
Meeting of the Cabinet - 17th February 2022

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive

Sheltered Housing Schemes – Update and Proposals

Purpose

1. To update Cabinet on two sheltered housing schemes that are no longer viable and to seek approval for arrangements to rehouse the remaining tenants.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:-
 - To confirm the winding down of sheltered housing at Joe Jones Court and Church View, to include the cessation of marketing any vacant properties and commencing the process of supporting all existing tenants to move to alternative accommodation.
 - All current unallocated and arising vacancies within the Council's sheltered housing will be ring-fenced for moves from Joe Jones Court and Church View unless not required.
 - Tenants from Joe Jones Court and Church View will be awarded Band 1 with a start date of their current tenancy, so that preference between them and in relation to any other applicants competing for non-sheltered housing is given to those with the longest time in residence. Those moving within our sheltered housing will be prioritised according to their predictive risk score and then by length of tenancy.
 - All tenants having to move out of Joe Jones Court and Church View will be eligible for Home Loss and disturbance payments in line with statutory entitlements and Council policy.
 - The Council through its existing contracts and internal services will provide packing, removals, disconnections, and reconnections, redirection of mail, plus two hours of handy person time if required to assist with DIY type tasks such as curtain rails. All

tenants will receive £200 for new curtains, and £500 where new carpets are necessary and have not been provided.

- Tenants who prefer to arrange all of these independently will be able to claim a fixed payment of £500, plus the curtain and carpet allowances where necessary.
- Where interim moves are necessary, the Council will provide carpeting, cookers and fridges and these are to be left in place for subsequent occupiers.
- The standard of properties offered will be clean throughout and with intact decorative finishes, but tenants may choose to receive decoration vouchers at standard levels should they prefer.
- Any tenant considering that these levels of compensation are significantly lower than substantial investments they have made recently and which will be lost, may submit evidence and have this considered on a case by case basis.
- To authorise the Deputy Chief Executive to carry out the recommended actions.

Background

3. The Council completed a stock sustainability study with external consultants in 2016. This review gave a RAG (red, amber, and green) rating to all 22,000 Dudley Council properties, with 72% of properties being green, 15% amber and 13% red. All 11 Sheltered Housing schemes were assessed as red, therefore representing an investment challenge and requiring options appraisal.
4. All of the Sheltered Housing schemes required significant investment to modernise the properties and communal amenities including rewiring, heating upgrades, lighting improvements, new lifts, fire alarm system upgrades and front doors. Many individual properties also fell short of modern expectations in terms of space standards and facilities, such as wet rooms. Two schemes have since been fully refurbished, two more are commencing refurbishment, and one new build replacement scheme is planned. Four more schemes have less invasive works completed and/or planned, but two schemes cannot be brought up to standard for the reasons below.

Joe Jones Court, Sedgley

5. The scheme consists of 19 bedsits and is difficult to let, especially the upper floor units. There are currently 11 voids and also two flats being used as decants. The scheme is of an unusual layout and has no lift. A site appraisal conducted by architects Michael Dyson Associates concluded that it is difficult to see how Joe Jones Court can be brought up to an acceptable modern standard in a cost-effective way and that it is questionable whether it is adequately functional in terms of meeting the minimum modern requirements for a sheltered housing scheme. A scheme of this size is too small to be economically viable and the site would not accommodate a larger scheme.

Church View, Gornal

6. Church View is also a small scheme with 15 bedsits and 5 flats. Again, the site would not accommodate a scheme large enough to be economically viable in the longer term. It is more popular than Joe Jones, and currently has no voids apart from two units being used as decants. Many of the flats are not up to the standard that we would like, such as level access showers and space standards, but the pressing issue here is the heating system. The boiler is no longer functioning and cannot be repaired. We have provided a temporary boiler which is currently situated on the car park and is an expensive short-term solution. Permanent boiler replacement has been considered, however existing pipework, valves, radiators etc would also all need replacing due to their ongoing failure rates, which could not be done with tenants in situ. There are also issues with heat transfer with the domestic cold-water supply and associated risks. It is not financially viable to repair and maintain the building effectively, especially as a complete decant would be needed without providing any real benefit beyond replacing the heating system.
7. Following consultation with tenants, their families and Ward Members, it has been concluded that the two schemes are no longer fit for purpose or viable, and that they should close when tenants have been found alternative homes. Individual discussions have taken place with tenants to confirm their needs and preferences, and the measures recommended in this report are designed to ensure that these can be met. Statutory consultation under the Housing Act is also taking place.

Finance

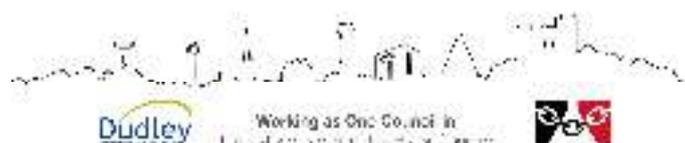
8. The cost of managing the removal process will be met from existing HRA budgets, including Home Loss and disturbance payments, which are likely to be in the region of £75,000. The Public Sector Housing Capital Programme includes resources to support investment in sheltered housing and other independent living.

Law

9. The Localism Act 2011 provides the general powers of authority for Dudley MBC to undertake this project. Section 1(1) provides the power to do anything that individuals may generally do. Section 1(5) states the power is not limited by the existence of any other powers which overlap the general power, such as the overlapping Housing Act 1985 S9 and S17 which is a general power to provide housing.

Risk Management

10. These proposals are designed to remove the risks associated with older people living in homes that are not fit for purpose. There is potentially a reputational risk in closing existing schemes, but this is mitigated by engaging tenants, their families and Ward Members in the development and delivery of the proposals, and by having better properties available to offer.



Equality Impact

11. There will be no negative impacts arising from the recommendations in this report. Residents and their families have been fully engaged in the development of the programme, which is designed to benefit older people and their wider communities. The Council is committed to increasing the number of sheltered housing units available for older people, whilst significantly improving the quality of the stock. There are no impacts on children or young people.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

12. This Decision has no direct organisational development/HR or transformational implications. However, the overall strategic approach to Sheltered Housing will make better use of existing resources and transform our service to older people. It will increase the number of units available, improve the physical quality of buildings and their environment, maximise the use of technology, and enable staff to support tenants effectively with their health and well-being in improved surroundings.

Commercial/Procurement

13. When all tenants have moved the building will require stripping down and demolition and these actions will be subject to the Council's Procurement Strategy and Procedures and Contract Standing Orders.

Council Priorities

14. These proposals form part of a wider programme to refurbish or replace sheltered housing schemes. We will provide older people with attractive, affordable homes in safe, resilient, healthy communities with high aspirations and the ability to shape their own future. Council housing forms part of the corporate estate, and our refurbished and new build schemes will be cleaner and greener and will make full use of digital technology.
15. The closure of unviable schemes can only relieve pressures on other local services, and the improvement of our offer to older people will help to reduce their need for secondary services. The borough has increasing numbers of older residents, and the provision of high-quality sheltered housing directly contributes to their health and well-being and promotes their safety and independence.



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