

# HOUSING COMMITTEE

## Agenda Item 59

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Brighton &amp; Hove Property Standard</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>5 March 2014 Housing Committee</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director of Environment, Development &amp; Housing</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Janine Healey</b>	<b>Tel: 293314</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report concerns the policy areas and specification of work that is carried out to council owned and managed homes as part of the planned programme of improvement work.
- 1.2 These improvements ensure all Housing Revenue Account (HRA) managed properties meet and exceed the government's Decent Homes Standard (DHS), and is known locally as the Brighton & Hove Property Standard.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Housing Committee approves:

- 2.1 That all residents be offered additional choice of coloured wall tiles, when having a kitchen or bathroom installed.
- 2.2 That all residents be offered additional choice of kitchen cupboard doors and handles when having a new kitchen installed.
- 2.3 That all individual sheltered homes with a street entrance be offered an external security light, when upgrading the electrics to that property.
- 2.4 That all sheltered housing schemes with communal lounges have a hearing loop installed when upgrading electrics to communal areas.

- 2.5 That a change in policy is agreed to allow tenants who have installed their own kitchen or bathroom to have the other room modernised by the council, if it is old or in disrepair (as per the age and condition requirements of the governments DHS).
- 2.6 To run a six to twelve month pilot enabling all 1 bed ground floor flats that become empty and require a bathroom replacement, to be considered for the installation of a level access shower instead of a bath.

### **3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **3.1 Housing register need for properties with a mobility rating**

- 3.1.1 The Accessible Housing Register links existing adapted and easier to access properties with individuals with specific needs. The draft Disabled Persons Housing Strategy aims to increase the supply of accessible homes for people with a range of needs and to pro-actively meet the demand for adaptations, rather than solely as a response to a community care assessment.
- 3.1.2 Mobility need is assessed as one of three categories: mob 1 for those who need full wheelchair access to mob 3 for those who can manage up to the third floor with a lift or up to three steps to access the property.
- 3.1.3 The demand on the housing waiting list (people that have actively bid in the past 12 months) demonstrates there are 297 people with a mobility need that are waiting for a 1 bedroom property.
- 3.1.4 Between November 2012 and November 2013 there were 69 one bedroom ground floor flats re-let. Of these, 32 had an existing adapted shower so were ring-fenced for applicants with a mobility need. Applicants (with a mobility need) who are re-housed into properties without a mobility rating or without a level access shower, are likely to result in an assessment request to Housing Adaptations and Occupational Therapy (HAOT).

#### **3.2 Recommended options**

- 3.2.1 **Design additional choice:** The coloured wall tiles are approx £13 p/m<sup>2</sup> compared to £6 p/m<sup>2</sup> for white tiles. This will add up to approx £30 per install for those that chose coloured tiles. Gloss kitchen cupboards are more expensive than the other options available and depending on the layout of the kitchen will add up to an approx £300 per install for those who chose this style. It is anticipated that extra choice of design will continue to increase residents' feelings of pride and personalisation of their home.
- 3.2.2 **Sheltered lighting and hearing loops:** External lighting to sheltered properties with a street entrance will incur an additional cost of around £115 per install. Hearing loops cost approx £500 to £600 to install. There are 23 lounges in sheltered schemes, ten of which already have hearing loops. A programme of 13 installs would cost £7,800 plus an annual service of around £55 per system.

- 3.2.3 **Tenant installations:** Of the sample of 71 stock condition surveys carried out this year which were looked at for this piece of work, 8 of them had a tenant installed kitchen or bathroom. Six of these residents had fitted both a kitchen and a bathroom, so the new policy would only apply to two properties. For these two properties, the bathroom was due for replacement in 15 years time. It therefore seems likely that this policy change will have a minimal impact on budgets, whilst addressing the feeling of unfairness for tenants who have invested in their homes.
- 3.2.4 **Showers in ground floor flats:** When replacing a bathroom in an empty property (ie to 1 bed flats on the ground floor) it would be timely to consider fitting a level access shower instead of replacing the bath. This is to create more opportunities for properties being suitable for those with mobility needs, and to ensure value for money by not removing newly installed baths following an assessment by an Occupational Therapist (OT).
- 3.2.5 Showers would only be installed in properties that have suitable external access and are then ring-fenced in the Homemove system for applicants with mobility need. The costs for this have been based on installing showers in approximately 15 properties that are re-let each year. It is not possible to accurately forecast the number of properties that will become empty and therefore the volume of work required. However this figure was arrived at in the following way:  
228 x 1 bed flat re-lets between 6/11/12 and 25/11/13  
69 of these were ground floor  
32 of these had an existing adapted shower  
1 was a sheltered property.
- 3.2.6 This gives a potential remaining 36 properties to adapt when empty. Of these, 14 properties had a new kitchen or bathroom installed when the property was empty – suggesting these would have been suitable for a level access shower if the external access to the property was also suitable. It is now proposed to run a six to twelve month pilot of installations to monitor the demand for installations, associated costs, any delay in re-letting the property and to be certain of the effectiveness of the policy proposal.

#### 4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 **Kitchen and bathroom policy:** The age and condition assessment for kitchens and bathrooms is currently linked, meaning that both rooms have to fail the government's Decent Homes Standard in order for one of them to be modernised. This has created a great deal of dissatisfaction among residents and led to many formal complaints and enquiries. With this in mind, the first change that was investigated was to sever this linked assessment. However, over a period of a ten year programme of work, additional funding of £11m to £15m would need to be made (between £1.1m to £1.5m per year), therefore it is not financially viable at this stage.

- 4.2 **Sheltered showers:** Consideration was given to installing level access showers into sheltered properties when they become empty and when installing a new bathroom. However, due to the review being undertaken of the Older Persons and Sheltered Housing function, and the proposals in the draft Asset Management Strategy to potentially increase the supply of sheltered housing schemes and extra care schemes within the city, it is proposed to put this on hold.
- 4.3 **Sheltered wifi:** To support digital inclusion, it was considered to install IT sockets and wifi into sheltered lounges. However the ongoing maintenance and ownership of the line was an issue and it is simpler to do this on a scheme by scheme basis directly with the Internet Service Provider. Funding for this has previously been provided via the Estates Development Budget and Resident Involvement officers and Mears will continue to support residents who bid for internet connections.
- 4.4 **Bathrooms:** Two items were looked at in some detail and then rejected from the proposals. The first was the option of installing a towel warmer in new bathrooms as part of either a bathroom replacement or heating upgrade. This was rejected due to a combination of cost and the towel warmer not being sufficient to heat the bathroom.
- 4.5 The second item was to provide an option of having a higher than standard toilet pan fitted as part of the bathroom replacement. After discussions with HAOT and suppliers, this was rejected due to a combination of cost and the need for adaptations to be personalised. HAOT would continue to design and support adaptations of this nature where required.
- 4.6 **Additional payment scheme:** There has been interest and support from residents, officers and contractors, to introduce a scheme whereby residents can choose to have more expensive or higher specification products installed as part of the programme of works, and for tenants to pay for this additional service. This might cover items such as decorative wall tiles, electrical sockets, electrical switches and towel heaters. This will be looked into as a separate piece of work.
- 4.7 **Adaptations policy:** Consideration was given to including guidance around removing unwanted adaptations from properties as part of the programme of improvement works. After consulting with residents and Councillors at Area Panels it was agreed that including a policy statement on removing adaptations created more confusion and uncertainty for residents, than the existing arrangement of not removing adaptations except in exceptional circumstances.

## 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The piece of work was launched at City Assembly in May 2013 with a presentation and group discussions. It was also held as an agenda item at the Tenant Disability Network, Sheltered Housing Action Group, at an officer meeting with HAOT and at two rounds of Special Area Panel meetings.

- 5.2 Discussions were held around product availability and specification, improving communal areas and supporting an increased provision of properties with mobility ratings and specific policy options.
- 5.3 Existing data collected from the Asset Surveys and New Tenant Questionnaire surveys were also reviewed to identify any emerging priorities that residents have.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The reasons for the proposed change to the Brighton & Hove Property Standard, as it relates to the governments Decent Homes Standard, is to ensure that homes are continuing to be maintained to a standard which our residents and tenants agree is “decent”; while at the same time identifying and addressing any specific areas that residents consider unfair or unequal.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### 7.1 Financial Implications:

- 7.1.1 It is anticipated that the costs of the proposed changes can be met within the proposed Housing Revenue Account Capital Investment Programme budget for 2014/15.
- 7.1.2 Demand and costs will be monitored during the pilot for replacing baths with level access showers, along with any associated decreased demand for HAOT Community Care Assessments for council tenants. Any variations to budget will be managed and reported through the council’s budget management process.

Finance Officer Consulted:      Name Susie Allen      Date: 08/01/2014

### 7.2 Legal Implications:

- 7.2.1 The Partnering contract with Mears is flexible and provides the opportunity to review the level of service provided and the financial framework used to provide it. It is not necessary to issue a Contract Variation Notice for changes of this nature.

Lawyer Consulted:      Name Liz Woodley      Date: 28/01/2014

### 7.3 Equalities Implications:

- 7.3.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was reviewed at the commencement of this piece of work, and will be finalised following decisions being made at Housing Committee.
- 7.3.2 The proposals have a positive impact on equalities for some of our most vulnerable residents. Installing hearing loops in sheltered lounges supports

improved socialisation and interaction between residents by removing a barrier to communication. External security lighting can increase the sense of security and safety for sheltered residents and reduce the likelihood of slips, trips and falls.

#### 7.4 Sustainability Implications:

7.4.1 One of the aims of these proposals is to ensure the sustainable use and supply of council homes for residents of Brighton & Hove, both now and in the future. The equalities work around sheltered homes, level access showers and tenant's own installations aims to support sustainable use.

7.4.2 There is a potential for reducing unnecessary waste, when baths are fitted to properties whilst empty and then followed by a request for adaptations by the new resident.

7.4.3 The One Planet logo will also be included on the information leaflet, in line with existing council policy.

#### 7.5 Any Other Significant Implications

none

#### 7.6 Crime & Disorder Implications

7.6.1 The recommendation to install a motion sensor security light to sheltered properties with a street entrance will help to provide residents with an increased sense of security against crime and anti-social behaviour

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

none

### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

none

### **Background Documents**

1. Equality Impact Assessment
2. Allocations Policy
3. Asset Management Strategy (draft)

