

## **Sheltered Housing Sub-Committee – 13 December 2005**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Sheltered Housing Sub-Committee** held on **13 December 2005** when there were present:-

Cllr T G Cutmore  
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley  
Cllr P K Savill

Cllr P F A Webster  
Cllr Mrs C A Weston

### **VISITING**

Councillors J E Grey and Mrs M S Vince.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

S Clarkson	-	Head of Revenue & Housing Management
S Neville	-	Residential Service Unit Manager
J Pritchard	-	Housing Manager
A Dutton	-	Assistant Housing Manager – Management & Lettings
D Butt	-	Housing Projects Manager
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

### **1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

Councillor P F A Webster was appointed Chairman of the Sub-Committee.

### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor T G Cutmore declared a personal interest in the Sub-Committee's business by virtue of his mother-in-law holding a sheltered housing tenancy.

Councillor J E Grey declared a personal interest in the business of the Sub-Committee by virtue of being on the deferred list for sheltered accommodation and representing residents from within the Trinity Ward who may be in need of sheltered accommodation.

### **3 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Sub-Committee noted its Terms of Reference.

### **4 REVISION OF THE COUNCIL'S LETTING POLICY**

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue & Housing Management on revision to the Lettings Policy.

In introducing the report, the Head of Service stressed the relationship between review of the lettings policy criteria and the housing stock transfer process. Two specific adjustments needed to be made to the draft policy as submitted to the meeting – the removal of one set of the words 'to be able'

from the fourth line of the second paragraph on page 7.5 and the replacement of '10' with '30' under points awarded against the Domestic Violence heading within the table on page 7.22. The heading 'Men with Access' in the covering report should be changed to 'Either sex with Access'.

During discussion some concern was expressed that the inclusion of an acceptance criteria provision that individuals who are in a position to make their own housing arrangements without recourse to use of social housing should not normally be housed by the Council could be viewed as discriminatory and inconsistent with a philosophy that health ground considerations should take precedence.

Responding to questions, officers advised that:-

- A key thrust of the 1996 Housing Act is that a Council's first priority is the provision of suitable/adequate accommodation to the population as a whole. Whilst there is an obligation on the Council to register anyone who asks to be registered, the Council has full discretion in setting criteria for the allocation of scarce resources and it could be seen as reasonable not to give a high priority to persons who have no immediate housing need.
- Proposals included the right for an individual to request a review or appeal on any decision made on their eligibility.
- Sheltered Housing can be seen as community housing for the active elderly. This is distinct from 'extra care' accommodation, such as that provided by the Swan Housing Association at Dobson's Close, Rayleigh.
- The number of individuals on the housing register for sheltered housing is very few, in part due to the philosophy of maximising the support available in an individual's home. Surveys have identified an increasing under-demand for sheltered housing – something that is a cross-country trend. Housing stock transfer could facilitate a level of investment that would mean accommodation could be upgraded to the higher standards now being expected by the public.
- A number of prospects could be associated with stock transfer, including, for persons with capital wishing to move towards sheltered housing or extra care accommodation arrangements, the opportunity to purchase accommodation to suit their individual need.
- It can be stated that the District Council must bring in an acceptance criteria policy change now otherwise future housing within the District will not be financially viable or supported financially by the Government.

- It is normal practise to offer only one offer of suitable accommodation if someone is in temporary accommodation due to being homeless. An associated driver is the Government target to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation. There is nothing to restrict someone being placed on the Transfer List once they are off the Homelessness List.
- The residency qualification whereby points are awarded to someone who is currently living in the District and has done so for six months in the last year or has lived in the District for three years in the last five years has been in place for a number of years. The arrangement reflects an inter-authority joint agreement, with cases of dispute being arbitrated by the Local Government Association. The extension of a residency qualification to, say, a ten-year period could be seen as placing too high an emphasis on homelessness and could introduce disparity between routes to accommodation. Officers would expand on this aspect in writing to Members of the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee recognised that, given the financial consequences of not pursuing stock transfer, the Council had no real discretion to retain current acceptance criteria – the whole process being Government driven.

In terms of some areas of detail it was agreed that:-

- The word ‘normally’ should follow the words ‘1-bedroom property will not’ in the final line of covering report paragraph 3.7.
- The words ‘housing register or go on the’ should be removed from the final line of paragraph number 4 on page 7.10 of the report.
- The word ‘is’ should be removed from the final line of proposed paragraph 13 on page 7.11 of the report and replaced with ‘up to level 5 may be’.
- The words ‘and have insufficient income or capital to be able to rent privately or purchase a home locally’ should be removed from the final line of the first box on page 7.20 of the report as this repeats a note on page 7.19.

At the conclusion of discussion on the report reference was made to the value of ensuring that, wherever possible, the Council’s Sheltered Housing Accommodation Register has similar levels of information about each property. There would also be merit in as many Members of the Sub-Committee as possible being in a position whereby they have viewed the accommodation in view of the next stage of this review. Officers confirmed that the Register was under review with a view to maximising/bringing consistency to the information on each property and that further arrangements could be made for Members to see schemes as considered appropriate.

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A further meeting of the Sub-Committee for the purpose of reviewing Sheltered Housing Schemes and the transitional plan was scheduled for 3.00pm on 18 January 2006.

**Recommended** to the Community Services Committee:-

- (1) That, subject to the additional adjustments identified above, the proposed amendments to the Lettings Policy be agreed on the basis that the Council must bring in an acceptance criteria policy change now otherwise future housing within the District will not be financially viable or supported financially by the Government.
- (2) That a Press Release be issued setting out the decision in (1) above.  
(HRHM)

The meeting commenced at 3.00pm and closed at 4.28pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....