

## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** **COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **MONDAY, 1 JUNE 2015**

**REPORT BY:** **CHIEF OFFICER (COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE)**

**SUBJECT:** **ALLOCATION OF SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 This discussion paper provides information on the issues affecting the level of demand for some sheltered housing properties in the county and proposes the next phase to explore solutions.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

2.01 There are 2613 units of sheltered accommodation in the county. The provision consists of a range of accommodation types as follows:-

- 1360 bungalows
- 63 bedsits
- 642 flats
- 408 mini group bungalows
- 140 mini group flats

2.02 The demand for these properties varies across schemes. This variance in demand can be a result of the properties being unsuitable either by the physical fabric of the building, size or the location. There have also been changes to the older persons service offer in Flintshire with the creation of flexible, tenure neutral floating support, alternative models and changing expectations of older people.

2.03 Currently, some properties are let to applicants who do not fit the age criteria for sheltered housing. This paper provides information on some of the factors affecting demand and proposes the next phase of work needed to ensure the council makes best use of stock by meeting housing need and maximising rental income.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

3.01 Older People Housing Need

Flintshire has an ageing population, a report by Betsi Cadwalder in 2013 stated that 37% of the Flintshire population are aged over 50. The Flintshire Housing Strategy states that numbers of people aged over 65 are set to rise by 40% over the next 15 years. The strategy projects that a large proportion of people over 60 will be homeowners. There is evidence of a growing number of older people and the council needs to be planning to meet their accommodation needs appropriately.

### 3.02 Accommodation Support

Until 2011, older people in need of accommodation and support applied for sheltered housing in order to benefit from the warden service provided to these properties. The implementation of the Sheltered Housing Improvement Project has widened the availability of the support service for older people to a tenure neutral service. Support officers who recently visited older applicants to discuss the changes to the housing register reported that a few applicants were happy to remain in their current accommodation once they were informed they could receive the support service there. This flexibility in support improves the service offered to older people who do not need to move to receive support. However, this may affect the level of demand for sheltered accommodation. The CBASS service supports 115 people outside of sheltered accommodation and receives approximately 12 new referrals a month to support older people in their own home.

### 3.03 Range of Options

The last five years has seen a change in the range of accommodation and care/support options for older people. There are 111 units of Extra Care accommodation that have been developed since 2009. There are a further 143 units planned for 2017/18. This provision of high quality accommodation provides another option for older people and in particular those with care needs. These developments are an asset to the county and increase options for older people. However, it is important for the council to plan for the effect this may have on the demand for existing sheltered accommodation.

### 3.04 Household Expectations

As a housing provider, the council needs to be aware of customer expectations. Some of the sheltered housing provision which was popular no longer meets customer expectations. Older people in the county and in particular those downsizing are not keen to accept a bedsit, often there are no applicants on the list to offer the property to or high refusal rates are experienced. Some of these schemes have become hard to allocate even though they have been refurbished and are otherwise suitable accommodation. Some of the existing provision is not suitable for older people due to the location, immediate

surrounding area, support networks or access issues.

### 3.05 Demand for Smaller Units

Changes to legislation and welfare reforms are increasing the demand for smaller accommodation units for the under-50 age group. The council requires small units for those single households and couples affected by the Spare Room Subsidy. This need will increase with the introduction of further welfare reforms limiting housing benefit for people aged under-25. Whereas some properties are unpopular or unsuitable for older applicants, they can provide an affordable, suitable housing solution for younger single households. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 extends the duties of the council to prevent and alleviate homelessness for all those who approach in housing need. Small units are essential to accommodate those who cannot afford their current accommodation. There are some areas in Flintshire where the only smaller units are sheltered stock and therefore no accommodation for other groups. The housing register is split by age category as follows:-

Age over 60	27%
Age 50-59.	13%
Age 30-49	37%
Age under 30	23%

### 3.06 Accessible Units

There are 40 applicants on the specialist housing register with high level complex needs requiring a bespoke solution. In addition, there are applicants on the general register with medical conditions, disabilities or other housing needs where sheltered provision may be the most appropriate or only suitable accommodation option. Over the past year, 25% of sheltered allocations were let to an applicant who does not fit the age criteria for sheltered housing. This issue needs addressing and a strategic approach taken as opposed to the ad hoc basis by which allocations are currently agreed.

### 3.07 Sheltered Stock Assessment

This paper will not breakdown the individual cases but summarise the general issues that need to be reviewed in more detail on an individual basis taking into consideration the needs of the community and the current scheme profile. The main issues that lead to low demand sheltered stock are:-

- The physical fabric of the building - steep stairs, no lift, steep access.
- Location – based on steep hills or rural locations where access to services is limited and can lead to social isolation for older people

- Changing family dynamics – older parents who still have dependent children.
- Property size and type - bedsits

These problems are leading to some properties being allocated to applicants with very low housing need and in some cases has created long term void properties. The rent loss through void sheltered properties in 2014/15 was 0.71% and this has been a trend over the last three years, this compares to 1.46% void rental loss across the total housing stock. This demonstrates over half of the void rent loss is attributable to sheltered housing void levels.

### 3.08 Next Phase of Work Required

Addressing the issues created by low demand sheltered housing and planning for the future accommodation needs of an ageing population, emerging demands for single households and those with disabilities requires a strategic approach. It is proposed that a Working Group carries out a full review and assessment of the sheltered housing stock in consultation with local Elected Members and Cabinet Members based on all the necessary information including:

- Profile of presenting need in that area
- Void rent loss and levels
- % of refusals and offers
- Occupancy levels
- Tenant profile information
- Scheme repair costs

The group would then make recommendations for consideration informed by local knowledge to make best use of the properties to best meet housing need.

Possible solutions that could be considered as part of the review of sheltered schemes may include:-

- Reducing age eligibility
- Conversion of scheme to meet needs
- Change of use (re-designation)
- Pro-active marketing
- Exploring partnerships with Health and Social Care

## 4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 Committee notes the issues raised in this paper around the demand for some sheltered properties.

4.02 Committee supports the proposal for the next phase of work to address these issues.

**5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 If the current void sheltered properties were able to be let it would bring £0.170m additional income per year into the Housing Revenue Account.

**6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 The provision of suitable and affordable accommodation to meet housing need will make a positive contribution to tackling poverty in the county.

**7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 None specifically associated with the content of this report.

**8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 None specifically associated with the content of this report.

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 None specifically associated with the content of this report.

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 The consultation required will be included in the remit of the Working Group.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 None.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 None.

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

None.

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