

**Subject:** *Delivery of support services for council sheltered housing tenants*

**Date of Meeting:** 20 January 2009

**Report of:** Director of Adult Social Care & Housing

**Contact Officer: Name:** Hilary Edgar **Tel:** 29-3354  
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**Key Decision:** No

**Wards Affected:** All

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 This report sets out recommendations for the future delivery of the support service for council sheltered housing tenants following the review of the sheltered service, consultation with residents and discussions with staff. The structure of the service needs to change to address problems in the current model of service, to meet residents' service requirements and accommodate future budget pressures.
- 1.2 The report also includes a review of the communal service charges in sheltered housing and details of the support charge for 2009/10.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Housing Management Consultative Committee recommends that the Housing Cabinet Member meeting:
- 2.2 (1) Notes the proposal, following consultation with residents, to retain a traditional, on site, scheme manager model of service, which will continue to be managed as a non residential service.
- 2.3 (2) Agrees the revised communal service charges as set out in Appendix 1 with effect from 6 April 2009 and authorises the Director of Adult Social Care and Housing to implement the new service and charges, but with power to make any minor amendments which may appear to be appropriate in particular cases.

**3. CURRENT SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE**

- 3.1 The council has 24 sheltered schemes with 855 units of accommodation. This represents half of the social rented sheltered stock in the city, and the council is by far the largest provider of sheltered housing.

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- 3.2 The council currently operates a scheme manager based model at individual sites with the out of hours cover based on relief wardens and the Carelink service. There are currently 19 Scheme Manager posts. This structure was introduced in 2000, following a best value review.
  - 3.3 Prior to sheltered schemes being supplied with emergency equipment linked to CareLink, residential staff were employed to respond to all out of hour's emergencies. The advent of CareLink rendered the 'live-in' aspect of residential staff less important.
  - 3.4 Some staff have found residential working stressful as they felt as if that they were never off duty. As a result, some residential staff have asked to become non-residential with the support of their union and occupational health. At the time of the review in 2000 there were 22 residential staff and by 2008 this had fallen to just 5.
  - 3.5 As there are currently fewer managers than schemes, some of the smaller schemes share a manager. However, in the medium and larger schemes there is only one scheme manager and this has created imbalances in workloads between staff.
  - 3.6 The current service model has been difficult to sustain over the past few years – it has been difficult to recruit staff to vacant residential posts and there are currently 5 agency workers in the service. A new model of service is therefore required which addresses the needs of residents at the same time as providing staff with manageable workloads and links with colleagues so that services can be maintained in their absence.

#### **4. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE**

- 4.1 The options for managing sheltered support services range from residential scheme managers to floating support, which is usually located off site and based on short term interventions to tenants in need rather than continuous support. There were two rounds of road shows in the summer and autumn of 2008 advising residents of the need to review the sheltered housing service and of the different ways the service could be provided.
- 4.2 This consultation established that residents did not want a model based on floating support and that they were keen to maintain a service based on scheme managers as they believed they were integral to a successful sheltered service. This view was represented in a petition from the majority of sheltered residents to this committee in July 2008 which said they wanted to retain scheme managers and not introduce floating support.
- 4.3 Discussions between officers and the Sheltered Housing Action Group established the following areas of agreement:
  - a) Scheme managers are an important asset in the sheltered housing service and should be locally based.
  - b) Savings can be made by reviewing overheads and by changing the out of hour's service provision. These savings could then be used to supplement scheme manager numbers.

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- c) The current service delivery model has a number of fundamental problems with equity of workload, cover arrangements, recruitment and consistency of service and this needs to be addressed in the chosen model of service.

- 4.4 Having established common ground between officers and residents, a desk top review of the costs other sheltered housing providers pay for their out of hours service, was carried out. This confirmed there is substantial scope for budgetary savings in this part of the service which can be invested in providing front line support services.
- 4.5 It is anticipated that there will be sufficient savings to fund 2 additional scheme managers, taking the total number of scheme managers from 19 to 21.
- 4.6 Site based scheme managers will be the bedrock of the new sheltered service. However, scheme managers will at times need to work with partner scheme managers to address the imbalances in work load and continuity of service provision when staff are on leave.
- 4.7 Links will be made between schemes taking account of the number of units and their location, so that the managers' workload is more fairly distributed. Each scheme will have a dedicated scheme manager who will be the main contact for residents, however in the larger schemes some tasks may be carried out by another manager.
- 4.8 Photographs and information about the scheme managers that residents in a particular scheme will have contact with will be available in each scheme, and these managers will be encouraged to build links with residents in the blocks they will be working in through social activities, and joint working with the dedicated scheme manager. This will ensure residents become familiar with the other scheme managers who may work in their scheme.
- 4.9 The five existing residential scheme managers will be offered the opportunity to remain living on site, whilst employed to deliver front line support services to sheltered tenants. Should any residential scheme managers wish to move, they will be offered assistance with their housing options.

## **5. ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SHELTERED HOUSING**

- 5.1 Consensus over the model of service provides an excellent starting point for the council and residents to continue working together on the following areas for improvement that were identified by tenants at the consultation road shows, the chairman's working group on sheltered housing and Sheltered Housing Action Group meetings:
  - a) Reviewing the scheme manager job description
  - b) Resident involvement in the recruitment of scheme managers
  - c) Providing clearer, more accessible, information for residents on service charges
  - d) Involving residents in the advertising and viewings of empty properties in their schemes
  - e) Developing a sheltered housing policy
  - f) Developing a communications strategy for sheltered housing
  - g) Specifying and procuring a new out of hours service

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- h) Reviewing, on a scheme by scheme basis, what to do with the empty warden's flats in schemes where they are no longer occupied by residential scheme managers
  - i) Undertaking a value for money review of the financial overheads within the sheltered service

5.2 Following February's Cabinet Member for Housing meeting, a project plan will be drawn up and presented to a future meeting of the Sheltered Housing Action Group which timetables this work over the coming year so that everyone involved in sheltered housing – residents, officers and members - will know the range and scope of the work that is being carried out.

## **6. SERVICE CHARGES**

6.1 Sheltered tenants currently pay charges for support and communal services. The support charge is eligible for Supporting People grant where a tenant is in receipt of Housing Benefit and the communal areas service charge is eligible for Housing Benefit.

6.2 The support charge is currently a flat fee of £13.25 per week for each tenant and covers providing housing related support to enable vulnerable tenants to live independently within the community. For example this includes completing benefit forms, arranging adaptations or other professionals to call, arranging social events for residents.

6.3 Approximately 84% of sheltered tenants are eligible for supporting people grant funding to cover their support charge with the remaining tenants paying themselves. The service was initially set up as self financing but is now operating at a cost to the HRA of £46,000 per annum. This is because the income received from the Supporting People grant and tenants has only increased by 2.1% over the last five years whilst the expenditure, mainly salaries, has continued to increase annually by inflation.

6.4 The Commissioning Body has advised that the Supporting People grant funding will be reducing over the next three years with no allowance for inflation. The exact level of reduction is unknown at present and is awaiting the strategic review of older peoples' services by the Commissioning Body. For 2009/10 the new Supporting People charge to tenants will reduce by 3% from £13.25 to £12.85 per week.

6.5 The charge for communal services includes communal cleaning, electricity costs, fire precaution equipment and materials. This service charge has been reviewed to ensure that costs are accurately recovered. The individual elements of the service charges including the increases or reductions are shown in Appendix 1. The main variation is from increased electricity costs averaging 83% from the new contract which was awarded on 1 April 2008.

6.6 Approximately 84% of sheltered tenants receive full or partial housing benefit to cover the communal areas service charges. Scheme Managers will work with the 59 tenants who will need to personally fund increases of more than £0.60 per week to ensure they are receiving all benefits to which they are entitled and offer general support.

6.7 Appendix 2 shows the net effect of the changes to both service and support charges for each sheltered scheme with effect from 1 April 2009.

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## 7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 There has been extensive consultation with tenants. This included a series of road shows visiting sheltered schemes to specifically discuss operational service delivery issues. This complemented the earlier series of road shows and wide ranging work of the Chairman's Working Group and the Sheltered Housing Action Group.
- 7.2 The majority of tenants who participated in the road shows expressed a desire to have a model of service based on scheme managers rather than floating support. The majority of tenants also agreed the provision of out of hours cover should be reviewed for efficiency and value. Most tenants consulted expressed strong views that the out of hours service should be re specified, with service levels agreed and procured in accordance with their wishes with an emphasis on better value for money and a less complex service.
- 7.3 The council welcomed a petition organised by the Sheltered Housing Action Group presented to this committee in July 2008. This overwhelmingly supported scheme manager services as opposed to floating support.
- 7.4 In response to these views officers proposed to redesign the service with team based scheme managers. Residents were concerned about some elements of this model of service and following further consultation with residents a revised model has been designed which retains traditional on site scheme managers, working in partnership with each other to cover absences and even out their workload.
- 7.5 There will be a review of the redesigned service, involving residents, six months after implementation. The outcome of this review will be reported back to the Sheltered Housing Action Group.

## 8. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS

### Financial Implications:

- 8.1 The supporting people expenditure budget for 2008/09 is £635,530 against an income budget of £589,530 which shows a forecast under recovery of £46,000. The proposed changes to the service will increase this level of under recovery to an estimated £65,000 which is absorbed by the HRA revenue budget. In order to reduce this under recovery, further savings relating to the out of hours service will need to be made as mentioned in paragraph 4.4 above.
- 8.2. The sheltered services budget will need to be closely monitored over the next few years to ensure that any future reductions in funding are matched with efficiency savings in order to ensure no further service pressures occur.
- 8.3 The review of the sheltered common areas service charges has highlighted an under recovery of £19, 800 which is due to be the 83% increase in electricity costs. Implementing the new charges from April 2009 will ensure all costs are fully recovered.
- 8.4 Further details regarding the service charge calculation are included in section 6 of the report and the Appendices.

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*Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks      Date: 07/01/2009*

Legal Implications:

- 8.5 The Council is empowered to provide sheltered housing, and to impose a reasonable charge on tenants for that service.

*Lawyer Consulted:              Liz Woodley                              Date: 22/09/2008*

Equalities Implications:

- 8.6 The proposed changes will ensure greater consistency in the support services provided to older vulnerable tenants.

Sustainability Implications:

- 8.7 There are no direct implications

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 8.8 There are no direct implications

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 8.9 There are no direct implications

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 8.10 There are no direct implications

**9. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S)**

- 9.1 The petition referred to at 6.3 above clearly demonstrated that tenants do not want to move to a floating support based model of service delivery. Discussions with tenants at all schemes during the consultation road shows confirmed this position.
- 9.2 The proposal to move to a team based system of working was not supported by residents and the future model will be based around on site scheme managers.

**10. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 For the Cabinet Member for Housing to agree a revised service delivery structure and changes to communal areas service charge.

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## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

- 1) Proposed sheltered communal areas service charge with effect from 6 April 2009
- 2) Proposed sheltered common areas and supporting people charges with effect from 6 April 2009

**Documents In Members' Rooms**      None

**Background Documents**      None

