

## **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

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

**DATE:** THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2013

**REPORT BY:** HEAD OF HOUSING

**SUBJECT:** SHELTERED HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.01 To update Committee Members on the work being progressed to introduce a Community Based (Warden) Support Service and provide detail and seek views on the next developments.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

- 2.01 At the 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 Executive also approved the commencement of the decision making process that would determine the continuation/cessation of the service tenancy arrangements at individual schemes. At the Housing Scrutiny Committee held on 7th March 2012, members resolved to receive reports on the work being progressed to develop the Community Based Support Service.
- 2.02 The focus of developments to date has been on developing the community hubs, implementing new working practices and assessing the support needs of all tenants. This work has provided crucial information to steer the next stage of the project which includes implementation of a new staff structure and further developing the expansion of the service to those in most need in general needs accommodation.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **Progress with Implementing a 'Needs Based' Support Service**

- 3.01 All sheltered tenants have had their support needs assessed through the completion of a comprehensive support plan. It has been important to ensure that the Accommodation Support Officers (wardens) approached this task with a good understanding of why effective support planning is important in order to identify needs and risks and the type of support that is required to meet these needs and minimise risks.

- 3.02 A key aspect of the support assessment is to be able to offer tenants the reassurance that the service is not being 'taken away' but is more flexible and responsive to when their needs change. A person who has been assessed as having no support needs at present is provided with reassurance that if their circumstances change they will have their support needs immediately reviewed and all tenants will automatically have their support needs reviewed every 6 months. Completing the needs assessments has demonstrated that there is capacity within the staffing resources to deliver support to more people outside of the sheltered schemes.
- 3.03 Any change process can be perceived as challenging and the changes to working practices for the staff were significant. To help staff to understand the need and the reasons for change they all have completed an extensive training programme on the Support Planning and the Change Process in order for them to be competent in the delivery of the improved service. Staff who were more proficient with the support planning process had been engaged to act as mentors to other team members in order to provide the support they need which has enabled all staff to feel confident and capable in carrying out effective assessments of support needs.

### **Progress in Developing Community Hubs**

- 3.04 In November 2011, Ewloe and Shotton hubs were set up as a pilot in order to assess the robustness of all aspects of the improved service delivery model and to trial the expansion of the service to council tenants in general needs housing. The pilot was then developed across the county and now all nine community based hub offices are in operation. A small team of between four to six staff are based in each hub office providing support to sheltered and general needs housing tenants living within the localities served by the office.
- 3.05 Three of the hubs have been set up in council accommodation that was selected as it was perceived to be less suitable for sheltered stock. However, in the current environment there is huge demand for Local Authority accommodation and these properties could provide suitable accommodation to people waiting on the housing register. In addition, Welfare Reform changes have increased demand for smaller properties. The nine hubs are spread across the county in the following locations; Connah's Quay, Flint, Holywell, Shotton, Mold, Buckley, Caergwrle, Ewloe, Mostyn. The service was set up around nine hubs but it is feasible for this to be delivered from six hubs. There would be a need to consult with staff and tenants to ensure the location and size of the six hubs is sufficient for support staff to carry out their duties and provide a suitable coverage of Flintshire. Members are asked to consider the potential for reducing the number of hubs to six across Flintshire.

### **Progress on Expansion into General Needs Accommodation**

- 3.06 The expansion of the support service to tenants living in council general needs properties has been lower than anticipated. The focus of activity has been on setting up the hubs, supporting the staff through the changes and carrying out needs assessments for all tenants. There are currently 21 people receiving support in general needs properties. This will now be taken forward as a priority. The service is developing a marketing and promotion plan. Links will need to be made to identify appropriate referral routes and good information provided on the role of the accommodation support service so that the service targets those most in need and does not duplicate the work of other providers. Access to the support service will be made available to tenants already in receipt of a Carelink or Telecare service in the first instance. The roll out of the service will be easier to market when it is not limited to council tenants as information can be distributed widely to other services and agencies.
- 3.07 The service will provide a valuable preventative service for older people in Flintshire County Council accommodation. There will be a number of individuals who are not in council accommodation who would benefit from this service that can prevent the need for more costly care services. The long term improvement plan was to develop this service into a county wide, tenure neutral service that will provide support to those Flintshire residents who need it most irrespective of their current tenure. This will be the next phase of the improvement project.

### **Progress with the Staff Restructure**

- 3.08 A piece of work has been carried out to assess the current level of support staff required to deliver the service taking into consideration time spent on travel, administration and other non direct support activities. This has been used to inform the staff restructure. There are reporting systems in place to closely monitor changing levels of demand for the service. In addition, the outcome reporting will provide evidence of the preventative role of the service and ensure it remains strategically relevant.
- 3.09 Based on good practice examples elsewhere, there is an expectation that support workers will spend 70% of their time delivering direct support to tenants. An analysis of all the needs assessments has provided an indication of the current level of support hours required across the sheltered schemes. These required support hours have then been added to the additional 30% non support time to give a total number of full time equivalent staff to deliver the service. Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of staff time and the analysis of time needed for support.
- 3.10 The restructure also needs to consider appropriate levels of

management to lead and oversee the service. The original staffing structure consisted of a Team Leader and a Senior Officer and thirty five full time equivalent support staff. There is a need to amend the structure to fit more appropriately within the organisational design parameters defined within the Flintshire County Council Organisational Design and Development Strategy and ensure the number of employees overseen by each designated management post fits within the recommended minimum spans of control at each level.

- 3.11 This proposed restructure matches the requirement of the service in terms of support hours, allows capacity for expansion and provides adequate supervisory and management roles. The new structure would consist of a Manager, 3 Senior Officers who will oversee 2 or 3 hub offices each and 29 full time equivalent Accommodation Support Workers. This amended structure delivers an efficiency saving as well as delivering support to increased numbers of vulnerable people. The posts in the structure are currently being assessed by the Job Evaluation Team. Staff will be able to deliver a flexible service including evenings and weekends as required and work is ongoing to scope a 24/7 response service which will be an additional cost.

### **Consultation and Feedback**

- 3.12 Feedback sessions were held with sheltered tenants in the pilot areas to continue the good practice of engaging with tenants as demonstrated within the service improvement programme. They were interactive sessions which encouraged tenants to feel confident in voicing their opinions on the new service model. The outcomes demonstrated that the tenants were satisfied with the new service delivery model. They also explained that their initial fears that they would not be receiving support had been allayed and they confirmed that the flexibility of the service allowed for more support visits when they needed them. It is pleasing to note that the tenants confirmed that they are receiving the types of services which they had expressed a strong preference for during the extensive programme of consultation on the service improvements.
- 3.13 All staff are now working to the revised service model and carrying out support work in line with support plans. There is evidence that staff and commissioners recognise the improvement in the community based service in terms of the quality of service provided to tenants. It is also evident that there has been a key opportunity for professional development and to improve the professional reputation of the accommodation support staff. The Supporting People Review Officer spent two sessions shadowing the support staff and reported that staff felt their role was more appreciated which in turn gave them improved job satisfaction and motivation. The tenants seen spoke highly of the service and recognised the need to target staff time at those in most need.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 Committee notes the progress of the Sheltered Housing Improvement Project.
- 4.02 Committee considers the proposal to deliver the service from a reduced number of hubs (9 to 6) and/or seek alternatives to the use of council housing.
- 4.03 Committee notes the future expansion proposals being developed for private sector tenants and home owners to deliver a county wide, tenure neutral service to commence April 2013.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01 It is anticipated that the restructure will deliver efficiencies through an estimated reduction of 6.8 full time equivalents with associated costs of circa £110k. These savings will take effect from 2014-15. The savings will be to the council fund budget as the whole service is eligible to be paid from the Supporting People Grant.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 None specifically associated with the content of this report.

#### **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 The current staffing hours provides the equivalent of 35.8 full time Accommodation Support Officer posts (some staff will work full time whilst other staff work part time). The new service model reduces the number of posts by 9.8 but provides opportunities for staff to apply for one of the 3 Team Leader roles that are being created in the new structure, leaving a net reduction of 6.8 full time equivalent posts, 3 of which are currently vacant.
- 9.02 The reorganisation of the service will be carried out in line with the Council's Organisational Change and Redundancy Policy and Procedure which will mean exploring opportunities for alternative work and considering opportunities for Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy if appropriate.

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

- 10.01 Effective consultation with tenants, staff, and local members has been carried out throughout the warden service improvement programme. This approach will continue throughout the next phase of the project.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

- 11.01 As above.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: The Restructure Analysis

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

**Contact Officer:**

**Telephone:**

**Email:**