

Meeting: Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 29th July 2013

Subject: Sheltered Housing Review

Report of: Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care, Health and Housing.

Summary: The report proposes changes to the ways Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) owned sheltered housing schemes are used in the future and that an agreed standard is used to assess the investment needs of existing sheltered housing. It also proposes a further review is undertaken into the investment needs and options appraisals of a small number of sheltered housing schemes which have potential for substantial improvement.

Advising Officer: Julie Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health & Housing

Contact Officer: Brian Queen, Interim Head of Housing Operations

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. A good provision of sheltered housing and other accommodation for older people offers choices of a different lifestyle, opportunities to downsize and connections to support and care networks. This particularly supports CBC's priorities:-
 - Promote health and well-being and protecting the vulnerable.
 - Value for money – freezing Council Tax.

Financial:

2. The Stock Condition Survey recently completed gives a full profile of the investment needs of the sheltered housing stock. What is not yet known is the cost of enhancing some of the schemes to provide an improved and integrated service. That would be the subject of a further report, including options in the event that the full cost could not be met by the Council acting alone.

3. The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan includes a budget of £500,000 p.a. for stock re-modelling, which could be used to fund the investment options appraisal and it is estimated that it may cost up to £50,000.

It is further proposed that a budget of £250,000 per year for minor improvement to amenities in all sheltered housing schemes could be funded from the sheltered housing reserve.

Legal:

4. Any legal implications will be reported verbally at the meeting.

Risk Management:

5. A risk log has been maintained for this project from the outset. The principle risks identified were capacity to see the project through and concerns of residents. The second risk has been mitigated by working closely with the Sheltered Tenants' Action Group (STAG).

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

6. Not applicable at this stage.

Equalities/Human Rights:

7. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
8. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on the proposed standard. The assessment highlighted that the Standard is likely to result in improved living and communal facilities, including greater disabled access where there is scope to adapt existing properties, and will advance equality of opportunity in terms of quality of life, independent living, and social interaction and integration. By using demographic data to better understand the layered effect of multiple protected characteristics the refurbishment and reorganisation of sheltered housing, underpinned by the 'Standard', will enable the Council to match tenant's circumstances with the most appropriate scheme to suit their needs; increasing integration and good relations amongst tenants.
9. A number of areas have been identified for further research and review as the programme moves forward, principally relating to the needs of disabled and less mobile older people. The Members of the Council's Equality Forum have welcomed the development of the standards but have also made a request that standards are developed in relation to the need for a range of inclusive social and cultural opportunities to be offered within sheltered housing.

Public Health

10. Plans to improve the use of communal lounges and garden areas and to provide organised activities will contribute to the health and well-being of residents and for older people living locally.

Community Safety:

11. Not applicable.

Sustainability:

12. Not applicable.

Procurement:

13. It is likely that procurement of advisors to review the potential for enhancing certain schemes will be via a small competition involving up to five candidate companies submitting sealed bids.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Committee is asked to:-

1. **Review and comment on the proposed sheltered housing standard at Appendix C.**
2. **Comment on the implications of re-designating some of the schemes as “55+ Housing” and moving to floating support.**
3. **Comment on the proposed way forward, as a major review of four sites, at:-**

Baker Street, Leighton Buzzard
Bedford Street, Leighton Buzzard
Croft Green, Dunstable
Tudor Court, Leighton Buzzard
4. **Note that other schemes will be reviewed against local factors but with the principal aim of raising the quality and amenity of each scheme, as far as possible to the proposed CBC Sheltered Housing Standard.**

Background

14. Across Central Bedfordshire there are 1,422 sheltered housing units, of which 132 are described as “Extra Care Housing” (ECH) in five schemes. ECH is not the subject of this report, but will be reviewed in a similar manner against evolving modern standards for Extra Care Housing as part of a “Meeting the Accommodation Needs of Older People” (MANOP) project. An Age UK definition of sheltered housing is attached as Appendix A and a full schedule of sheltered and extra care housing in Central Bedfordshire is attached at Appendix B.
15. Central Bedfordshire Council owns 545 flats and bungalows in eighteen schemes described as “sheltered housing”. The number includes twenty flats which are let to general needs households due to their inaccessibility to older people (e.g. third floor without a lift). Most of these homes were built between 1965 and 1980, although one scheme was built much earlier; Croft Green 1945-60 and one later; Kingsbury Court around 1990.
16. These schemes are very popular with existing residents. There is a variety of designs and layouts, but the common features are an alarm system hard wired in each home and monitored continuously and the support from a team of dedicated Supported Housing Officers (SHO’s) who visit each scheme and each resident on a regular basis. They can assist residents with obtaining social or health care, access their entitlements and generally support residents to continue to live independently. Some more recent residents decline to have SHO’s visit however.
17. In addition to sheltered housing schemes, the SHO’s also visit a number of “mini-groups”, which are flats and bungalows also with hard wired alarm systems but not officially described as “sheltered”. In practice, there is very little difference between some sheltered housing schemes and the 120 bungalows and flats in “mini-groups”, as is discussed later in this report.
18. All of the Council’s sheltered housing schemes are in generally good condition and meet the former “Decent Homes Standard”. Due to their age, however, significant investment will be needed at some schemes to renew or refurbish some building components, in the near future. It is this prospect, coupled with difficulty in letting some sheltered housing units, which this report addresses.
19. The schemes were originally built to design guides with space standards no longer considered acceptable, including bedsit rooms, without any separation of lounge and bedroom. Although some schemes were adapted to reduce the number of bedsits, the results have been compromises over layout, a reduction of the number of units at each modified scheme and a residual number of bedsits remaining. Modifications were not carried out to any agreed modern standard.

20. Against that it should be said that the vast majority of existing residents in sheltered housing like where they live. The problem has been convincing those who do not live in sheltered housing that it could be suitable for them. This is a problem not unique to CBC but is being, or has been, faced by every landlord of sheltered housing.
21. In recent years some sheltered housing has become difficult to let. Age restrictions have been lowered to 55 years, in an endeavour to find additional customers. In some instances lettings are made to that age group on the basis that no other re-housing option is available to them. The result is the age gap between some residents can be forty years or more. The problem has been that some schemes attract very little interest under Choice Based Lettings and vacancies can last for ten weeks or more.
22. It was, therefore, proposed that a “CBC Sheltered Housing Standard” should be developed in consultation with existing residents and that all existing schemes should be measured against those standards. In due course, proposals should be brought forward for appropriate investment to bring each scheme as near to that modern standard as possible. The proposed standard is at Appendix C.
23. The proposed CBC local sheltered housing standard is based on a questionnaire sent to all sheltered housing tenants and meetings held with residents, where such facilities existed, to discuss the standard and how tenants felt about their own schemes. CBC officers worked closely with the Sheltered Tenants’ Action Group (STAG), who welcomed the initiative and co-hosted the consultation meetings. In all sixteen meetings took place with residents, and the Project Group met fourteen times; including two workshops to go through the standards and then consider an initial assessment of how each scheme compared to that standard.
24. The residents’ questionnaire was based on the “HAP: PI report” (Housing our Aged Population: Panel for Innovation – 2008) which set out an outline standard. It was recognised at an early stage that none of the existing schemes could match the minimum space standards recommended by HAP: PI and the Group agreed, therefore, that standards for existing schemes would be aspirational, relate to the amenity provided, and show how the scheme could be improved. Any newly built scheme would need to be constructed to much more specific and exacting standards.
25. Even with more general descriptions of standards, the Group recognised that none of the schemes were likely to comply fully. It would, however, be possible to review the future investment needs and potential of each scheme to be improved against that standard.

26. A modernised sheltered housing scheme which matched most the proposed standards could be capable of making a much greater contribution to the care and support of older people; use its facilities and amenities to the benefit of the wider community; and be an attractive housing option of choice for older people. This includes the use of communal lounges and facilities such as gardens to promote health and well-being amongst residents and older people in the vicinity. Some schemes might also, with modifications, be capable of meeting the need for people with mild and moderate Dementia.
27. The Supported Housing Officer service is partially funded by the General Fund. Improved Value for Money will be achieved by better targeting of that resource, better use of existing amenities such as communal lounges and gardens and properties being easier to let.

OPTIONS

28. At this point, the likely investment needs of all sheltered housing could not be met from existing resources. It is proposed, however, to prioritise a detailed review of investment needs and options to four locations initially. These schemes, at Baker Street, Bedford Street, Croft Green, and Finch Crescent offer the greatest potential for improvement, whilst also posing current challenges about allocations and use. Improvements could include replacement day centre facilities on a local basis, subject to feasibility studies.
29. In addition, a pilot scheme at Manor Court working with apprentices from the Ground work Trust to transform the communal garden into an open air amenity, and work on the communal lounge at Bedford Street, have both demonstrated the potential of these facilities to provide a local community resource and to promote health and well-being. It is proposed that an annual small improvements fund of £250,000 p.a., from the HRA be set aside from the HRA Capital Programme. Proposals to invest that fund could be considered by a delegated panel consisting of CBC Officers, members of STAG and chaired by the Executive Member. Proposed Terms of Reference for funding works would be up for discussion but would include contributions to healthier living and to wider community benefits.
30. A number of sheltered housing residents do not want or need support from a Supported Housing Officer (SHO). Re-designating seven of the schemes, totalling 201 homes, as “55+ Housing” would release some tied SHO resource to cater for older people living in the wider community of whatever tenure. This could align the SHO service with the provision of “Lifeline” alarm systems based on a telephone connection, rather than hard wiring. Early work focussing on providing an outreach service to older people in the Caddington area, using Manor Court as a “hub”, has delivered pleasing initial results. The learning from this will be transferred to the Barton Le Clay area (focussed around Gale Court as the “hub”), as a possible second outreach target area. Both schemes are separate from the main clusters of CBC sheltered housing in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.

31. To complement the possible expansion of more outreach work, a review of the charging arrangements for Lifeline is underway. This, with a view to providing an enhanced service, can be provided within existing resources and with the support of Well-being, CBC's emergency response monitoring service.
32. Five schemes require modest investment to improve amenities. These include Furness Avenue, Gale Court, Holts Court, Manor Court and Tudor Court, totalling 182 homes. An assessment of the works necessary to raise amenities against the agreed standard would take place once consultation about the standard has been completed and would probably take about six months.
33. Re-designation of seven schemes as Housing 55+ would not, in practice, mean a significant change in service but would retain the 55 years ago limit and provide targeted support to those residents who want and need it. They would, in effect, be "mini-groups" with similar arrangements and be a potentially attractive option for those below retirement age who want or need to downsize.
31. A major review is required for four schemes at Baker Street, Croft Green and Finch Crescent, totalling 163 units, but with the potential for an expansion in each case.
32. Crescent Court (21 units) was included in the review but no proposals are being made currently, pending the outcome of the neighbourhood planning exercise currently in hand; which may identify an alternative site.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Definition of Sheltered Housing by Age UK.

Appendix B – Schedule of Sheltered Housing in Central Bedfordshire.

Appendix C – (Draft) Sheltered Housing Standard for Consultation.

Background papers and their location: (open to public inspection)
Equalities Impact Assessment – Social Care Health and Housing files