

## **Report to Cabinet**



**Report Reference: C-042-2017/18**  
**Date of meeting: 1 February 2018**

**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Committee: Communities Select Committee (Chairman – Cllr Y. Knight)**  
**Subject: Rationalisation of Sheltered Housing Assets - Initial Scoping Report**  
**Responsible Officer: Alan Hall (01992 564004)**  
**Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).**

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### **Recommendations:**

(1) That further consideration be given to reducing the amount of low-demand sheltered housing in the Council's ownership and developing the resultant vacant land or buildings to provide either general needs housing, temporary homelessness accommodation and/or more appropriate accommodation for older people in order to help meet the housing needs of local people registered on the Housing Register in the future;

(2) That the "Sheltered Housing Standard", attached as Appendix 1, be adopted - with an objective of all sheltered housing schemes retained in the long term meeting the Standard over a reasonable period of time;

(3) That a further report be brought to a future meeting of the Communities Select Committee with:

- (a) recommendations about which sheltered housing schemes should be decommissioned over a period of time and their site(s) redeveloped;
- (b) an initial proposed approach to decanting the existing residents;
- (c) a Communication Strategy for the Project;
- (d) initial redevelopment proposals for each of the identified sites;
- (e) indicative budget costs; and
- (f) an Equalities Analysis;

(4) That the assessment of sheltered housing schemes considered most suitable for redevelopment has regard to the following criteria:

- (a) the number of bedsits;
- (b) the lettable, demand and location of the scheme;
- (c) the long term costs of improvements/repairs;
- (d) the amount of sheltered housing within the locality;

**(e) the number of lettings to local residents compared to applicants on the Supplementary Waiting List; and**

**(f) the demand for general needs housing in the locality; and**

**(5) That the Select Committee reports to the Cabinet again, with its recommendations, after it has considered the further report from Officers.**

### **Executive Summary:**

At our meeting held on 16th January 2018, we considered an initial scoping report from the Director of Communities on a proposal that consideration should be given to reducing the amount of low-demand sheltered housing in the Council's ownership and developing the resultant vacant land or buildings.

In recent years, there has been a sharp decline in the popularity of sheltered housing, with older people tending to prefer to remain in their own homes for much longer, until they need to move directly into independent living, residential or nursing accommodation – which has resulted in many vacancies in sheltered housing becoming difficult-to-let. At the same time, the Council has increasing numbers of local people registered on its Housing Register in need of general needs housing.

We are therefore proposing that the Council reduces the amount of low-demand sheltered housing, through decanting the existing residents at some sheltered housing schemes to other suitable accommodation and then developing the resultant vacant land or buildings, and that an appropriate number of schemes be identified by officers for potential redevelopment in the medium to long term, having regard to the criteria proposed in our report.

We are also proposing the adoption of a "Sheltered Housing Standard" that the remaining sheltered schemes should meet, to provide decent accommodation that is fit for future purposes.

We intend to report to a further meeting of the Cabinet on: which sheltered housing schemes we feel should be decommissioned and their site(s) redeveloped; an initial proposed approach to decanting the existing residents; a Communication Strategy; any initial redevelopment proposals; indicative budget costs; and an Equalities Impact Assessment.

### **Report:**

1. At our meeting held on 16 January 2018, we considered an initial scoping report from the Director of Communities on a proposal that further consideration should be given to reducing the amount of low-demand sheltered housing in the Council's ownership and developing the resultant vacant land or buildings to provide either general needs housing, temporary homelessness accommodation and/or more appropriate accommodation for older people in order to help meet the housing needs of local people registered on the Housing Register in the future.

2. The Council has a number of sheltered and grouped housing schemes to accommodate older people. "Sheltered housing schemes" tend to refer to one or more large buildings comprising self-contained flats and usually a communal lounge; "grouped housing schemes" tend to refer to self-contained flats or bungalows with front doors opening onto the street, perhaps with a communal hall nearby. However, for the purposes of our report, both sheltered and grouped housing schemes are treated the same and referred to, generically, as "sheltered housing schemes".

3. In both cases, residents currently receive a daily well-being check from their Scheme Manager, usually through a home visit, and are also monitored by the Council's Careline Service 24

hours a day (by the Scheme Manager, when on duty, and by the Council's Call Monitoring Partner, Tunstall Telecom, when the Scheme Manager is off duty). In most cases, communal social activities are arranged or co-ordinated by the Scheme Manager.

4. Over many years, sheltered housing has provided a safe and enjoyable environment for older people to live independently together, until their care and support needs are such that they need to move into more intense extra-care accommodation (now often referred to as independent living) or residential/nursing accommodation.

5. However, we were advised that, in recent years, there has been a sharp decline in the popularity of sheltered housing (which is reflected across the country), with older people tending to prefer to remain in their own homes for much longer, until they need to move directly into independent living, residential or nursing accommodation. We learnt that this has resulted in many vacancies in sheltered housing becoming difficult-to-let, particularly bedsits and some first floor flats, resulting in allocations being made to applicants registered on the Council's Supplementary Housing Waiting List (comprising applicants who are ineligible for the main Housing Register), particularly older people currently living outside the District, usually wanting to live nearer their son or daughter.

6. At the same time, we noted that the Council has increasing numbers of local people registered on its Housing Register in need of general needs housing (i.e. accommodation that is not reserved for any particular client group) who are having to wait long periods of time to be accommodated, usually years, and in the meantime living in deficient existing accommodation. Furthermore, demand for temporary accommodation for homeless households has increased too.

7. We were interested to note that, separate from sheltered housing, the Council has for many years designated specific accommodation on our housing estates as being particularly suitable for older people, such as bungalows and ground floor flats, which have the Careline system hard-wired into the property and a Scheme Manager visiting 1-4 times a fortnight, depending on the assessed level of risk. However, due to this accommodation also becoming difficult-to-let, the Council has undertaken a programme of de-designation over a number of years, whereby vacant designated properties for older people have been re-let to general needs housing applicants (usually comprising households of single people or couples). Since 2008, 829 such properties have been de-designated.

8. The purpose of the report to our Select Committee was therefore to start a conversation on whether or not consideration should be given to the Council reducing the amount of low-demand sheltered housing, through decanting the existing residents at some sheltered housing schemes to other suitable accommodation and then developing the resultant vacant land or buildings to provide accommodation to help meet the housing needs of local people registered on the Housing Register, or homeless households, through the Council's Housebuilding Programme.

9. At the same time, we considered the standard of accommodation that the remaining sheltered schemes should meet, to provide decent accommodation that is fit for future purposes.

#### Location of Sheltered and Grouped Schemes

10. The Council has the following sheltered housing schemes:

**Table 1 – Location of Sheltered and Grouped Housing Schemes**

Town/Village	Name	Nos. of properties		
		Flats	Bedsits	Total
<b>Sheltered Accommodation</b>				
Buckhurst Hill	Buckhurst Court	51	0	51
Epping	Chapel Road (*)	26	(*)	26
Loughton	Parsonage Court	47	0	47
Nazeing	Hyde Mead House	40	0	40
North Weald	Leonard Davis House	46	1	47
Ongar	Frank Bretton House	33	0	33
Waltham Abbey	Jessopp Court	39	0	39
“	Jubilee Court	24	24	48
<b>Totals</b>		<b>306</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>Grouped Accommodation</b>				
Epping	Chapel Road (*)	(*)	26	26
Epping	Pelly Court	16	28	44
Loughton	Hedgers Close	21	0	21
Waltham Abbey	Grove Court	13	6	19
“	Brookways / Rochford Ave	25	0	25
<b>Totals</b>		<b>75</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Grand Totals</b>		<b>381</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>466</b>

(\*) = Chapel Road, Epping comprises a mix of sheltered and grouped accommodation

Demand for Sheltered Housing vs Demand for General Needs Housing

11. As explained earlier, there has been a sharp decline in the popularity of sheltered housing, resulting in many properties becoming difficult-to-let, whilst increasing numbers of local people are registered on its Housing Register in need of general needs housing. This was illustrated to us in two main ways, as shown in the tables below.

**Table 2 - Nos. on Housing Register Seeking General Needs & Sheltered Accommodation (1.1.18)**

Band	General Needs				Sheltered	
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	Total	1 Bed	SWL
A	75	47	7	129	43	131
B	50	362	114	526	49	
C	531	145	28	704	62	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>1,359</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>131</b>

12. As can be seen from the table above, there are currently only 154 applicants on the Housing Register seeking sheltered accommodation, compared to 1,359 applicants seeking general needs accommodation (including 656 applicants seeking 1 bedroomed properties).

**Table 3 - Bids received for Vacant General Needs & Sheltered Accommodation (1st Sept 2017 – 31st Dec 2017)**

Location	Bids for General Needs Accomm. from HR			Bids for Sheltered Accomm. from HR	
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	1 Bed	Offered to SWL?
Fairways, Waltham Abbey			25		
Tillingham Court, Waltham Abbey	157				
Torrington Drive, Loughton	139				
Pelly Court, Epping				1	Yes
The Spinney, Loughton				3	No
Englands Lane, Loughton			52		
Limes Avenue, Chigwell		41			
Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey		78			
Buckhurst Court, Buckhurst Hill				2	No
Parkfields, Roydon		114			
Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey				2	No
St John's Road, Epping		126			
Parsonage Court, Loughton				6	No
Edward Court, Waltham Abbey	139				
Jubilee Court, Waltham Abbey				1	Yes
Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois				1	Yes

13. As can be seen from the table above, there was a high number of bids from Housing Register applicants for each of the general needs accommodation that became available (an average of 98 bids per property), compared to the low number of bids received from Housing Register applicants for each sheltered property that became available (an average of just 2 bids per property).

14. It also shows that the demand for 3 of the sheltered properties that became available during the period was so low that it was necessary to offer them to applicants on the Supplementary

Waiting List (i.e. to households not eligible for the Housing Register due to them either not having any assessed housing need, not living in the District for more than 5 years or, more likely, not currently living in the District). This demonstrates that the demand for general needs housing from eligible Housing Register applicants is far greater than the demand for sheltered accommodation.

15. In view of the ongoing low level of demand for sheltered housing, compared to the high demand for general needs housing, the Select Committee is of the view that the point has now been reached where the amount of sheltered accommodation provided by the Council across the District should be reduced and that some of the sheltered housing buildings or land should be redeveloped to provide either general needs housing, temporary homelessness accommodation and/or more appropriate accommodation for older people in the future.

16. However, it was made clear to use that such a proposal would need time and careful, sensitive planning to execute, since it would be necessary both to cease lettings to sheltered schemes identified as appropriate for redevelopment (to create vacancies) and to decant all the existing tenants of the sheltered housing schemes identified for redevelopment, all of whom are older people (and many with vulnerabilities), into alternative accommodation (either through developing the site as a whole or on a phased basis).

#### Future Demand for Sheltered Housing

17. Although sheltered housing is not as popular as it once was, we consider that there is still a need for this form of accommodation within the foreseeable future, even if the Council's supply of sheltered accommodation is reduced. However, against the potential backdrop of a reduced supply and an ageing population, we feel that it may be appropriate to consider whether the minimum age for eligibility of sheltered accommodation should be increased from its current 60 years of age. We understand that this is an issue that will be considered as part of officers' separate review of the Older People's Housing Service, to be undertaken during 2018/19.

18. One of the barriers to older tenants moving from family houses into sheltered accommodation is often that many older people still like to have a garden and some want the opportunity to occasionally accommodate children, and particularly grandchildren, on sleepovers. Therefore, we feel that one option within any redevelopment proposals could be to incorporate some one or two-bedroomed bungalows - with access restricted to older Council tenants vacating 3 bedroom family houses.

19. Another alternative could be to redevelop one or more existing sheltered housing sites into independent living schemes for older people, in partnership with Essex County Council, that offers the availability of care, 24 hours each day, for older tenants in need of at least 5 hours care each week. We noted that there is currently only one independent living scheme in the District (Honeytree Court, Loughton), with a further one planned (at Hillhouse, Waltham Abbey), yet the County Council has identified a need for further independent living accommodation in the District.

#### Proposed Sheltered Housing Standard

20. For the sheltered accommodation that is retained, which is expected to be the majority of the existing schemes, we are proposing that the Council should adopt a "Sheltered Housing Standard" which the Council should aim and plan to meet over a reasonable period of time. This should reflect the current and anticipated needs of older residents within the foreseeable future.

21. A Sheltered Housing Standard proposed by officers (based on a standard previously advocated by a predecessor to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government), with which we agree, is attached as Appendix 1. We noted that the cost of bringing all the Council's remaining sheltered housing schemes up to the Sheltered Housing Standard will depend on the number and which (if any) sheltered housing schemes are identified for redevelopment. This is

particularly the case for ensuring that, in accordance with the Draft Standard, all accommodation provided is self-contained since, as can be seen from Table 1 above, a number of sheltered housing schemes still have some bedsits which, if the sheltered scheme is retained, would need, over time, to be converted into self-contained flats (usually 3 bedsits into 2 flats), which is expensive.

### The Next Steps and Criteria for Assessment

22. Having considered the Director of Communities' detailed report, we are of the view that there is a need to rationalise the amount of sheltered housing provided by the Council in the District. A criteria would need to be adopted to help identify which sheltered schemes should be reviewed, with a view to potential redevelopment. We are therefore recommending to the Cabinet that an appropriate number of schemes should be identified by officers for potential redevelopment in the medium to long term, having regard to the following criteria (many of which are inter-linked):

- The number of bedsits – with those with the most bedsits being most appropriate
- Lettability, demand and location – with those with difficult-to-let and a surplus of accommodation being most appropriate
- Long term cost of improvements/repairs - with those with the greatest financial costs being most appropriate
- Amount of sheltered housing within locality - with those in areas of greatest supply being most appropriate
- Number of lettings to local residents compared to Supp. Waiting List applicants - with those with the greatest no. of Supp. Waiting List lettings being most appropriate
- The demand for general needs housing in the locality - with those in areas of greatest need for general needs housing being the most appropriate

23. The initial thoughts of officers are that it may be appropriate to identify around 3 schemes in the first instance.

### The Next Steps

24. This report is only an initial scoping report to the Cabinet. We are proposing that officers assess each of the Council's existing sheltered housing schemes, using the assessment criteria set out above, and report to a further meeting of the Select Committee during 2018/19 with:

- Recommendations about which sheltered housing schemes should be decommissioned over a period of time and their site(s) redeveloped;
- An initial proposed approach to decanting the existing residents;
- A Communication Strategy;
- Initial redevelopment proposals;
- Indicative budget costs; and
- An Equalities Impact Assessment.

25. We would then report to the Cabinet further with our recommendations, following our detailed deliberations on these issues.

**Resource Implications:**

None at present – but any redevelopment proposals will have significant resource implications which will be covered in the further report.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

Housing Act 1985.

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

None.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

None at present – but consultation with existing residents will be an integral part of the proposed project.

**Background Papers:**

None.

**Risk Management:**

No material risks have been identified for the proposed recommendations at present – but, if taken forward, the proposed project will have a number of risks that will be included in the further report to the Select Committee.

**Equality Analysis**

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. Therefore, the required equality information will be provided as part of our further report to the Cabinet.