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## **COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Members to consider a second tranche release of some of the Council properties currently designated for occupation for people of pensionable age.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The Committee has been requested to consider re-designating these properties on three occasions during the last 18 months. In March 2001, 26 flats were redesignated, three of which have become available for allocation and have been dealt with as sensitive lettings. There have not been any problems as a result of these lettings.
- 2.2 Members have agreed that if this arrangement was successful, a second tranche might be released early in the new municipal year.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council's current housing stock is 1,879 properties (including the Finchfield Bungalows) and comprises the following:-

Temporary Accommodation	28	} 1,073
Multi-bedroom	931	
One-bedroom General Purpose	114	

Aged Person Designated property (43% OF ALL STOCK)

One-bedroom Bungalow	197	} 806
Sheltered Accommodation	521	
One-bedroom Non-sheltered	88	

- 3.2 There are several tenants, of pensionable age and below, who live alone in a multi-bedroom property. To assist in achieving vacancies in these properties, the Community Services Committee at their meeting on the 2 April 2002 agreed to reinstate the Transfer Incentive Scheme. This scheme provides a financial incentive for tenants to "downsize" their accommodation by giving them £1500 for every bedroom forgone.
- 3.3 There are currently 697 applicants under pensionable age on the Housing register of which 260 are waiting to be made an offer of a one-bedroom property.

- 3.4 There are 165 applicants on the aged persons register. Of these, only 81 are on the active register, the remaining 84 being held on a deferred list. Many of the applicants on the active register are very specific as to the type and location of any property they would be prepared to accept, e.g. south-facing garden, close to shops etc. Appendix A is a list of those properties currently designated for occupation by people of pensionable age and are recommended for consideration for sensitive letting.

#### **4 RIGHT TO BUY**

- 4.1 Section 122 of the Housing Act 1985 gives people the right to serve on the Council, notice claiming the Right to Buy. The Council is unable to defend applications for the Right to Buy from any tenant living in a pensioner designated flat above ground floor, without a lift or which is remotely situated. If the flat is situated on the ground floor this might also be lost to Right to Buy if the block is in a remote location.
- 4.2 In the past, Members have expressed concerns that should a property be re-designated for general use rather than designated for pensioner occupation then it might be lost from stock by virtue of "Right to Buy". However, if the circumstances described in 4.1 above exist then the Council has no defence against a Section 122 Notice and the property must be sold to the tenant at the appropriate discount.
- 4.3 In the experience of the Head of Service, fewer flats and single person units are subject to 'Right to Buy' requests with multi-bedroom units being the most favoured.
- 4.4 Rochford is now one of the only District Councils in the County that still designates non-sheltered housing for pensioner occupation. The Head of Service draws to Members attention the disparity in applicant/accommodation ratios between the General and Pensioner Housing registers:-

General	260/114	ratio	0.44
Pensioner	81/285	ratio	3.52

This indicates that those on the pensioners register are eight times more likely to receive the offer of accommodation than those on the general register (all other issues being equal).

- 4.5 The Government Office for the Eastern Region (GOER) have pointed to this as an issue which needs to be addressed.

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**5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 A change in policy would enable the Housing Management Team to reduce the length of time one-bedroom pensioner designated properties remain empty, as often these are subject to several refusals because of location (too remote) and not being on the ground floor.
- 5.2 Re-designation as general needs housing would also enable tenants wishing to transfer to a smaller property to achieve this at an earlier date thus freeing up their multi-bedroom property for applicants on the Housing Register. This would include those to whom the Council has a duty as homeless families and those who have a need to transfer to a larger property.

**6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are very sound reasons, both of a management and financial nature, to recommend the move to a completely unregulated stock. Principally, this includes the reduction in loss of rent due to properties remaining unoccupied, and to reduce the cost of Bed and Breakfast charges incurred in housing homeless households.
- 6.2 The Council would also be demonstrating to GOER that they have listened to their comments and are taking action to resolve an anomalous situation. This may help improve Rochford's 'ranking' which is currently as a "below average" performing Authority.

**7 RECOMMENDATION**

It is proposed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that the One-bedroom Aged Person designated flats set out at Appendix 1 be released for general occupation.

S J Clarkson

Head of Revenue and Housing Management

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**Background Papers:**

None

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**APPENDIX 1**

Shoebury Road, Great Wakering	-	4 one-bedroom flats (2 ground floor and 2 first floor)
	Note	Situated within a block of 6 flats comprising of 4 one-bedroom flats and 2 three-bedroom flats
	-	<b>Adjacent to St Johns Road – deregulated in March 2001</b>
Evergreens, Barling	-	8 one-bedroom flats (4 ground-floor and 4 first-floor)
	Note	Remotely situated
Rodwells, Little Wakering	-	8 one-bedroom flats (4 ground-floor and 4 first-floor)
	Note	Remotely situated
Sutton Road, Rochford	-	4 one-bedroom flats (2 ground-floor and 2 first-floor)
	Note	<b>Same design and similar location to Rochefort Drive Deregulated in March 2001</b>
Warwick Drive, Rochford		2 one-bedroom flats (1 ground-floor and 1 first-floor)
	Note	Part of a development comprising of 3 one-bedroom flats and 1 three-bedroom house. The house and 1 flat being sold
Boulevard, Rochford	-	7 one-bedroom flats (4 ground-floor and 3 first-floor)
	Note	2 blocks of 4 flats – 1 sold, ground-floor properties have own external door

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Harris Court, Hockley	-	7 one-bedroom flats (5 ground-floor and 2 first-floor)
	Note	Also, within Harris Court there are 2-bedroom flats – 1 one-bedroom flat and 1 two-bedroom flat have been sold
Shepherds Court, Hockley	-	6 one-bedroom flats (4 ground-floor and 2 first-floor)
	Note	There are also 2 two-bedroom flats in Shepherds Court
Bardfield Way, Rayleigh	-	11 one-bedroom flats (6 ground floor and 5 first-floor)
	Note	Situated in 2 blocks of flats – 1 first-floor flat being sold – these flats are of the same design as the general purpose flats in Bardfield Way and Hatfield Road
Sudbury Close, Hawkwell	-	15 one-bedroom flats (7 ground-floor and 8 first-floor)
	Note	1 ground-floor flat has been sold – the flats are considered to be remotely situated and in the past have proved difficult to let due to their location