OPEN

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6th September 2004

PRESENT:-

Labour Group
Councillor Harrington (Chair), Councillor Bambrick (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Mrs. Mead and Mulgrew.

Conservative Group
Councillors Hood and Lemmon.

In Attendance
Councillors Southern and Richards (Labour Group).

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Martin (Conservative Group).

CYS/11. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 26th July 2004 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CYS/12. **SHELTERED HOUSING SITE VISITS**

Peartree Court, Etwall

The Chair reported on the site visits that had been undertaken on 21st August 2004. He reported on the changes which had taken place at Peartree Court since the last visit by the Committee. At the site meeting, plans to replace the heating system had been explained. Two options were being investigated; the continuation of the existing communal system or separate controls for each flat. A decision was to made shortly and residents would be advised of progress. The Committee expressed concern regarding delays in replacing the heating system and recommended that it be dealt with as soon as possible.

Concern was expressed that some residents had advised of a difficulty in taking a bath and expressed a preference to have a shower over a bath. Officers explained that residents could apply for a disabled adaptation grant to meet the cost of this work although the availability of communal facilities could have an impact on grant application outcomes. The Committee requested that initially, a further communal shower facility should be provided but that shower provision generally should be addressed. The Housing Operations Manager referred to the provision of "lifetime bathrooms" and stated that Officers would be requesting additional funding for such provision.

Councillor Southern referred to the proposals suggested by the Committee but emphasised that finance was required in order to make such improvements. The Chair suggested that there was a need to take a long-term view on budgeting for sheltered housing facilities and upgrades. The Chairs requested a definitive list of sheltered housing facilities. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that a long-term strategy/proposed policy would be useful to both tenants and managers and would assist Officers in implementing quick fixes accordingly where required to improve the service.

Newlands Close, Church Gresley

A detailed report was presented on actions which had been undertaken since the last visit to the this facility by the Committee. Concern was expressed by the Committee that no progress had been made on dropped kerbs at Newlands Close and it was felt that this should be undertaken as soon as possible. In addition, although the Housing Operations Manager had reported that an additional £14,000 had been made available for grounds maintenance across all sheltered housing accommodation there was still a lack of clarity over maintenance standards, and operational issues had affected the programme. The Chair asked for monitoring of how the additional budget was being spent.

Concern was expressed that access to the site was poor and that the rear car park was a mess. Parking by non-residents on the site was causing a problem and Councillor Southern suggested clamping offenders.

The Chair advised that a resident had recently reported problems with the heating system which had been installed last year. Initially she had been very pleased with it but was now having problems with keeping the radiators warm due to the position of the thermostat. The Chair asked for clarification as to whether this particular fault was likely to be reported on other such heating systems installed across sheltered housing accommodation. The Housing Operations Manager agreed to look into this matter to ascertain whether other residents were experiencing similar problems.

Unity Close, Church Gresley

The Chair advised the Meeting of progress that had been made since the last visit by the Committee. Concern was expressed that the fire evacuation procedure remained unclear and the Sheltered Housing Manager reported that he had a meeting planned with representatives of the Fire Service who had been reluctant to provide one particular process for evacuating the building due to the communal nature of some of the building.

It was noted that one lady had expressed concern regarding delays in getting repairs undertaken. She had received a letter in May advising that her repair would be carried out within 28 days but this was still outstanding. The Housing Operations Manager advised that this delay was due to the Council currently not holding the stock to undertake the particular repair to this lady's kitchen as this kitchen unit was a model which the Council no longer carried. The work had been awarded to contractors accordingly but the need for better communication with residents was to be addressed.

The Chair advised that he had referred some of the issues regarding anti-social behaviour at the site to the Crime and Disorder Partnership for

appropriate action. Councillor Southern suggested that CCTV could be installed at the site as particular problems with anti-social behaviour was being experienced. Councillor Southern also asked the Committee to note that Unity Close, Church Gresley had been given a 'gold star' award for service in the past.

To summarise, the Chair advised that the Committee had been pleased with the improvements made at sheltered housing accommodation since the last site visits undertaken. He suggested that long-term planning would be recommended by the Committee. Councillor Southern thanked the Committee for looking at sheltered housing accommodation and also expressed his thanks to staff involved in the service. The Chair advised that a formal report would be produced on the Committee's findings for consideration by the Housing and Community Services Committee. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that this report would make suggestions for taking the sheltered housing service forward and it would help to assist the Housing and Community Services Committee in its future planning. The Community Scrutiny Committee should now step back having produced its findings in order that the Policy Committee could take the most appropriate action.

CYS/13. **SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICES**

The Housing Operations Manager presented a detailed report on the Sheltered Housing Service and advised that in response to the Best Value Re-inspection of the Service in December 2002 a Task and Finish Group had been established to draft a Service Vision and standards for accommodation. This Group commissioned an 'Older Persons Needs and Market Demand Survey' aimed at identifying current and future demands and aspirations. This survey was completed in July 2003 and following its analysis a report detailing the draft vision, standards of accommodation and standards of service was presented to and agreed by the Housing and Community Services Committee in November 2003. Consultation with the sheltered housing tenants regarding the vision and standards was also carried out in Spring of this year. Some 201 responses were received and of these 195 supported the vision and standards.

The Committee was advised that the service currently had some 1,100 properties that needed to be considered on an individual basis in light of the standards of accommodation. It was anticipated that this exercise, including managing the decanting of tenants to other more suitable accommodation where necessary would need to be phased over a period of at least five years. This declassification process had already commenced with the flats at the following locations being identified as unsuitable for sheltered housing. (All but the flats at Hatton were in blocks of four with stairs making them unsuitable for adaptation):-

- Belvoir Crescent, Newhall 30
- Pine Grove (flats), Newhall 16
- Honeysuckle, Meadow Lane, Newhall 16
- Four Lane Ends, Newhall 12
- Bloomfield Close, Hilton 20
- Foston Close/Field Avenue, Hatton 10

It was reported that the Housing and Community Services Committee had approved the de-classification of the above schemes, subject to consultation with the relevant tenants. This was with the proviso that all existing tenants could remain and still receive the Sheltered Housing Service or they would be prioritised for a move to permanent sheltered housing and qualify for a grant of £250 to assist with moving costs. The Committee had also directed that where existing tenants chose to stay, despite de-classification, the de-classification should be undertaken in two phases as follows:-

Phase One

Where any original sheltered housing tenant remained resident within a block of flats then vacant dwellings would only normally be let to applicants over 40 years of age. Any exceptions to this policy would need the express prior approval of the Housing Services Manager.

Phase Two

Where no original sheltered tenants remained resident within a block of flats then vacant dwellings would be let in accordance with the standard Allocations Procedure.

This consultation had now been completed and schemes detailed above had been de-classified with lettings being made to those aged 40 years and above. Twelve such units had been let since 9th August 2004.

Members were advised that in relation to the physical attributes for those properties which were to remain as sheltered housing there were a number of initiatives that would assist the aspirational standards. A number of the Planned Maintenance programme elemental specifications had been amended to take account of the agreed requirement for the accommodation standards. For example, lever taps were now specified for all new kitchens and bathrooms and non-slip flooring was the agreed specification for bathroom floors.

It was reported that since the Best Value Re-inspection of the service, some £185,000 had been awarded to fund both initial improvements required to meet some of the original recommendations of the Best Value Review and ongoing improvements some of which were noted in the 'standards' document circulated. This capital allocation had funded initiatives including the replacement of soft furnishings in communal areas to ensure fire safety standards were adhered to, the installation of door entry systems to communal schemes and communal lounges. A number of other improvements were planned and in the process of being implemented which would improve further the communal facilities throughout the sheltered housing stock, including upgrading of kitchens and laundries and access improvements to help meet Disability Discrimination Act requirements.

It was acknowledged that the Sheltered Housing Service had come along way since 2001/02. Whilst there had been some initial investment more would be required in order to continue to improve the service and meet the standard the Council had now committed itself to. Members received the following details which showed current progress against standards of accommodation to date:-

Criteria	Progress
Paths – minimum width 900 mm	Outstanding
Paths – non slip surface	Outstanding
Paths – handrails fitted	Outstanding
Lifts available for 1st floor and above properties	Outstanding
Two way electrical switches in communal areas	Outstanding
Central heating installed	Programmes underway
Hot water thermostatically controlled	Programmes underway
All dwellings have a warden call system	Complete
Smoke detector installed	Complete
CO2 Detector installed	Outstanding
Kitchen is in a separate room	99.9% Complete
Kitchens have a minimum 1.5 m workspace	Programmes underway
All taps are lever taps	Programmes underway
Floor coverings in kitchen and bathroom are slip resistant	Programmes underway
Suited locks fitted	Programme underway
All wheelchair dwellings have min 1.8 x 1.4 m turning area	Complete

The Committee asked that target dates for implementation of the above action be included in future reports. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that a framework of standards (building in assumptions on funding allocations) be produced outlining priority areas and areas to be targeted.

Members were also advised that the majority of revenue funding for the Sheltered Housing and CareLine Services was now received via the Supporting People funding stream which was administered by the Social Services Department of Derbyshire County Council. When the programme went live in April 2003 the District Council (along with other existing providers) was given an interim contract to continue delivering the Sheltered Housing and CareLine services. At that time it was understood that following a successful inspection by the Supporting People Team a 'Steady State' contract would be issued authorising the Council to continue to deliver the services for the following three years. Members were advised that unfortunately the Supporting People funding stream was oversubscribed nationally which had led the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to request each Administering Authority to submit proposals for efficiency savings. These proposals had been submitted and the ODPM had advised that each Administering Authority would be notified of its funding level in the Autumn of 2004. This meant that no Steady State contracts would be issued in Derbyshire until the funding level was known. The Housing Operations Manager advised that the Council had recently been given notice that it would receive a slight increase in its funding (22 pence per household) and Officers were currently looking at how this funding would be spent.

The Committee was advised that the Sheltered Housing and CareLine services had now undergone their Supporting People Review which comprised the submission of the Strategic Relevance document, two Quality Assessment Framework documents and an on-site inspection. Some initial feedback was given on the inspection day in which the inspectors advised that they were confident that the service was valued by its customers and that staff and managers alike were knowledgeable and professional. The formal notification would not be issued until after the ODPM announced funding levels in the Autumn of this year.

(At 5.20 p.m. Councillors Southern and Mrs. Mead left the Meeting.)

The Sheltered Housing Manager gave a detailed presentation, particularly on the Control Centre Services (CareLine) presenting all of the above information visually to Members in order that they could see photographs of some of the changes which had been made to sheltered housing accommodation. He talked about the service pursuing the Association of Social Alarm Providers and Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies accreditations. He also advised of the new initiative Telecare and reported that £10,000 worth of free equipment had been secured through Officer negotiation with different companies to improve the service.

CYS/14. **HOUSING STOCK OPTIONS**

Councillor Bambrick advised that he had asked for this item to be placed on the agenda. As the matter had now been deferred by the Housing and Community Services Committee for consideration in October it was agreed that this item be placed on the agenda for the next Meeting.

CYS/15. **REPORTS TO POLICY COMMITTEES**

The Chair advised the Meeting that a report on the findings of the inspection of the sheltered housing accommodation would be produced reflecting the Committee's conclusions and recommendations. He stated that Policy Committees should be encouraged to undertake similar work and the report would be sent to all Community Scrutiny Committee Members for comments prior to it being submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee. The Chair encouraged feedback from Members accordingly. Councillor Hood expressed the need to emphasise that the comments made by the Scrutiny Committee were not a criticism of the Policy Committee's operations, merely recommendations for improvement.

It was noted that the Car Parking report would be submitted to the next Environment and Development Committee. The Chair advised Members that he would not be present at that Meeting and asked for Members of the Committee to attend and support the Vice-Chair in presenting the report.

CYS/16. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair advised that the Work Programme had been scheduled with the Policy and Best Value Manager. The Chair suggested that the Committee could arrange a Special Meeting to look at Post Office closures.

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting closed at 6.00 p.m.