

## OLDER PERSONS' HOUSING AND SUPPORT STRATEGY REVIEW OF OLDER PERSONS' HOUSING

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### **Introduction**

The information attached details the proposed revised categories for Older Persons' Accommodation in Redditch. There is additional information regarding the consultation that has taken place which identified the main causes of concern that residents have. The reasoning and deliberation behind the proposals are also discussed. Those issues which have been identified as unacceptable have been highlighted. A Residents Group was formed in January, 2010 to work with officers and details are given. The benefits of adopting the proposals are provided as a conclusion to this document.

## **PROPOSED CATEGORIES**

### **Older Persons Supported Housing – Category A**

- suitable for persons aged **65** years old and over **and** who have an assessed support need.
- acceptable safety and security standards
- in a suitable, desirable location
- suitable internal and external access, including a lift to upper floors
- suitable communal facilities
- eligible to join in communal activities at other schemes

### **Older Persons Supported Housing – Category A Bungalows**

- suitable for persons aged **60** years old and over with preference to be given where there is an assessed support need or to a wheelchair user
- also suitable for adults aged 18 years old and over with severe mobility issues or wheelchair users
- suitable internal and external access
- eligible to join in communal activities at other schemes

### **Older Persons Housing for Over 60's– Category B**

- suitable for persons aged **60** years old and over with or without an assessed support need
- priority would be given to wheelchair users in level access units
- priority would be given to those with an assessed support need
- upper floors (where appropriate) only suitable for mobile persons
- priority to move to lower floors would be given to current upper floor residents if criteria met
- suitable internal and external access
- eligible to join in communal activities at other schemes

### **Over 50's Housing – Category C**

- suitable for persons aged 50 years old and over with or without an assessed support need
- upper floors (where appropriate) only suitable for mobile persons
- priority on lower floors would be given those with mobility issues
- priority to move to lower floors would be given to current upper floor residents if criteria met
- eligible to join in communal activities at other schemes

## Consultation

The Council have fully appreciated the time and efforts afforded by residents, councillors and officers during the consultation process. There is no doubt that their thoughts, views and opinions have strongly influenced the outcome of these proposals.

Feedback has been encouraged and we have responded accordingly. Details of the consultation held can be found attached, feedback forms and minutes can be found in the background papers as can details of the prior period of consultation held in 2007.

**Below is just a sample of the feedback we have received recently and which was analysed prior to proposals being made.**

### **Staff Conference – 7th September, 2009**

- (I now have a) much clearer idea of what the council intend to do
- Be sensitive to (tenants) perceptions and expectations
- Keep staff involved, they know the residents
- Should consider safety
- Be honest when informing of changes, do not give higher expectations which can't be delivered
- Involve Home Support Officers
- (This has) given planning (department) some ideas when considering what is necessary in new builds
- Use different methods to approach tenants who won't attend meetings
- Keep us up to date with all ideas and developments
- Very interesting and informative
- Update front line staff and offer one to one consultations
- Involve other agencies

## **Public Conference – 25th September, 2009**

- Very enjoyable few hours
- A very interesting meeting, lots of information
- Worried that decisions have already been made
- Excellent balance of jargon to plain English
- We will actively contest this
- Interesting and most helpful but we do not agree with the letting procedure it is unfair
- Should also consider private home owners
- Very positive and encouraging for the future
- Would be useful to go and visit other towns
- Encouraged by time and effort from officers, please don't let it go to waste and create a happy, safe and pleasant environment for older people to live in (and for those younger to look forward to)

## **Scheme Visits – October, 2009**

Individual sets of minutes from each scheme visit are available in the background papers. The following comments are from residents who completed a feedback form.

- Only allow over 50's in older persons if they are disabled
- Sheltered label is most important
- Would rather not be called 'sheltered' housing
- I do not feel reassured
- Very well put across, pleased to hear we will be kept informed
- Should have carefully considered lettings plans
- Decision making should be made carefully taking into account vulnerable people

- The standards cover most of what elderly people need for comfortable living
- We feel very strongly that the scheme should remain over 60's
- Introductory tenancies are a good idea, long overdue
- Just enough information, too much would be confusing
- Attention should be given to sound proofing
- Do not allow groups of properties to become ghettos
- The information given about the priorities (in the action plan) helps people understand more

### **Consultation Feedback conference – 31st March, 2010**

- Enough consultation has been carried out but public involvement has been low
- Continuance of the residents group is essential even after the decisions are made
- Initiative (to be involved) was firmly placed on tenants – no attempt (was made by the Council) to contact all tenants individually
- There is ample opportunity to ask questions but could also have a box in the One Stop Shop
- Some people used the event to air their own personal grievances
- Could use 'peer' interviewers
- Excellent layout and presentations
- There has been enough consultation but can always think of more ways
- Apathy prevents enough people attending these events
- People think decisions already made because of the amount of information you are giving, they are not used to it.

## **End of consultation questionnaire – March 2010**

Further to comments made at the feedback conference that perhaps more vulnerable people had not been given enough opportunity to air their views a questionnaire was taken by the Home Support Officers to gauge awareness and capture any concerns and questions from our more vulnerable residents that may not have attended any of the advertised events.

Over 1,000 were issued and we received over 300 responses. The Home Support Officers were able to reassure many residents and others have been sent information as requested. Fortunately, most were already aware of the consultation but it was indeed worthwhile to be able to address those who did have concerns.

## Main causes for concern

The standards were set following the initial consultation with residents during the “My Home, My Future, My Choice” consultation in 2007. These standards were explored again with scheme residents in October, 2009. The main causes for concern related to:

- **The size of properties** – a particular concern were bedsits which are no longer desirable as older persons accommodation except for a minority who appreciate a smaller, more manageable environment.
- **The layout of the properties** - in particular to the problems relating to the use of wheelchairs indoors.
- **Internal access** – some schemes are not suitable for wheelchair use in communal areas in particular where there is no lift or where there were internal steps to properties, slopes and narrow corridors.
- **External access** – there were some issues with hills and steps outside some properties.
- **Poor location** - taking into account distance to shops, public transport, hills etc.
- **Inadequate parking** – in some cases causing neighbour disputes
- **Safety and security** – in particular fire safety and door entry systems
- **Age mix** – we talked to many residents where schemes had already had the age limit reduced to 50 and there were mixed opinions about whether this worked. Generally, this seemed to work well but in some instances it did not work at all due to the differing lifestyle of the tenants causing anti-social behaviour.
- **Support needs** – during the recent consultation many residents expressed concern regarding the change in the supporting people contract. It was felt that as many residents now did not need the service that the Home Support Officer would not be around as much as they were used to and this compromised a feeling of security.
- **“Sheltered”** – There were mixed views on the importance of using this term. The majority of residents felt it was important and provided a sense of security and urgency when dealing with service providers. Others felt it was derogatory, dated and as there was no legal definition as such, a meaningless term.

## Reasoning

### Category A

When considering which properties should be placed in Category A we were looking for those properties which were able to meet the main concerns raised by the standards that were set or at least were reasonably expected to be able to be brought up to those standards within a reasonable period of time. It was essential that any property considered for this category meant that the Council complied with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which requires that we “overcome physical barriers to access”. It was therefore essential that all properties and communal areas were level access and could accommodate the use of a wheelchair. Equally essential was that there was lift access to upper floors. Bedsit accommodation was considered unsuitable for this category.

During consultation there was also strong concern about the introduction of floating support. Many residents were worried that the Home Support Officer may not be around as much as they were used to and this would compromise security. It was felt, therefore, that where all the standards were met or could be met that criteria should include a requirement for the need of the Home Support Officer, that way every resident would have an assessed need for the service and the Home Support Officer would spend more time on the Scheme.

A major concern during consultation was that older people, especially those over 70 or 80 expected a much quieter lifestyle. An ageing population has meant that the lifestyles enjoyed by 50/60 year olds are very different from what they were 20 years ago. Whilst there are many examples where these age groups can get along reasonably well it was felt that increasing the age limit on allocation to this category would improve the lifestyle for older residents. To balance demand with lifestyle we are recommending an entry age for this category of 65 years of age and over.

The preferred choice of accommodation lifestyle for older persons was either bungalows or communal living and these, where they met the standards, have been placed in Category A.

### Category B

There were some schemes that did not reach all the standards, or could not reasonably be expected to reach the standards within a reasonable period of time, if at all. However, there were still many attributes that meant they were suitable as older persons' accommodation. Where we could be satisfied that all the following qualities applied we have placed the properties in Category B.

- Acceptable safety and security standards
- Where there is a communal lounge nearby
- Strong levels of communal activity



- Medium to high dependency on the Home Support Service
- None or low amount of bedsits
- Good local facilities within walking distance
- Good, regular transport links
- No more than one upper floor
- Level access to lower floors
- No Category A schemes in the locality

Because a high number of these properties do not have a lift to upper floors or level access in some places it would be more suited to persons who are mobile due to some of these access barriers. However there is still a lot of accommodation in this category which would be suitable for people with mobility issues. Because of the mixed type of accommodation within this category there would be no requirement to need the Home Support Service but this would be available to those with an assessed need.

Importantly, we have not underestimated the strength of feeling and insecurity that the magnitude and timescales of this project has caused residents. Research into demography and good practice, future changes in assistive technology and peoples aspirations will always be a vital element of strategic planning. Therefore, if there are any steps we can take now to minimise the effects that inevitable future change will bring then it makes sense to do so.

By introducing this category to our Older Persons Housing portfolio we can, should the need arise in the future, review older persons housing on a much smaller scale.

### **Category C**

The schemes (or part of) that did not meet the criteria for Category A or B have been placed in this category unless:

- There is more than one upper floor and no lift
- Increased risk of fire safety
- High volume of bed sit accommodation
- Mixed tenancy types (eg. general let and over 50's in the same building)

Giving reference to the amount of over 50's on the current waiting list it was felt that there was sufficient demand, at the moment, to retain as much of the stock as met the needs of this category of applicant.

Where a scheme has been identified as having any of the above points is has been deemed not suitable as older persons accommodation.

## **Properties Not Deemed Suitable As Older Persons' Accommodation**

Our research and consultation has informed us that the following headings are unacceptable in older persons' accommodation:

### **Bedsits**

Bed sit accommodation is no longer accepted as suitable accommodation for older people. A very small minority are happy with it but in general it is not appropriate to maintain large amounts in our stock. Because there is a low demand for this type of accommodation it also causes loss of revenue for the Council due to lengthy void periods.

### **Difficult access**

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires that we 'overcome physical barriers to access'. Aspirations and needs of tenants are also changing and expectations are that once a move into older persons' accommodation is made that this should be for life. There will be exceptions where tenants choose to move for personal reasons or care needs increase substantially. Our stock should not prevent tenants being able to stay in a scheme because of mobility issues. Upper floor accommodation, where lift access is not feasible has meant that much of our stock does not meet acceptable standards for Category A. Where stock is placed in other categories it was felt that there should be some potential to improve access in the future or no more than one upper floor.

### **Mixed age**

Whilst there were many examples of over 50's mixing well with older people there were strong concerns that younger people and in particular families do not compliment older persons' lifestyles. Therefore, it was felt that where schemes were partly for older people and partly for general let they were not suitable. As the demand for general let accommodation is far greater it was more feasible to change its full usage accordingly or explore other options where demand is high.

### **Inadequate Safety precautions**

Where our inspections have highlighted a cause for concern with regard to safety further investigations have been carried out. Where adequate measures cannot be put in place then this cannot be deemed as acceptable accommodation.

## **“My Home, My Future, My Choice Residents Group”**

The group was set up following feedback received during the consultation events held in September and October, 2009. Several requests were made for closer working between Officers and residents. As feedback was collated during the consultation period residents were asked to express an interest in being more closely involved in consultation and then contacted in January, 2010 and invited to a meeting to discuss forming the group.

The group have agreed to abide by ‘terms of reference’. Meetings have enjoyed regular monthly attendance since January, 2010 and members are a mixture of current tenants, potential tenants, owner occupiers, Older Persons Forum, councillors and Officers. The agenda has been flexible and generally set mutually between all members of the group.

The Council has appreciated the time devoted by the group members. Their contributions continue to be invaluable.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Council feel that by adopting these proposals and the revised action plan we will achieve the following:

- Be fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Improve the lifestyles of wheelchair users and over 65's with support needs
- Provide accommodation for older people who do not necessarily need support but appreciate a different lifestyle
- Show that we have listened to our tenants needs and aspirations as far as is practicably possible
- Invested in improvements to properties and services
- Afforded a commitment to reviewing the allocation process into older persons accommodation
- Provided more accommodation for general let needs
- A commitment to investigating options for first time buyers, temporary respite care and other types of specialist accommodation
- A commitment to working closer with our tenants to improve our service and communication.
- Minimised the need for large scale reviews in the future