

Sheltered Housing Consultation Events – Outcomes

During February and March 2014, events were held at all 29 sheltered housing schemes within the borough and all residents were invited to attend either the event at their own scheme or an alternative event at a scheme of their choice.

594 tenants out of a possible 1386 invitees (43%) attended the events.

Chart 1 shows the breakdown by scheme.

At the events three areas were discussed:

1. The sensitive letting of sheltered properties to people aged 45 to 60 years
2. Mobile Sheltered Housing Officers (SHOs) working in teams to cover a number of schemes rather than an officer per scheme.
3. The re-introduction of service charge; options discussed for three levels of charge according to the level of service provided

Officers attended the events and recorded verbal feedback. They made themselves available to discuss concerns with tenants on a one to one basis following the meetings and also at pre-arranged appointments if required.

Tenant's expressions of their views differed but there were consistent themes (outcomes) which mirrored the findings of the questionnaires.

Key Findings:

1. The sensitive letting of sheltered properties to people aged 45 to 60 years

There was general agreement that people aged 45 to 60 should not be accommodated in sheltered housing, although many thought that lowering the age limit to 55 year was a fair compromise. Reasons given for this fell broadly into the following categories:

- The lifestyles would be too different – younger tenants were likely to still work, would play louder music and stay up later, whilst older people wanted a quieter lifestyle
- Younger tenants could have children themselves, or visiting children, who could be disruptive
- Younger tenants were more likely to commit anti-social behaviour and/or have drug or alcohol issues
- Younger tenants were more likely to have mental health issues

- Younger tenants were more likely to have a car and there was insufficient parking which could lead to disagreement amongst tenants

A few tenants indicated that younger people may benefit from the support provided in sheltered accommodation but this was far from a universal view.

Some tenants would be more willing to accept younger residents who had been “vetted” to ensure they were suitable for the scheme i.e. they had similar lifestyles to the current tenants. A few could see that younger tenants would benefit the older tenants by offering them support e.g. by doing odd jobs, shopping for them etc.

But there was an overwhelming view that there was no benefit to current tenants at all and many felt worried and/or vulnerable that older and younger tenants could be mixed, citing their reasons for moving into sheltered accommodation as gaining more security. Many also indicated that family members gained comfort from know that their parents, aunt, uncle etc. were looked after in sheltered accommodation.

Subsequently, the view was frequently expressed that “hard to let” whole blocks should be de-regulated so that younger people could live together in those schemes leaving fewer sheltered schemes. Deregulated schemes should be those with no lifts and properties above the ground floor.

Another solution often proposed was to install lifts to properties above ground floor – either a through floor lift or stair lifts where appropriate.

A number of tenants praised the use of ex-warden accommodation for learning disability residents through Family Mosaic and suggested sensitive lettings to people with mild disabilities could be successful. However, there was concern that if too many properties were let outside of the current age criteria then there would be insufficient stock available for older people in the future.

2. Mobile sheltered housing officers (SHOs) working in teams to cover a number of schemes rather than an officer per scheme.

The vast majority of participants felt that losing a personal sheltered housing officer would be detrimental – reasons given fell into a number of clear categories:

- Tenants would lose many of their social activities, which are currently organised by the SHO
- Tenants would be left for long periods of time with no support, since the SHOs would be busy at other schemes – it was felt this would particularly affect smaller schemes

- A personal scheme officer gets to know tenants better and can offer a more personal service – this gave the perception of greater security and confidence. Many praised their SHOs and gave examples of support provided to them or other residents.

A few tenants indicated their support for a mobile service stating it could provide more professionalism, fewer clashes of personality between the SHO and tenant, and less “favouritism”. Speaking with someone each day, regardless of whether or not it was the same officer, was sufficient for some but these views represented a very small minority.

A recurring comment was that SHOs do not currently spend enough time with tenants due to training commitments and covering staff sickness at other schemes.

3. The re-introduction of service charges and options of three levels of charge according to the level of service provided

There was almost unanimous agreement against the introduction of any service charge and again, views fell clearly into a number of categories:

- Concerns that tenants would not be able to afford the extra cost
- Rents were perceived to be too high already, with much comparison made with three bedroom houses attracting a similar rent. Subsequently residents believed that they were already paying for the sheltered housing service within their rent.
- It was felt that the service currently offered was not of a high value and did not represent value for money
- There were very strong views about tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit who would not have to meet the extra cost. Many felt benefit recipients should not be able to comment since they would not be financially affected.
- Those currently in receipt of housing benefit were concerned that future benefit changes might leave them liable for the charges in future
- Many commented that it was the Council’s decision to remove the charge and “not their fault” so why should they have to pay now
- Although most people agreed that the service needed to be paid for, there appeared to be little concern that general needs tenants were currently meeting the support costs. There was an attitude that older tenants were entitled to receive such a benefit since they had worked and paid into the system for much of their lives

Residents were invited to comment on 3 levels of service and the estimated cost for each.

There was overwhelming agreement to keep the current service i.e. Option 1, but equally an overwhelming determination not to pay the associated cost. Subsequently whilst a few residents indicated that they would reluctantly pay for a service if it meant keeping their

current SHO, most residents would not commit to choosing a level of service they were willing to pay for.

A few commented that any service provided should be on a sliding scale and tenants should be able to opt in and out of differing levels, depending on their current circumstances and needs.

4. General comments

Many participants took the opportunity to comment generally on services provided by the Council and again there were recurring themes:

- The closure of area housing offices made it more difficult to speak with a housing officer and to report repairs – tenants felt that the removal of a personal SHO would only add to the difficulty
- There were a large number of tenants who had used the Care line service in the evening or weekends, who complained that it took a long time to get through to someone. This was distressing when they had an emergency situation

Many participants also suggested ways to use the hard to let properties:

- Advertise more effectively – do not use the word “warden” as this can be off putting and stigmatises sheltered housing
- Change the lettings criteria to allow more owner occupiers to sell their properties and take Council accommodation, for which they would pay full rent
- Let them at reduced rents

Many could not comprehend that properties would be hard to let, since the schemes they occupy were popular and had no shortage of waiting residents, particularly the ground floor properties. This again led to wide agreement that hard to let blocks should be put back totally into general needs rather than mixing age groups.

Unfortunately there were a very high number of participants who stated

- Decisions have already been made
- The Council does not listen to residents
- The Council is blackmailing tenants by giving them only three choice of service charge
- They did not “sign up” for service charges or the potential changes to the service and therefore do not have to pay them

Chart 1

Complex		No. of Residents Per Complex	No. Residents Attended	% attendance
Grays & Stifford Clays	Airey Neave	31	18	58%
	Atlee Court incl Lucas Road (14+7)	28	21	75%
	Dexter Close	53	16	30%
	Doug Siddons	37	24	65%
	Frederick Andrews	80	27	34%
	Harty Close incl Gaitskell	81	21	26%
	Headon Hall incl St cedds.	35	8	23%
	Chafford	17	7	41%
	Wellington	24	11	46%
	Piggs Corner	91	32	35%
Tilbury & Chadwell	Alexandra Hall - Dunlop Road	43	17	40%
	Alf Lowne	34	19	56%
	Arthur Barnes Court	42	21	50%
	Crown Crt incl Montreal/Newton (12+4)	72	16	22%
	Delargy Close	36	16	44%
	Lansbury Gardens	48	27	56%
	Mahoney Hall/ Fairfax/Adelaide (10+5)	31	15	48%
	Vigerons	36	22	61%
Corringham &Stanford	Bellamine incl Dessons (8+16)	59	24	41%
	Freeman Court - Gordon Road	47	11	23%
	Kynoch Court	54	17	31%
	Langland & Nottage	46	22	48%
	O'Donoghue Hse/Thors Oak	70	32	46%
Sth Ockendon Aveley & Purfleet	Benyon	36	15	42%
	Broome Place	25	18	72%
	Helford Court	29	26	90%
	Jack Evans	39	14	36%
	Mulberry Drive	39	20	51%
	Rookery Court	35	21	60%
	The Rowans	29	15	52%
	The Sycamores incl N. Malt (14+5)	53	19	36%
	Chichester	6	2	33%
Total resident attendents		1386	594	43%