

Community and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting	15 December 2016
Report Subject	Sheltered Housing Review
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing
Report Author	Chief Officer, Community & Enterprise
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update to committee members on the issues affecting the level of demand for some sheltered properties in the county, and on the recommendations from member workshops held in the summer to discuss a review of low demand sheltered housing schemes in the south of the county.

The report seeks agreement for potential scheme remodelling and re-designation options to enable best use to be made of the current stock to meet future local housing need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To support the work to date and to note that further work should take place to develop firm proposals for those schemes/ properties identified as appropriate for re-designation, re-modelling, or alternative future use.
2	To support (in principle) de-commissioning of sheltered schemes which cannot be made fit for purpose, re-designating them for alternative clients groups, or agreeing to redevelop the sites.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW
1.01	<p>BACKGROUND</p> <p>There are 2613 units of sheltered accommodation in the county. The provision consists of a range of accommodation types as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1360 bungalows• 63 bedsits• 642 flats• 408 mini group bungalows• 140 mini group flats <p>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.</p>
1.02	<p>CONSIDERATIONS</p> <p>Accommodation Support</p> <p>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. The CBASS service currently supports 117 people outside of sheltered accommodation and receives approximately 12 new referrals a month to support older people in their own home.</p>
1.03	<p>Range of Options</p> <p>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 2017/19. 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. However, it is important for the council to plan for the effect this may have on the demand for existing sheltered accommodation.</p>
1.04	<p>Household Expectations</p> <p>As a housing provider, the council needs to be aware of customer expectations. Some of the sheltered housing provision which was popular</p>

	<p>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.</p>
1.05	<p>Demand for Smaller Units</p> <p>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 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 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.</p>
1.06	<p>Accessible Units</p> <p>There are 40 applicants on the specialist housing register with high level complex needs requiring a bespoke housing 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.</p>
1.07	<p>Sheltered Stock Review</p> <p>A comprehensive review has been carried out on all of the council's sheltered housing stock. This included looking at void loss, demand, property size and location.</p> <p>The main issues that lead to low demand sheltered stock are summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property size and type – bedsits <p>These problems are leading to some properties being allocated to applicants with very low housing need and in some cases has created long term empty properties. The rent loss for vacant sheltered properties in 2015/16 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.</p>
1.08	<p>Member Workshops</p> <p>Two Member Workshops were held in the summer to discuss the low demand sheltered schemes in the south of the county. Elected Members and Cabinet Members were invited to review the information and put forward potential proposals based on their local knowledge as to how to make best use of the properties and to meet housing need in their wards. Members were provided with a table (appendix 1) outlining the most difficult to let sheltered properties in the South. Their comments have been captured and a range of proposals on a scheme by scheme basis were considered which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce age eligibility • Conversion of scheme to meet needs • Change of use (re-designation) • Pro-active marketing • Exploring partnerships with Health and Social Care <p>It was recognised that there may be a small number of schemes where it is not feasible or viable to make them fit for purpose. Reasons for this include: structural or serious repair problems, the absence of a lift, fundamental accessibility issues resulting from the original design. It would not be viable for an older person to continue to live at these schemes as they become frailer. In these situations the council can consider ‘de-commissioning’ and designating the scheme as general needs or for fitter older people only, or consider redeveloping the schemes. Discussions have started with colleagues in Social Services to explore further options that fit in with their longer term strategic plans.</p> <p>With support from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, future, business case reports will be brought to committee on a case by case basis, where recommendations will be made on specific schemes which should be de-commissioned or re-designated, which will include the sensitive re-housing of tenants when necessary.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no immediate resource implications arising from this report

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Full consultation will be carried out with tenants where there are firm proposals to change a sheltered scheme

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	A comprehensive risk assessment will be completed scheme by scheme for any proposed changes

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Difficult to let Sheltered Properties

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None Contact Officer: Steve Agger, Housing Service Manager Telephone: 01352 701658 E-mail: steve.agger@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	None