

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - 17 NOVEMBER 2015

DECOMMISSIONING OF FORMER SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is to inform the Panel on the Decommissioning Process of former NFDC Sheltered Housing Schemes, currently Older Persons Accommodation.
- 1.2 Decommissioning means that some Older Persons Schemes will be refurbished to make them general needs accommodation. All communal facilities such as lounges, toilets, showers, bathrooms, kitchens, will be redeveloped where possible into additional accommodation or storage and utility areas for individual smaller dwellings.
- 1.3 By making these changes NFDC will increase the accommodation which is most in demand (namely single persons aged 40 years and over). It is expected we will gain an additional 18 one bed flats between 2016 and 2018 by making alterations to 9 schemes.
- 1.4 There may be the opportunity to increase additional new units perhaps by further 4 to 6 one bed dwellings in the future, however this will depend on movement within some schemes to free up existing 2 bed dwellings which can be converted to 1 bed by utilising some additional areas which are closing next to the dwellings. We are unable to confirm at this time, however we have identified a possibility.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Hampshire County Council undertook a Strategic Review of Older Persons Accommodation in 2009. NFDC's District Core Group worked with HCC appointed staff on the review of 20 NFDC Sheltered Housing Schemes.
- 2.2 The outcome of the review at that time was that 9 NFDC Sheltered Housing Schemes were not fit for purpose for housing Older Persons. Contributory factors to this were that the dwellings were bedsits, location of properties and local infrastructure. HCC advised NFDC that they would no longer fund these schemes with Supporting People Funding from 1st April 2012.
- 2.3 The cuts to Supported People Funding were announced late in 2011 and it was apparent that NFDC could no longer sustain a Sheltered Housing Service therefore a decision was taken to withdraw completely from all SP Funded Services and cease a Sheltered Housing Service.
- 2.4 A NFDC review of housing demand at the time clearly showed the need for accommodation for single persons in the mid- range bracket. NFDC took a decision at this time to change 7 of the 9 previously identified non fit for purpose schemes to general needs status which would assist with alleviating the pressure on the Housing Waiting List. NFDC continued at this time to contemplate and monitor the demand for single persons accommodation at Whitecroft and Corbin Court.
- 2.5 It was decided however that as many of the schemes had an Older population it would be unfair to introduce any age allocations policy to these schemes therefore the decision was taken to restrict the age limit to 45 years and over. It was felt that this would balance the schemes well in terms of Older Persons living with Middle Aged Persons until such a time as when the balance of newer younger tenants were the majority in the schemes.

- 2.6 Tenants within 7 identified schemes were notified that their schemes would be decommissioned over a period of time and that with immediate effect any new allocations would be for persons aged 45 years or over.

3. IDENTIFIED SCHEMES

- 3.1 The schemes identified for Decommissioning are:

- Marryat Court (New Milton) - Phase 1 (May – Sept 2016)
- Lawrence House (Hythe) - Phase 1 (May – Sept 2016)
- Wilson Court (Fordinbridge) – Phase 1 (May – Sept 2016)
- Clarks Close (Ringwood) - Phase 3 (May – Sept 2018)
- Corbin Court (Pennington) – Phase 3 (May – Sept 2018)
- Compton House (Totton) - Phase 2 (May – Sept 2017)
- Sarum House (Totton) - Phase 2 (May – Sept 2017)
- Whitecroft (Hythe) - Phase 3 (May – Sept 2018)
- Robertshaw House (Lyndhurst) – Phase 2 (May – Sept 2017)

- 3.2. Corbin Court and Whitecroft were the only 2 schemes not agreed for decommissioning prior to 1.4.12. This was due to the fact that HCC had agreed to continue to fund them through SP on a trial basis. NFDC did not decide to decommission both these schemes until 2014. Tenants at these schemes were notified late in 2014 while tenants at the other schemes were notified between 2010 and 2012.

4. DECOMMISSIONING PROCESS

- 4.1 The decommissioning process is complex and requires intricate planning and attention to detail as well as excellent communications with the affected tenants as well as other departments within the organisation who will be affected by the changes such as the cleaners.

- 4.2 The process will involve:

- Communal Lounges will be converted into individual 1 bed flats.
- Communal Laundries will be closed.
- Carpets will be removed from hallways and landings and replaced with flooring.
- Communal bathrooms, shower rooms, toilets will be closed.
- Stairlifts/lifts will be removed/closed down.
- Integrated fire panels will be removed and stand-alone wireless smoke detectors will be installed in hallways and landings.
- Integrated Hardwired Alarm System will be disconnected.
- No weekly visits to the schemes to undertake H&S Inspections
- Future allocations to the schemes will be for persons aged 40 years and over

5. TRANSITION

- 5.1 This has been a challenging project as we are keen to ensure the continued wellbeing of existing tenants (especially those Older Persons who have been in residence at the schemes from the days of Sheltered Housing).

- 5.2 Time scales for the works to the schemes have now been set and meetings have been held with all tenants at the schemes between June and August of this year. Local Ward Councillors were all invited to attend the meetings. Councillor Jill Cleary (Portfolio Holder for Housing & Communities) attended all the meetings.

- 5.3 Many tenants were frustrated at the changes and unsure of the future when they heard the proposals of what the process involved.
- 5.4 We wanted to ensure we made the transition as smooth and seamless as possible and have agreed a list of gestures which NFDC will provide to make this happen.
- NFDC will ensure every dwelling within the 9 schemes has plumbing facilities installed in every flat to enable tenants to have their own washing machine.
 - Bedsits will also have plumbing facilities installed where possible. If the bedsit is too small some of the areas being closed down will be utilised to make individual utility areas assigned to the relevant dwelling. We can achieve this by utilising the existing bathrooms, shower rooms and toilets as the plumbing is in place.
 - NFDC are gifting every tenant who was living in the scheme prior to 1st April 2012 a washing machine. The machines will be purchased by the procurement department and installed by NFDC. They then become the responsibility of the tenant to repair, maintain and replace.
 - External Rotary Driers will be installed in the grounds of the scheme to allow for drying facilities. The Council do not have a statutory duty to provide drying facilities.
 - Additional parking will be installed where possible along with new bike sheds.
 - NFDC have offered every tenant who is affected by the removal of the stair lift or lift a paid transfer to a like for like property within the district. This includes Extra Care Schemes and NFDC Older Persons Accommodation (age restricted 60 years and older).
- 5.5 Following the scheme meetings, tenants accepted that they were not being left high and dry and the offer of an “assisted financial package” to move those who would be most affected was welcomed.
- 5.6 During September 2015 all tenants living on the 1st or 2nd floors of these schemes were visited by their Neighbourhood & Tenancy Management Assistants. The tenants were interviewed in relation to their mobility, respiratory and health issues. Forms were completed and a Priority Transfer List was compiled.

6. STATISTICS

- 6.1 A total of 81 tenants have been visited and 74 were interviewed for the Priority Transfer List for an “assisted package” which consists of a transfer to a like for like property paid for by NFDC.
- 6.2 Of the 81 tenants interviewed:
- 8 are not eligible to move (no health issues but would like to move)
 - 24 do not wish to move as they are happy to remain and can manage stairs.
 - 7 have still to be interviewed.
 - 2 tenants have already been offered alternative accommodation and are in the process of their moves.
 - The remainder are on the list and we are confident that all will be moved before their schemes are due to be decommissioned.
 - Some tenants have generously offered to give up their Ground Floor Accommodation to allow tenants who wish to remain in their scheme the opportunity to move to the Ground Floor. These tenants have been accepted as part of the assisted package.

7. LIFTS AND STAIRLIFTS

- 7.1 Two years ago we had an unfortunate incident at one of our Ex Sheltered Housing schemes whereby a tenant died. The family suggested that it was when she was using the stair lift and that the stair lift was faulty. A Coroners hearing was held and the Landlord Services Manager represented the Council at the hearing. NFDC were completely exonerated of any fault with the equipment as the proof of inspections and servicing was evidenced. Further evidence from tenants led to a verdict of accidental death being awarded as it was proven that the deceased tenants was using the stairs and not the stair lift.
- 7.2 The Coroner did however comment that any building or scheme which had a stair lift should ideally be managed 24 hours a day. There are a variety of models of stair lifts and if schemes have them they should meet certain specifications in terms of a generic need. Following on from the hearing a decision was taken to remove stair lifts from all NFDC owned accommodation to ensure any future incidents could not be challenged. Of the schemes being decommissioned there are 4 schemes which have stair lifts.
- 7.3 Three of the Schemes have lifts. Again a discussion was taken around how the lifts would be managed when the schemes were decommissioned bearing in mind that the scheme would no longer receive a weekly Health & Safety Inspection by a Housing Officer and if the lifts were retained we would need to ensure a resource to visit weekly to test the alarm system in the lift.
- 7.4 All General Needs schemes owned by NFDC are walk ups. There are no lifts. The main question we asked was if we retained the decommissioned schemes with lifts and stair lifts we would set a precedent in terms of there never being a "right time" to close or remove them. In the next few years as we allocate properties in these schemes tenants will expect the lift or stair lift to remain and we may get tenants who have slight mobility problems accepting properties that in the longer term we will need to move when the lifts/stair lifts are taken away.
- 7.5 There is also the cost of maintaining three lifts to consider:
- Preventative Maintenance Costs on the 3 lifts total £4,601 since 2011.
 - The lifts were replaced between 14 and 16 years ago at a cost of approximately £75,000 per scheme.
 - It costs approximately £795 per annum to service each lift making a total of £2,385 per annum on service costs.
 - The life span of a lift is between 15 and 25 years. The older the lift the more expense on repairs.
- 7.6 If a lift needed to be replaced we would be looking at expenditure of approximately £75,000 to purchase the lift plus the ongoing service contract and preventative maintenance costs which would continue into the future. During this time of austerity NFDC must look to make efficiencies therefore although no time is the right time, it makes sense to do it during the decommissioning works when we have the process in place with assisted packages for transfer.
- 7.7 Four of the schemes currently have stair lifts. The cost to service each stair lift is £120 per annum. Each stair lift has two services a year on a bi annual interval.
- 7.8 Since 2010 the total costs of repairs to the 4 stair lifts is £8254.58.

- 7.9 A replacement stair lift can cost between £1600 and £3842 (heavy duty stair lift).
- 7.10 The life expectancy of any stair lift varies on usage but older models are more robust. A modern stair lift should have a life expectancy of approximately 10 years with the older models lasting approximately 20 years. Three of the four schemes stair lifts are 20 years old.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Outline costs have been submitted for the first phase of decommissioning. It is estimated that it will cost approximately £250,000 to undertake the work to Marrayat Court, Lawrence House and Wilson Court.
- 8.2 Costs have not yet been submitted for phases 2 and 3 although it is expected that with the exception of Whitecroft they will be approximately in the same region as phase 1. Whitecroft may require more structural work therefore may be more expensive.
- 8.3 On completion of the decommissioning of the 9 schemes at an overall cost of approximately £750,000, it is anticipated that NFDC will secure 18 additional units for rent at very reasonable cost. The increase in rental income will be approximately £78,000 per annum from the additional units. When the three phases are complete and the dwellings tenanted payback will take approximately 9.5 years.

9. PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S COMMENTS

- 9.1 Having attended all the decommissioning scheme meetings and listened to our tenants needs, I can confidently say that all matters have been addressed and I am looking forward to putting the changes into place. This will give us additional units of accommodation as well as rental income thus making better use of our housing stock

10. TENANTS' COMMENTS

- 10.1 Tenants will comment verbally at the Panel Meeting.

11. RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 It is recommended that the Panel notes the progress made with the decommissioning of the former Sheltered Housing/Older Persons Schemes.

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Background Papers:

None