

Item no.

Report to: **Executive**
Date: **13 January 2009**
Report of: **Executive Member for Housing**
Subject: **Review of Sheltered Housing Units and Communal Halls**
Ward: **All**

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides details of proposals for a review of the District Council's Sheltered Housing Units and Communal Halls.

2.0 Consultation

- 2.1 This report has been developed in consultation with the Council's Management Team and East Durham Homes' Management Team and Board. The project plan for implementation of the review contains specific detail of consultation with local residents, elected Members, community groups and other relevant stakeholders.

3.0 Background & Reasons for the proposed Review

- 3.1 District of Easington Council has been providing Sheltered Accommodation and Communal Halls for social activities for older people since the 1970s. There are currently six Sheltered Housing Units (SHUs) and fifteen Communal Halls dispersed throughout the District, and a schedule of properties is provided in Appendix 1 to this report.

Sheltered Housing Units

- 3.2 The six SHUs provide accommodation for older people, predominantly in the form of one bedroom flats and bedsits, with associated communal areas and social activities. There are 145 flats/bedsits in total across the six SHU schemes. The Council's Care Services function provides the Resident Warden and 24/7 monitoring and mobile response service to the SHUs, with the management and maintenance of the properties provided by East Durham Homes.
- 3.3 Falling demand for this type of sheltered residential accommodation over recent years has resulted in the profile of residents changing significantly, with some of the SHUs now predominantly occupied by very frail older people and residents with a diverse range of support needs, including younger people with learning disabilities. While most of the SHUs are just about managing to maintain an active 'waiting list' East Durham Homes are struggling to allocate empty units in others despite active marketing, open days, and the lowering of age limits for some of the schemes. This situation seems counter-intuitive to the demographic profile of our local communities which record an increasing proportion of older residents, and the proposed review

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will identify how each of the six SHUs can contribute to the current and future provision of accommodation and services for older people in each local community.

- 3.4 Changes to the funding of the Care Services support provided to residents of the SHUs through the Supporting People Grant (SPG) regime mean that the Resident Warden service and the provision of social activities are no longer grant-eligible activities and as a result the cost of these services are now picked up by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). As these services are not charged directly to the residents receiving them, the services are classed as 'pooled' services (in effect all Council rent payers are making a contribution to services provided to only a few). This situation was raised as an issue of concern by the Audit Commission during the 2006 inspection of East Durham Homes and again more recently when the Council engaged the Audit Commission to carry out support work with East Durham Homes earlier this year. The proposed review will identify the costs and income associated with each of the SHUs for discussion with residents and other stakeholders with a view to clarifying the financial sustainability of each of the schemes.
- 3.5 Residents of the six SHUs receive services from District of Easington Care Services and East Durham Homes as well as other agencies including Durham County Council Adult Services, the Primary Care Trust and Age Concern. The proposed review is intended to ensure that all key stakeholders are engaged in the options appraisal of the SHUs and that the resulting options are taken forward as a coordinated multi-agency approach to providing services from the schemes.

Communal Halls

- 3.6 The fifteen Communal Halls operated by the District Council's Care Service function are typically sited amongst surrounding Older Persons accommodation, with a nominated Care Services Warden responsible for the organisation of social events in the hall and monitoring health & safety issues, reporting repairs, etc.
- 3.7 The buildings are predominantly used by older people living in the direct vicinity, and although the majority of these will be Council tenants there is no preclusion of non-Council residents. Indeed, over recent years members of the wider community have been actively encouraged to participate in social activities held in the buildings as a way of increasing 'foot-fall' as well as promoting and fostering stronger ties with the local community. The type of social activities varies from building to building; typical activities include Bingo, Cards & Dominoes, Coffee Mornings, Lunch Clubs, Neighbourhood Watch and Citizen Advice Bureau sessions. The usage of the buildings also varies greatly, from around 4 hours per week to over 25 hours per week, as does the actual number of residents using the facilities.
- 3.8 The Communal Halls are dispersed throughout the District, with some settlements having multiple provision and others having none. There are also a range of other Communal facilities in many settlements that provide similar or complementary social activities for local residents. The proposed review is intended to identify the full range of provision in each of the settlements and through engagement with local

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residents and other stakeholders review the options for future use of each of the Halls.

- 3.9 Similar to the Sheltered Housing Units, the costs associated with the provision of the Communal Halls falls to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and is a 'pooled' cost i.e. the Council does not charge the users of the buildings directly and as such Council rent payers are effectively all making a contribution to services provided to only a few. The proposed review will identify the costs and income associated with each of the Communal Halls for discussion with residents and other stakeholders with a view to clarifying the financial sustainability of each of the schemes.
- 3.10 Although the Halls are serviced by District of Easington Care Services Wardens some are also used by other agencies including Durham County Council Adult Services, the Primary Care Trust and Age Concern. The proposed review is intended to ensure that all key stakeholders are engaged in the options appraisal of the Halls and that the resulting options are taken forward as a coordinated multi-agency approach to providing services from these locations.

4.0 Details of the Proposed Review of Sheltered Housing Units and Communal Halls

- 4.1 A project team has been established to take forward the proposed reviews of the six Sheltered Housing Units and fifteen Communal Halls. The team is made up of Officers from the Council's Housing, Regeneration, Asset & Property and Corporate Development Services as well as representatives from East Durham Homes. A full risk assessment has been carried out for the projects, and the Regeneration & Development Directorate Management Team will act as the Project Board, receiving project update reports as a standing agenda item every month.
- 4.2 The Review of each of the SHUs and Communal Halls will consider three elements: *Property* – the quality of the building and the amenities provided; *Place* – the wider community context; and, *People* – issues such as demand & usage, community demographics, and other stakeholders' views. Consultation with residents, users, Members and the wider community are built into the project plan to ensure that the final options report for each building takes these views into account.
- 4.3 The review of the Sheltered Housing Units is intended to begin with Dormand Villas, Station Town, as work with the residents and stakeholders has been ongoing here for some time due to long-standing issues of low demand. The final options report for Dormand Villas programmed for completed in March 2009, with the final options reports for the remaining 5 SHUs following on through April, May and June 2009. The review of the Communal Halls is programmed for completion in April 2009.
- 4.4 The detailed consultation plans for each project include face to face meetings with residents, staff and service users, briefing sessions with Local Members, consultation with other local stakeholders and key partners. An initial letter to residents setting out the consultation process has been prepared, subject to the decision recommended in this report, and a series of briefing meetings have been planned

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during January and February 2009. The projects will also be included in the regular briefing meetings with the relevant Council Portfolio holders.

- 4.5 As the delivery of the recommended projects straddles the timeframe of this District Council and the new Unitary Council it is proposed that a progress report be presented to District Council Members in March 2009 prior to the final options reports being fed into the new Unitary Council's decision making processes as part of the emerging work programme of the new Council's Housing Service.

5.0 Implications

5.1 Financial

The proposed options appraisals will be completed from within existing resources and as such there are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations in this report. The final options reports will include detailed information of costs and funding for any options put forward for consideration. The options appraisal work will include a review of existing service provision and funding sources and is intended to address issues previously raised by the Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate in terms of charges to the HRA.

5.2 Legal

There are no direct legal implications.

5.3 Policy

There are no direct Policy implications. The Council's Housing Strategy 2008-11 adopted by Council in April 2008 includes a priority of "Work in partnership with housing providers to improve existing older persons housing stock and provide new build units".

5.4 Local Government Review

The proposed review of SHUs and Communal Halls has been reported through the LGR Housing and Asset & Property Workstreams. Work has already begun on preparing proposals for a similar approach to Older Persons Accommodation and Support Services across the whole of County Durham.

5.5 Risk

Both of the proposed project plans have been subjected to a full Risk Assessment and the appropriate actions put in place to mitigate established risks.

5.6 Communications

Both project plans include detailed plans for communication with a range of stakeholders including existing residents/users, local Members, partner agencies, and the wider community as appropriate.

6. Corporate Implication

6.1 Corporate Plan and Priorities

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The proposals contained in this report are in line with the Corporate Plan priorities of 'Decent Homes for All', 'Making the District Safe' and 'Building a Healthy Community'. The proposal is in line with the Council's Housing Strategy 2008-11, as set out in para 5.3 above.

6.2 Equality and Diversity

The proposed options appraisals will be subject to full Equality Impact Assessments and any resulting actions incorporated into the final options report. The consultation processes included in the options appraisals are intended to provide opportunity for face to face consultation with residents of the SHUs and users of the Communal Halls.

6.3 E-Government

There are no direct E-Government implications.

6.4 Procurement

There are no direct Procurement implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The final options appraisal reports will include consideration of any associated Procurement implications.

6.5 Service Plan

The recommendations of this report are in line with the delivery of the Housing Service Plan.

6.6 Performance Management and Scrutiny

The detailed project plans include specific performance management details and the project has been incorporated into the Regeneration & Development Directorate Transitional Plan. It is recommended that, if approved, the Head of Housing present the detailed options appraisals to the Scrutiny Management Board for consideration of future scrutiny arrangements.

6.7 Sustainability

There are no direct Sustainability implications.

6.8 Human Resource Implications

There are no direct Human Resource implications contained in the recommendations of this report. The final options reports will include consideration of any Human Resource implications, and the detailed project plans including consultation with staff.

6.9 Social Inclusion

The recommended review of SHUs and Communal Halls is intended to provide a clearer picture of how existing provision by the Council is meeting the needs of older people in our local communities. The final options reports will provide recommendations for improved provision in order to promote social inclusion of older people in these communities.

7 Recommendations

Members of the Executive are recommended to:

- Approve the proposed consultation and options appraisal projects for the Council's Sheltered Housing Units and Communal Halls as outlined in this report

Background Papers

District of Easington Housing Strategy 2008 – 11

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Detailed Project Plans

Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate report on East Durham Homes July 2007

Responsible Officer

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APPENDIX 1 SCHEDULE OF COMMUNAL HALLS AND SHELTERED HOUSING UNITS

Sheltered Housing Units

Unit	Location
Donnini House	Easington
Dormand Villa	Station Town
Jubilee Centre	Seaham
Jubilee Square	South Hetton
Primrose Court	Blackhall
Robinson House	Horden

Communal Halls

Unit	Location
Airlee House	Blackhall
Lee House	Easington
Poplar House	Easington
Bruce Kirkup Centre	Horden
Roseby Road	Horden
Sunderland Road Centre	Horden
McRae House	Murton
Fairclough Court	Peterlee
Burnway Centre	Seaham
Byron Lodge	Seaham
Earl House	Seaham
Shakespeare Centre	Seaham
Wheatley House	Wheatley Hill
Charlton House	Wingate
Gully House	Wingate