

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel **DATE:** 06 November 2013

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PORTFOLIO: Councillor James Swindlehurst – Commissioner for Neighbourhoods and Renewal

PART I **FOR CONSIDERATION & COMMENT**

OLDER PEOPLE'S HOUSING OFFER

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an overview of current services provided by Housing in relation to older people's accommodation and charts the transformation of the service over the recent past.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

- 2.1 That the Panel note the report and, in particular, the current status of the supported housing complexes and the level of service provided by external agencies.

The Slough Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Corporate Plan

3a. Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

The quality of, and access to, housing is a key priority for the council. Slough's Wellbeing Strategy names housing as one of five priorities with the vision that:

"By 2028 Slough will possess a strong, attractive and balanced housing market which recognises the importance of housing in supporting economic growth."

Housing is central to the health and wellbeing of the population; it gives the ability to access work and for older residents suitably located and adapted dwellings provide a safe environment for retained independence.

3b. Slough Wellbeing Strategy: Cross-Cutting themes

Elderly Residents who are adequately housed, and feel safe are able to take pride in their community and work to improve the image of the town as well as improving their own quality of life and life chances.

3c. **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)**

Housing is a contributory factor to the wellbeing of Slough residents, and the provision of any form of housing to those in need supports the priorities in the JSNA and it contributes to reducing inequalities in health by avoiding the occupation of poor quality sub-standard housing.

3d. **Corporate Plan 2013/14**

The project contributes to the priorities in the Corporate Plan by improving the customer experience by ensuring that the available services and facilities are responsive to the demands of local residents.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no additional financial implications relating to this report

(b) Risk Management

This report records the historic transition from Sheltered Housing through to Supported Housing and beyond and, as such, is purely retrospective and without associated risk.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no human rights implications for this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

As a reference report this does not make any recommendations as to future operation of the service or of policy change. Should changes be proposed in future an EIA will be completed at that stage.

(e) Workforce

There are no workforce implications within this report

5 **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 Like the majority of the council's housing stock, those designated as being exclusively for older people were built around 50 years ago and for much of their early life business carried on with little change. At its peak in 2003 the Sheltered Housing Service supervised over 2,500 dwellings which were split across complexes, clusters and free standing and isolated units in the following proportions.

No.	Stock category
229	Units in sheltered complexes
541	Units in associated outside 'sheltered' schemes for persons aged 60 and over
667	Units for persons over 58 (ground floor flats and bungalows)
1031	Units with first allocation option for persons over 50 and possible use

	by under 50
15	Units with a general needs classification but currently attracting a Supporting People charge
+5	Extra Care (Redwood House)

- 5.2 At that time this represented around one third of the total housing stock but the quantity of designated units owed more to a policy decision to avoid offering the Right-to-Buy to all tenants rather than any detailed assessment of need.
- 5.3 Around ten years ago, national changes in housing benefits and rent policy introduced two initiatives which affected the operation of the Sheltered Housing Service. Firstly, service charges were 'de-pooled' from the basic rental charge identifying for the first time to managers and tenants alike, the true costs of operating services. Second was the introduction of the Supporting People initiative which removed care and support charges from the basic housing benefits to be alternatively funded through a unified single Supporting People grant fund.
- 5.4 A review of the service at that time identified that the stock also included a number of sheltered complexes whose quality of provision was no longer considered acceptable or appropriate. These buildings were configured with bed-sit accommodation and shared sanitary facilities. These sites were gradually decommissioned, the residents relocated and the sites redeveloped in partnership with an RSL.
- 5.5 At the same time to reduce costs and provide a wider base for the support service, the residential wardens living in the blocks were replaced with a floating support service with the teams of up to 20 Supported Housing Officers co-located to provide services to the complexes as well as the outlying dwellings firstly in four, then three and ultimately two teams across the borough. This coincided with a change in designation from Sheltered Housing to Supported Housing as the Government drove changes to the classification status and attempted to provide greater clarity over what constituted care and support.
- 5.6 The remaining nine complexes continue to operate to this day providing accommodation on the following sites
- Allington Court 38 units
 - Armstrong House 19 units
 - Apsley House 21 units
 - Brooke House 27 units
 - Redwood House 21 units
 - Garrick House 8 units
 - Kennedy House 17 units
 - Seymour House 23 units
 - Calstock House 8 units
- 5.7 A combination of reducing demand for supported housing and the relative unattractive, outdated nature of the stock continued to lead to over provision and to counter this the first initiative was to re-designate all upper floor accommodation and outlying stock as being reserved for over 50's rather than just over 60's.
- 5.8 It was recognised that this alone could not resolve the issue but would assist in regularising the management of the stock and of the 2,483 units designated in the Council's stock records at 1st April 2003 for use by older people:

- 333 (14%) were currently let to persons aged less than 50
- 304 (12%) were currently let to persons aged 50 to 59

5.9 In 2007 supply and demand of supported accommodation was reviewed and it was found that with a dedicated stock of 2,500 units for older people there were only 300 older people on the housing register seeking such accommodation, whereas for persons under the age of 50, 1100 applicants were competing for the 97 available general needs units.

5.10 This imbalance clearly needed to be addressed and the de-designation programme identified the long term future of stock reserved for older people and proposed that over time the less desirable or inappropriately located stock would be released for general needs housing to reduce the waiting time for such clients. In these locations subsequent lettings would be managed sympathetically with offers being made to clients in their 40's and 50's rather than to a young individual or household where a clash of lifestyles would lead to immediate problems.

5.11 Any older people finding themselves in de-designated stock were given immediate priority to relocate into retained stock if they felt that the change in residence was something that would affect them adversely. In practice only nine residents across the borough opted to seek a move.

5.12 Following the review the following units were released to general needs housing

Studio bungalows	222
1 bedroom flats	853
1 bedroom bungalows	73
1 bedroom houses	40
1 bedroom mobile homes	26
Other properties	9
Total	1288

The advantages of de-designation were that:

- the dwellings could be let to a person of any age;
- the properties would be eligible for purchase under the right to buy;
- supported housing service would be available to new tenants as floating support, for which a charge would be made;
- existing receivers of Supported Housing services, will continue to receive the service under existing charging arrangements for the duration of their tenancy; and
- 70% of current residents in proposed de-designated blocks were aged under 60 at the start of their tenancies and 48% of current tenants were aged under 60 as at January 2007 so there was a limited impact upon clients compared to the benefits being derived.

5.13 Because of the specific nature of their design the supported housing complexes remained 'designated' and as such, except in very rare cases, individual dwellings are retained solely for those over the age of 60.

5.14 Over the past five years the complexes and cluster units have also benefited from Decent Homes investment into the individual units providing new bathrooms and kitchens, double glazing and energy efficient heating systems and in many case communal lounges and catering facilities have also been upgraded.

- 5.15 The next change to the supported housing service was prompted by the year on year reduction in Supporting People (SP) funding grant from central government used to finance the service which continued to be available to the residents of the remaining 1,500 designated units. In 2007, the total cost of operation was £830,111 per annum, which included funding of £700,000 from SP. By 2010 this funding was reduced to £300,000 with a further proposed reduction to £200,000 in the following year.
- 5.16 Rather than being an evolving service designed to meet the needs of older residents it became an exercise in simply managing decline such that the service was reduced through natural wastage from a head of service, four seniors and 14 officers down to one senior and six officers.
- 5.17 Thus while under the management of People 1st (Slough) Ltd., when the Supporting People commissioning team proposed the retendering of the floating support contract it was decided that People 1st, or SBC directly, could not compete with the national accredited specialist providers on cost or service quality and would not submit a bid to continue operating the service after the re-tendering period.
- 5.18 The direct impact of this on supported housing residents was less than might be imagined as at the time of transfer, only around 250 of the 1,500 clients were in receipt of any form of support, the rest were entirely independent but simply choosing to live in a community of similarly aged residents.
- 5.19 The benefit to the council corporately was the continuation of the service for reduced expenditure and to a tenure blind client group which means that elderly vulnerable residents of Slough can now receive the necessary support regardless of whether they are council or RSL tenants, private tenants or indeed homeowners, based upon need rather than simply 'the colour of their front door'.
- 5.20 The nine sheltered schemes consisting of one-bed and bed-sit flats all have common rooms and laundry facilities and guidelines are provided to prevent inappropriate use or occupation of a communal lounge by one or more residents. Some sites have guest suites which enable residents to have extended family or friends to stay for limited periods although this is limited to occasions when providing care rather than for purely vocational purposes. A charge for this is made to cover operational costs and bookings are managed through the housing service.
- 5.21 Historically, when each scheme had a resident warden there was a greater involvement with a programme of social activities and in some cases this has continued although it has generally declined and despite several attempts by the housing service to promote social activities the increasing independence and mobility of residents has meant that many prefer to 'do their own thing'.
- 5.22 Historically, all designated properties have had 'pull cord' community alarms operated by Careline although according to tenants' needs they have been disconnected. With the introduction of far more beneficial assistive technology coupled with the increasing obsolescence of the hard wired community alarm system, the pull cord service has been decommissioned to be replaced by independent dispersed alarms, pendants and other monitoring equipment to provide an enhanced service to those that specifically need it. All supported housing residents were contacted as part of this process and only around 250 have been assessed as having a need for the technology or indeed expressing a desire to have it. This number, of course correlates with the proportion who have an identified support need.

- 5.23 This reassessment of needs based provision while not providing the reassurance of a 'what if' scenario to an otherwise fit and able older person does mean that the increasingly limited funds available are concentrated on those clients with an identified need.
- 5.24 The other reason why residents of supported housing generally require less support and are seen to be increasingly independent is the introduction of the borough's extra care facilities which have delivered 120 units of rented and shared ownership accommodation which provide support to increasingly frail residents. Many of the residents of The Pines and Northampton Avenue have transferred from supported housing tenancies, homes which have in turn been let to older people with generally better health, mobility and independence.
- 5.25 The essence of Extra Care Sheltered Housing is that the people living in a complex will receive a wide range of support and, will therefore, be able to avoid the need to progress through a system of different institutions if their needs become more acute. Extra Care Sheltered Housing cuts across the established orthodoxies for supported housing in blurring the divide between sheltered housing and the care home regime. With life expectancy increasing there will be an increasing need for more extra care facilities across the borough not only to meet support needs but also to reduce excessive expenditure for the council in having to place elderly residents in residential care when supported independent living would continue to be more cost effective and more importantly, more beneficial to the residents themselves.
- 5.26 With an identified increasing need for extra care provision, it is likely over time that the future of some of the existing complexes will be considered and evaluated for potential to extend or convert into those extra care facilities. When such a review takes place it will be done sympathetically to, and inclusive of the residents to ensure that their views are represented in any report and recommendations.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Over the past ten years the supported housing service has gone through a period of transition driven by a desire to balance supply and demand for accommodation and national reductions in public sector funding which have required services to become far more targeted and focussed on those who actually require a service and derive a benefit from it. Historically tenants received a suite of services simply because of the designation of their accommodation whereas now, services are targeted at those who have an identified need for them.
- 7.2 The council is no longer the provider of supported housing services and we are now merely one of many landlords across the borough who may provide accommodation to clients in need of support. The occupation of a designated unit does not in itself result in the provision of a service or imply any eligibility for one, instead a supported housing unit simply means that as a prospective tenant you will be housed in a cluster or complex of residents over the age of 60.

8 Background Papers

None.