



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 17TH SEPTEMBER 2015

SUBJECT: REMODELLING OF SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek the views of CHTG members on proposals for an in-principle agreement for feasibility studies to be undertaken for six sheltered housing schemes (Castle Court, Waunfawr House, Ty Melin, Ynyswen, Britannia Court and St Mary's Court) for remodelling.
- 1.2 To also seek views on proposals for the six schemes to be omitted from WHQS works programme if recommendations are supported, unless funding is available within the business plan to undertake work to one or two schemes depending on the detailed costs being within this budget.
- 1.3 The views of CHTG will be considered together with this report by Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and thereafter submitted to Cabinet for a decision.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 A number of sheltered housing schemes were identified through the 2012 stock appraisal of the sheltered housing review as not being fit for purpose. Five of the six schemes have bedsit accommodation.
- 2.2 The council recognises that older tenants need to be supported, wherever possible, in accommodation that is accessible and supports their rights to independence.
- 2.3 A review of all stock identifies that some schemes include properties and amenities that are inadequate and do not meet acceptable space standards. This information was considered alongside void levels and the ability to remodel and the six schemes proposed were identified.
- 2.4 Consultation has taken place with tenants and ward members to identify any concerns. All schemes were visited by officers and face to face meetings held with the residents to explain the options for their schemes. This was also followed up with a questionnaire that we sent to all tenants within the schemes. The majority of tenants appear complacent about the proposed changes although all schemes identified improvements that they would like to see. Ward members were in favour of the proposals but were keen to ensure that tenants were supported fully in the decant process and that funds were made available to ensure the projects were completed in full and that there was a firm commitment from the Council that the proposals would be delivered as soon as practically possible.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Welsh Housing Quality Standard is intended to ensure that all local authority and housing association homes are improved and maintained to achieve specified standards.

- 3.2 The Single Integrated Plan 2013-2017 has a priority to “Improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the County Borough.
- 3.3 The Council’s Local Housing Strategy “People, Property, and Places” has the following aim:
 “To provide good quality, well managed houses in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations.”

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Sheltered Housing was developed over 30 years ago to provide accommodation for older people who were relatively fit and active. As a person’s health and mobility deteriorated residential and nursing homes were then expected to fulfil a person’s accommodation requirements. Services have changed significantly over this time and current practice is to help people to continue to live as independently as possible at home.
- 4.2 Legislation, guidance and good practice supports people to live in their own homes for as long as they wish to do so with assistance, aids and adaptations as necessary. Sheltered accommodation can help address those needs but some sheltered council provision in the borough of Caerphilly is not fit for purpose.
- 4.3 A budget has been allocated within the Housing business plan to bring all our sheltered housing schemes up to the WHQ Standard, however it was clear when the review of the sheltered housing service was undertaken, that a number of our schemes were not capable of meeting the WHQS due to their size and layout and this was particularly the case in those schemes comprising bedsits. The business plan does include a budget for remodelling two of our schemes, but on further investigation, the amount allocated is deemed insufficient to bring the schemes up to the required standard.
- 4.4. It is therefore an opportune time to review our plans for the sheltered housing schemes. Due to the stock appraisal identifying a need for significant remodelling of six schemes, it would seem inappropriate to proceed with the WHQS works to these schemes without considering alternative options. Whilst providing tenants with new bathrooms and kitchens for example, these would still not meet the WHQ Standard in many cases and the funding could be better utilised by contributing to the cost of remodelling in order to make these schemes fit for purpose and meet the changing needs and demands of our tenants for the future.

4.5 Audit of schemes – Principles and Values

- 4.5.1 New build schemes should follow Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (HAPPI) principles and Designed for Life standards but to ensure our current stock is fit for purpose and provides a viable and desirable alternative option for our residents, standard principles should be applied for existing sheltered accommodation. These are defined as:-
- Properties are accessible and are suitable for people to receive care and support appropriately.
 - All properties have their own facilities including a separate bedroom.
 - The scheme has accessible communal facilities.
 - The scheme has a vibrant, active community.
- 4.5.2 When considering the above principles the sheltered housing stock was surveyed in relation to:
- Size of individual properties.
 - Long term voids.
 - Ability to remodel.

Appendix A, analyses the sheltered housing stock against these principles and the following schemes were identified as having bedsits or very small 1 bed flats; have a high incidence of long term voids and are considered capable of being remodelled to provide more suitable accommodation. These are all in the former Islwyn area and comprise Britannia Court, St Mary's Court, Waunfawr House, Castle Court, Ty Melin and Ynyswen. Two other schemes, Ysgwyddwgwyn and Alexandra Court also have small property sizes, but Ysgwyddwgwyn cannot be substantially altered due to its location on a hillside and Alexandra Court continues to be a very popular scheme (although this may want to be re-considered at a later date). Other schemes cannot be altered to become more accessible due to their location or inability to include facilities such as a lift.

- 4.5.3 Appendix B shows photographs of two bedsits. Typically, there is no window in the sleeping area, no area for eating and the kitchen is so small that often the fridge is in the hallway. Use of zimmer frames and wheelchairs are practically impossible due to the extremely limited size of property and there is an associated increased risk to tenants of trips and falls. A washing machine cannot be fitted into a kitchen in any of these schemes. An added problem due to the lack of circulation space, particularly in the bedsits, is that it is extremely difficult for carers to provide the level of support needed by some tenants, particularly if the individual is confined to bed as access is limited. There are also concerns regarding the ability of carers to ensure that a tenant's dignity is maintained in such a situation.
- 4.5.4 The six schemes have inadequate guest bedroom facilities and are rarely used in the current form. There are no scooter storage facilities and generally storage for tenant possessions is lacking. Some of the external space is poor and does not assist people who may have mobility issues, dementia or other cognitive impairments. Improved external and internal space would assist people with long term health conditions to be more healthy and improve their wellbeing.
- 4.6 The six schemes that have been identified are:
- Castle Court
 - Waunfawr House
 - Ty Melin
 - Ynyswen
 - St Mary's Court
 - Britannia Court
- 4.6.1 Initial plans have been drawn up for these schemes and the estimated costs of developing all six schemes would be over £3.2 million.
- 4.6.2 If the proposals were approved, it is likely that the number of properties available across all six schemes would reduce from 164 to 110. There would be a net loss in income but this would be offset by reduced void loss. It is anticipated that if the schemes are not remodelled there would be an increasing number of voids as the schemes become even more unpopular and fail to provide the standard and level of accommodation the tenants need and expect. Appendix C shows the proposed property sizes for each of the six schemes.
- 4.7 The numbers of voids in the six schemes has ranged from 2 to 8 per year per scheme. Appendix D shows the levels of voids over the past five years, the average duration time and reasons for refusals. The high number of long term voids confirms the unpopularity of these schemes.
- 4.8 Consultation with tenants, staff and ward members has taken place and the feedback from this can be found in section 8 and appendix E. In essence, the majority of consultees understand the reasons for the proposed remodelling and are supportive of the proposals.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An EIA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and Supplementary Guidance and no potential for unlawful discrimination was identified. 2.2 above recognises that the council has considered the needs of older people, and the needs of people with disabilities are met as a matter of course in any remodelling and upgrading work. The consultation with tenants has not brought to light any other equalities-related issues.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A comprehensive feasibility study will need to be commissioned. Appendix F shows indicative costs for updates to the six schemes. However, these costs do not include any external works or reconfigurations to communal areas apart from Castle Court.
- 6.2 All schemes have been budgeted for under WHQS and these savings would offset some of the costs required to remodel the schemes. A full cost appraisal for the work has not been undertaken but it is expected that each scheme will cost between £300,000 and £1 million.
- 6.3 Feasibility calculations will include savings from removal of long terms void costs, finance redirected from WHQS and income loss associated with reducing the number of properties.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Staff will be required to support tenants that may be decanted as part of the remodelling process but this will be managed through existing resources.
- 7.2 External consultants will carry out the feasibility study.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 Tenants at all six schemes were consulted in group meetings on what they felt about their current property, what changes they would like to see and what they considered would make the schemes fit for the future. Additionally, tenants received individual questionnaires to feedback their thoughts on their property and the overall scheme.
- 8.2 Five of the six schemes were either willing or laissez faire about remodelling their schemes. Only one scheme, St Mary's Court, strongly stated that they like their bedsits and would not want to consider changes. However, tenants at St Mary's Court also highlighted a number of issues with their scheme including the size of the property, lack of lift and issues with access.
- 8.3 Councillors representing the locations of schemes were informed of the consultations that had taken place and the feedback received. Whilst concerned about the wellbeing of the tenants, councillors also agreed that the principles for undertaking this project were desirable to ensure the viability of schemes in the future and to ensure that the future health and well being of tenants was not hampered by poor/unsuitable accommodation. Ward members were particularly concerned that the Council gives full commitment to ensure funds are available for this work to be done post 2020 and to demonstrate commitment to the remodelling proposals that, if financially viable, remodelling in one or more of the schemes commences prior to 2020.
- 8.4 Social Care has indicated that there is a growing demand for appropriate housing with people with dementia and people with physical disabilities. In particular, as people are supported to stay at home with domiciliary care, there is a growing prevalence of service users that are 'trapped' downstairs in one or two rooms as their property cannot be adapted and there is no suitable alternative for them to move to. This service area will shortly be undertaking its own review of accommodation for its service users and this will be used to further inform the feasibility study.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 It is recommended that a full and comprehensive feasibility study is commissioned for the six sheltered housing schemes identified in the report.
- 9.2 Following a positive outcome of the feasibility study that the schemes be removed from the WHQS programme with the intention of remodelling them post 2020, (with one or two before this time if financially viable,) with completion of all properties by the end of 2025.
- 9.3 That this report and the views of CHTG members be presented to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for consideration and thereafter Cabinet for a decision.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To ensure the long term viability of sheltered housing schemes.
- 10.2 To ensure older people have appropriate and suitable accommodation that meets their needs now and into the future.
- 10.3 To ensure that the sheltered housing schemes are DDA and RNIB compliant and can support people to live independently for as long as possible thus reducing dependence on social care and health services.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Housing Acts 1985, 1996, 2004. This is a Cabinet function.

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Appendices

- Appendix A - Analysis of sheltered housing schemes
Appendix B - Images of existing bedsits
Appendix C - Existing and Proposed Remodelling Property Sizes
Appendix D - Voids Information
Appendix E - Consultations
Appendix F - Preliminary Budget Estimate of Costs