

Housing Scrutiny Committee – 11th October 2007

41. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES – SHELTERED HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Head of Oxford City Homes submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) which outlined the findings from the appraisal of the Council's sheltered housing stock. The report set out the strategic, physical and financial viability of each of the sheltered schemes. Recommendations on whether to renovate, remodel or dispose of each block were also included in the report.

The appraisal of the Council's sheltered blocks had been carried out following approval granted by the Executive Board on 20th February 2006. The City Council is looking at its sheltered housing provision because currently there is low demand for these properties, as in some cases they are poor quality and people were being encouraged to live independently as much as possible. Graham Stratford in response to questions said that all but a few sheltered housing properties in Oxford (including those owned and managed by Housing Associations) were now on the unified register and that these one or two individual properties were being dealt with on an individual basis.

Councillor Sareva said that she wished to know what properties the council had access to under this unified register if the Council was disposing of its own properties. In response Graham Stratford said that the location of the properties were detailed in the report and that he was happy to discuss these further with Councillor Sareva.

Councillor Williams said that he felt that if there was a reduction in the number of properties available but those remaining were refurbished etc. demand for this type of accommodation would increase. In response Graham Bourton said that over the past few years demand for sheltered accommodation had decreased which has led to a number of vacant properties.

Councillor Sanders said that she was not surprised that the take-up of sheltered accommodation was low, particularly when some residents had to share facilities such as a bathroom. She said that the Council owed it to people in sheltered accommodation to provide good quality housing.

Councillor Sinclair said that Rowlands House was the first property to go through the process and it had not been handled well. She felt in particular that consultation had been poor. The Sandhills and Risinghurst Parish Council had not been informed or consulted on the plans for Rowlands House. She asked what consultation would happen with residents? In response Graham Bourton said that he intended to write to residents on the blocks proposed for disposal setting out the proposals for sheltered accommodation in the City, to reassure them that they would be housed by Oxford City Council in the same area if at all possible. This consultation would begin on Friday 12th October 2007. He said that lessons had been

learned from Rowlands House and this was one of the reasons why all the schemes were now being reported at the same time, so plans for individual blocks were not seen in isolation.

The Committee noted that allocations policy to sheltered blocks have been changed in recent years. Previously there had been a policy of putting young people into sheltered accommodation, however this had now changed and that the policy was that only those 60 years of age or over would be allocated sheltered accommodation providing that they had a recognised support package in place following an assessment of their needs. However there were some exceptions and this was for disabled young people who it was felt would benefit from such accommodation, but again this would only be considered on a case by case basis and with a full support package in place. It was made clear to the Committee that elderly people over the age of 60 would not be refused sheltered accommodation if they did not have a high level of support needs, if the individual was set on moving into sheltered accommodation and that it would be in the best interest of that tenant.

Graham Bourton said with regard to consultation that this had been more difficult with the previous incremental package of refurbishment etc. The proposed programme included all of the properties and would allow for full consultation to take place.

Malcolm Everton said that living in sheltered accommodation creates a community and this has to be appreciated when properties are refurbished etc. Graham Bourton agreed and said that for example with George Moore Close, all residents had to be moved out due to asbestos being found in the building, but all were given guarantees that they could if they wished move back to the property, which most of them did.

The Committee agreed to

(a) To Recommend the Executive Board:

(1) That it notes and endorses the resulting conclusions drawn and recommendations made for future use of sheltered accommodation;

(2) That approval be given to the recommendations made for the sheltered schemes and the future investment they should receive, namely that:

(i) The schemes detailed in paragraph 18 of the report are to be retained as sheltered housing and receive investment to meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010 and the minimum design standards for sheltered housing;

(ii) The schemes identified for disposal and/or redevelopment in paragraph 19 of the report are agreed in

principle with the expectation that further detailed reports in regard to those scheme are submitted in due course:

- Marston – Bradlands and Cumberledge House
- Blackbird Leys – Windale House
- Littlemore – Eastern House

(iii) The Capital Receipts from schemes that are being recommended for disposal are used to contribute to the remodelling programme for the retained schemes and the general Decent Homes Programme:

- Alice Smith House
- Grantham House
- Cumberledge House
- Rowlands House

(iv). As the programme advances allocation to sheltered housing is suspended where the scheme is identified as likely to be disposed of or to undergo major works that require tenants to be decanted.

(3). That agreement be given to the Outline Sheltered Housing Improvement Programme and requests reports for individual schemes that require major plans and proposals as the programme progresses be submitted;

(4) That agreement be given for consultation with tenants and other stakeholders should begin at the earliest possible date once agreement has be reached in terms of the Outline Sheltered Housing Improvement Plan;

(b) In addition, the Committee agreed to recommend:

(1). That tenants who are decanted from a sheltered block that is to be sold off should be given top priority for sheltered accommodation within the area that they currently live;

(2) That Parish Councils should also be part of the consultation process;

(3) That tenants currently in sheltered accommodation who wish to move out of this type of accommodation should be given the opportunity and help to achieve this to free up sheltered units to those who need them most;

(4) That able-bodied tenants over the age of 60 should be allowed to apply for sheltered accommodation and housed if it is their best interests and accommodation is available.