties for people with learning disabilities met general approval and led some tenants to comment that similar sensitive lettings to those with disabilities would be acceptable.

## 5.5 Key findings 2 -The current service model

5.5.1 Consultees were asked to respond to a proposal to introduce mobile teams of sheltered housing officers rather than an individual officer per scheme.

5.5.2 37% of respondents to the questionnaire disagreed with this option whilst 35% agreed.

5.5.3 The events highlighted large inconsistencies in the service currently received by tenants.

5.5.4 Some tenants felt they received an excellent service but many expressed dissatisfaction; inconsistency in the provision of sheltered housing officers during holiday periods, sickness and training was highlighted many times.

5.5.5 Tenants from smaller schemes tended to be happier with their service and in particular the amount of officer time spent with tenants.

5.5.6 Tenants from larger schemes were more often dissatisfied with the service, complaining that the larger number of tenants impacted on the time available for individual tenants.

5.5.7 Officers explained to tenants that the inconsistency in service was not surprising given the large difference in numbers of properties at each scheme: the largest scheme has 72 properties whilst the smallest has only 24; however, both have a single sheltered housing officer.

5.5.8 46% of questionnaire respondents believed the proposal to introduce mobile working would affect the service they received and that it could be affected in the following ways:

- There would be a loss of security and continuity
- Tenants would have to wait longer for a response in an emergency situation
- Costs would be increased

5.5.9 60% of the questionnaire respondents identified extra services that they would like to see sheltered housing officers provide. These included:



- More social activities
- More contact with tenants
- More support with repairs

5.5.10 However, 47% of questionnaire respondents indicated that they would not be willing to pay an additional weekly charge for increased services. Only 29% indicated that they would.

5.5.11 At the events, the majority of tenants voiced their concerns that they would lose services by not having a specific sheltered housing officer at each scheme. The lost services identified, mirrored those identified within the questionnaires.

5.5.12 Overall, whilst tenants placed a high value on the services sheltered housing could provide, it is apparent that the current service is not clearly defined or delivered in a consistent manner and this hindered tenants in being able to support a future service charge.

## 5.6 Key findings 3 - How service charges could be applied

5.6.1. Consultees were asked to comment on the proposal to re-introduce service charges for the sheltered housing service.

5.6.2. Officers explained that currently the service charges were being met from general housing rent receipts and that this could not continue. Tenants benefitting from the service would ultimately need to pay for it.

5.6.3. 57% of questionnaire respondents disagreed with the proposal.

5.6.4. Descriptions of three service levels with estimated costs were provided and consultees were asked to indicate which service level they most agreed with.

5.6.5. At the events, there was almost unanimous disagreement with the reintroduction of a service charge but overwhelming agreement to keep a service

5.6.6. Reasons provided for not paying a service charge included:

- Tenants cannot afford extra cost – officers explained that those eligible for Housing Benefit would have this element covered
- Tenants claimed rents are already too high and made comparison with the same rent for a three bedroom house. All rents are determined by the rateable value of the property and because most sheltered housing is of a higher rateable value the rents are higher

- The service provided did not warrant the extra cost – lack of understanding of the service provision is addressed in key findings 2.
- Housing benefit recipients were not expected to meet the charges now but may have to in future
- It was the Council's fault that the service charge was removed and therefore tenants should not be penalised now.

5.6.7. It was clear from the consultation that sheltered housing tenants do want a service but they are not prepared to pay for a service that is inconsistent and undefined.

## 5.7 Sheltered Housing Forum

5.7.1 Consultation results and the recommendations listed in section 9 were discussed with the sheltered housing forum in June 2014.

5.7.2 Members of the forum had no recommendations.

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

6.1 This report makes recommendations for the sheltered housing service that will improve the health and wellbeing of current sheltered housing tenants.

## 7. Implications

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Beard**  
**Finance Officer**

- Decommissioning of sheltered properties – there is a potential cost to the HRA for home loss and disturbance payments up to a maximum of £1.5m over 5 years
- New service model – there are potential savings to HRA of £216k per annum
- Service charges – costs will depend on the option chosen for the future introduction of service charges as shown in section 3 – this ranges from no cost to £550k per year.

### 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Alison Stuart**  
**Principal Solicitor**

- Charging tenants for services is a permitted term within the current tenancy agreements, (as recently amended via the varied tenancy agreements). However legal advice should be considered before implementation.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

- A full equality impact assessment based on the consultation will be completed before implementing any of the proposed changes'

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

- Recommendation for a new service model has implications for staff. The new model will reduce staffing levels from 29 to 16 sheltered housing officers.

### 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 – November 2013  
<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/thurrock/MeetingsCalendar/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/2315/Committee/401/Default.aspx>

### 9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1- letter to tenants
- Appendix 2 - Questionnaire
- Appendix 3 – Members Briefing
- Appendix 4 – Sheltered consultation – questionnaire outcomes
- Appendix 5 – Sheltered consultation events - outcomes
- Appendix 6 – hard to let properties
- Appendix 7 – decommissioning sheltered properties
- Appendix 8 – home loss and disturbance payments
- Appendix 9 – analysis of service offer

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