

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Review is

- To establish whether the Sheltered Housing Service provides a value for money service and how it can be improved.
- To establish residents' satisfaction levels and understanding of Sheltered Housing and Housing Options for Older People
- To determine a better understanding of the complex nature of Sheltered Housing

This Review has been part of the Committee's Work Programme for some time and it was agreed that it was timely for the Review to commence in October 2009.

A Councillor Task and Finish Group was established comprising Councillor Christopher Malpas (Chair); Councillor Malcolm Mildren (Vice Chair), Councillors Lee Mason, Irene Markham, Jean Hawkins and David Garlick. Two Co-opted members joined the Group, Councillor Gina Ogden, Chair, Adult and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, Northamptonshire County Council and Fiona Seymour, Head of Adult Social Care, Northamptonshire County Council.

The Task and Finish Group agreed that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- A synopsis of all information available
- Results of surveys undertaken
- Performance Indicator Statistics
- Evidence from the Portfolio Holder (Housing)
- Best practice Council – Nottingham and Cambridge
- Visits to internal Sheltered Housing accommodation – observing process and speaking to employees and tenants:-
- Visit to the Call Centre – observing process and speaking to employees
- Evidence from tenants – meetings, as part of the site sites, written evidence
- Evidence from:-
 - SITRA
 - Northamptonshire County Council
 - Northants Health
 - Age Concern

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Task and Finish Group established that: -

- 4.1.1 The Task and Finish Group recognised that traditional sheltered housing is provided in a variety of forms and that Northampton, similar to other towns, has built and/or adapted accommodation as sheltered housing over the last fifty years.
- 4.1.2 The financial costs of providing support to older people are significant. It is important that services demonstrate value-for-money, maximise their impact and deliver positive outcomes that contribute and complement the other support that older people receive (i.e. family, health service etc.)
- 4.1.3 It was acknowledged that people are now living longer and the older population is growing. There are now more people aged over 60 than under 25 in the general population. The Task and Finish Group realises that this is a huge issue that needs to be addressed in order to understand the impact on Northampton.
- 4.2.1 Further discussions are taking place with Supporting People regarding preventative services and it was acknowledged that it needs to adapt to the changing environment or risk losing Supporting People funding.
- 4.2.2 There is not one single solution of housing options for older people and that it must be about choice with a range of options available. Detailed at Appendix D is population comparison data for Northampton Borough Council and Milton Keynes Council.
- 4.2.3 A lot of elderly people live in general needs accommodation but cannot access support, therefore there is a need to review the situation and look more widely at a joined up approach with partners, which will assist greater numbers of people to live independently.
- 4.2.4 After hearing all the evidence the Task and Finish Group agreed that the current set number of scheduled visits to sheltered housing tenants is not flexible enough and should be based on needs.
- 4.3.1 The Task and Finish Group noted the importance of the benefits of the Telecare System but was concerned to hear that not all of the Telecare system was compatible with the Lifeline system currently operated by Northampton Borough Council. This system assists residents to live as independently as possible in their own homes. There are several 'add ons' to the system, which includes a medication dispenser, memo reminder and a plug to prevent flooding. The Task and Finish Group felt that with the Call Care Service, based at Exeter Place and the Telecare Scheme at Gladstone Centre there appeared to be some overlap in the assessment process and the Task and Finish Group supported discussions taking place regarding how this could be combined.

- 4.3.2 The Task and Finish Group commended the excellent job that staff based at Exeter Place were doing but was concerned about the lack of office space and recommended that alternative office space be considered such as John Dryden House.
- 4.3.3 The Task and Finish Group supported the investigations that are taking place into widening the provision of the Lifeline system, for example to individuals living on their own. It was acknowledged that this would create further income to the Council but may also require additional resources.
- 4.3.4 The Task and Finish Group felt that it would be beneficial for dialogue to take place with Private Sector Housing Providers and to encourage the co-ordination and widespread use of the Lifeline System.
- 4.4.1 There is a need to assist communities to help each other, and to invest in prevention initiatives that support independent living.
- 4.4.2 The Task and Finish Group felt that some of the community rooms located within Sheltered Housing are poorly managed and under used and that discussions should take place how they could be better used.
- 4.4.3 The Task and Finish Group noted the integrated system that is in operation within the Mental Health Service, which was brought in around eight years ago, works very well. Support is dependent upon the individual's needs. It was felt that this emphasised the need for a joined up approach of all Agencies for the service of sheltered housing and housing options for older people.
- 4.5 The Schemes Review is scheduled to complete by April 2010 and it was noted that this Review is likely to see a recommendation for a decrease in sheltered housing properties across the borough.
- 4.5.1 Currently ward Councillors are not made aware of the Sheltered Housing Coordinators are for each ward and the location of sheltered housing within each ward. The Task and Finish Group felt that it would be beneficial for Councillors to be provided with such a list. It would be useful for Councillors to be furnished with this information in case of a problem.
- 4.5.2 The Task and Finish Group felt that the sheltered housing coordinators' role should be clarified.
- 4.6.1 The Task and Finish Group noted the concerns raised by some residents regarding the loss of resident wardens and the replacement with floating support. Many residents realised that this was not the best way to deliver services, created dependency and was campaigned for by a vocal minority. The Task and Finish Group was therefore minded not to support the campaign for the return to traditional resident wardens.
- 4.6.2 It was recognised that there is a need to understand what is driving the requests for an on site warden. There is also a need to understand what people want so that issues such as the number of staff required can be understood; there may also be competition from the private sector. It was

further realised that the Council was unable to continue with the old system and further consultation with residents and stakeholders would be required.

- 4.6.3 The Task and Finish Group was pleased to note that 86% of service users were relatively satisfied with the service following a user survey.
- 4.6.4 It was important however to understand the issues of the 14% who were not satisfied and work to make changes to improve services to this significant minority.
- 4.7 Northampton Borough Council has 47 Sheltered Housing Coordinators, which is equivalent to 37 and a half full time equivalent (FTE). It was noted that this is considered adequate to deliver the service contracted for. The Sheltered Housing Coordinators visit the 2,100 properties that are designated as sheltered housing in accordance with the three levels of support – daily, three times a week or monthly. The Task and Finish Group noted that Milton Keynes Council has 26 full time and two part-time Sheltered Housing Officer that cover 29 Sheltered Housing Schemes, around 800 households. Each Sheltered Housing Officer is based at an office on site. The Sheltered Housing Officers carry out daily visits to tenants within their allocated sheltered housing scheme. Sheltered Housing Officers are funded via the Supporting People Programme.
- 4.8.1 The Task and Finish Group felt that consideration needs to be given as to how mobility scooters are best stored in the future and whether or not renting garages within the complex to people living outside is in the best interests of everyone concerned.
- 4.8.2 At the site visit to Milton Keynes, the Task and Finish Group heard that its Sheltered Housing tenants are permitted to use mobility scooters on site and in the corridors. Milton Keynes Council is putting together a Policy, with the Fire and Rescue Service stating the criteria for storage and charging of the vehicles. Tenants with such a vehicle will be required to have public liability insurance. It was suggested that when the Policy has been finalised that a copy should be forwarded to the Head of Housing Needs and Support.
- 4.9.1 Frequently smoking takes place in the communal lifts creating health and safety issues. The Task and Finish Group understands that the Sheltered Housing Co-ordinators are trying to resolve this situation but felt that extra steps will need to be taken to ensure that the safety and comfort of the residents is paramount.
- 4.9.2 When visiting Sheltered Housing accommodation within the borough, the Task and Finish Group was concerned to note the ineffectiveness of warm air heating. The Group had met with a tenant sitting under a blanket to get warm as she was unable to use the warm air heating system as it affected her asthma.
- 4.10 In putting together its Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (screening) the Task and Finish Group was mindful of the need for a full EIA to be produced for Sheltered Housing for any future changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations.

- 5.1 The Task and Finish Group therefore recommends to Cabinet that:
 - 5.1.1 When considering the Task and Finish Group's recommendations that Cabinet recognises that the ageing population presents a huge challenge for the council in a period of public spending cuts. It also presents a significant opportunity to improve the Services offered to older people in a way that effectively promotes independent living. The fact that there are more individuals aged over 60 than under 25 is a huge issue that should be addressed and the impact on Northampton understood and responded to. The Council needs to develop a wide range of options to suit the needs of older and vulnerable people and that represent real choice in terms of the services offered.
 - 5.1.2 After hearing all the evidence from various sources, the Task and Finish Group realised that a return to the old system of residential wardens would not improve services to older people and should not be returned to.
 - 5.2.1 To ensure that services represent excellent value for money, are competitive and deliver positive outcomes to promote independent living, a flexible structure of visits to sheltered housing tenants should be introduced according to individual needs. Such changes to be in line with the Supporting People grant conditions to safeguard this important funding stream.
 - 5.2.2 The Head of Housing Needs and Support be authorised to commence dialogue with private sector housing providers to encourage the co-ordination and widespread installation of the Lifeline system.
 - 5.2.3 The Task and Finish Group accepts that the floating support system generally works but highlights the need for flexibility of provision and to minimise the frequency of staff changes to ensure stability and continuity of service provision.
 - 5.3.1 Discussions should take place regarding how Northamptonshire County Council and Northampton Borough Council can work more closely together to eliminate overlaps with some of the work streams at the Call Centre and Telecare Office.
 - 5.3.2 The use of digital technology should be maximised to support the delivery of services, such as Telehealth.
 - 5.4.1 Dialogue takes place between the Portfolio Holder (Housing), relevant key officers, ward Councillors, tenants and other concerned Agencies to investigate how the community rooms can be used to their full potential.

- 5.4.2 The Head of Housing Needs and Support be authorised to set up a meeting with Northamptonshire County Council, all relevant Agencies and organisations to promote a joined up approach to the delivery of services for older people, with a particular focus on the role of Voluntary Groups and the importance of community activities to counteract social isolation.
- 5.4.3 A general review of the Garage Tenancy Agreement should take place to include the possible adaption of garages for the storage of mobility scooters.
- 5.5 That the Head of Housing Needs and Support completes the review of sheltered housing properties and produces a plan that outlines which properties will no longer be designated as sheltered, identifying opportunities for new build which meets lifetime homes standards. The Task and Finish Group's observations about heating systems at some sheltered housing units to be taken into consideration during this review.
- 5.6.1 A full consultation programme, in accordance with the Council's Consultation Toolkit, with existing and potential sheltered housing tenants, is developed regarding any proposed changes.
- 5.6.2 Improved communication methods with existing and potential sheltered housing tenants is maintained. In particular to work with dissatisfied residents to understand their issues and respond to their concerns
- 5.7 The location of the Call Care service to be reviewed due to the poor quality of accommodation currently used and the service is relocated.
- 5.8.1 A Policy for the storing of mobility scooters at sheltered housing accommodation is introduced. The evidence contained in this report should form part of that Policy.
- 5.8.2 Ward Councillors to be issued with details of the location of sheltered housing and details of the Sheltered Housing Coordinators for each ward
- 5.9.1 The issue of security doors and access is reviewed in blocks of flats designated as sheltered housing
- 5.9.2 That the Head of Landlord Services is requested to address specific issues at Melbourne House as identified in the main body of this report. The first floor door entry systems at Melbourne, Abbey and Devonshire be redesigned or appropriately adjusted to alleviate the current problems encountered by tenants.
- 5.10 A full Equality Impact Assessment is produced for future changes to Sheltered Housing.