

HOUSING COMMITTEE

12 October 2015

7.00 pm – 9.25 pm

Council Chamber, Ebley Mill, Stroud

3

Minutes

Membership:

Councillor Mattie Ross**	P	Councillor Elizabeth Peters	P
Councillor Doina Cornell *	P	Councillor Gary Powell	P
Councillor Miranda Clifton	P	Councillor Lesley Reeves	P
Councillor Gordon Craig	P	Councillor Mark Rees	P
Councillor Kevin Cranston	P	Councillor Emma Sims	P
Councillor Jonathan Edmunds	P	Councillor Debbie Young	P

** = Chair * = Vice Chair

P = Present A = Absent

Other Members In attendance

Councillor Liz Ashton	Councillor June Cordwell
Councillor Chris Brine	Councillor Geoff Wheeler

Officers in Attendance

Strategic Head Tenant and Corporate Services	Accountancy Manager
Head of Housing Contracts	Principal Policy Officer
Head of Asset Management	Democratic Services Assistant
Head of Housing Management	
Interim Business Development Manager	

Others Present

Partner Ark Housing Consultancy John Paterson
Director of Housing Services Ark Housing Consultancy Kieran Colgan
Chair of Stroud Council Housing Forum Ian Allen

HC.023 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Steve Lydon.

HC.024 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

HC.025 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair of the Committee answered questions from Sheila Thomas, Peter Price, Jim Simpson and Pauline Simpson which had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

HC.026 REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING STOCK: TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT OF AN ASSET STRATEGY

John Paterson and Kieran Colgan from external consultants Ark Housing Consultancy informed Members of the findings of an independent review of the suitability and viability of SDC's sheltered housing stock, with recommendations on future investment and options for these assets. Review headlines were:

(a) Scheme & Resident Profile

- (i) SDC's sheltered housing stock consists of almost 800 homes in 29 schemes which cater specifically for those over 65 or vulnerable people. In many cases, this stock does not meet the needs or aspirations of the community in 2015.
- (ii) Almost all the schemes are purpose built, all at least 25 years old and over 40% of stock was built over 45 years ago in the 1960s.
- (iii) Almost three quarters of the homes in the schemes have one bedroom. Bedsits account for around 11% and bungalows for almost 40% of the stock. Only 5% of homes have more than one bedroom.
- (iv) Demographic changes mean that sheltered housing tenants are a diverse group with an increasingly wide range of expectations, needs and ages. For example, at the Willow Road scheme over a quarter of residents are over 80 and a quarter under 60 with over 16% of residents currently employed.

(b) SDC: Areas of Positive Practice Identified

- (i) SDC demonstrates some strong performance in terms of void times (the period when a property becomes vacant before it is relet) and potential repair costs.
- (ii) The new service structure appears to be working well and leading to a reduction in costs and an enhanced service to tenants.
- (iii) Realisation of the potential to "sell" services to the wider community.
- (iv) Good use of communal facilities and sharing mobility scooters.
- (v) Transparent approach to "subsidising" sheltered housing costs and a tenant focused approach to setting rents.
- (vi) Good approach to appropriate use of service charges.
- (vii) Dedicated resources identified to fund scheme renovations.

(c) Asset review: key findings

- (i) Repair numbers and costs were too high in some schemes.
- (ii) Void costs in a small number of schemes were consistency high.
- (iii) Turnover in some schemes was over 20% and “demand” problems in some schemes (bedsit & unit size).
- (iv) Void times can be too long and some long term voids.

(d) Categorisation of schemes

Schemes were categorised using a simple traffic light system to reflect the degree of “risk” to the Council.

- (i) **Red:** A scheme with significant issues relating to its physical nature, repair or condition, the degree of local demand/competition, an inherent viability problem or a combination of these so that significant action will be needed within five years.
- (ii) **Amber:** A probable requirement that major investment, development or re-utilisation will be needed within 10 years.
- (iii) **Green:** A good quality scheme which is essentially sustainable in the longer term (up to 30 years) in its present form with some improvement or upgrading work.

(e) Review findings

80% of the sheltered properties in the district are in good condition, or had the potential to be so, once renovated.

- (i) 13 schemes including almost half of homes should be retained in the longer term to continue providing older people’s housing. These should benefit from improvements such as improving communal entrances, lounge and garden, the creation of scooter stores, improvements to car parking and lift installation where practicable.
- (ii) 5 schemes should be improved for an alternative use as they are not suited to specialist older people’s housing. However, they are probably sustainable as ‘age-exclusive or ‘age preferred’ for people aged 50+.
- (iii) 3 schemes should be remodelled for continued older peoples use. To ensure these schemes are fit for purpose these schemes will require investment in remodelling/modernisation (the removal of bedsits and improvement of space standards, for instance) to better meet the needs of older people.
- (iv) One scheme should be remodelled for alternative use as it is best suited to return to more general needs provision; probably ‘age-exclusive’ for people aged 50+. Opportunities for redevelopment to provide additional units and revenue returns should also be explored on this site.
- (v) 6 schemes should be decommissioned as older peoples housing, as their performance and quality is poor and remodelling is not economic or practicable. A more detailed feasibility study will be required to make an informed decision on redevelopment or disposal.

(f) Outline Budget

- (i) A breakdown by scheme of the outline costs to deliver the preferred programme flowing from the preferred option has been compiled.

- (ii) The total cost is £4,678,800 to cover the improvements or remodelling identified and associated fees/VAT including home loss and disturbance allowance in line with SDC policy.

(g) Review Recommendations for SDC

- (i) To consider the findings in the draft report and agree overall strategy.
- (ii) To build project management capacity and begin the process to conduct the design feasibility work.
- (iii) To work with residents to set the 'Stroud standard' for sheltered housing formulating improvement and remodelling plans which aim to ensure that:
- SDC's sheltered housing stock has level floor access throughout all common areas and first floor accommodation that is accessible via a lift.
 - Bedsit accommodation is phased out.
 - Schemes provide adequate car parking suitable for residents and visitors along with secure mobility scooter storage with recharging points.
 - Community lounge spaces are redesigned to be more attractive and inviting.
 - Tenants' homes and communal areas offer the highest level of thermal and energy efficiency that can be reasonably provided.
 - Garden areas are accessible to those with mobility issues, and also from the community room with appropriately wide opening doors.
- (iv) To work with partners to improve local knowledge on 'demand. '
- (v) To improve financial performance and make best use of assets by:
- Understanding stock condition, unit costs and lifecycles.
 - Addressing long term voids in sustainable schemes.
- (vi) Further improve service quality and efficiency by:
- Fully understanding service charges.
 - Explore opportunities around hub activities.
 - Develop a clear communication plan.

In reply to Members' questions, John Paterson and Kieran Colgan advised:

- (vii) A typical timescale for leading in to actual work would be 12 to 18 months with a feasibility study, design, costing and public consultation all working in parallel. It would not be unreasonable to estimate a total programme timescale of around 7-10 years.
- (viii) The "forensic grip" on assets and liabilities referred to is the regulatory expectation that landlords should know the spend on a unit by unit basis and be able to make robust decisions for the whole portfolio.
- (ix) While work is undertaken affected tenants would be moved into alternative properties and provided with help to support them through any transition.

Councillor Debbie Young requested the addition of the words "reporting back to committee with recommendations" at the end of both paragraph b and c of decision box 2 which was unanimously agreed.

During debate Members unanimously supported the review.

- RESOLVED**
- 1. That schemes identified as 'green' and 'amber' are supported and a programme developed and implemented for their improvement, subject to budget availability and constraint.**
 - 2. That schemes identified in the 'red' category, are approved, in principle, to consider options for redevelopment, and that:**
 - (a) Officers will prioritise and undertake a review of each site looking at its options and potential, with the engagement of local ward members and tenants and will return to committee as soon as practicably possible with their recommendations. Where a strong case emerges for a similar options appraisal to apply to an 'amber' scheme, this will be brought back to committee, as above.**
 - (b) Officers also develop a long term delivery programme, identifying costs, financial resources and timescales. Supported by a financial plan which models and responds to risks such as the budget requirement for a 1% rent decrease, RTB changes and other challenges reporting back to committee with recommendations.**
 - (c) That a wide ranging package of support, for tenants who are affected by these works, is developed, minimising inconvenience and enabling the programme to be effectively delivered reporting back to committee with recommendations.**
 - 3. That a communications plan is implemented.**

HC.027 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were none

Meeting Ended at 9.25 pm

Chair