
REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM:	7
DATE OF MEETING:	3 RD FEBRUARY 2005	CATEGORY:	DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	OPEN	
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	TONY WARD (819483)	DOC:	
SUBJECT:	SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICES	REF:	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:	HCS01

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 That Members note the improvements and further proposals to the Sheltered Housing Service both in terms of service delivery and standards of accommodation provided.

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 To inform members of progress made by the Sheltered Housing Team.

3.0 Background.

3.1 Members will recall that following a Best Value inspection in 2001 the Audit Commission delivered a report that was critical of the Sheltered Housing Service then provided. The Council responded by remodelling the service, and a new Sheltered Housing Team, based on the Community Warden model was set up from March 2002. A Best Value re-inspection was scheduled for December 2002 and the new Sheltered Housing Team worked throughout the year to become established and to resolve many of the issues highlighted by the initial Best Value Report.

3.2 The re-inspection produced a more favourable result, scoring the service as being a "Fair service that has promising prospects of improvement."

3.3 This report seeks to highlight the continuous improvement and progress made by the Sheltered Housing Service since the Best Value Re-inspection.

4.0 Detail

- 4.1 The Sheltered Housing Service has sought to deliver continuous improvement to the services and accommodation it provides, and has built on the achievements noted in the Audit Commission report of the re-inspection of the service.

Strategic Vision

- 4.2 The Best Value Report highlighted that at the time of the Inspection the Authority had no clear strategic vision for the Sheltered Housing Service. Members will recall that aided by input from a "Task and Finish Group" a strategic direction document, including a Vision Statement, Aims and set of Standards of Accommodation was put before this Committee in November 2003. Following Committee approval residents were consulted. Some 201 responses were received with 195 of those endorsing the proposals.
- 4.3 The Vision Statement and Aims have been adopted by the Sheltered Housing Team, and all the sheltered schemes have been audited to identify non-compliance with the physical Standards of Accommodation agreed by Housing and Community Services Committee in November 2003. Work to implement these physical standards has already commenced, with non slip flooring being installed as standard as part of the replacement kitchen and bathroom programme. In addition, lever taps are also being installed as part of the kitchen programme.
- 4.4 Also at Committee in November 2003, approval was sought to de-classify 104 flats in Pine Grove, Newhall, Belvoir Crescent, Newhall, Bloomfield Close Hatton, Four Lane Ends, Newhall, Honeysuckle Close, Newhall and Foston Close/Field Lane, Hatton. Existing tenants were consulted and the de-classification process set in motion. Sheltered tenants on the schemes were given the opportunity to move to more suitable accommodation. The majority of residents consulted decided to stay-put however four residents have taken up the offer to move and have been supported through the process.
- 4.5 The first phase of de-classification has been undertaken and the majority of the previously, difficult to let, flats have been taken up by tenants who are over 40, in accordance with the amended allocations policy as previously agreed by Committee. When whole blocks are free of sheltered tenants the flats will be let in accordance with the standard allocations procedure.

- 4.6 The de-classification process should be seen as on-going and a further report was brought to Committee in January 2005 to de-classify flats at Croft Close, Netherseal. Further schemes will need to be considered for de-classification where it will not be viable to refurbish them to meet the essential criteria of the Service Standards. In deciding which schemes should be de-classified a recent paper published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister with respect Right to Buy and specifically the right to refusal needs to be considered. The paper sets out a number of physical attributes that need to be present within and around a dwelling for that dwelling to be considered sheltered accommodation. The recommendations set out within the paper align closely with the essential criteria in the Standards of Accommodation.
- 4.7 Members will be aware that following Committee approval and tenant consultation Smallthorn Place and Bass's Crescent sheltered scheme were closed and the tenants successfully re-housed. Proceeds from the sale of the two sites, currently estimated at £635,000 for Smallthorn Place and £260,000 for Bass's Crescent, have been earmarked to provide the equipment to bring the 116 non-sheltered bungalows previously identified into the sheltered housing stock, fund the improvements to the standard of accommodation provided by the service and to upgrade the existing warden-call equipment, which Members will recall is first generation technology. Warden call equipment has now moved on to fourth generation, meaning that it is becoming increasingly difficult to repair and maintain our existing equipment as the parts are no longer manufactured.
- 4.8 Approval to end the provision of white goods was also granted by Members at Housing and Community Services Committee in November 2003. The white goods, mainly cookers, will be gifted to the residents with effect from 4th April 2005, following safety checks, most of which have now been undertaken. The provision of such white goods is not general practice amongst other Local Authorities and the majority of new tenants expect to bring their existing white goods with them when they move home. All residents, currently with white goods, will be written to, informing them of the decision and Community Wardens will carry out follow-up visits to clarify any issues arising from the letter.

Supporting People

- 4.9 Since April 2004 a high percentage of the funding for the Sheltered Housing Service has been provided by Supporting People funding. The Supporting People Fund is administered by Derbyshire Social Services and the Sheltered Housing Service is contracted to Supporting People to provide a service to the residents who live in the District's sheltered housing schemes. In order to remain contract compliant, quarterly returns have to be submitted and the service has to work within a Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). Services are also inspected to

ensure compliance with the contract. South Derbyshire's Sheltered Housing Service was in the first tranche of services to be inspected and underwent an inspection over the summer of 2004. We still await the formal report and judgement of the inspection, however initial feedback was positive with the inspectors saying they felt the Authority delivered an effective service that had a strategic relevance and was sensitive to the needs of its customers.

Improvements to the Service

- 4.10 Over the past two years the Community Warden Team and the CareLine Team have consistently provided a reliable and responsive service 24 hours a day everyday of the year. The service is backed by a comprehensive procedure manual. The manual has been developed in an interactive format and has been validated as a good practice document by HouseMark. Sheltered Housing tenants can rely on a regular planned visit, every other working day, programmed calls from the CareLine Team and a mobile warden response to out of hours emergencies. During the financial year 2003/04, the Community Wardens responded to 357 out of hours emergency calls. A significant volume of emergency visits carried out by the team relate to falls and in response to this the service has just purchased three lifting cushions that enable the safe lifting of people who fall but do not sustain injury. The purchase of these cushions will enhance the health and safety of staff and reduce the need for ambulance crews to attend. All Community Wardens have received training on the appropriate and safe use of these cushions.
- 4.11 On the sheltered schemes with communal lounges many social activities take place from the perennial weekly bingo to gentle exercise, carpet bowls, games afternoons and luncheon clubs. Many activities are facilitated by the Community Wardens, however outside agencies and tenants themselves are encouraged to use the communal lounges to partake in and organise social activities.
- 4.12 The Community Warden Team are currently working towards accreditation under the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies (CSHS) Code of Practice. Accreditation under this code will act as a quality mark for the service but, more importantly, it is expected that compliance with the code will provide a full or partial passport with respect to contractual obligations relating to Supporting People Funding. The service already works within the Code of Practice framework that is currently being evidenced and full compliance and accreditation is expected within three to six months.

CareLine

- 4.13 Over the past eighteen months the CareLine Service has been totally reorganised. New shift patterns have been introduced that have enabled the service to be more responsive to requests for assistance.

- 4.14 A comprehensive procedures manual has been developed and staff are currently working towards accreditation for the Association of Social Alarm Providers (ASAP), Code of Practice. Accreditation to this code is important as it is expected to provide a passport to Supporting People funding. It is expected that without compliance with the Code of Practice, CareLine type services will not be seen to meet the demands of the Supporting People contract. A secondary, but no less important, reason for seeking Code of Practice compliance is that potential growth may come from providing service to other housing providers within or outside the District and it has become practice for all organisations market testing their monitoring services to cite compliance with the ASAP Code as a prerequisite of any tender. A pre-audit of the CareLine Service is being undertaken by ASAP on the 1st & 2nd February 2005 and a full audit is expected to be undertaken within three months of the pre-audit.
- 4.15 The CareLine Centre makes and takes in excess of 10,000 calls per month via the Tunstall calls handling system. This ensures regular contact with the residents in sheltered housing. During the financial year 2003/04, CareLine received and made 119,675 calls via the Tunstall system. Of these calls, 24,916 were incoming calls for assistance from Sheltered Housing customers and 98.09% were answered in under 60 seconds. In addition to this core activity the centre provides a wide ranging, out of hours, service whenever the Civic Offices are not open. The majority of calls are for housing repairs, environmental health issues or drainage, however the Centre fields a significant amount of calls from customers of the Council who just need advice or sign-posting to the relevant services. CareLine staff also provide lone working cover for staff from across the Authority.
- 4.16 The CareLine Service continues to grow its base of dispersed alarm (Lifeline) customers at a rate of around 10% per annum. Anyone in the social or private housing sector wishing to purchase a dispersed alarm can be connected up within 24 hours of contacting the CareLine Centre. The majority of referrals for dispersed alarms come via occupational therapists and other health and social care professionals providing day to day evidence of local partnership working that is beneficial to residents of the District.

Partnerships

- 4.16 The Best Value Inspection reinforced the importance of working in partnerships and members of the Sheltered Housing Team actively participate and contribute to various multi-agency forums including, The Older People's Reference Group, Single Assessment Process (SAP) Implementation Group, Derbyshire Sheltered Housing Forum, Supporting People Provider Forum and the Southern Derbyshire Falls Group. In addition to attending and contributing to these groups the Community Wardens are currently working closely with local health

professionals on a falls awareness project with the aim of reducing the number of falls within the district and therefore the number of hospital admissions.

Physical Improvements to Sheltered Stock

- 4.17 Following the Best Value Re-inspection there has been an on-going programme of improvement across the sheltered schemes. Control equipment in the warden call equipment was upgraded to speed up connections between the schemes and the CareLine Centre. This equipment is compatible with the new fourth generation technology. Fire doors have been installed throughout the schemes within the communal areas and all blocks of flats that did not already have door entry systems were upgraded.
- 4.18 In conjunction with the Crime and Disorder Partnership, security lights have been installed at Princess Close, Woodville and at Percywood Close, Hilton.
- 4.19 Extensive work has been undertaken and is on going to upgrade all the communal lounges throughout the District. Annexe 1 sets out in tabular form the main improvements across the schemes with communal lounges.
- 4.20 At Fisher Close, in addition to the general upgrade, the heating has been replaced, the communal kitchen upgraded and the communal lounge made compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act by replacing internal steps with ramping and extending the toilet area to provide wheelchair access.
- 4.21 At Willoughby House the communal lounge was seldom used because there was no kitchen and the lounge acted as a direct access route to four flats at the rear of the scheme. Here a corridor has been created, reducing the area of the lounge but still providing enough room for small gatherings. A kitchen has been created and equipped for use by the residents,
- 4.22 At Kendrick's Close the small kitchen and laundry have been remodelled to make best use of limited space. Plans are at hand to increase the car-parking facility at this scheme using funds made available to upgrade the sheltered housing schemes.
- 4.23 At Newlands Close, to combat on going vandalism and anti-social behaviour, an open porch was turned into an entrance hall. The approach to the communal lounge has been remodelled, removing planters and benching. The changes appear to have provided an effective solution to the original problems.

5.0 Future

- 5.1 To maintain the continuous improvement achieved over the past three years the sheltered housing service must achieve the accreditations highlighted earlier in this report, sustain its Supporting People contract and continue to grow its core business through the increase in dispersed alarm connections and possibly winning contracts for new business from other housing providers. There are also a number of other areas where growth might be achieved.
- 5.2 Recent developments within the social alarm field, has seen the introduction of assistive technology or "Telecare" equipment. This wireless equipment, such as fall detectors, activity monitors and environmental sensors is seen as a low cost way of allowing older people to stay independent at home and decrease the need for people to move into hospital or residential care. In March 2004 the CareLine Service was successful in a bid for £6000, from the Southern Derbyshire Care and Housing Forum, to set up a "Telecare Resource Room" at Granville Court.
- 5.3 Using the £6,000 and negotiating with the companies that provide this type of equipment we now have a unique facility at Granville Court with a resource room and a respite flat fully set up to demonstrate assistive technology. The facility has over £15,000 worth of equipment on display, at no cost to the HRA, and will be used in the future to raise awareness and train Health and Social Service professionals who are expected to be the main customers for the new technology.
- 5.4 In addition to assistive technology the CareLine Service is currently investigating the possibility of setting up a lone working system that can be marketed across the Authority and to other agencies to generate income. Also there is a possibility that CareLine may be involved in the monitoring of CCTV when introduced to the District, subject to cost and feasibility.
- 5.5 Work will continue to implement the physical standards to the sheltered housing stock. The cost of bringing all current sheltered stock up to the proposed standard has been identified in the region of £2,150,000. Annexe 2 details the costs against each physical standard.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 In order to continue to deliver improvements to the Sheltered Housing Service, the following funding will be required;
- £350,000 to upgrade Warden Call equipment to existing customers.
 - £35,000 to install Warden Call equipment to 116 bungalows.
 - £2,150,000 to carry out physical improvements to ensure that the Sheltered Housing stock complies with the agreed standards and

relevant legislation. (If the sheltered housing stock, due to further rationalisation, for instance fell by 15% within the next two years, the effect on the financial projection would be to reduce it to £1,830,000).

- 6.2 The proceeds from the sale of Smallthorn Place and Bass's Crescent are currently estimated to total £945,000. This therefore leaves a maximum current deficit of some £1,590,000. Consideration must now be given to the ways in which funding can be identified to cover the shortfall, and/or to re-prioritise the recommended standards for accommodation.
- 6.3 There remains limited scope within the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to contribute towards the shortfall. Current available finance within the two accounts is primarily targeted on meeting the minimum Decent Homes Standard by 2010, which is a formal requirement of the Government. Housing Services is continuing to talk to its tenants about whether it is possible to deliver at least part of a higher specification than the basic Decent Homes Standard. The current estimate is that to deliver the 'Silver' standard in full, an additional £19,000,000 of funding is required. The silver standard would mean achieving the Government minimum or 'bronze' standard, plus re-wiring, new doors and other works. A further £14,000,000 will be required to deliver the 'Gold' standard in full. The gold standard would mean achieving the silver standard plus installing showers in bathrooms, improved security, environmental works and some other improvements. These higher standards were established and detailed as part of the Option Appraisal process completed in mid-2004.
- 6.4 Officers have considered other possible ways of raising additional finance. Currently there is no charge levied to Sheltered Housing tenants for the maintenance and/or replacement of communal furniture, fittings or equipment, or grounds maintenance. The cost of providing this is currently funded from 'pooled' resources in the HRA. Consideration may be given to the formulation of a charge for these services, although further detailed work would need to be undertaken before the feasibility and implications of this option could be fully understood. However the amount of additional finance likely to be raised through this route would be minimal compared to the current projected shortfall on delivering the sheltered housing service standards in full and such a charge is unlikely to prove popular with customers.
- 6.5 It is clear that there are major funding issues with not only the overall HRA but also in relation to achieving higher standards of accommodation both in the general purpose and sheltered housing stock. In the next 6 months the Council needs to produce an updated HRA business plan. In addition there is a commitment to report back to Committee on the retention decision and the medium and long-term

viability of the HRA. It is therefore proposed to commit as previously agreed the proceeds from the Smallthorn Place and Bass's Crescent sale in full to the upgrade of the warden call equipment and, in conjunction with customers and to be reported through Committee, on the priorities for investment arising from the standards previously agreed and identified at annexe 3. Within the body of the 2005 HRA Business plan we will then identify if further funding can be delivered to meet the sheltered housing standards in full.

7.0 Corporate Implications

- 7.1 The Council is committed to improving the services received by it's customers. The actions detailed in this report evidence continued improvement by the Sheltered Housing Service.

8.0 Community Implications

- 8.1 The Sheltered Housing Service is delivered to some of the most vulnerable people living in South Derbyshire. The improvements to the way in which the service is provided ensures the most effective response to issues. Physical improvements already carried out, along with those planned ensure a safe environment is provided. Partnership work, especially with the Crime and Disorder Partnership, has further ensured that the physical changes enhance security and a sense of safety both to individual dwellings and communal facilities.

9.0 TACT

- 9.1 TACT members were an integral part of the Task and Finish Group which formulated the service standards and aims. TACT remain fully supportive of the continued improvements to the service and accommodation.

