

# Housing Management Consultative Committee

## Agenda Item 73

Brighton & Hove City Council

**Subject:** Sheltered Housing Focus Group update  
**Date of Meeting:** 24 March 2009  
**Report of:** Director of Adult Social Care & Housing  
**Contact Officer: Name:** Mr Martin Reid **Tel:** 29-3321  
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**Wards Affected:** All

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Housing Management Consultative Committee on the work of the Sheltered Housing Focus Group looking at issues raised by tenants concerning council owned sheltered housing in the City.
- 1.2 Housing Management Consultative Committee on 23 September 2008 considered an update report on the work of the Sheltered Housing Focus Group. The Committee noted that officers would arrange visits to the sheltered housing schemes with shared facilities for the Cabinet Member for Housing.
- 1.3 Visits to sheltered housing schemes with shared facilities and others suggested by the members of the Focus Group have now been undertaken. This paper reports on the outcome of these visits and actions arising in line with Focus Group recommendations.
- 1.4 Key proposals include: Re-letting empty scheme manager flats in 7 schemes; Feasibility studies into providing self contained bathing facilities in 3 schemes currently with shared facilities.
- 1.5 A range of scheme specific issues arose from the visits which will be taken forward separately.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Housing Management Consultative Committee notes the progress of the Sheltered Housing Focus Group following visits to sheltered housing schemes detailed in this report.

### **3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:**

- 3.1 Housing Management Sub Committee 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008 considered reports from the initial Chairman's Working Groups. At the Housing Management Sub-Committee on 11 March 2008 the Chairman announced the creation of a Working Group for Sheltered Housing to operate in a similar way to those already reviewing other areas.
- 3.2 Following this meeting, a focus group consisting tenant representatives and officers was set up to work with the Head of Housing Strategy to undertake a review of issues arising concerning council owned sheltered housing in the City.
- 3.3 In line with other previous groups the Sheltered Housing Focus Group consisted of members (and deputies) drawn from each Area Panel, the High Rise Action Group and the Sheltered Housing Action Group.
- 3.4 The Focus Group used the points arising from the Sheltered Housing Action Group Tenants only meeting on 13 February 2008 to frame meeting topics and the Group's Work Plan.
- 3.5 The first meeting of the Focus Group took place on 11 April 2008. There were five subsequent meetings. The Focus Group and tenants representatives presented their work to the Cabinet Member for Housing, at a meeting that took place on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2008. Update reports on the work of the Group were considered by Housing Management Consultative Committee on 22 July 2008 and 23 September 2008.
- 3.6 A number of key themes emerged from the meetings which tenant representatives wished to see addressed. These included the suggestion from tenants on the Focus Group that the Cabinet Member for Housing visit individual sheltered schemes which still have shared facilities and others identified by the Group.
- 3.7 Schemes identified by members of the Focus Group and visited by the Cabinet Member for Housing were: Ainsworth House ( 22 December 2008); Broadfields and Laburnum Grove (16 January 2009); Woods House, Muriel House, Evelyn Court and Hazel Holt (9 February 2009); Jubilee Court, Jasmine Court, Southease, Stonehurst Court (20 February 2009).
- 3.8 Residents of each scheme were contacted prior to the visits and offered the opportunity to meet with Cabinet Member for Housing. Scheme managers were also present with keys being made available for empty flats and any empty scheme manager accommodation.

- 3.9 Tenants on the Focus Group and most of those that met with Cabinet Member for Housing on scheme visits felt strongly that sheltered housing with shared bathing facilities was inappropriate accommodation to meet today's needs and aspirations. Sheltered housing with shared facilities can prove very difficult to let when it becomes vacant. Residents in a number of schemes fed back that the demographic mix of the scheme was affected when flats with shared facilities were let as their experience was that more men were prepared to accept this accommodation than women.
- 3.10 Of the schemes visited the following had some shared bathing facilities: Ainsworth House; Broadfields; Laburnum Grove; Jasmine Court; Jubilee Court; Evelyn Court and Hazel Holt.
- 3.11 Of these, the following have been subject to further detailed feasibility work into the potential for self containing bathing facilities as part of the HRA Capital Programme: Laburnum Grove; Jasmine Court and Hazel Holt. This additional feasibility work is being undertaken on the basis that visits identified these schemes as the most likely to be able to deliver self contained bathing facilities without major structural works on the properties.
- 3.12 Housing Management surveyors and Housing Adaptations Team have visited the three schemes to undertake initial feasibility studies. Follow up works will include finalising technical specification, pricing works are bringing forward a proposed programme of works.
- 3.13 The 2009/10 HRA Capital Programme paper, also to be considered on this HMCC agenda, includes provision to undertake feasibility and allow for alteration of internal layout of flats in Laburnum Grove, Jasmine Court and Hazel Holt to provide a shower room in the bedsits.
- 3.14 Options for the remaining schemes which did not present as straightforward opportunities for self containing will continue to be kept under review in consultation with tenants.
- 3.15 As part of the visits and wider Focus Group the number of empty sheltered scheme manager flats remaining empty was a significant issue. Scheme manager flats are empty in 7 sheltered schemes across the city. Following agreement on the future provision of sheltered scheme manager services these empty scheme manager flats can now be considered for re-letting. (Letting one of them will require re-siting of scheme manager 'office' facilities.)
- 3.16 A proposal arising from discussion with tenants was that these properties should be targeted at older households prepared to give up larger family homes. It is proposed that allocation of these properties be managed on a project basis, within allocations policy, targeting under-occupiers and subject to the sheltered housing assessment process.

- 3.17 The sheltered housing assessment process has been put in place in response to tenant concerns to ensure that only those people who are suitable for sheltered accommodation can bid for it and that any support package required is in place from commencement of tenancy. This is covered in more detail in the Allocations and Adaptations Policy Review papers also to be considered at this meeting.
- 3.18 Scheme specific issues were raised on each of the visits. It is not proposed to identify and address each of these in this paper. They are being followed up separately. However, as a flavour of the matters arising some of the points raised by tenants included – this is not an exhaustive list: Accessibility of common areas within and around schemes was raised as a particular issue at Ainsworth House, Broadfields and Jubilee Court; Accessibility of shared bathing facilities (which varied in age and quality) arose as an issue in most of the schemes where these were present; Woods House residents would like the Council to investigate re-use of public toilet facilities adjacent to the block as a scooter store; At Broadfields, Southease and Ainsworth the quality of grounds maintenance was raised as an issue. Repair of structure and exterior was raised at Broadfields and Elwyn Jones Court. The issue of parking, in particular disabled parking, was raised at Laburnum Grove, Stonehurst Court and Woods House.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 As part of the work of the Sheltered Housing Focus Group and at the request of tenant representatives on the Group, informal tenant consultation events organised by Supporting People and Housing Management took place across all the sheltered housing schemes owned by Brighton & Hove City Council.
- 4.2 The smaller group discussion format of the roadshows was welcomed by many residents, especially those who do not usually attend more formal consultation events or meetings.
- 4.3 Residents were invited to meet with the Cabinet Member for Housing on her visits to the schemes detailed in this report.

## 5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations in this report, however some of the proposals put forward do have financial implications. The HRA Capital Programme 2009/10, also being presented at this meeting, includes provision for feasibility studies and alternate layouts to include shower rooms in the sheltered schemes identified in this report. The proposal to re-let empty scheme manager flats in 7 schemes will reduce the loss of rental income from these properties by approximately £22,000 per annum.

- 5.1 Financial implications from scheme specific issues will be reviewed as these issues are taken forward.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Susie Allen, Principal Accountant Date: 11/03/09*

### Legal Implications:

- 5.2 As the report is for noting there are no significant legal implications. Further no individual's human rights are adversely affected.

*Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley*

*Date: 10/03/09*

### Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Any policy or strategy development arising from the work reported above will be subject to a full Equalities Impact Assessment.

### Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report. Housing is one of the 12 key objectives in the Council's Sustainability Strategy which aims 'to ensure that everyone has access to decent affordable housing that meets their needs'.

### Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

### Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 Any policy or strategy development work arising from the work of the Focus Group will be undertaken with due regard to appropriate risk assessment requirements.

### Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 The work of this Focus Group reflects the priorities and aims of the 2020 Community Strategy and Council's strategic goals of improving housing in the City and ensuring that residents have a healthy living environment.

