

## **DE-REGULATION OF FRANCIS WALK, CROWN HILL, CLARENCE ROAD AND TENDRING AVENUE HOUSING**

### **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Members are requested to consider the de-regulation of 14 one bedroom flats at Francis Walk and Crown Hill, 10 one bedroom flats and 4 bedsits in Clarence Road and 12 one bed flats in Tendring Avenue in Rayleigh from pensioner designated housing to General Needs housing.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Currently all these flats have pensioner residents and are connected via Tunstal Alarms to a sheltered scheme for which the residents pay £22 per week Supporting People charge.
- 2.2 Last year Committee agreed that because the flats at Francis Walk and Crown Hill are very poorly designed for the elderly they would be de-regulated from Sheltered housing from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004. However it was envisaged that the flats would continue to be let only to the over 60's and that if they were unhappy with the proposals they could transfer into an alternative sheltered scheme. To date no resident has requested a transfer.

### **3 DETAILED CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 The Head of Revenue and Housing Management is now requesting that the de-regulation of flats connected to a Sheltered Scheme be extended to also include flats in Clarence Road, linked to Francis Cottee Lodge, and flats in Tendring Avenue, linked to Chignall House. Also that the de-regulation be taken a stage further and the properties be re-designated as general needs housing.

- 3.2 There are many reasons for this request:

#### **Government rules on the use of Bed & Breakfast**

- 3.1.1 From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 Local Authorities are no longer supposed to use bed and breakfast accommodation for families and pregnant women unless in an emergency situation and for no longer than six weeks. Rochford Council currently has eleven families in bed & breakfast accommodation and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has strongly voiced its objections to the current situation and advised the Council to review its practices immediately. Further, on 20 February 2004 the Chief Executive, Corporate Director (Finance and External Services), Head of Housing Health and Community Care, and Head of Revenue and Housing Management were summonsed to a meeting with GO-East where ODPM expressed considerable

concern about the current situation and the Council's ability to meet the statutory requirement by 1 April and beyond.

### **Sheltered Provision**

- 3.3.2 Currently Rochford has 463 sheltered properties and 187 bungalows for the over 55's as opposed to 1128 general needs properties.
- 3.3.3 There are currently 682 applicants on the Housing register of which 121 are pensioners actively seeking a new home. However only 55 are resident in the District, 36 have family in the District they wish to be with and 30 have no connection whatsoever with the District. Many of these pensioners will not accept sheltered accommodation but are waiting for a bungalow. Also some of these applicants own their own home and could afford to purchase a bungalow or sheltered flat. Many are not therefore in housing need.
- 3.3.4 There are 100 people on the transfer list of whom 28 are pensioners requesting sheltered accommodation, most of who now need ground floor accommodation or are in a studio apartment and would like a one-bedroom flat.
- 3.3.5 Because of the ratio of properties between OAP designated and general needs (1:2) compared to those awaiting housing (5:1 younger people to pensioners), with void levels at 1:1 pensioners/general needs, pensioners are five times more likely to be housed or re-housed than younger people. At a recent meeting with the Government Office for the Eastern Region (GO-East) concern was expressed at this imbalance and the recommendations contained in this report go some way to rectifying this situation.

### **Location of Flats**

- 3.3.6 None of these flats are ideally designed for the elderly having no lifts for the first floor, internal steps, located on a hill or being remote from the town centre and are not easily let.

### **Other Considerations**

- 3.4 Members will obviously be concerned about the possible effects on the existing residents, that using these flats for general needs housing might have. However, the Head of Service believes that the deregulation of the housing units will provide more flexibility for his housing management team when considering transfer requests and allocations.
- 3.5 Any tenant with genuine concerns will be advised of the changes and offered the chance of transferring into suitable alternative accommodation for the elderly. It is proposed that residents will not only be given priority for a move but also that the Housing Manager be given the authority to arrange and pay for removal expenses at a cost of approximately £150 per flat subject to their financial status.

- 3.6 Elsewhere on this agenda is a report recommending the adoption of Introductory Tenancies so that any unsuitable tenants can be identified at an early stage and dealt with appropriately.
- 3.7 The four bungalows opposite the flats in Crown Hill will remain as provision for the over 55's only.

#### **4 RISK MANAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 Strategic Risk**

If action is not taken to reduce or eliminate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, ultimately sanctions will be imposed against the Council and inspections will be very critical.

##### **4.2 Operational Risk**

Problems of communicating the changes can best be dealt with by the Tenant Participation Officer to ensure the smooth transition from deregulation.

##### **4.3 Reputation Risk**

Residents will be kept fully informed of the position and the situation monitored to limit any adverse comments.

#### **5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 If any instances of crime and disorder do occur in these flats, then swift action will be taken against the perpetrators. This will be enhanced if Introductory Tenancies are introduced.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 If all the residents did request a transfer then it would take a considerable time to transfer them all. It is estimated that the maximum that could be paid out in removal expenses is approximately £1000 pa. This is minimal when compared to bed and breakfast budget. The change of use from pensioner designated sheltered accommodation to general needs housing would not have any staffing impact on the warden provision.

#### **7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The change of use of the buildings from existing provision to general needs does not require a home loss payment as the buildings are not being demolished or altered.

**8 RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) To deregulate the flats at Francis Walk and Crown Hill into general needs housing from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 as these residents have already been advised of the loss of the warden services.
- (2) To offer the current pensioner residents of these flats a priority transfer into alternative accommodation and the opportunity to apply for removal expenses only.
- (3) To agree the deregulation of the flats at Clarence Road and Tendring Avenue with a consultation process to take place and a phased deregulation and transfer of tenants to take place with a target date of commencement from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2004. These residents to also be offered as priority transfer and opportunity to apply for removal expenses.

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**Background Papers:**

None

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