

APPENDIX

**Joint report of[x1]: Oxford City Homes and Oxford Community Housing Business Managers**

**To[x2]: Executive Board**

**Date[x3]: 14 May 2007**

**Item No[EM4]:**

**Title of Report [x5]: Proposal to change the allocation criteria for the Rose Hill flats, Rose Hill, Oxford and designated elderly two flats on Ashurst way**

### Summary and Recommendations

**Purpose of report[x6]:** To seek approval to change the allocations criteria for the Rose Hill flats and to put in place a local lettings plan for the flats

**Key decision[x7]:** No

**Portfolio Holder[x8]:** Patrick Murray

**Scrutiny Responsibility[x9]:** Housing

**Ward(s) affected[x10]:** Rose Hill and Iffley

#### Report Approved by [EM11]

**Portfolio Holder:** Patrick Murray[EM12]

**Legal:** Jeremy Thomas [EM13]

**Finance:** Suzan Smart[EM14]

**Strategic Director:** Michael Lawrence[EM15]

**Policy Framework[x16]:** Allocations Policy

#### **Recommendation(s)[x17]:**

1. That the process for this pilot project is approved
2. To approve the proposal that subject to consultation being carried out with tenants at the scheme the allocation criteria for the Rose Hill flats will be changed by removing the restriction of letting to over 40s only.
3. To recommend the attached local lettings plan, to Full Council, for the flats once these have been de-designated

## Background

1. The review of older people's services carried out in 2006 looked at the need to rationalise the allocation of housing for older people. This report recommended that;

*In 2006 a pilot appraisal is undertaken in line with the proposal above with three schemes (approximately 100 units) These are units at the Rose Hill flats, Pegasus Road and Brome Place. Only one of the schemes will be de-designated in the first instance.*

And:

*That a rolling programme of appraisals and de-designations is developed for a further 270 identified units once the pilot has been evaluated.*

This recommendation forms one of the action points in the Older People's housing strategy.

2. The reasons to de-designate some of the properties currently allocated to people over 40 are:
  - To ensure older people who choose to live in accommodation with other older people are offered housing of a suitable design and location.
  - That such schemes are managed as specialist schemes and tenants can be easily identified for support and advice.
  - That the numbers of properties offered to younger single people are increased. There is evidence of a shortage of properties for single people and having a greater pool of properties will allow for more sustainable lettings whilst still meeting the needs of the most vulnerable.
3. A process has now been designed for this pilot project and having been through the first stage of this process it has been decided that Rose Hill Flats should be the first scheme to be de-designated as older people's housing.

## The process to de-designate elderly schemes

4. A process has been designed which aims to take full account of the wishes of residents in schemes being considered for de-designation.
5. This process has several stages

- A desk top appraisal of the scheme carried out by the Estate Manager to consider how suitable the scheme is in terms of design and location for older people, to outline any management problems at the scheme and to assess the likely impact of de-designation on the tenants currently living at the scheme.
- This appraisal is considered by a group of members (including ward councillors) and managers to decide if the scheme is suitable for de-designation.
- If the scheme is considered suitable, a letting plan for the scheme is recommended to Council members.
- A consultation is carried out individually with current tenants at the scheme to gain their views.
- A final decision is made and if this is to de-designate the property any residents aged over 55 will be offered a move to specialist older people's accommodation should they wish this. They will be offered a package of financial and practical support with a move in line with decanting of sheltered housing schemes.
- That on de-designation a local lettings plan is introduced for the flats to ensure a more balanced community.

### **Appraisal of the Rose Hill flats**

6. The desktop appraisal of the Rose Hill flats highlighted their unsuitability for letting to older people due to poor access and lack of security features. The flats have also had a number management issues arising from the current mix of tenants. The decision was taken by the Allocations Manager, the Tenancy Operations Manager and the ward councillors that tenants should now be consulted on the removal of the age criteria for letting the flats.

### **Recommendations**

7. We recommend Board to approve the process for this pilot.
8. We recommend that Board approve the proposal that the scheme is de-designated subject to our consultation with tenants at the scheme and let according to the local lettings plan as outlined in the attached appendix.
9. That Board recommend the management and local lettings plan, to Full Council, for the scheme in line with the attached appendix.
10. That Board note the recommendation of Housing Scrutiny:
  - (a) To endorse the proposed pilot local lettings plan for the Rose Hill flats once they have been de-designated subject to the following amendments in the lettings criteria:

- (i) The removal from the criteria that up to 25% of all vacancies be offered specifically to applicants in employment to prevent a polarised area of deprivation;
- (ii) That 75% of all prospective tenants should have an identifiable support need and must only be allocated to the scheme if they have an identifiable, on-going and effective support/care package/plan in place, which is standard Allocations practice for any single accommodation.

But do not act upon it as not all applicants on welfare benefits have, or need, a support package.

**Name and contact details of author[x18]:** Simon Price, Tenancy Operations Manager (T: 335720 E: [sprice@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:sprice@oxford.gov.uk))

Marianne Upton, Allocations Manager (T: 252633 E: [mupton@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:mupton@oxford.gov.uk))

**Background papers[x19]:** None

## Appendix one

### Background

1. Rose Hill Flats are owned & managed by Oxford City Council.
2. It is a development of 28 properties comprising 16 studio flats, & 12 1-bedroom flats. Also attached are 4 flats in Ashurst Way, which are considered integral to this block (these tenants are included wherever Rose Hill Flats are referred to). There are no internal communal areas in the block but there are communal gardens & drying areas.
3. Oxford City Council currently allocates these properties to applicants over the age of 40 with support needs (due to the hard-wired alarms available). The block has been chosen as the pilot for de-designation given strong evidence that the majority of demand for single persons accommodation is from applicants under the age of 40.
4. As part of the de-designation process, current tenants over the age of 55 (proposed higher age limit for designated properties) will be given the opportunity to transfer away from the block if they so wish. There will be close management of any moves that are necessary & tenants will be compensated for moving.
5. There will be consultation with each tenant on an individual basis about the proposed changes to the way the block is allocated.
6. There have been some serious management problems at the scheme in recent years. These problems have included vandalism & behavioural issues related to drug & alcohol abuse.
7. Additionally, the location of the block, adjacent to the parade of shops, has also lead to incidents of anti-social behaviour from non-tenants in the area.
8. Turnover in the scheme has been reasonably high. In the last 2 years, 12 tenancies were ended for the following reasons:
  - Transfer
  - Death
  - Moving to private address
  - Rehabilitation
9. Of the 32 current tenants of Rose Hill Flats, most have an identified support need (which include mental health issues & suspected

substance abuse issues). Several agencies provide support to the tenants.

10. Of the 32 current tenants of the scheme, over 80% are in receipt of benefits.
11. These properties have been difficult to let in recent years because they are designated for older applicants with support needs. On average a successful allocation has taken between 2 & 5 offers. Average void time is 19 weeks for these properties due to the difficulty in letting them.

### **Purpose of the Local Lettings Plan**

12. To stabilise the scheme following de-designation by having tenants who want to live in the environment of the scheme & who value the property as their settled home.
13. To build a sustainable community within the scheme by having a mix of tenants & offering a range of management initiatives to reduce the number of tenancies that end.
14. To improve the quality of life for all the tenants living in Rose Hill Flats.

### **Management Initiatives**

15. Having a robust management plan for the scheme is integral to implementing a successful lettings plan for any scheme.
16. Cherwell Housing Trust has already set up management & environmental improvements at Gibbs Crescent, working in conjunction with the Crime prevention Officer & the Local Community Beat Officer.
17. These improvements include:
  - Support & advice during Accompanied Viewing & Sign-up from Void Property Officer & Rent Officer
  - Support from Tenancy Sustainment Officer as required
  - Weekly scheme inspections by the Estate Manager during their walkabout
  - 28 Day Welcome visits by the Estate manager after tenants move in. This is to ensure they have settled in & have no outstanding issues that need to be dealt with
  - Regular patrols by Street Wardens & Police Community Officers

- Enhanced repairs service for issues of security & exterior damage to the block

### **Lettings Proposals**

18. It is proposed that the Local Lettings Plan will be introduced for Rose Hill Flats for 12 months initially, with an in-built 6-month review.
19. The following criteria will be adhered to by Oxford City Council:
- Tenants must usually be at least 18 years old (although younger tenants may be considered with a guarantor)
  - No children allocated as part of the household for the flats in the scheme
  - Introductory Tenancies are offered to all new tenants where appropriate
  - Up to 25% of all vacancies can be offered specifically to applicants in employment to prevent a polarised area of deprivation
  - Prospective tenants who have identified support needs will only be allocated to the scheme if they have an on-going & effective support package/plan in place, which is standard Allocations practice for any single accommodation
  - Careful consideration must be made before offering a tenancy to anyone with a history of being vulnerable to exploitation by others
  - No cats or dogs will be allowed in the scheme
20. It is proposed that a formal review of the scheme is carried out after 6 months & 12 months to assess the effectiveness of the Local Lettings Plan & consider extending the term of the Plan