

Scrutiny Committee

31 May 2012

Urgent Item – Review of the sheltered housing provision

Report to	Cabinet	Item
	13 June 2012	
Report of	Head of housing	
Subject	Review of the sheltered housing provision.	

KEY DECISION

Purpose

To consider the issues arising from phase II of the sheltered housing review that seeks to ensure the council has a sheltered housing provision that is fit for purpose; which tenants choose to live in; supports independent living and provides community hubs for older people.

Recommendations

1. To develop a five year investment programme for inclusion in the housing capital programme, estimated to cost £2.6m, to improve and reconfigure high demand purpose built flatted sheltered housing with investment in 2012/13 being funded from underspend;
2. To consult with the Sheltered Housing Tenants Forum on the implications of adopting an enhanced standard of internal finishes and fittings for sheltered properties prior to letting and report the outcome to a Cabinet;
3. To agree the proposal from the Sheltered Housing Tenants Forum to re brand the sheltered housing stock; to reflect accommodation that supports independent living;
4. Subject to agreement with tenant representatives, reduce the age restriction for sheltered accommodation from 60 to 55 years;
5. To review on a scheme by scheme basis the future of all other sheltered housing for which there is a lower level of demand. The outcome of these reviews will be considered by cabinet; and
6. To create a temporary four year post of project manager, at an cost of £37,000 per annum, to be funded initially from the HRA contingency in 2012/13 and HRA budgets thereafter.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority Decent housing for all and the service plan priority ([Click here to type service plan priority](#))

Financial implications:

The estimated capital investment of £2.6m will be undertaken over a 5 year period. This will cover the cost of improving guestroom facilities and reconfiguration of smaller units to form two bedroom accommodation. Expenditure in the current financial year will be funded from underspend in the approved capital programme.

The project manager function (which is subject to assessment as part of the Councils job evaluation process) is estimated to cost £37,000 per annum. This will be funded from the HRA in a full year and from the contingency budget in the current year.

The reconfiguration of units, reduction in voids and overall reduction in the number of units at some schemes may have an impact on rental income and service charges. The full impact will need to be assessed on a scheme by scheme basis.

Ward/s: All wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Victoria McDonald – Housing

Contact officers

Tracy John 01603 212939

Nigel Andrews 01603 212572

Background documents

Cabinet report 21st September 2011: Review of the sheltered housing service (exempt report)

Report

Background

1. Sheltered housing is independent living for council tenants over 60 years of age. The Norwich city schemes comprise of 1 & 2 bed units with some shared facilities such as communal lounges, guestrooms and laundries, depending on whether the scheme is a block scheme (flats) or bungalows. The schemes are supported by the community alarm service together with a team of support workers providing housing related support and sheltered housing officers, for housing management activities.
2. The Council currently has 992 units in 28 schemes. The schemes are made up of purpose built bungalows and low rise flatted units, including good neighbour schemes. The good neighbour blocks are mostly 3 storey flats without lifts. Some of the schemes provide facilities that act as a local community hub for older people.
3. As part of the first phase of sheltered housing review the council has restructured and separated the tenancy management and housing related support service provided to residents. The new structure was implemented in April 2012.

Demand for sheltered housing

4. In Norwich, despite an ageing population, there has been a decreasing demand for sheltered housing. This reflects national trends and the main reasons for this are that more people choose to remain in their family homes and seek to access care and support in different ways. This current trend may change due to the changes in welfare benefits and pressure on under occupying households to free up family homes but it is not envisaged that this will address all of the reduction in demand for sheltered housing. Registered providers (RPs) do not have a large sheltered housing stock in the city but they are also experiencing a reduction in demand and they are reviewing their provision. Notwithstanding this it is also important to note that compared with the council stock, those RPs with sheltered accommodation have newer schemes with more modern facilities; making them more popular than council owned assets.
5. Easy access to community services (such as GP surgeries, bus routes and local shops) is particularly important to residents of sheltered accommodation. Some of the lowest demand schemes are on the outskirts of the city or in locations that do not have easy access to facilities of this nature.

National context

6. In terms of demand at a national level, it is estimated that the number of people over 85 has doubled since 1982 and it is projected that it double again by 2026. There will be 1.7 million more people who will need care and support in 20 years time, and it is anticipated the number of people with dementia will double over the next 30 years.

7. In this context Shelter has recently published a report which claims that nationally the housing market is failing to meet the needs of older people. Their report 'A better fit? Creating housing choices for an ageing population' - makes a number of recommendations including:-
 - a) There is a need for a significant increase in the "supply and range" of housing for older people, including private rented and owner occupier specialist housing.
 - b) Developers should build attractive and well designed homes for older people and specialist providers must be upfront about their services and charges.
 - c) The planning system must support the development of housing for older people. Local planning authorities must factor older people's housing need into local plans, strategies and housing market assessments, while integrating these with health and social care strategies.
 - d) Older people need to be better informed at an early stage about their housing options and plan ahead accordingly. Many need practical help and support with their housing and planning their later life.
 - e) Local government can do more to facilitate schemes that help older people move to accommodation that's more suited to their needs.
8. This national overview is of interest in that it identifies the importance of providing accommodation that is more suited to the changing needs of older people. Locally this is reflected in the fact that there is a reducing demand for the current sheltered housing provision in the city and this has been a major driver behind the need for this review.

Wider local context

9. In terms of local policy the Council supports the aims of the 'Living Longer Living Well' as part of the 'Norfolk Older People's Strategy' in developing and delivering a number of services in partnership with the statutory, voluntary and private sector. The overall aim is to promote independence and well being and to link housing and support needs of older people especially when looking to design and develop housing with care schemes. An essential element of this approach is seeking to offer older people choice as to the type of home they would like to live in.
10. Norfolk County Council has also published its strategy, 'Building a Better Future' which looks to create quality care accommodation for older people living in Norfolk. It sets out a transformation programme of up to 15 years, with the objective of replacing the county's current care estate with high quality care accommodation, through NORSE Care. The expectation is that over time NORSE Care will seek to re-provide current long stay residential care places with specialist dementia care places and new housing with care schemes.
11. This strategy supports the council's long term vision as a landlord to provide high quality accommodation for older people. In a wider context the councils

housing strategy for the city is currently being refreshed and this will seek to ensure that there is appropriate provision for older people's accommodation and their support needs, including owner occupied, private rented and affordable housing.

12. The following table provides an overview of the changing demographic profile of the county and city council areas. The level of increase over the period 2008 to 2020 in the city is lower than that being experienced elsewhere in the county but the change is still significant.

	2008	2020	% increase
Norfolk			
65+	177,100	238,900	34%
85+	24,500	34,500	41%
Norwich			
65+	19,400	22,000	13%
85+	3,300	3,800	15%

Sheltered housing review

13. The above assessment has identified a growing number of older people in the city but at the same time the demand for sheltered accommodation is reducing. It is important that in its role as housing landlord, the council's sheltered housing provision is fit for the future and that any over supply is addressed. The housing stock managed by the City Council is ageing with most being over 20 years old. This is in contrast to registered provider developments that have predominately been built over the last 30 years. These units tend to more accurately reflect older peoples' changing housing aspirations in terms of space, size and level of 'finish'.
14. At an early stage discussions have been held with the sheltered housing tenants' forum to obtain their views on the current and future provision for sheltered housing. They have asked the council to prioritise the rebranding of the sheltered service and to invest to improve and sustain the sheltered stock for future generations. These views have been captured in the following proposals.
15. To help ensure that the council stock is fit for purpose an asset review has been undertaken. The review has shown that the quality of the sheltered housing on offer is very good in the majority of bungalow schemes but that, in line with many other local authorities, there is currently an over supply of sheltered stock within the city. There are 602 people registered on the waiting list for sheltered accommodation and most are only interested in the bungalow developments.

16. To illustrate the difference in demand between property types the table below shows the average 'void to let' period for sheltered housing in Norwich over the last 3 years. This clearly demonstrates the high demand for bungalow developments and conversely the low demand for sheltered housing flats. In some schemes it can take over a year to fill a vacant unit.

Sheltered Housing	No of days
Bungalows	22
Ground Floor Flats	55
1 st Floor Flats	62
2 nd Floor Flats	97

Retention of high demand sheltered units.

17. This analysis has led to the conclusion that the future investment strategy of the council should focus on the sheltered stock that is in most demand (i.e. bungalows and purpose built flatted schemes) and that all other stock should be reviewed on a scheme by scheme basis.
18. Over the next five years in addition to investment in bungalows it is also proposed that there is capital investment in purpose built flats to achieve the following two key improvements to help ensure that they are fit for purpose:
- Improving the internal space layouts and increase the number of 2 bed units. Some of the smaller flats have a very compact layout, with a small living room and single bedroom with only just enough space for a sofa or a bed. Older people have often previously occupied larger homes having lived in family sized accommodation, often on their own, for some time before they move into sheltered accommodation. For these residents the change to smaller accommodation can often be fairly stressful and smaller units does not encourage this transfer. To help address this, and to make the accommodation on offer more relevant to current expectations, it is recommended that where it is possible to identify adjacent smaller flats that these are reconfigured into larger, more desirable 2 bed units.
 - Improving the guestroom facilities for visiting families. Visiting families are very poorly catered for within the schemes. Guest rooms have a low specification with no bath or shower facility and are not in demand. There is evidence that suggests some older people are reluctant to move to sheltered accommodation because of the lack of adequate guest room facilities. The guest rooms in sheltered housing are a good idea to support residents bringing their family for short visits but in their present form they emphasise an 'institutional' feel. To address this it is proposed that in each scheme an existing vacant flat is converted into a family guest unit,

providing living space, a kitchen, and bathroom and bed spaces for a visiting family. Providing a more attractive guest facility should increase income from letting the family guest room and increase the demand for sheltered units from single people moving out of larger family units. A recent focus group of tenants recommended this approach.

19. In addition to the improvement programme it is also proposed that consideration be given to the scope to improve the standard for vacant sheltered accommodation properties prior to letting be improved. Currently it is the same standard as that for general needs housing. This means the properties have no internal decoration, basic flooring to kitchen and bathrooms only, and require the incoming tenants to carry out their own decoration and carpeting/flooring to the living room and bedrooms. This can be a barrier to older people accepting sheltered housing tenancies and prevent downsizing. An aspiration is to achieve a higher specification, with full decorations; flooring and modernised kitchens and bathrooms will make the properties ready to move into and thereby reduce the upheaval and the stress of moving. This should help to encourage tenants to move out of under occupied family homes which are in demand. However this is not a straightforward matter and there will be an impact on the overall HRA revenue programme and on service charges. These matters require further consideration and they will be the subject of further discussion with the sheltered housing tenants forum and the outcome will be reported to cabinet for a decision on the way forward.

Approach for low demand sheltered units

20. The review has shown that Norwich City Council has an over supply of sheltered housing. There is a lack of demand for particular sheltered schemes with some units being vacant. These schemes suffer from high void rates and failure to deal with this underlying lack of demand poses a significant risk to the city council.
21. One example of low demand units are a number of general needs flats that were reclassified into sheltered / good neighbour schemes. They do not benefit from on site communal facilities and have stairs access only to upper floors. They are generally difficult to let and their classification as sheltered housing needs to be assessed. This assessment may identify that these units would be more appropriate to general needs housing and it is likely that they could help meet an expected increase in demand for 1 bed accommodation as the full impact of changes to welfare payments is known. In these schemes existing tenants would have the choice to move to other sheltered accommodation (in accordance with the existing council policy) or to remain as a tenant of general needs housing. This approach requires detailed assessment on a scheme by scheme basis and engagement with the sheltered housing tenants forum, city wide board and affected tenants. Specific proposals will also require further approval by cabinet.
22. Another use of existing low demand stock is the link to the growing need for housing with care. Potentially there is an increasing demand for housing with care for older people who are frail, including those with low level dementia which offers significantly more support to residents than sheltered

accommodation. Applications for this type of housing are managed by the city council in respect of housing need together with NORSE Care and Broadland HA providing landlord services. Although there is a track record of partnership working with the county council, more opportunity could be made of the city's 28 sheltered housing schemes as part of the overall strategic plan to offer choices to older people in the city. Norfolk County Council has developed 2 housing with care schemes and the city council manages the allocation process to these facilities.

23. Block schemes within the vicinity of other 'housing with care' schemes are ideal to convert because of the opportunities to share some of the management costs. Initial indications from the county council are that they are keen to develop such a scheme; however, further investigation will be required to identify if this is a viable solution. Given the need to review the councils stock it is now considered prudent to develop further planning with the county council and NORSE Care, taking account of what the city council already provides. The outcome of this partnership working on housing with care will be the subject of a future report to Cabinet.

Other changes to the sheltered housing service

24. There are currently a low number of applicants registering for sheltered accommodation and one reason for this is that there is a perception that some of Norwich's block schemes of sheltered accommodation are of a poor standard with an institutional feel and out of date facilities. Recent discussions with the sheltered housing tenants forum and tenants identified a strong desire to change this image and rebrand the service with the aim of promoting the fact that it was accommodation that supported independent living for the elderly. This approach would be consistent with the new investment programme and any new branding would need to be developed with tenant representatives.
25. Currently there is an age restriction of 60 years in Norwich for sheltered accommodation. There is no legal requirement for this type of limit and it is a barrier to some people who may wish to move to a sheltered housing scheme. This restriction affects people who are between the age of 55 & 60 and people who are over 60 with a partner who is under 60. Lowering the age restriction from 60 to 55 would allow more people access to sheltered housing. This change will be discussed with the tenant representatives and, subject to their agreement, can be implemented.
26. Demand for sheltered schemes could also be increased by making them available to housing applicants with low to medium learning/support needs, who would benefit from living in a supported, but independent community. Sheltered housing units are often supportive communities ideally suited to integrating those with learning needs who have been dependent upon carers in the past. This is consistent with promoting independent supported living of adults. There may also be a demand to offer sheltered housing to those with a physical disability, who would fall into the lower age range, but needing a supportive environment in which to remain living independently. This idea requires further consideration and discussion with tenant representatives and

will be the subject of a further report to cabinet when these have been completed.

27. To help implement this phase of the sheltered housing review a cross service officer project team will be created and resourced within the existing structures/budgets. However there will be a need for a new post to manage this change and this will require separate funding from the housing revenue account.

DRAFT

Integrated impact assessment



NORWICH
City Council

The IIA should assess **the impact of the recommendation** being made by the report

Report author to complete

Committee: Cabinet

Committee date: 13th June 2012

Head of service: Tracy John

Report subject: Review of the sheltered housing provision

Date assessed: 18 May 2012

Description:

	Impact			
Economic (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Finance (value for money)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	There will be additional costs but reducing voids and making greater use of the existing stock will have a positive financial impact.
Other departments and services e.g. office facilities, customer contact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
ICT services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	May allow for a reduction in ICT costs
Economic development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	May allow sites to be developed in line with our housing strategy
Financial inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Social (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Safeguarding children and adults	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change
<u>S17 crime and disorder act 1998</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable
Human Rights Act 1998	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change
Health and well being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Refurbishment of identified schemes will enhance residents health and well being, by providing better accommodation to meet the needs of those requiring support

	Impact			
Equality and diversity (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Relations between groups (cohesion)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change
Eliminating discrimination & harassment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change
Advancing equality of opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Will provide better accommodation to those with disabilities and therefore may contribute to wider social inclusion
Environmental (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change
Natural and built environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any new build, either by ourselves or a partner, would be required to meeting environmental conditions
Waste minimisation & resource use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change
Pollution	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change
Sustainable procurement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change
Energy and climate change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any new build, either by ourselves or a partner, would be required to meet energy and climate conditions in regard to 'green' build.

	Impact			
(Please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Risk management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Builds upon the partnership we have with Norfolk County Council, Community Services, NORSE Care. Review of assets and enhancing current schemes can only place us as a forward thinking authority in delivering high class and environmentally friendly sheltered housing accommodation.

Recommendations from impact assessment

Positive

Enhanced accommodation for older people. Reduction in the underoccupation of low demand residential units.

Negative

Some disruption to tenants in low demand sheltered housing schemes.

Neutral

New brand for the service.

Issues

DRAFT