

**OXFORD CITY COUNCIL  
BOARD/COMMITTEE and Dates Housing Scrutiny 25<sup>th</sup> January,  
Housing Advisory Board 26<sup>th</sup> January , Executive Board 20<sup>th</sup> February**

**Report of:** Graham Stratford, Business Manager, Housing Services

**Title:** Review of Older Peoples Housing and Services

**Ward:** All

**Report author:** Fiona Brown

**Contact Tel No:** 2077

**E-mail address:** [fbrown@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:fbrown@oxford.gov.uk)

**Key Decision:** Yes

**Lead Member:** Cllr. E Turner

**Scrutiny responsibility:** Housing

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Executive Board agrees to:

1. Note the contents of the review report (attached) and takes the key decisions as outlined in the recommendations below.
2. Agrees in principle to the programme for carrying out options appraisals on the Sheltered sites in line with that recommended in section 7 of the review report. These appraisals will come back to members for final decision during the course of 2006.
3. Agrees that an appraisal and pilot de-designation of the units listed in section 7 and appendix 4 of the report goes ahead in line with the procedure suggested.
4. That the minimum age limit for housing remaining as designated to older people (as listed in appendix 4 of the report) is raised to 55 years. This decision will need to be ratified by full council as part of the allocations policy review.
5. That the Council's policy on housing owner- occupiers is better publicised and staff are given clearer guidelines on implementing this.

**1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report is designed to guide members to the key decisions Executive Board needs to take from the recommendations provided by the Older People's Housing and Services Review report. Many of the

recommendations are procedural and are therefore only to be noted by the board. The decisions for Executive Board are listed above.

The staffing implications of the report are dealt with in section 9.

## **2. Relevance to The Councils vision and strategic aims**

2.1 The report takes a wide view and as such helps meet a number of the Council's strategic aims. It makes clear recommendations for both accommodation and service improvements and access to services. Both are part of the Council's Vision.

2.2 In particular it meets the following strategic priorities:

- Increasing the quantity and quality of affordable housing. Section 7 of the report in particular outlines a programme designed to help the council improve the quality of its housing for older people.
- Reducing poverty and social exclusion. Section 8 in particular makes recommendations for improving access and information about services.
- Developing and implementing the Councils equality policy. Section 12 makes it clear that there are concerns about groups from BME communities having equal access to services and recommends the Equality Steering Group takes this work forward. The needs of other groups not currently well served are also addressed by the review. These are specifically older homeless people and frailer elderly people.

2.3 The review helps the council meet the objectives of other strategies; most notably the housing strategy that specifically highlighted the need for a review of the Council's sheltered housing provision. The review also looks closely at the requirements of the Supporting People strategy, which will form the basis of future commissioning decisions. A full list of relevant local and national policies can be found at section 4.

## **3. Background and Context**

3.1 The review was carried out between September and December 2005. The full background can be found at Section 1 of the report. The central aim of the review was to gauge how much housing for older people was required and how the quality of the accommodation could be improved. However it was important to set this in the context of the Supporting People strategy and good practice in service delivery.

## **4. Consultation**

4.1 All the main stakeholders were represented in the steering group for the review and other consultation was carried out. Details of the consultation are provided in section 2 of the report.

## **5. Advantages and disadvantages of considered options.**

**Recommendation two. Carrying out a programme of options appraisals on identified sheltered schemes over the next year.**

6.1 A full scheme appraisal was carried out. Details of this can be found in section 7 of the report. Schemes were grouped by location and looked at in pairs or threes. The sheltered scheme appraisal identified the most desirable scheme in each locality for refurbishment or redevelopment but a full options appraisal should help identify how best to achieve the aims of increasing the quality of the remaining stock.

Advantages

- Council members and officers will have the full information on which to base decisions about closure and reinvestment
- The programme takes place over a number of years allowing for a change in direction should circumstances change.
- The future of schemes will be clear so that unnecessary expenditure on work to meet decent homes standards is avoided.
- Ultimately the remaining council schemes will be of very high quality, easy to let, strategically relevant and clearly attractive to funding from Supporting People

Disadvantages

- The inevitable unsettling of residents whilst the future of schemes is being decided. This can be at least partly overcome by sensitive and timely communication.
- The outcome of the options appraisals is likely to result in the loss of a significant number of units. The review is clear about the need to put focussed efforts into developing extra care housing to replace the loss of sheltered units but there is no guarantee at this stage this will happen. However closures will only happen if the options appraisals show there is no other way to improve the overall quality of the stock. The plan to increase the relevance and quality of the designated elderly stock will make this a more viable alternative choice for older people.

Risks

- There is a risk of poor media coverage but this can be planned for by a clear media strategy highlighting the reason for undertaking the options appraisal and for any subsequent decision about reinvestment in the stock.

**Recommendation 3. That an appraisal and pilot de-designation of the units listed in section 7 and appendix 5) of the report goes ahead in line with the procedure suggested.**

6.3 The arguments for de-designating some of the units currently let only to people over 40 are set out in section 7 of the review report. Carrying out an

initial appraisal and a pilot project to de-designate a scheme provides the following advantages and disadvantages.

### **Advantages.**

- The plan to de-designate units will have a positive impact on the accommodation for both older and younger people. Older people will be allocated more appropriate housing (but still be able to access general needs housing if they wish) Younger people will have a greater pool of housing available to them
- A pilot project is a safe way of testing the process for de-designation
- Carrying out an appraisal will ensure that schemes are only de-designated where they are unsuitable for older people and will not cause major upset to the current residents in the schemes

### **Disadvantages**

- There may be some inevitable disruption if residents choose to move as a result of the de-designated and staff time will need to be allocated to ensure those who need it are supported to move.

### **Risks**

- That schemes become unmanageable if they are let to only vulnerable single people. This can be planned for through robust lettings plans and carrying out support needs assessments for younger applicants.

**Recommendation 4. That the minimum age limit for schemes not to be de-designated is raised to 55 years**

**N.B This decision will need to be ratified by full Council as part of the allocations policy review due in June 2006**

6.4 Part of the purpose of the recommendations for the elderly designated stock is to improve the housing not de-designated to make it more suitable for the needs of older people. Consultation with agencies and older people highlighted that moving into accommodation only let to older people was a popular choice.

### **Advantages**

- Only letting designated housing to over 55 year olds will focus the housing as properly provided older peoples provision.
- It should increase the popularity of this housing as a choice for older people which will become more important if there are less sheltered units as a result of the options appraisals

### **Disadvantages**

- There are no plans at this stage to transfer any residents aged under 55 from designated elderly schemes so it may take some years before all schemes only house older people.

## **Risks**

There are no identified risks with this recommendation.

### **Recommendation 5. That the Councils allocation policy as it relates to owner occupiers is publicised and staff are given clearer guidelines about how to implement this.**

6.5 The housing requirements study indicated that most older people were owner-occupiers. This item is covered in section 8 of the review report. Less well off owner-occupiers can have less chance of accessing sheltered housing as they are trapped between not having sufficient capital to afford private provision and not being able to access the City Council waiting list. The report suggests the need for more home ownership options when developing sheltered housing but there are some strong arguments for ensuring owner-occupiers know they can access the waiting list within the parameters specified by the policy.

## **Advantages**

- The change will increase opportunities to access sheltered housing. Many older people who are home owners still suffer the disadvantages of low income households and often suffer from poor housing such as disrepair as well as having support needs.
- The move may help increase overall mobility within the housing market releasing larger homes onto the market.

## **Disadvantages**

- This may increase demand for sheltered housing at a time when the overall stock is likely to be reducing. However demand for sheltered housing is currently low and any increase is unlikely to be over whelming

## **Risks**

There are no identified risks with this recommendation

## **7. Financial Implications.**

7.1 The financial viability of the control centre at the moment is partly reliant on the income from the sheltered housing schemes. Loss of units will result in a further loss of income for this service. See section 9 of the report. This recommends that a full appraisal of this service be carried out.

7.2 If the decision following the various stock options appraisals involves disposal of a site any capital receipts can be used to help the Council meet its decent home requirements.

7.3 The Options appraisals will need to be accompanied by financial modelling which will have an impact on budgets.

## **8. Legal implications**

8.1 The Legal department has checked this report and there are no legal implications for these changes.

## **9. Staffing implications**

9.1 The staffing implications relate to the mobile wardens. There are already staffing issues caused by the reduced funding going into the control centre and if schemes close this may mean the further loss of staff. However this could be offset by a growth in business from the community alarms and telecare provision. Staffing issues should be addressed by the review of the control centre and it is difficult to fully appraise implications for staff until this has been done.

## **10. Other possible means of achieving the objectives**

10.1 With the need to ensure achieving decent homes standards taking priority for funding it is not possible to carry out further major refurbishment within the Council's budget without raising capital from elsewhere. Spending money on existing schemes to bring them up to standard can only be achieved by the capital receipts raised by the disposal of sites.

## **11. The timetable for action following the decision**

11.1 A full implementation plan for all the review recommendations can be found at section 13 of the report.

## **12. List of appendices.**

12.1 A full copy of the review report is attached

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:  
Portfolio Holder: Ed Turner  
Strategic Director: Michael Lawrence  
Legal and Democratic Services: Lindsay Cane  
Financial Management: Penny Gardner

Background papers: (List of UNPUBLISHED papers that have been relied upon in preparation of the report)