

Subject:	Seniors Housing Review		
Date of Meeting:	13 November 2019		
Report of:	Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods, & Communities		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Peter Huntbach	Tel: 01273 293248
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Ward(s) affected:	(All Wards);		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 To report on the findings of the seniors housing review agreed at Housing Committee in November 2018 and for the recommendations of this review to be agreed.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Housing Committee agrees the overarching design standards proposed by Design South East.
- 2.2 That Housing Committee agrees the solutions for removing barriers to letting seniors housing properties.
- 2.3 That Housing Committee agrees the proposals for Burwash Lodge outlined in section 9 of this report.
- 2.4 That Housing Committee agrees for further reports on any proposals to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

3. CONTEXT/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- 3.1 As the population of Brighton and Hove ages, our housing stock will need to adapt to the changing needs and expectations of its residents. The evidence nationally and locally is that although there remains a need and wish for specialist housing for older people it has to be of good quality.
- 3.2 The council has 23 seniors housing schemes (including one extra care scheme) providing 876 units of accommodation. These are largely flats, though 43 are bungalows. Three new flats are currently under construction at Elwyn Jones Court and Woods House.

Size	Number	%
studio	232	26%
1 bedroom	553	63%
2 bedroom	90	10%
3 bedroom	1	0%
Total	876	100%

3.2 With the exception of Brooke Mead, the council's seniors housing schemes were built (or changed to specialist provision) between the 1960s and 1990 and largely reflect the design standards of their time. This means that:

- Some schemes no longer meet good design principles for older people and have outdated facilities.
- Some schemes are unsuitable for frailer people or those with disabilities.
- Some schemes now appear unattractive or institutional and are difficult to let.
- There is no consistency of design across the schemes and standard of housing varies from scheme to scheme.

3.3 Although we have invested in our schemes and decommissioned others, there has not been an overall design approach. This has resulted in expenditure to maintain and improve the fabric of the building whilst not always addressing some of the factors that make the properties viable or attractive as older peoples housing.

4. Review

4.1 Following agreement at Housing Committee in 2018, the following steps were undertaken:

- An independent consultant, Design South East (D:SE) visited each scheme and assessed each against contemporary standards of good design (Appendix 1)
- Staff, stakeholders and architectural specialists held a design roundtable event, including a site visit to an award winning development in Seaford (Appendix 2).
- Residents, prospective residents and staff attended seven workshops.
- D:SE consulted with the Seniors Housing Action Group and the proposed standards were approved by this consultative body in July 2019.
- The Housing Property & Investment Team investigated costings.

4.2 As well as housing design, the review also considered the barriers that older people faced when considering moving house.

4.3 The review took place in coordination with a citywide assessment of older peoples' housing needs involving Housing, Adult Social Care and Planning ensuring that the seniors review linked with this work. The findings of this cross-tenure assessment have informed the review.

5. The Brighton & Hove Standard

5.1 D:SE proposed an overarching design standard that covers:

- Communal areas
- Circulation space

- External space
- Private accommodation (each flat or dwelling)
- Accessibility
- Guest facilities
- Security
- Storage

5.2 Following feedback from residents, the additional items are recommended:

- Video as well as audio door entry systems for individual homes.
- Mobility scooter storage either within the scheme or outside

5.3 Adopting this standard would ensure that the council has a consistent design approach for its seniors housing stock across the city which will help inform future planned maintenance and housing development. Lessons learnt on good design for an ageing population could also help inform programmes for our general housing stock.

5.4 The standard is summarised in Appendix 3 with estimated costings in Appendix 4. These are indicative costs that will be worked up in any future Asset Strategy and 30 Year Business Plan of the Housing Revenue Account going forward.

6. Implementation

6.1 Implementing the standard will require us to:

- Consult with residents.
- Use the overarching standard to inform planned maintenance specifications or future developments.
- Set aside capital budget to develop systemic improvement programmes for seniors housing.
- Consider the fixtures and fittings in the communal areas within capital investment programmes.
- Maximise funding opportunities to refurbish outdated schemes such as the Homes England 'Care & Support Fund'.
- Involve stakeholders – and especially residents and the Housing Adaptations team- more closely in the design of programmes, especially in relation to disability and access issues.
- Consider options for schemes where it is not viable to implement the standard.
- Work alongside the housing review of grounds maintenance to ensure that communal gardens are well maintained and remain an important part of the green infrastructure of the city.

7. Opportunities and challenges

7.1 The main opportunities in adopting the standard are:

- It will make our schemes more suitable and attractive for an increasingly ageing population.
- It responds to the views of residents and prospective residents about our schemes.

- Good older peoples housing will help those looking to downsize or move from general stock housing, in turn releasing much needed properties to let.
- It should make our schemes easier to let, in turn improving performance and rental income.
- Improvements in communal areas and how these spaces are used helps develop activities that can encourage social connectivity and tackle loneliness.
- It enables us to create more secure environments to reduce the risks of crime or fear of crime.
- It helps us evaluate our schemes and make a more informed decision about future investment. There may be scope to increase the supply of seniors flats at some schemes, or review options at others.
- It delivers the housing business plan commitment to improve housing quality and, where it encourages more downsizing, improving supply.
- It meets a key 'ageing well' action within the council's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy regarding the need to improve the design of physical environments to support an ageing population.
- In line with the City Plan, it will make our schemes more sustainable, creating environments and buildings that are more durable.
- Good design in seniors housing could provide valuable lessons in how to make all homes more suitable for an ageing population.

7.2 The main challenges in adopting the standard are:

- There are cost implications, as significant investment will be required.
- The work required at some sites to bring them up to this standard may be prohibitively expensive or impractical.
- Any work required will require resident consultation and may be unpopular and / or incur unsustainable disruption to the community concerned.
- Making changes to schemes to make them more homely requires us to assess the fire risk and additional measures may be needed where adopting a more managed (as opposed to a sterile) approach to communal areas.

8. Barriers to letting

8.1 Outdated, unattractive and institutional schemes do not help us let our seniors homes. In the last financial year (2018/19) our average letting time was 51 days for seniors housing compared to 26 for general stock housing. The council also incurred £0.076m lost rent and £0.050m council tax liabilities associated with unlet property.

8.2 However, whilst the schemes themselves might be off-putting, the review also looked at the other factors that act as barriers for people wishing to move into seniors housing. Moving can be difficult at the best of times let alone for those who are older, frailer and without means or support.

8.3 Barriers to letting seniors housing has implications for housing and the city as a whole:

- Properties are difficult to let and incur rent loss.

- Opportunities for downsizing and releasing general stock housing are not realised.
- Older people remain in unsuitable, inaccessible and non-decent housing.
- Increased housing costs, including adaptation and temporary accommodation costs.
- Wider health and social care costs associated with poor housing including premature moves to residential and nursing care.

8.4 The common barriers to letting identified through the consultation were:

- The unsuitability of some schemes including location.
- Financial cost including removal, decorating and carpeting.
- Personal cost including the physical and emotional toll.
- Lack of information, practical help and support.
- Letting processes including poor 'lettable standard' and time constraints.
- A restrictive approach to pet ownership.

8.5 To address these barriers the following solutions are recommended:

- For all public and internal information on older peoples' housing options to be updated to ensure better advice about what is available and to restate the benefits of moving into seniors housing.
- An under-occupation role within Tenancy Services (this is within existing budget) to help to meet the business plan objective 'making best use of housing stock'. The post holder will assist under occupiers to move, freeing up family-sized accommodation for households on the waiting list. They will guide tenants through the process of a move from start to finish. This will also reduce voids in senior's housing.
- For the council to provide assistance with removals where required to ensure an easier move into seniors housing and to overcome the financial and practical burdens associated with the moving process. Based on the number of lets in 2018/19 help with removals is estimated at £0.500m.
- Increasing the seniors housing budget to enable a systemic approach to furniture renewal as opposed to spot purchasing.
- For decorating and carpeting to be part of the 'lettable standard' for seniors homes where required, extending a pilot into 2020/21.
- For pet ownership to be welcome in all schemes subject to normal tenancy permissions. As well as ensuring that older people are not forced to give up their pets when seeking different housing, this also welcomes ownership to help address loneliness and isolation.

8.6 Whilst there may be solutions to some barriers some schemes may still prove hard to let. Consideration to the use of Local Lettings Plans may assist to address this problem

9. Burwash Lodge

9.1 Burwash Lodge sits next to the Lindfield Court seniors housing scheme and comprises a learning disability service and eight Housing Revenue Account

(HRA) flats. The Specialist Community Disability Service (SCDS) rent five of the eight flats for people with learning disabilities following agreement in 1987 (then with East Sussex County Council) for a specialist housing provision.

- 9.2 The three remaining flats at Burwash Lodge are let as seniors housing despite residents having to leave their home and cross between sites in order to use the services and facilities associated with Lindfield Court. This is a historic anomaly and the recommendation is to extend the SCDS's use to all flats. The flats will remain a HRA asset as with the five existing flats rented to SCDS.
- 9.3 To ensure that our seniors housing residents are not adversely disrupted this change should only happen when the current residents relinquish their tenancies.
- 9.4 This change helps deliver the housing business plan action to enable the supply of accommodation for vulnerable adults particularly those with learning disabilities.

10. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

10.1 Remaining as we are is not a viable option since:

- The suitability of the housing does not sufficiently meet the current and projected future needs of older people in the city.
- There will be continuing problems in lettings our homes with incurred costs due to rent loss.
- The opportunity of releasing general stock housing through households moving to seniors housing will be lost.
- We are not making best use of our assets and investment in our council homes.
- Benefits associated with older people moving into specialist housing will not be realised.

11. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 11.1 Seven workshops were held between February and March 2019 with tenants, prospective tenants and key housing staff teams (Re-Housing Team, Homemove, Housing Options, Seniors Housing) where participants were asked to identify barriers and solutions to letting.
- 11.2 Consultation has taken place with the representative body for seniors housing tenants, the Seniors Housing Action Group (SHAG). SHAG representatives have expressed their views that:
- The seniors housing service and especially the scheme manager should have more involvement in the whole letting process.
 - Prospective tenants need better information about seniors housing including the availability of floor plans, and better adverts (especially regarding what a 'studio flat' is).
 - Some schemes are no longer fit for purpose especially considering wheelchair use and disability access. Some schemes have been converted from general stock housing and were never designed as specialist housing for older people.

- Accessibility was a key issue when the proposed standard was discussed (e.g. at Somerset Point where residents in wheelchairs cannot access the balconies because of a raised threshold).
- The council should build new purpose built schemes (with a concern that the city has lost seniors schemes but not necessarily replaced them).
- Location and access to easy transport routes are key factors for people considering seniors housing.
- Communal areas need to be attractive whilst still being safe in terms of fire.
- Security should be improved to stop tailgating, such as better door entry systems where people can see as well as hear callers.
- If pets are to be allowed in schemes, they should not be allowed in communal lounge areas and signage should inform people of this.

11.3 The service has also presented at the October 2019 Age Friendly Coffee and Conversation event and attended the Active Forever event meeting with prospective tenants.

11.4 There has also been city wide consultation on older peoples housing undertaken by Housing LIN (Learning and Improvement Network) in 2019 as part of the older people housing needs assessment– this consultation included meetings with residents at our Leach Court and Elwyn Jones Court seniors schemes.

11.5 Consultation has taken place with the Specialist Community Disability Team with regards to Burwash Lodge.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 The review has identified a need to modernise our seniors housing stock to a consistent standard at a time when the local population is ageing. This presents the opportunity to improve the stock for current and future need, whilst understanding that this also presents a challenge particularly at some schemes where it may be difficult to do so.

12.2 The review has found barriers to letting homes and offers solutions to make it easier for older people to move into.

12.3 Plans for seniors housing will sit within the overall Asset Strategy and 30 Year Business Plan of the HRA. This will require details within each financial year of building works priorities and intentions.

13. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications:

13.1 The HRA budget proposals for 2020/21 will include £0.150m to enable decorating and carpeting to be included as part of the lettable standard for Seniors Housing. Also £0.200m will be included as a proposal in the draft Capital Programme for 2020/21 to address some of the 'quick wins' in the D:SE report such as decorating of communal space and the design of some entrance lobbies. The longer term strategy for Seniors Housing will be included within the 30 Year Business Plan for the HRA.

Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks
21/10/19

Name Date:

Legal Implications:

13.2 The Housing Act 1985 includes express powers for the council as landlord to enlarge, repair or improve property and to fit it out with furniture, fittings and conveniences. The property proposals outlined in the report are therefore within the council's powers. The legal implications of any future proposals will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Lawyer Consulted:

Name Liz Woodley

Date: 24/10/19

Equalities Implications:

13.3 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is enclosed (Appendix 5). The recommendations within the report help address social inequality within the city by offering a more comparable standard with higher-end private sector retirement housing. The recommendations also ensure that older and disabled people in the social housing sector have the same opportunities to access better housing to enable them to live independently and age well.

Sustainability Implications:

13.4 In line with the City Plan (One and proposals in Two), the report recognises the need to continue ensuring the provision of affordable accommodation for older people. It also recognises the importance of making our existing buildings more sustainable, modernising them to reflect suitable design standards, and retaining the green spaces associated with communal garden areas.

13.5 During all refurbishment or improvement projects, measures to reduce both carbon emissions and fuel use for residents will be fully considered. This will build upon works already undertaken to reduce the environmental impact such as changing internal lighting systems or installing solar panelling. Seniors housing aims to be an exemplar in terms of tackling fuel poverty and moving towards zero carbon.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

13.6 The proposed standard of design includes improvement to the security of buildings in developing staged entry, which can help deter distraction burglary by putting a more effective boundary between private, residential space and more public, communal spaces. The further recommendation of video door entry ensures better protection of the private, residential spaces.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

13.7 The risks and opportunities of the proposals are set out within this report.

Public Health Implications:

- 13.8 Considering the needs of older people in the design of the physical environment is a commitment of the Brighton & Hove Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2019-2020).

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 13.9 The review has been undertaken alongside the Older Peoples Housing Needs Assessment undertaken by Housing LIN and the recommendations herein are consistent with the assessment and considered within the Equality Impact Assessment.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. D:SE Seniors Housing Scheme Overview Report March 2019.
2. D:SE Roundtable Best Practice Report March 2019.
3. D:SE Proposed standard.
4. Summary of estimated costings.
5. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

Documents in Members' Rooms

- 1 None

Background Documents

1. Scheme addresses and wards
2. Housing for older people inquiry (Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee) February 2018. Link:

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/housing-for-older-people-17-19/>

