

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY and EXECUTIVE
Date of Meeting: 3 March 2015/17 March 2015
Report of: Assistant Director Housing
**Title: SUPPORT FOR RESIDENTS IN OLDER PERSONS’
ACCOMMODATION**

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

Continuation of the current arrangements for supporting residents in the Council’s older persons’ accommodation following withdrawal of Devon County Council’s ‘Supporting People’ funding after 31 March 2015.

2. Recommendations:

That Scrutiny Committee note, and Executive approve:

1. Continuation of funding for the warden service (one Senior Warden and four Wardens) plus the Home Call alarm service to residents in the Council’s older persons’ accommodation from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for a period of up to 12 months in the first instance from 1 April 2015. The estimated cost of making up the shortfall following the withdrawal of DCC funding would be £182,000 (£131,000 for the wardens plus £51,000 for Home Call).
2. Additional funding of up to £40,000 from the HRA to be used to fund community development/engagement worker(s) to build capacity among residents of older persons’ accommodation and develop partnerships with the voluntary & community sector to reduce dependency on state provision.
3. The further investigation of different models of service delivery and funding arrangements to meet customer demand in the future.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

Retaining the warden service and the emergency alarm system safeguards the welfare of older residents and allows officers to fully explore different viable options for the delivery and funding of housing support services to older tenants in the future.

Not to retain the warden service could potentially compromise the wellbeing of some of our older residents (leading to increased demands on the ‘public purse’) and expose the Council to reputational damage.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

To maintain the warden service and the emergency alarm for a further year in the first instance would result in additional estimated costs to the HRA of:

- £131,000 for the wardens
- £51,000 for the alarm system

Sufficient budget provision is available within the HRA Working Balance to meet these costs.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

The budgets for next financial year were formulated under the assumption that the Neighbourhood Warden Service would cease following the end of the Supporting People Subsidy. Supplementary budgets, as set out in this report, will therefore be required in 2015/16 for continuing the service.

6. What are the legal aspects?

The proposal to finance these services from the HRA falls within the legal powers of the Council given that section 11A of the Housing Act 1985 allows for the Council to 'provide services for promoting the welfare of the persons for whom the accommodation is so provided.' This provision was specifically included in the Act to provide for costs associated with such a service or services to be debited to the HRA.

The proposals contained in this report are also consistent with the key principles of the Care Act 2014 which come into force in April this year.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 Background

Exeter City Council owns and manages 552 dwellings for older people on 22 different sites in the City. Older Persons' Housing (formerly known as 'Sheltered Housing') is a specialist form of accommodation comprising accommodation and a range of support services to people over 55 years old. The support services include an emergency alarm system and an optional warden service. Accommodation is usually in the form of self-contained flats or bungalows grouped on schemes which often have additional communal facilities (common rooms, laundry facilities, guest rooms etc.)

8.1.1 The idea behind a different housing provision for older people was to promote:

- Independent living
- Safety and security
- The reassurance of a 24 hour emergency call system
- A warden service

- Social activities, if required
- 8.1.2 The warden service itself is provided by one Senior Warden and four Wardens. They have a specific range of duties which include:
- Regular personal visits to tenants
 - Testing the alarm, personal pendants and smoke detector systems
 - Checking building safety
 - Showing new tenants around
 - Undertaking needs assessments
 - Advising on the availability of other forms of health and welfare support
 - Reporting repairs and giving contractors access
 - Budgetary advice
 - Making referrals for aids and adaptations
 - Helping with any neighbour disputes
 - Assisting with form filling
 - Administering the common rooms, laundry/drying room and the guest rooms
- 8.1.3 The warden service is a housing support service; it does not provide health, social or personal care. It has become clear, however, that the kind of 'low-level' support provided by the warden service can be key in preventing more expensive interventions later on (such as social care packages and hospital admissions). In light of this, attempts have been made to engage the County Council and the NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group in continuing to provide financial support to the service, but with no positive outcome thus far.
- 8.1.4 The alarm system is provided through Home Call based at Exeter City Council and provides an emergency monitoring service 24 hours a day.
- 8.1.5 Demand for older persons' accommodation is strong. There are currently 345 single people and couples aged over 55 registered with Devon Home Choice who have expressed an interest in such accommodation. 75 of these have a high level of housing need (Devon Home Choice Band B).
- 8.1.6 Since 2003 the package of housing related support (wardens and alarm system) has been mainly funded by Devon County Council (although ECC's Housing Revenue account also contributes to the overall service at a cost of approximately £33,500 per annum). They commissioned ECC to provide the support which was funded through the Supporting People programme. This funding (also referred to as 'targeted support') is due to cease on 31 March 2015.

8.2 Reviewing the service

- 8.2.1 A questionnaire was sent to all residents of older persons' accommodation in October 2014 asking for their views on the warden service and the alarm system; what, if anything, they would be prepared to pay for these services; and what other support services they used.
- 8.2.2 305 responses were received to this questionnaire, a high level for a survey of this kind. Analysis of these responses shows that the three 'very important' services for residents are the Home Call alarm system, general checks on health/welfare, and the reporting of repairs. Organising referrals for aids and adaptations to properties, and assisting with the use of communal and laundry facilities, also scored highly. It

is also clear from the responses that the wardens are additionally providing other support to residents (posting and collecting prescriptions, packing bags for hospital stays, contacting GPs, discussing problems) which are outside the strict scope of their job description, though arguably consistent with the overall 'purpose' of their role.

- 8.2.3 Despite the very clear 'demand' for support services, 57% of respondents indicated that they would not be willing (or potentially could not afford) to pay anything towards the cost of providing them. 30% said they would consider paying between £1 and £5 per week, 11% between £5 and £10 per week, and 2% more than £10 per week. There is, therefore, a fairly sharp 'disconnect' between the current 'need' for the warden (and alarm) service and the willingness, or ability, to pay for it.
- 8.2.4 Concurrently with the survey, officers commenced discussions with the voluntary sector to determine whether they could fill the gap left by the potential withdrawal of the warden service, and how they would do so. While there is clearly the potential for the voluntary sector to deliver the necessary support services in some parts of the city, it is less clear whether 'seamless' arrangements could be put in place across the whole city, what these would cost, whether these costs would be affordable for the majority of our residents and, thus, whether they would be sustainable.
- 8.2.5 The cost to residents themselves of having the benefit of a warden service and an alarm system (providing all residents were charged) would be in the region of £8.50 per week. Most of this cost would not be eligible for housing benefit, so again affordability would be an issue.
- 8.2.6 Partly owing to the terms of their tenancy agreements, and partly through custom and practice over the years, residents of older persons' accommodation have become accustomed to a certain level of support provided by the Council through the warden service and the Home Call alarm system. They have also, in the main, become accustomed to not having to pay for these services. One of the striking points about the survey responses was the apparent lack of community cohesion and peer-support networks among our older 'communities', with very few references to people receiving help from their neighbours, friends or even family. Arguably, this is something that needs to be addressed if alternative models of service provision are ever going to take root and be effective, as there is a level of 'expectation' around the role of the Council that may not be realistic against the backdrop of continuing reductions in public sector capacity and competing demands on budgets.
- 8.2.7 The proposed community development and engagement worker(s) will have a key role in developing potential partnerships with voluntary & community organisations and building neighbourhood 'capacity' among our older residents.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

Maintaining housing support services to older persons will support the Corporate Plan in the following areas:

- Keep me and my environment safe and healthy
- Keep place looking good
- Provide suitable housing
- Maintain our property assets

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

There are no risks financially as the HRA can fund the anticipated costs. There are no risks operationally as existing services will be maintained. There would be potential reputational risk to the Council should these services be removed with no viable alternatives in place.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

There will be a positive impact on health & wellbeing, and vulnerable adults, from the continuation of the warden service and Home Call.

12. Are there any other options?

Potentially, yes – but they require further work and evaluation.

Assistant Director Housing

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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