

DE-REGULATION OF FRANCIS WALK, CROWN HILL, CLARENCE ROAD AND TENDRING AVENUE.

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, Rayleigh from Sheltered Housing to General Needs housing.
- 1.2 This item was referred on to Overview & Scrutiny from the Policy committee.

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 £21 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 no longer be managed as Sheltered Housing. However residents were advised 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 & 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 Chignal 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

- 3.3 The Government set Local Authorities a target which from 1st April 2004 became a legal requirement that no families with children be placed in bed and breakfast except in an emergency and even then for a maximum of six weeks. Considerable effort was needed to ensure the target was met and the challenge the Council faces is to maintain the situation. The Government has issued guidance on a number of steps that an Authority can take in order to

meet its obligations and these include maximising the supply of accommodation available through its allocation scheme.

Sheltered Provision

- 3.4 Currently Rochford has 463 sheltered properties and 187 bungalows for the over 55's as opposed to 1128 general needs properties.
- 3.5 At the time of drafting this report, there were 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.
- 3.6 There are 100 people on the transfer list of whom 28 are pensioners requesting sheltered accommodation, most of whom now need ground floor accommodation or are in a bedsit and would like a one bed flat.
- 3.7 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. This imbalance has been highlighted by the Housing Inspectorate, CPA Inspectors and the Government Office for the Eastern Region (GO-East).

Location of Flats

- 3.8 None of the flats under consideration in this report 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. Accordingly, these properties are unattractive for pensioners and often difficult to let to those most in need of housing. This results in flats being offered to those well down the Housing Register and often with no local connection.

Other Considerations

- 3.9 Members will obviously be concerned about the possible effects of using these flats for both permanent and temporary accommodation will have on existing tenants, albeit that any changes will occur over a very long period of time – perhaps decades.
- 3.10 Should Members agree the recommendations then residents will be advised of the changes and, should they so desire, be offered the chance of transfer to 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.

- 3.11 At an earlier meeting of Community Services Committee, Members agreed to adopt Introductory Tenancies in order that any breaches in the tenancy agreement can be dealt with swiftly.
- 3.12 The four bungalows opposite the flats in Crown Hill will remain as provision for the over 55's only. Now that the Crown Hill / Francis Walk cluster is no longer managed as a Sheltered Housing scheme, the Council has no scheme designated for occupation by pet-owning tenants. This matter might best be referred for consideration to the Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee.

4 RISK MANAGEMENT

4.1 Strategic Risk

If action is not taken to reduce or eliminate the use of bed & breakfast accommodation, ultimately sanctions will be imposed against the Council and inspections will be very critical. The Housing Minister is proposing to "Name and Shame" those authorities not meeting the criteria.

4.2 Operational Risk

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

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 breaches of tenancy agreement do occur in these flats, then swift action will be taken against the perpetrators.

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, but this would be over a long period of time. The change of use from 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 Sheltered 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 **RECOMMENDS** to the Community Services Committee:-

- (1) That the flats at Francis Walk and Crown Hill be de-regulated into general needs housing from 1st June 2004 as these residents have already been advised of the loss of the warden services.
- (2) That current residents of these flats be offered a priority transfer into alternative accommodation and the opportunity to apply for removal expenses only.
- (3) That in principle agreement be given to the de-regulation of the flats at Clarence Road and Tendring Avenue with a consultation process to take place and a phased de-regulation and transfer of tenants to take place with a target date of commencement from 1st August 2004; accepting always that a complete change of regulation may take several years. 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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