



REPORT TO:	HOUSING & COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM:
DATE OF MEETING:	18 NOVEMBER 2004	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	OPEN:
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CLLR K HARRINGTON (CHAIR - COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	VISITS TO SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

6(a)

1.0 Recommendation

1.1 It is recommended that:

- Feedback on the site visits to sheltered housing schemes be noted
- The Committee addresses the issues raised in paragraphs 3.10 to 3.13 at the earliest opportunity and monitors progress on a frequent basis.
- The Committee ascertains whether similar or other issues are evident at other sheltered housing schemes and take appropriate action
- The Committee considers undertaking periodic site visits of its own to see at first hand the operation of its services

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide feedback on visits made by members of the Community Scrutiny Committee to three of the Council's sheltered housing schemes
- Assist the Housing and Community Services Committee to further develop and improve its sheltered housing service

3.0 Detail

Background to the Visits

- 3.1 In August, members of the Community Scrutiny Committee visited sheltered housing schemes at Pear Tree Court (Etwall), Newlands Close (Church Gresley) and Unity Close (Church Gresley).
- 3.2 The Committee had visited these schemes in October 2002 and sought to assess what progress had been made in the intervening period.
- 3.3 At each scheme, members held a 'round table' discussion with residents, the Community Warden and managers of the service. They also looked at the accommodation (particularly communal areas) and tested the responsiveness of the emergency alarm system.
- 3.4 On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank residents and staff for their hospitality and for assisting with our enquiries.

Progress Overall

- 3.5 The Committee noted a significant improvement in the quality of the service since its last visit and this was also recognised by residents.
- 3.6 Initial doubts amongst residents about the move to a community warden service would seem to have been allayed. There was an active social programme for each of the schemes visited and the quality and warmth of the dialogue between residents and housing staff was clearly evident.
- 3.7 New furniture and fittings had been purchased (or were planned) for Community Rooms and residents had been involved in making these decisions. Cleaning of windows and communal areas had improved and portable electrical appliances were now being tested on a regular basis. Some remedial works (involving new fencing and the removal of planters) had also been undertaken in the vicinity of the Community Room at Newlands Close and this had helped to reduce vandalism.
- 3.8 The emergency alarms were tested at all three schemes and the response times were within the agreed standard.
- 3.9 The Community Scrutiny Committee also identified a number of specific issues at each of the schemes, which need to be brought to the attention of this Committee.

Pear Tree Court, Etwall

3.10 The issues at Pear Tree Court were:

- the delay in choosing a new heating system - this was also holding up plans for the kitchen and laundry room and the provision of a new carpet for the lounge
- the provision of shower facilities for residents who now found it difficult to take bath

3.11 Members considered that the issue of shower facilities also highlighted the need for the Council to take a longer-term view when planning and budgeting for new and replacement facilities in sheltered housing schemes.

Newlands Close, Church Gresley

3.12 The issues here were:

- the provision of 'dropped' kerbs within the development - this had been raised during the 2002 visit
- the need for greater clarity over maintenance standards for areas of landscaping and open space along with improved monitoring/reporting regimes (*this was also an issue at Unity Close*)
- heating systems - Members were made aware of a problem relating to the positioning of thermostats on radiators and queried whether this was a problem in other schemes
- parking by non residents within the development

Unity Close, Church Gresley

3.13 The issues at Unity Close were:

- delays for residents in getting done (including lack of information about why a particular repair might take a long time)
- fire evacuation procedures and the need to remind residents of the arrangements on a regular basis
- parking by non residents and anti social behaviour (in particular, pedestrians and motorbikes using the development as a thoroughfare and drunken behaviour)
- blocked and damaged guttering and the need to include this in future maintenance programmes

Discussions with the Chair and Vice Chair

- 3.14 The Community Scrutiny Committee met with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee to discuss their findings on 6 September 2004. The Committee would, like to thank them for attending the meeting and for their helpful contributions.

Conclusions

- 3.15 The site visits and the discussions with residents and housing staff have enabled members to see at first hand the operation of the sheltered housing service. This approach is one that the whole of the Community Scrutiny Committee would strongly recommend to other Committees.
- 3.16 The Committee noted significant improvements in the service since its last visits and members and staff are to be congratulated for their efforts. However, Members also observed a number of issues at each of the schemes that should be addressed at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.17 Finally, it must be remembered that the Committee was able to visit only a very small number of the Council's sheltered housing schemes. In order to ensure the continued development and improvement of the service, the Housing and Community Services should ascertain whether similar or other issues are evident at other schemes and take appropriate action.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 These will need to be determined in the light of the Committee's response to this report.