
REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 6
DATE OF MEETING:	21 NOVEMBER 2002	CATEGORY:
REPORT FROM:	CLLR KEN HARRINGTON (CHAIR OF THE COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CLLR KEN HARRINGTON	DOC:
SUBJECT:	SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE – BEST VALUE REVIEW	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: CS03

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 That the Housing and Community Services Committee considers the issues raised by the report and considers the recommendations made in Section 5.

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- review the issues arising from visits made by the Community Scrutiny Committee to sheltered housing schemes in the district
- review progress made on implementing the Improvement Plan
- provide support to the Housing and Community Services Committee and officers in their preparations for the re-inspection of the service by the Best Value Inspectorate

3.0 Detail

Introduction

- 3.1 The Sheltered Housing Service is due to be re-inspected by the Best Value Inspectorate in the week commencing 9th December. A formal presentation by the inspectors has been arranged in the Council Chamber for 3rd December at 11.00am.
- 3.2 In preparation for the re- inspection, the Committee agreed to carry out a 'reality check' on the implementation of the Improvement Plan by visiting a sample of sheltered housing schemes. (Minute No. CYS/19 of 19 August refers.)

3.3 Reports on the site visits and progress on implementing the Improvement Plan were received by the Community Scrutiny Committee on 21st October (Minutes No CYS/32 and CYS 33 refer)

Site Visits

3.4 The visits took place on 11 and 16 October. The schemes visited comprised:-

- Smallthorn Place, Woodville
- Pear Tree Court, Etwall
- Newlands Close, Church Gresley
- Unity Close, Church Gresley
- Patrick Close, Linton.

3.5 The schemes were selected to represent the different types of accommodation provided by the Council. Details can be found at Annexe A.

3.6 During the visits, members met residents to hear their views on the accommodation and services provided by the Council. Contributions were also received from Cllrs Hood and Lemmon (at Pear Tree Court, Etwall) and from the following officers:

- Dawn Dawson (Advice, Liaison and Sheltered Housing Manager)
- Tony Ward (Sheltered Housing Team Leader)
- Angela Davies (Community Warden)
- Sue Hubbard (Community Warden)
- Shelley Whiddett (Community Warden)

3.7 Members were accompanied by Tony Stamper (Audit Manager) whose role was to assist in the 'challenge' process.

3.8 On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank everyone involved in our visits.

Overall Impressions

3.9 The Council now has in place a Community Warden service that provides all residents of our sheltered housing schemes with the same level of access to the Warden service (i.e. 5 visits per week). This is a significant achievement.

3.10 Members were also impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment shown by staff in delivering the service.

3.11 However, there are a number of issues that will need to be addressed if the service is to continue to move forward.

The issues

The 'vision' for the sheltered housing service

3.12 The Council has 44 sheltered housing schemes that provide a total of 1166 sheltered homes for older people. This represents about 30% of the Council's dwelling stock.

3.13 Essentially, there are two types of scheme:

- schemes, like Pear Tree Court, which are made up of flats and bedsits and have communal facilities such as kitchens, residents' lounges and laundry facilities
- small clusters of bungalows or flats, like Unity Close, which may (but not necessarily always) have a community room

3.14 All of the Council's sheltered homes are connected to the Piper Lifeline system and as mentioned previously, community wardens make a set number of visits to every resident.

3.15 The residents that we met were generally satisfied with their accommodation, although a number who had previously had the services of a resident warden felt that they had 'lost out' in the re-organisation. This is entirely understandable and perhaps more needs to be done to explain the reasons for the new arrangements and to reassure residents about the availability of help in the case of emergencies.

3.16 During the visits, members were advised by officers that the proportion of the Council's stock which is classified as 'sheltered' is high compared with other authorities, as is the number of schemes.

3.17 It would be prudent, therefore, as part of the preparations for the 'Supporting People' programme, to define more clearly what is meant by 'sheltered housing' and to tailor the allocations policy and the services that we provide accordingly. This will help to ensure that our limited resources are directed to those in greatest need.

3.18 The vision would, of course, have to be agreed with residents and other stakeholders.

Use of Community Rooms

3.19 The loss/reduction in social activities, especially in schemes which had a resident warden, was an issue for a number of residents.

3.20 At a couple of the schemes we visited, residents had already begun to organise social events for themselves and to make use of Community Rooms. At others, there was very little taking place, due in part to the age and capacity of the residents.

3.21 This relates back to previous comments about the need to establish a clear vision for the service. However, there is also a need to develop a strategy to empower residents (who are able) to organise social activities for themselves and to enlist the support of public and voluntary sector partners to achieve this.

Health and safety matters

3.22 Health and safety matters were a major concern to the Best Value Inspectors and members gave this particular attention during the site visits. We found that some progress had been made in all of the areas identified by the Best Value Inspectors.

3.23 However, more needs to be done, in some cases as a matter of priority, on the following:

- the testing of portable electrical equipment
- updating health and safety risk assessments for all schemes

- improving standards of cleanliness - members were informed that cleaning regimes have now been specified and that these will be incorporated in cleaning contracts or work schedules for Council's own employees.
- reviewing the use of communal kitchens by outreach groups
- ensuring that all residents are aware of fire evacuation procedures
- addressing personal safety issues for residents and wardens (e.g. adequate external lighting, cutting back overhanging shrubs and bushes where people can hide, additional fencing and gates etc.)
- ensuring that emergency alarms are tested/reset after routine maintenance work
- addressing the needs of people with disabilities in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act (e.g. installing dropped kerbs, providing lifts which can be used by wheel chair users, painting and lighting effects to help the partially sighted etc.)
- developing a long term strategy for upgrading the Piper System and fire prevention measures
- ensuring that furniture in communal areas complies with fire safety requirements (members were informed that a programme to replace chairs in community rooms would begin shortly)
- upgrading door entry systems to communal schemes

Maintenance of grounds and property

3.24 Members were pleased to note that one of the Council's Housing Inspectors has now been given specific responsibility for sheltered housing and that in future, we will try to carry out 'area based' planned maintenance that would include both sheltered and general needs housing. Plans to consult residents about maintenance proposals are welcomed.

3.25 Members were also advised of the progress that has been made in the development of alternative housing options for schemes at Basses Crescent, Castle Gresley, Pine Grove, Newhall and Smallthorn Place, Woodville, including consultation with residents. In the interests of existing residents, there is a need to ensure that this momentum is not lost and that a preferred solution is identified as quickly as possible.

3.26 Other issues that members consider should be addressed comprise:

- improving standards of grounds maintenance (e.g. grass cutting, weed control, shrub and tree pruning) - members observed that current arrangements for grounds maintenance seem to be uncoordinated and primarily responsive. However, officers from Housing Services and Technical Services have recently agreed plans to tackle immediate problem areas and to develop a more detailed specification for grounds maintenance works that allow better planning and improved monitoring.
- enforcing dog fouling legislation
- completing the facilities audit for all schemes and developing a programme of internal decoration, provision/replacement of equipment etc.
- finalising the proposed window cleaning contract
- clarifying the position on winter gritting

Working with partners

3.27 The quality of life for the residents of our sheltered homes also depends on the support they receive from Social Services, health and voluntary sector organisations. It is necessary, therefore, to have in place referral mechanisms, joint working protocols and other arrangements to ensure that older and potentially vulnerable people receive 'joined up' services.

3.28 The move to the Community Warden model serves to emphasise the need to:

- conclude a Hospital Discharge Protocol (*now under discussion*)
- make better use, if possible, of the Granville Court Respite Unit (*provisional agreement has been reached with Social Service and the Primary Care Trust over a limited use of this facility*)
- encourage Social Services to involve Community Wardens in home care plans (*recently agreed*)

Roles and responsibilities

3.29 A recurring theme during the site visits has been lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities. This operates on a number of levels:

- between the Council and residents
- between the Council and partner organisations
- between Council departments
- within the Housing Service

3.30 Clarification of roles and responsibilities would help the service to move forward in a planned and sustainable manner. A starting point would be for the Council to clearly state its standards of service and to ensure that these standards are widely publicised, especially to health and social services personnel.

Data management

3.31 The final issue concerns the management of information about sheltered homes and their occupants. At the present time, there are three separate IT systems concerned with rents, housing maintenance and lettings. Also, some information is not recorded, such as details of adaptations to properties.

4.0 A long term plan for how data is collected and managed would seem to be essential.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 Financial or other resource implications arising from this report have not been quantified at this stage.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 The site visits and the discussions with residents and frontline staff have enabled members to see at the first hand the operation of the sheltered housing service. We would commend this approach to other committees.

5.2 It is evident that the sheltered housing service is now starting to move forward. The issues that have been identified should support this process. These may be summarised as :

- the 'vision' for the sheltered housing service
- use of community rooms
- health and safety matters
- maintenance of grounds and property
- working with other partners
- roles and responsibilities
- data management

5.3 A key challenge for the service will be to find ways of dealing with short term issues whilst developing long term, sustainable solutions.

5.4 It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Develops a clear vision of what constitutes the Sheltered Housing Service and how this impacts on the sheltered housing stock.
2. The alternative development options presently being considered for some of the stock should be considered as a high priority with a decision and action implemented swiftly in the interests of the affected residents.
3. Ensures that the planned improvements to maintenance of grounds and property, inclusive of cleaning contracts, are completed and are included within budget proposals for next year, including growth items where applicable
4. Ensures that sustainable Health and Safety systems are in place and are incorporated in the Performance Management System
5. Clearly defines the roles and responsibilities for service provision for ourselves and our partners. A starting point should be a widely publicised document which clearly states our standards of Service
6. Makes the replacement of computer systems a priority