

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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| TO: | HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 14 MARCH 2018 | AGENDA ITEM: | 13 |
| TITLE: | HOUSING SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE | | |
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals to reconfigure the way that housing services for older people are delivered so that they are available for more residents, prioritised for those in most need and so as to develop resilience to current and future social and demographic pressures.
- 1.2 In the reports *Homelessness: Update on Demand Pressure and Actions to Mitigate and Meeting Housing Need for Households Affected by the Benefit Cap* to HNL in November 2017, details were given of the increasing pressures on the Council's housing services and the need to continue to innovate and adapt to mitigate these.
- 1.3 In addition to these national housing pressures, local demographic changes are also anticipated. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) projects that the number of over-65s living in the Reading Borough Council area will have increased by a third by 2030 and the number of over-80s increased by almost half. As the older population grows it is also becoming a much more diverse group; assumptions about individuals because of their age are likely to be confounded by a broad range of needs and aspirations.
- 1.4 Key aspects of these proposals in response to changing needs include:
 - i. Increasing the support available to the Council's sheltered housing tenants
 - ii. Implementing a 'hub and spoke' model of support provided from sheltered housing hubs on an outreach basis, so that it is also available to older people with support needs in the wider tenant community (in Council homes)
 - iii. Reducing the age limit for sheltered housing and de-designating the Council's other age-restricted properties so that allocations can be based on the individual household need for each type of accommodation.
- 1.5 A consultation has been carried out with sheltered housing tenants (and applicants) and a summary report of findings is attached at **Appendix One**. An Equality Impact Assessment is attached at **Appendix Two**.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That members note the proposals set out in Section 5 of this report and approve:

- a) A reduction in the age limit for sheltered housing from 60 to 55, which alongside detailed housing assessments with prospective tenants will enable appropriate lettings to be made to those in most need;
- b) Remove the age criteria that are attached to some Council homes and amend the Allocations Scheme, introducing options designed to promote sustainable communities whilst maintaining a fair system of allocating new tenancies.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Reading Borough Council's Allocations Scheme sets out the rules about who can apply for social housing within Reading Borough and how the Council manages and allocates social housing via Homechoice at Reading.
- 3.2 The Allocations Scheme permits for allocations of age-designated properties to tenants below the set age requirement where the housing officer consults with tenants in a block in assessing the suitability of each applicant.
- 3.3 Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities were given new duties to provide or arrange services that help prevent people developing needs for care and support (or delay people deteriorating such that they would need ongoing care and support).

4. CURRENT POSITION

Sheltered Housing

- 4.1 Reading Borough Council's sheltered housing offers older people the support to live independently with access to round-the-clock emergency assistance, plus onsite facilities and social activities. The Council is Reading's largest provider of sheltered housing with nearly 300 units of accommodation, typically designed or adapted to provide added security and accessibility for older and frailer tenants. In addition the Council manages 40 units of extra care housing at Cedar Court.
- 4.2 Sheltered housing applicants are visited at home for an assessment to determine their need for this type of supported accommodation. There were 168 households referred for sheltered housing assessments in 2016/17, up from 160 in 15/16 and 88 in 14/15. Demand is greater than supply: Reading Borough Council had an average of 36 sheltered housing vacancies per year over the last three years.
- 4.3 The growth in the number of older people seeking housing with support is likely to continue. The ONS projects that Reading's population of over-65 will increase from 2014 to 2030 by 34% and 51% by 2035. And the number of over-80s is set to increase by 49% by 2030 and 68% (to 9,600) by 2035.
- 4.4 The ONS addresses the potential impact of this in its report *Insights into Loneliness, Older People and Well-being* (October 2015), identifying over-80s as at particular risk of loneliness with a considerable impact on their well-being. Housing tenure type is identified as a particular risk factor and those that report the highest levels of loneliness are social housing tenants, followed by those renting privately. It concludes that particular consideration is required by support services to minimise some of the impact that risk factors of loneliness have: particularly bereavement, poor health and housing tenure.

- 4.5 As the size of the older population increases and becomes more diverse, services must be equipped to support a broader range of needs. Case reviews identify a number of sheltered housing residents with more complex needs, such as mental health concerns, problems with drug and alcohol use and displaying antisocial behaviour. A small number of residents with such needs can result in a requirement for a significant level of resource and expertise to effectively support them. Close partnership work between Housing Services and Adult Social Care is needed to do this and on-going work between these services has identified some gaps which the proposed sheltered housing reshape seeks to help address.
- 4.6 Over the course of the past year officers have completed a programme of activities to consult on and review the way the Council delivers its sheltered housing services so that they are up to date and prepared for the future. This has included a digitisation project designed to increase service efficiency and improved flexibility to adapt to tenants' needs. Paper-based records and processes have been digitised and by making full use of the Council's ICT systems and hardware, the important landlord and monitoring functions within sheltered housing have been streamlined. Improved weekend working arrangements have significantly reduced staff overtime commitments and associated costs.
- 4.7 A sheltered housing consultation was carried out throughout the summer of 2017 and the full report is available at Appendix A. All current tenants and recent applicants on the housing register waiting for sheltered housing were invited to 'recruitment' events at each of the sheltered housing units. Tenant volunteers worked alongside housing officers to encourage and assist as many people as possible to engage with the consultation questions. The events were lively and well attended and also gave housing applicants the opportunity to meet current tenants and experience the type of accommodation and support available in sheltered housing.
- 4.8 One of the key topics for the consultation was the criteria for sheltered housing; unlike most providers in Reading the Council has set a lower age limit of 60 (as opposed to 55). As a result of this a small number of people whose health or other needs would be best met by this type of accommodation have to wait or seek less suitable housing and support. Current thinking in the sector is that needs-based allocations are more appropriate than attaching strict age criteria; and whilst most suitable applicants are likely to be in their sixties or over, some will be younger. The consultation gave tenants the opportunity to have their say on these and other issues that might influence their communities.
- 4.9 176 responses were submitted, 85% from current sheltered housing tenants and 15% from applicants:
- The majority of tenants were supportive of a reduction in the age limit for sheltered housing from 60 to 55, if the same assessment process were applied.
 - The support service is the most important factor for people in choosing to move into sheltered housing and is also the feature that current tenants would be most likely to tell other people is the most important benefit of sheltered housing.
 - Over a third of sheltered housing tenants reported feeling lonely often or some of the time.
 - Only a fifth of respondents said they had used the internet.
 - Just over half of tenants attend sheltered housing's activities and events often or some of the time. There were many suggestions for what else people would like to see offered and these are detailed in Appendix A
 - The majority of housing applicants said that if they could access the kind of support available in sheltered accommodation they could continue living at home independently for longer.

- 4.10 The topic of broadening the sheltered offer was also discussed at the August Tenant Consultation Day. In particular the suggestion of offering the type of support available in sheltered housing to older Council housing tenants more widely was met with strong support.

Age designated properties

- 4.11 Distinct from sheltered housing, the Council has set age designations on a number of its properties. Nearly 1,000 general needs homes (predominantly in blocks of one-bedroom flats) have such restrictions; about a third are reserved for people aged over 50 and the majority of the rest for over 60s. Like all Council tenants those living in age designated properties can benefit from the Council's social landlord services, however, there is no cohort-specific support and activity programme or management service in place such as in sheltered housing.
- 4.12 These designations were set over twenty years ago and were not formally documented at the time. Officers consider it most likely that they had been introduced as an attempt to address problems with neighbour disputes (for example because of noise or lifestyle differences) between older tenants and newer, younger tenants.
- 4.13 Whilst the Council recognises that incompatibilities may still arise between different tenants, practice has developed so that segregating residents in general needs properties solely based on age is not considered a practical or effective way of addressing these. It could unfairly discriminate against younger tenants seeking an affordable place to live and introduce tenants who although they qualify by age have no priority for housing or due to historical issues are not compatible with the tenants already in residence. The Council has effective services in place to support tenants and address any issues or neighbourhood disputes but these are better managed if this is taken into account at the point when an allocation is made to an appropriate property.
- 4.14 Significantly the contemporary context is a housing affordability crisis in Reading, with over 250 households in temporary and emergency accommodation, including more than 20 households looking for one bedroom properties. Age restrictions have resulted in a significant inadvertent impact on the way Council properties are allocated: because these age designations do not match the most pressing demand pressures, many are allocated to applicants assessed as having no priority for housing.
- 4.15 Many age designated blocks already have people aged below the designation living in them because of tenancy successions and tenants who live together with younger partners. Some have been sold through the right to buy and therefore the Council no longer has any influence over the age of the occupants in these homes. Likewise, a number have eventually been let to younger tenants because no one of the specified age has expressed an interest when the property was advertised.
- 4.16 Where there is a need to actively promote community cohesion and sustainability within neighbourhoods through tenancy allocation decisions, local lettings policies offer a more equitable and versatile alternative to age restrictions. Additional terms, for example checking for any incidents of antisocial behaviour, can be added and subsequently reviewed where appropriate. With a changing demographic, age alone is not an indication as to whether a tenant will be the perpetrator of anti-social behaviour or neighbour nuisance.
- 4.17 The Council's Allocations Scheme currently requires a process where to allocate a property in an age-designated block to a younger applicant, the housing officer consults with tenants in a block in assessing the suitability of each applicant based

solely on age. An amendment to the Scheme would allow a consistent approach on which types of lettings are appropriate to be made prior to the re-let process. This could take in a range of factors such as no history of anti-social behaviour, no history of noise nuisance etc. so that in the future all eligible applicants have an opportunity to express an interest and are not excluded on the basis of age alone. In this way the most appropriate allocation can be made.

5 OPTIONS PROPOSED

- 5.1 Introduce a new offer of outreach support from sheltered housing on a hub and spoke basis. This would be available to older people living in Council housing in the wider community, including where the provision of support may avoid or delay the need for care or accommodation-based services. The objective is to support those who don't currently meet the threshold for adult social care services to remain living independently in their own homes for longer or through the process of applying for alternative accommodation (including sheltered housing) and providing advice to prevent homelessness. The service would work with older people who have had sheltered housing assessments and are Council tenants (including those living in properties that are currently age-designated) who would benefit from sheltered support. This 'hub and spoke' model would also:
- Promote sheltered housing as a venue for other services to hold activities, information and education sessions
 - Invite support customers to join in the events and activities at their local sheltered housing and to use their communal facilities.
- 5.2 Reduce the lower age limit for sheltered housing from 60 to 55. Continue with detailed community assessments that focus on the need for and suitability of sheltered housing as well as hub and spoke support, so that the correct services can be provided for people as they are required.
- 5.3 Replace age-designations with local lettings policies, making properties available to those in most need. Amend the Council's Allocations Scheme to substitute ad hoc 'sensitive lettings' with the following broader principles:
- Where specific properties are especially suited for people who are frail or have limited mobility (for example, level access or with adapted facilities) let on the basis of need for this type of accommodation. Whilst this is likely to be predominantly older, frailer, people it will not exclude younger applicants with an accessibility need.
 - Where blocks of homes have been designated as for over 60s/50s and properties have been consistently let to over 60s/50s, replace the age restriction with a local lettings policy reducing the risk of incompatibility with new tenants.
 - Where blocks of flats already have a number of tenants of all ages despite the age-designation and this has not resulted in any housing management concerns, remove the age designation.
- 5.4 Reshape the sheltered housing service to:
- Create distinct landlord and support functions, enabling more support time with tenants and increasing the offer of support out into the community.
 - Introduce new person-centred and action-based support plans and develop staff specialisms to enable effective housing-related support with older people with mental health concerns for example, or drug and alcohol problems.
 - Broaden the activities programme, including personalised activities packages for those experiencing or at risk of loneliness or isolation and addressing the current low level of digital inclusion, working in partnership with voluntary sector organisations.

- Create a dedicated function to foster closer working relationships with adult social care services on an early intervention and prevention basis, linking these services across the well-being agenda.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 These proposals will contribute to the following service priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-18:
- Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable; and
 - Providing homes for those in most need.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".
- 7.2 The sheltered housing consultation ran from 7 June to 31 August 2017 and 176 tenants and applicants took part. The target audience's specific needs were central to the consultation methodology. Events were advertised within sheltered housing and invites were sent to all tenants and everyone on the housing register who had been assessed for sheltered housing in the last year or earlier if they were still actively bidding.
- 7.3 Officers identified anyone who might need additional help and tenant volunteers worked alongside to encourage and assist people to fully engage with each topic. The full results of the consultation are available at Appendix One and have shaped the proposals in this report.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is available at Appendix B. The EIA found that these proposals would have a differential impact on older and younger people due to their age but that this would be a positive one.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Section 167(8) of Part VI Housing Act 1996 requires that a local housing authority shall not allocate accommodation except in accordance with their allocation scheme. s167 (2e) of Part VI Housing Act 1996 provides that a Local authority's allocation scheme may contain a provision about the allocation of particular housing accommodation, subject to the scheme complying with its obligation to ensure that certain applicants are secured reasonable preference. In this case, if the proposal was agreed in relation to lowering the age limit for sheltered accommodation from 60 years to 55 years, this

would not cause a change to the provision of reasonable preference to be given to applicable applicants and would not have direct legal implications in respect of the allocation scheme in this regard”

- 8.2 Section 167(7) of Part VI Housing Act 1996 requires the local housing authority, before adopting an allocation scheme, or making an alteration to their scheme reflecting a major change of policy, to (a) send a copy of the draft scheme or proposed alteration to every registered social landlord with which they have a nomination agreement; and (b) afford them a reasonable opportunity to comment. In this case, this is not a major alteration so this obligation does not arise.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) deals with council housing finance. The main income is housing rent, and all expenditure related to council housing (such as dealing with lettings; managing, maintaining and repairing the stock; collecting rent) is charged to this account. The Housing Revenue Account is ‘ring-fenced’ (separate) from other Council activity (this is accounted for through the ‘General Fund’ account). The Council’s Sheltered Housing is funded through the HRA. Outreach support can therefore legitimately be provided to older, Council housing tenants living in general needs stock. However, support to older people/sheltered housing applicants in other tenures would need to be funded through some supplementary source. Group activities in sheltered housing could reasonably be attended by a wider cohort.
- 9.2 The proposed changes to the sheltered housing service will involve a net increase of 1.6 x FTE posts which can be managed within the current sheltered housing budget within the HRA by reducing the level of overtime and making use of an under utilised supplies budget. The increased staffing and proposed changes will deliver the benefits detailed within the report - increasing support levels to reflect changing needs; providing preventative support to older tenants in general needs Council stock to sustain independent living and inform housing choices; and therefore reducing wider whole system costs.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 “Homelessness: Update on Demand Pressure and Actions to Mitigate” and “Meeting Housing Need for Households Affected by the Benefit Cap” reports to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee, 16 November 2016. Reading Borough Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme (January 2016).