

Appendix 7 – decommissioning of unsuitable and/or hard to let sheltered housing

The Council currently owns 1386 properties which are defined as sheltered housing, and located within 29 sheltered schemes. Many have a communal hall.

Criteria for an allocation of sheltered property are found within the Council's Allocations Scheme at section 12:

In order to be eligible for these schemes applicants must meet all of the following criteria

- *60 years and over or aged 55 to 59 years and in receipt of Higher Rate Disability Living Allowance (Mobility or Care element)*
- *Single or joint applicants with no children*
- *In need of the housing support provided by the scheme*

Properties “unsuitable” for sheltered housing

A number of the schemes have been identified as unsuitable for sheltered housing due to various factors including:

- Too far from public transport and shops e.g. Rookery Court, West Thurrock
- Above ground floor level – 1st and 2nd floor accommodation – with no lift. There are 611 sheltered properties located in buildings on the 1st floor or above, and of these properties, 82.4% have no lift service. It is not anticipated that all of these would be unsuitable since many sheltered housing residents can manage a flight of stairs. However properties on the 2nd floor, or with other factors that affect their suitability, could be considered for decommissioning.
- Mixed properties i.e. where there are sheltered flats on ground level and general needs properties above
- Properties on a steep hill
- Schemes which are closely located to other schemes resulting in an abundance of sheltered housing within a small area
- Schemes requiring major and costly works to bring them up to an acceptable standard and/or DDA compliance

Often tenants indicate their wish to transfer from these properties but unless they have an identified need for a priority move (e.g. a medical need) it may take some time for a transfer to be achieved.

Many of the flats within these schemes are difficult to let and may have to be advertised a number of times before a suitable tenant is found.

Proposal:

Schemes designated unsuitable and/or hard to let are decommissioned (i.e. the sheltered housing service is removed) and all current sheltered tenants of these schemes are offered the opportunity to decant to alternative suitable sheltered accommodation or to remain in the block without a sheltered service.

Decanting tenants from Decommissioned blocks

The housing allocations scheme provides the process for permanently decanting tenants. However due to the age groups and potential vulnerability involved, extra sensitivity will be required and assisted bidding would be offered.

Tenants must be consulted and given choice over where they wish to move. They must be offered assistance with the practical elements of moving. Compensation in line with statutory requirements will need to be provided (see Appendix 8 – Home Loss and Disturbance payments).

The Housing allocations scheme allows the highest banding (Band 1) for tenants who are permanently decanting. Since tenants would be able to bid for properties of their choosing it is difficult to predict how long it would take to decant all those indicating their wish to move. But with flexibility once a decant has been agreed the move could be achieved within a few months since tenants would have the highest priority for 75% of all advertised sheltered properties. However, this is subject to the requirements of tenants and availability of alternative desirable sheltered accommodation.

Support programme for decanting tenants

When a block or scheme has been identified for decommissioning an open meeting with tenants of the scheme will be arranged as soon as is practically possible – it is important that tenants hear of the decision first hand. Family members and friends will be able to attend the meeting to support tenants.

Tenants will be given the option to remain at the property without the sheltered service or to transfer to an alternative sheltered property of their choosing, subject to availability and priority. The implications for each option will be explained at the initial tenants meeting and again at a follow up meeting with each individual tenant.

Should the tenant wish to move, an officer will assist them with completing an online application form and ensure that their application attracts the highest priority banding. Assisted bidding will be offered – this could range from sending a weekly list of available properties, telephoning to discuss properties and placing bids on the tenants behalf.

A dedicated housing officer will manage the decanting process from start to finish so that tenants have a single point of contact within the Council. This will include the following:-

- Contacting the tenant when possible suitable accommodation becomes available
- Attending the viewing of the new property with the tenant
- Arranging for Home Loss and disturbance payments to be made as appropriate
- Arranging the practicalities around the move e.g. removals, redirection of post, disconnection & reconnection of cookers etc.
- Arranging for decoration of the new property if appropriate

A handy person service will be provided to tenants so that all small DIY jobs can be performed e.g. removing and re-hanging curtains, pictures, shelves etc.

The amount of support provided will be tailored to the tenant's requirements and dependent on other support networks. This will be discussed during the initial meeting with the tenant to ensure that all anxieties about the process are addressed.

Time scales for decanting properties

Where it has been agreed that a scheme should be decommissioned all tenants would be advised of the decommissioning and offered the support programme.

There are two options for the next stage of the process:

- Option One:

A date would be identified for when the removal of the sheltered housing service would take effect. This would depend on the size of the scheme but is envisaged to be between 6 and 12 months. This would be subject to availability of suitable alternative accommodation.

Where the future use of the scheme is for general needs, any void properties in the interim would be advertised and let as general needs accommodation – however, the lettings would be treated with sensitivity in view of the remaining sheltered tenants.

Where the future use of the scheme is for specialised clients (see below) – negotiations would take place with Social Services to determine suitable new tenants and or any lease arrangements. Again sensitivity to the needs of remaining sheltered tenants would be required and if necessary properties may need to remain void or be used for temporary accommodation on a licence basis.

Once the service removal date was reached the sheltered housing service would be removed. This includes the removal of all sheltered equipment such as pull cords and Tunstall systems.

- Option two

The sheltered service would be gradually wound down but would remain in place until the last sheltered tenant who had indicated they wish to move, had vacated.

Whilst this option gives more assurance to the tenants in terms of a service being available it could severely delay the decommissioning programme and cause more uncertainty for tenants.

Future use of decommissioned properties

The future use of decommissioned properties will be considered on a case by case basis but options would include:

- Specialist client groups

The desire to move long term residents out of unsuitable residential care placements, alongside the increasing need to reduce costs to the general fund for such placements, has resulted in discussions between Social Care services and housing regarding availability of alternative accommodation which could be set up as supported housing.

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Subsequently it has been identified that one or two decommissioned sheltered schemes could provide suitable accommodation for other client groups, for example clients with mental health issues.

- General needs accommodation

There is a shortage of one bedroom accommodation for singles and couples waiting to be housed or transferred into smaller accommodation.

There are currently 4945¹ applicants on the Councils Housing waiting lists and of these 2432 (49%) are waiting for 1 bedroom properties.

Of those waiting for 1 bedroom properties

- 1998 (82%) are waiting for general needs accommodation
- 428 (17%) have a priority banding
- 130 (5%) would like to downsize from a larger property

- Use of Halls and ex-warden accommodation

Some decommissioned schemes will have halls and/or ex-warden accommodation attached to the scheme. These can be utilised to meet a variety of needs including:

- Community halls
- Resource centres for mobile officers
- Day care provision for support groups e.g. dementia support groups
- Respite care
- Specialised accommodation for those with autism

Recent examples of successful co-operation with Adult Social Care, Children's Services and providers such as Family Mosaic, to provide supported housing to groups such as those with Learning Disabilities has highlighted how joint working can achieve successful outcomes.

Initial recommendations for decommissioning

The following schemes have been identified for decommissioning:

Extra Care Properties at Piggs Corner and Kynoch Court

75² of the 1386 sheltered properties are also designated as Extra Care accommodation;

- 55 flats at Piggs Corner, Grays
- 20 flats at Kynoch Court in Stanford-le-Hope

¹ Data from Thurrock Choice Homes on 4th June 2014

² This figure excludes other properties within these schemes which are not defined as Extra Care.

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The extra care flats are located together within one section of the schemes. There are other flats within the scheme which are not extra care

Allocations of Extra Care properties have to meet further criteria beyond the requirement for sheltered, which is examined via a joint panel of housing and social care officers.

Tenants of these properties have care needs requiring a higher level of support which is provided via a care package from Adult Social Care (ASC). Subsequently, although the current sheltered service offer is made available to them, they do not require it. In essence it is a doubling of support provision and potential cost to the tenant (i.e. a tenant will be receiving a package of support from carers who are visiting daily – why would they require a daily call from the sheltered housing officers to see if they are ok).

Discussions with ASC have resulted in the decision that the extra care properties are removed from Sheltered Housing stock. The tenancy management would continue with the housing department along with the allocation process but ASC would be solely responsible for the support of tenants.

This would not affect the remaining sheltered housing tenants within these schemes – the sheltered housing service would continue in these properties.

1. Langland Close and Nottage Close - Corringham

Appendix 6 shows that sheltered properties in Langland Close and Nottage Close are often hard to let, but they are also unsuitable for sheltered accommodation because of their lack of lift facility and their location.

The properties are situated in 4 blocks of 11 flats – two each side of a busy road.

- 12 x ground floor (3 in each block)
- 16 x 1st floor (4 in each block)
- 16 x 2nd floor (4 in each block)

32 flats are above ground floor with no lift.

The following chart indicates the breakdown with regards to transfer applications:

| Floor level | No. of Tenants | | | Total |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| | Live Transfer Applications | Previous Transfer Applications* | No Transfer Applications | |
| Ground Floor | 1 | 0 | 11 | 12 |
| 1st Floor | 4 | 2 | 10 | 16 |
| 2nd Floor | 5 | 3 | 8 | 16 |
| | 10 | 5 | 29 | 44 |

*Tenants previously had transfer applications but did not renew them when the CBL system changed to an online application form in May 2013.

This indicates that 44% of the tenants in flats above ground level have indicated, either now or in the past that they would like to move.

| Age Groups | |
|---------------|----|
| Under 60 | 3 |
| 60 to 65 | 6 |
| 66 to 80 | 19 |
| Over 80 | 6 |
| Age unknown** | 10 |
| Total | 44 |

** These are long term tenants with tenancy start dates before 1999. There are currently no details of dates of birth on Saffron or Novalet.

2. Chichester Close – Aveley

Chichester Close consists of 8 flats within 2 blocks.

- 4 x ground floor flats (2 in each block)
- 4 x 1st floor flats (2 in each block)

There are no lifts.

The scheme is annexed to The Sycamores and New Malting's with a shared communal hall. However the two blocks are physically isolated from the main complex and communal hall and tenants have to walk around the scheme to gain access.

The 1st floor flats have often been difficult to let and subsequently one flat has been leased to Family Mosaic for learning disability clients.

Another 1st floor flat was previously leased to Family Mosaic under the same programme but the scheme proved so successful that the young tenant with learning disabilities was allocated the property on a permanent basis because of the shortage of sheltered tenants bidding for the flats.

This means there are currently only 6 sheltered tenants. One tenant has a live transfer application and one had a previous application that was not renewed when the online application form was implemented in 2013.

| Age Groups of tenants | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Non sheltered | 2 |
| 60 to 65 | 3 |
| 66 to 80 | 3 |
| Over 80 | 0 |
| Total | 8 |

Chichester Close flats have been identified as requiring a number of major works in a recent survey.

The impact of the disruption to tenants whilst works are being carried out has yet to be assessed but it may require tenants to be decanted on a temporary basis.

3. Alexander Road and Dunlop Road – Tilbury

This scheme consists of 10 blocks with 4 flats in each block

- 20 x ground floor flats (2 in each block)
- 20 x 1st floor flats (2 in each block)

20 Flats are above ground floor with no lift

The flats are surrounded by general needs accommodation and close to a school but are not nearby any other public amenities such as shops, GP surgery etc. This makes them unpopular; recently one flat was advertised 12 times before a successful bidder could be found.

There are lots of issues with ASB in the area and the properties need major works to upgrade the ramps in line with DDA compliance.

There is a hall attached to the scheme which would be ideal for day care provision for dementia sufferers who would be brought in via transport. Discussions with Adult Social Care have indicated that the four flats at Dunlop Road would be ideal for supported housing for people with mental health issues.

| Age Groups of tenants | |
|-----------------------|----|
| Under 60 | 3 |
| 60 to 65 | 10 |
| 66 to 80 | 16 |
| Over 80 | 8 |
| Age unknown | 3 |
| Total | 40 |

4. St Cedds Court – Grays

This is a mixed community scheme with 34 sheltered flats on the ground floor, and general needs accommodation (Studio and 3 bedroom maisonettes) above. There are issues for tenants regarding noise levels, children and ASB.

There are also major works required to bring ramps at the properties up to DDA compliance and there are currently covered walkways between the sheltered flats that need to be up graded to meet fire compliance – if the blocks were not sheltered housing, these would be removed.

| Age Groups of tenants | |
|-----------------------|----|
| Under 60 | 6 |
| 60 to 65 | 4 |
| 66 to 80 | 14 |
| Over 80 | 6 |
| Age unknown | 3 |
| Void | 1 |

| | |
|-------|----|
| Total | 34 |
|-------|----|

5. Montreal Road and Newton Road – Tilbury

This scheme comprises of 32 flats

- 16 x ground floor (4 in each block)
- 16 x 1st floor (4 in each block)

There is no lift

Tenants have access to the communal hall at Mahoney Hall 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.

| Age Groups of tenants | |
|-----------------------|----|
| Under 60 | 4 |
| 60 to 65 | 6 |
| 66 to 80 | 14 |
| Over 80 | 3 |
| Age unknown | 4 |
| Void | 1 |
| Total | 32 |

Summary of potential decommissioned properties

| Scheme | Sheltered Tenancies |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Chichester Close | 8 |
| Langland Close | 22 |
| Nottage Close | 22 |
| Montreal road | 16 |
| Newton Road | 16 |
| St Cedds Court | 34 |
| Alexandra Road | 35 |
| Dunlop Road | 4 |
| Total | 157 |

On the basis that an average of 145 sheltered properties are relet each year, (see chart below) of which 75% would be available for tenants transferring with a priority band, it is clear that the decommissioning programme could take a number of years especially if the tenant only wants to move to a particular scheme. However, this is mitigated by the fact that decanting tenants are awarded the highest possible banding (band 1) and therefore would only be competing against other decanting tenants for properties of their choice.

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| Properties re-let 2009 to 2014 | Total | Average per year | Average per month |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Aveley | 64 | 13 | 1 |
| South Ockendon | 39 | 8 | 1 |
| SLH & Corringham | 130 | 26 | 2 |
| Tilbury | 113 | 23 | 2 |
| Garrison Purfleet | 13 | 3 | 0 |
| Grays | 252 | 50 | 4 |
| Chadwell | 87 | 17 | 1 |
| West Thurrock | 27 | 5 | 0 |
| | 725 | 145 | 12 |