

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **WEDNESDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2014**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

SUBJECT: **SHELTERED HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To update Committee Members on the successful completion of the improvement programme within the Community Based Accommodation Support Service (previously the Sheltered Housing Service).

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 At the (then) Executive meeting held on the 18 January 2011, approval was given for the model of the community based warden support service to be developed and piloted. The new service aimed to provide support services that are accessible, based on support needs, quality assured, and help people to live independently and safely within their own homes for as long as practical". The Executive also approved the commencement of the decision making process that would determine the continuation/cessation of the service tenancy arrangements at individual schemes.

2.02 At the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7th March 2012, members resolved to receive reports on the work being progressed to develop and implement the Community Based Accommodation Support Service.

2.03 At the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21st February 2013, Members received a report providing them with an update on the development of the community hubs, the implementation of new working practices and the assessment of the support needs of all tenants. The report also advised Members that the next stage of the improvement project would include the implementation of a new staffing structure and the expansion of the support service to make it accessible to tenants residing in general needs accommodation. An update on the progress within these two areas and upon further service improvements is set out within this report.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Progress with Implementing a 'Needs Based' Support Service

- 3.01 All sheltered tenants continue to have their support needs assessed through the completion of comprehensive support plans. A key aspect of the support assessment is to provide tenants with the reassurance that the service is not being 'taken away' but is now more flexible and responsive to when their needs change. For example, a tenant who has been assessed as having no current support needs is reassured that if their circumstances, unfortunately, change they will have their support needs immediately reviewed and, very importantly, all tenants automatically have their support needs reviewed every six months.
- 3.02 The maintaining and collating of the records from support sessions has enabled the service to be able to provide objective and detailed performance information. From April 2013, the service has been included in the suite of housing performance indicators which are reported to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The target is for the service to achieve a minimum 70% support time out of all the available staff hours. It is pleasing to report that the service has achieved and this target across each quarter during the current financial year.
- 3.03 The collation of the performance data has also provided valuable management information on the breakdown of support hours across each community hub. Using this information, the service is able to appropriately and effectively target its resources and identify where there is available support capacity, which is particularly relevant during a period of expansion.

Progress in Developing Community Hubs

- 3.04 There are nine community based hub offices in operation with a small team of between four to six staff based in each hub office. The staff provide support to tenants in all tenures living within the localities served by the office.
- 3.05 At its meeting in February 2013, the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported a proposal to move the hubs that have been set up in council accommodation to alternative locations, thus enabling these properties to be returned to council stock and allocated as suitable accommodation to people waiting on the housing register. The Ewloe Hub has been moved to a new location and the property has been let to an applicant on the housing register.
- 3.06 Only two hubs are now based within council accommodation. These are in Mostyn and Caergwrle. Alternative locations have been explored in these areas; however, the options identified have either been unsuitable or expensive. All the hubs, apart from these two,

have been established with no rental costs and the service has been keen to identify cost effective options. A potential solution would be to allocate the two council properties where the hubs are based to people on the waiting list and reduce the nine hubs to seven across the county. The allocation of the Mostyn hub would be a priority as there are currently applicants on the register who would qualify for this property. However, the decision on the future of the Caergwrle hub could be made giving consideration to whether there would be demand for this property which is an upper floor flat. Where the hubs are returned to council stock, the staff can work from nearby hubs which will not have any negative impact on the service delivered. Indeed, most support services in the county work successfully from one main location or office base.

Progress on Expansion into General Needs Accommodation

- 3.07 In February 2013 the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the expansion of the service to people in their own homes who would benefit from the support the service provides and prevent the need for more costly care services. In the past few months, this has enabled the service to promote itself as a county wide, tenure neutral service accessible to Flintshire residents who need support to live independently and safely within their home irrespective of current tenure.
- 3.08 There has been significant progress with the expansion of the tenure neutral support service over the last few months and the service has connected with two important referral routes; Social Services for Adults First Contact Team and the Accommodation Support Referral Gateway.
- 3.09 In quarter three, the service received fourteen referrals from the First Contact Team, nine referrals from the Support Gateway and two from Age Connects, a Voluntary Sector Organisation working alongside the service. The service has been able to assess individuals and allocate support within two days of receiving a referral. In total, the service is now supporting forty-two people outside of sheltered housing accommodation.
- 3.10 The capacity of the service to further expand is being closely monitored and managed. Support staff are finding that those who were assessed as having no support needs are gradually coping with reduced levels of support which is enabling the staff to have the capacity to assess and support new referrals.
- 3.11 The service also plans to ensure additional support capacity is available by making best use of resources through developing closer links with other services supporting older people. The service is working closely with the Support Gateway and is contributing to the development of the new sub regional Age Connects service. The service already receives referrals from Age Connects and will invite

Age Connects staff to utilise the community hubs to promote closer working. It is anticipated that referrals will flow seamlessly between the services so that short term support can be provided to tenants around specific areas when and if needed. The close working arrangements with the Support Gateway will ensure that support services are targeted at those most in need and residents are referred to the most appropriate service for their needs and will enable the services to support as many people as possible.

Progress with the Staff Restructure

- 3.12 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the proposed restructure based on a comprehensive assessment of support needs and a breakdown of available staff time. The structure was developed with consideration to current and anticipated future needs. The proposed structure included three senior officers and 28 full time equivalent support officers.
- 3.13 In February 2013 there were 35.8 full time equivalent support officers in the structure and 3 of those posts were vacant. It was agreed that this number would be gradually reduced over a period of 12 months to achieve the efficiency in 2014/15 without staff redundancies. The service has now reduced to 28 full time equivalent posts. In September 2013 the restructure was finalised and all existing staff transferred into the new Accommodation Support Officer Posts. The three Senior Officer Posts are vacant and a business case has been submitted to recruit to these posts.
- 3.14 It has been an important element, when introducing the changes within the service, to keep staff fully involved in the process. It is pleasing to note that staff are finding their job more rewarding and have more job satisfaction through the new working arrangements and this is also reflected through improved attendance at work figures.

Consultation and Feedback

- 3.15 It has been important to recognise that the service improvement programme and the significant changes it proposed may have caused some residents and/or staff to be concerned about various aspects of the service improvements. However, Members will be aware that a commitment to engage in positive and effective consultation with residents, staff, and local members on potentially contentious and sensitive issues has been continuously demonstrated throughout the service improvement programme.
- 3.16 In order to build on the shadowing sessions which involved a reviewing officer shadowing a number of support staff on their visits and the feedback sessions held with tenants, a further independent assessment has been carried out and an additional evaluation is currently being undertaken.

This evaluation consisted of the Supporting People Reviewing Officer randomly selecting residents to interview about their experience of the new service. Thirty residents were selected to take part in the initial evaluation. Six residents did not want to take part and eleven could not be contacted to arrange a meeting. The thirteen that were interviewed provided positive feedback about the service. Six residents received regular support visits and seven no longer received support visits. The six in receipt of support were happy with the support they received. One person had made a complaint but was happy with how their complaint had been handled and fully resolved. The seven who were not in receipt of support were also content. Three of these residents who were now not receiving visits said that they had been worried at first but were now content with the service. One person explained how they had not had support visits, however, after a bad spell they had been reassessed and started to have regular support visits again. They further explained that as their circumstances had now improved they had now reverted back to no visits. This person felt reassured by these arrangements, i.e., the flexible and responsive support services.

- 3.17 Some issues raised through the interviews included the rotation of support workers, which has been one of the major challenges in implementing the new service. Residents like to have continuity of service from one person and some negative feedback was provided on the rotation of the three staff within a hub so that residents are familiar with the whole team. However, the rotation of staff is an important aspect of ensuring that residents are familiar with all staff members (and staff members are familiar with residents). The issues have been dealt with on an individual basis and residents seem happier now they have become familiar with all the staff within the small team.
- 3.18 Residents also talked about some people who no longer received visits who they perceived to be lonely. They recognised that it was not the role of the support worker to provide company but that activities or befriending may be a gap in current provision. Accommodation Support Officers will promote activities and refer to befriending schemes where relevant.
- 3.19 The first independent evaluation provided valuable feedback and the service is committed to continue to learn from customers about what is working well and what may remain as an area of concern. Therefore, a follow up independent evaluation with a second group of residents will be carried out in January 2014.
- 3.20 Further feedback was included in the STAR survey, an independent survey sent to randomly selected tenants to measure satisfaction levels with Flintshire Housing Service. The survey had a section specifically on the accommodation support service which demonstrated high levels of satisfaction reported across all measures.

Further Developments

3.21 Winter Preparation for Vulnerable People

The service has been working with third sector agencies to link up and co-ordinate bad weather preparations particularly in the event of heavy snowfall or floods. The Accommodation Support Officers work pro-actively to prepare people who receive the service but there remains an issue for the older people and others who maybe vulnerable who are not receiving services. Age Concern, Red Cross and Care and Repair all have plans in place for clearing snow, shopping and picking up prescriptions but until now have all been working in isolation.

3.22 The Community Based Accommodation Support Service has agreed with third sector agencies that all activity is coordinated through the housing staff based in Castle Heights. This team will act as the central point for elderly and vulnerable to contact when in crisis, staff would then be able to contact the relevant agency or Flintshire service to assist. The service has collected names of volunteers who can help in their local area in the event of bad weather. The 'Practical Assistance Line' has been launched and promoted across agencies and Flintshire Community Services Directorate.

Strategic Relevance, Value for Money and Benchmarking

3.23 The service has been working with the Supporting People Team to identify how this service will fit and link with other preventative support services to ensure Flintshire has an adequate range of services to meet the presenting need in the county.

3.24 The transformation and modernisation of the sheltered service to a Community Based Accommodation Support Service has been fully implemented. The next steps being undertaken are to continue to engage with customers to improve and shape delivery. It is also an ambition of the service to benchmark with wider organisations in terms of quality and value for money to ensure the service achieves excellence and remains strategically relevant. The service has been working in partnership with the finance team and Supporting People to start to benchmark the costs of the service with other Local Authorities and Housing Associations.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 Committee notes the progress of the Sheltered Housing Improvement Project from February 2013 and that the Improvement Programme has now been successfully completed.

4.02 Committee supports the proposals to reduce the total number of hubs from nine to eight and seek alternatives to the use of council housing.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 Efficiency savings of £110k have already been achieved. There are no further financial implications arising from this update report.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 Housing Support Services make a positive contribution to the prevention and reduction of poverty across vulnerable households.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 There are no specific environmental implications within this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 There are no specific equality implications within this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 All personnel issues have been managed and all necessary consultation has taken place. There are no further implications arising from this report.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 No further consultation required

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Full consultation undertaken throughout the process.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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