
REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 8
DATE OF MEETING:	11 th March 2004	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	OPEN PARAGRAPH NO: NA
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	BEVERLY WAGSTAFFE Ext 5822	DOC:
SUBJECT:	WALBROOK HOUSING ASSOCIATION - ALEXANDRA ROAD PROJECT	REF: BW
WARD (S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: CS01

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 Members support the proposed remodelling of the Alexandra Road project to 8 self-contained flats and 3 units of floating support.
- 1.2 Members approve the short-term letting of 3 to 4 low demand Council flats to ensure continuity of the existing service during the construction phase. (*Location to be agreed by Housing Services Manager in consultation with the Chair of the Committee*).

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To seek member's support for proposals to remodel the existing accommodation/service currently provided by Walbrook Housing Association at 79 to 89 Alexandra Road, Swadlincote.

3.0 Detail

Historic background to the Alexandra Road Project

- 3.1 The Alexandra Road Project was built in 1992. It comprises of 9 bed-sit flats, which have a bed-sitting room and kitchenette. Residents have to share toilet and bathroom facilities. There is also a warden's flat and a shared living room. The building is owned and the support service provided by Walbrook Housing Association. The primary service users were young lone mothers.
- 3.2 It was not long after the accommodation was completed that Walbrook Housing Association started experiencing difficulties letting properties. This is reflected in the fact that they have never been able to build up a waiting list for the project. Since September 2003 the Housing Strategy Manager has been working closely with the Local Teenage Pregnancy Group and Walbrook Housing Association to look at the reasons why the Project is unpopular and to explore the options/future demand for this accommodation/service. From discussions with partner organisations, including

Social Services and the PCT it appears that problems surrounding the voids appear to have been as a result of the unpopular design of the bed-sits and the poor referral process. Also, the 'stigma' of the 'lone parent' diminished which also reduced demand for the accommodation.

- 3.3 Since the late 1990's, in partnership with the local authority, Walbrook Housing Association began to network with a number of key partnership agencies in an attempt to increase the use of the project. Working with Social Services, the Youth Information Shop and The Children's Society (now closed) it became apparent that there was a need for accommodation for young homeless females. As a result, the project revived as accommodation used for housing this client group whilst also housing the occasional single pregnant woman or teenage parent. However, the shared nature of the accommodation meant that the bed-sits remained unpopular and there were often clashes between the two client groups as a result of the differing needs and expectations; e.g. Use of shared bathroom facilities for bathing babies.

Supporting People

- 3.4 With the introduction of Supporting People in April 2003, Walbrook Housing Association had to enter into a contract with Derbyshire Supporting People to continue to receive funds for the housing related support aspect of the service. The contract is for the following service: -
- Primary Client Group – Single Homeless with Support Needs – 16 to 25.
 - Secondary Client Group – Young People at Risk – 16 to 25.
 - The service is for single women.

Housing Needs

- 3.5 Annexe A shows that South Derbyshire has the 6th highest level of under 20-year olds conceiving in Derbyshire, outside the City. When looking at the figures, it must be remembered that not all pregnancies will progress full-term. However, it is likely that some of those young mothers who either unfortunately lose a baby or have chosen to terminate the pregnancy may still be vulnerable and require support. The Ward of Midway is the highest level of conception rates for under 20 year olds in South Derbyshire.
- 3.6 For the period April 2003 to December 2003, the Council has registered 30 single females under the age of 25 as homeless. There are currently 27 single females under 25 registered on the Councils Housing Waiting List looking for a 1 bed flat.

Proposals

- 3.7 Under the Supporting People rules any change in a service providers contract requires the consent of the Supporting People Commissioning Body. Any significant change in the service potentially may result in the funds having to be surrendered and any new service would not only require the Support of the Commissioning Body, but would have to be tendered; i.e. in this case Walbrook Housing Association, whilst the owner of the building, could not guarantee on being the service provider.
- 3.8 The Project needs to cater for a minimum of 8 service users to be economically viable. Therefore the proposals are to remodel the building to provide 8 self-contained 1-bed flats. Walbrook have secured funds of approximately £150,000 for the capital works.

- 3.9 Through the work of the districts Homelessness Steering Group it is clear that tenancy sustainment support is an important factor in preventing homelessness. With this in mind and the reduction in units, a meeting has been held with the Derbyshire Supporting People Lead Officer to get a view on whether or not this change substantially affects Walbrook's contract. The proposals are for the 8 units of supported accommodation plus possibly 3 units of move-on tenancy sustainment support. The client group will not change. There will be no additional Supporting People costs.
- 3.10 The Supporting People Lead Officer is supportive of the proposals; particularly as tenancy sustainment support fits within the Government's current objectives to prevent homelessness. Hence, the view being that the proposed changes are only minor should not be re-tendered for. However, the decision is that of the Supporting People Commissioning Body and Derbyshire County Council to suspend their standing orders. Under the new Supporting People regime this is the first time that a service provider has proactively responded to user needs to remodel a service. Hence, no precedent has been established and whilst officer's view is that the service should not be re-tendered the proposals will have to be approved by the formal process.
- 3.11 To address the poor referral process, a steering group has recently been established with key partners. Proposals are that a referral procedure is drawn up and signed up to by relevant partners who will then jointly be responsible for maximising the future use of the project.

Interim Arrangements during the Construction Phase

- 3.12 If Supporting People funds are confirmed then it is likely that works will commence in early Summer 2004. The contract period is anticipated to be 6 to 9 months. There are currently 7 service users in Alexandra Road, however, in the last few weeks a number of users have moved on and there has been reluctance for new residents to move in due to the uncertainty surrounding the re-modelling. By the time of work commencing it is anticipated that there will be 3 to 4 residents that will require temporary re-housing. There will be a need to continue the service during the construction phase. If the service cannot continue during this interim period Supporting People funds will be withdrawn, the existing care worker possibly being made redundant and the existing residents will have to find alternative accommodation/ support. Discussions have taken place with the Derbyshire Supporting People Lead Officer on the interim arrangements. The Lead Officer agrees that it would not make practical sense to stop the service, particularly as there will still be a demand for the service. Therefore, proposals are that in the short term a floating support service will be provided. However, 3 to 4 residents will still need to be temporary re-housed. Also, being mindful that to receive floating support, accommodation must first be secured and that there is a general shortage of accommodation for single people in the district, members are asked to consider letting 3 to 4 low demand 1-bedroom flats on licence to these residents. (*Location to be agreed by Housing Services Manager in consultation with the Chair of the Committee*). Upon reopening these residents would then return to Alexandra Road. This will ensure continuity of service and also provide a rental income for the Council on some long-term voids.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 None

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 This project fits within the Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy objectives to provide stable housing to enable vulnerable people to live successfully within the community and to prevent homelessness.

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 The project will help towards meeting the Governments objectives to reduce National Homelessness levels and provide much needed accommodation for single young people in the district.

7.0 Conclusion

Bed-sit accommodation does not generally meet the aspirations of today's service users and is particularly unsuitable for young mothers. Not remodelling the building will lead to further low demand and potentially the withdrawn of Supporting People funds. The proposals will give flexibility to meet both the needs of young mothers and young vulnerable females with the added value of floating move-on tenancy sustainment support when the user moves to permanent accommodation.