

APPENDIX 1

Proposed restructure of Sheltered Housing Summary of Tenant Consultation August 2012

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of tenant feedback on the proposed restructure of the Sheltered Housing service and supports the summary of tenant feedback contained in the relevant Cabinet report.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The current Sheltered Housing service model has been in place for more than 15 years and has been funded through Supporting People Grant since 2003 (please see sections 4B and 7 of the Cabinet report).
- 2.2 Supporting People Grant (SPG) requirements include achievement of quality standards in support delivery, risk assessments and safeguarding of vulnerable adults, service user involvement etc. These quality standards were not in place prior to the introduction of SPG.
- 2.3 From 2004 to 2010 the Sheltered Housing service was subject to several Supporting People reviews and was assessed as achieving only minimum quality standards. During this period, various improvements were made (for example, in support planning) but these were insufficient to improve overall performance. It was acknowledged that a service review was required and tenants were consulted in this regard in 2007. The Housing Department were able to commit to a formal review of the service in 2010, when a permanent management team had been established and the drive to improve the Sheltered Housing service was committed to the Housing Ambition Plan.
- 2.4 In July 2011, new processes and procedures for delivering the service were implemented and a Supporting People review in late 2011 found that quality had improved significantly.
- 2.5 During efforts to improve service delivery in the first half of 2011 we were aware that a reduction in SPG was likely but this was not confirmed until late 2011.

3.0 Consultation

3.1 Tenant consultation events July / August 2011

- 3.1.1 In order to gather tenant's views about the service and how it could be improved we held 3 consultation events in July / August 2011. 124 tenants attended (22% of all tenants) and translators were provided for speakers of languages other than English.
- 3.1.2 Whilst a majority of attendees were happy with the service, many tenants complained that either "strangers" (i.e., locums) appear or there is no cover at all when their designated Warden is absent.
- 3.1.3 In the proposed restructure, we will cover staff absence within the Sheltered Housing Team and no longer rely on locum cover. Scheme Coordinators (responsible for housing management issues) will each cover two schemes, dividing their time between the schemes as required, for example to monitor contractors, and have a fixed and publicised scheme presence. Support Coordinators will each cover from two to three schemes and be available to meet with and support tenants on a one to one basis as required. For example, if a tenant needs to see a Support Worker for an hour every day, this support will be provided. All staff will be known to tenants of the schemes they are attached to.

The effect of the restructure on staffing levels is that the current frontline staffing level of 18 will be retained. There are currently 18 Warden posts and in the new structure there will be 10 Scheme Coordinators and 8 Support Coordinators. Further, there will actually be an increase in frontline staffing hours. Currently, because Supporting People funding is insufficient, we typically provide 553 frontline hours per week (office hours, Monday to Friday). Under the proposed structure this will increase to 648 hours – the equivalent of more than 2.5 full time posts.

- 3.1.4 During the consultation events tenants also complained that response times from the out of hours service were poor. We will be working on developing tenant awareness regarding the role of Helpline, as there is confusion about this and the role of the emergency services. We will also be working with Helpline to develop a Service Level Agreement.

3.2 Tenant questionnaires September 2011

- 3.2.1 In September 2011, we sent a consultation questionnaire to all tenants (translated in to community languages for Gujarati and Tamil speaking Tenants) asking them if they agreed with the consensus gained at the July / August events. 64 tenants (nearly 12% of all tenants) returned a

questionnaire and 54 tenants (nearly 85% of respondents) agreed that we needed to improve cover arrangements for staff absence and the out of hours service.

3.3 Further consultation events November 2011

- 3.3.1 In November 2011 we received confirmation of significant reduction in Supporting People Grant. In response to this and on consideration of feedback from the consultation events in July / August 2011 & the survey in September 2011, we arranged to consult with tenants on a proposal to restructure the service.
- 3.3.2 We held two consultation events to obtain tenant's views on remaining with the current staffing structure or restructuring the service as per the present proposal. 87 tenants attended (16% of all tenants).
- 3.3.3 Tenants were clear, that they did not want to remain with the current staffing structure as this would result in a significant loss of Warden posts but asked for the rationale behind this particular proposal and why for example, we couldn't collect the funding through Housing Benefit as proposed but retain one designated Warden per scheme.
- 3.3.4 Remaining with the present staffing structure of one designated Warden per scheme would not allow us to offer tenants a choice in who they speak to about their support needs. For example, a male tenant with personal care needs is likely to be reluctant to discuss these with a female member of staff. Many tenants expressed their support for a staffing structure that allows tenants a choice in who they speak to.
- 3.3.5 Many tenants said that they wanted to keep their designated Warden. There are several points here. Firstly, it is likely that many tenants will continue to see their existing Warden either in their new role of Scheme Coordinator or Support Coordinator. Secondly, in addition to this there will also be a further 2 or 3 members of staff that tenants will have direct access to. Thirdly, as strongly expressed by members of the Supporting People Older People's Subgroup, whilst it may be easy for tenants who are happy with their Warden to come forward and say so, tenants who are unhappy with their Warden are not as likely to come forward.
- 3.3.6 Other questions included:
- Who would do what?
- We explained that there would be two staff teams, one to focus on housing management and one to focus on support. Staff responsible

for housing management functions such as monitoring contractors, overseeing the security & safety of the building etc would be called Scheme Coordinators. And that staff responsible for supporting individual tenants, and helping with things like benefit claims & accessing services such as personal care, would be called Support Coordinators.

- How would you ensure that staff are on site to let contractors in?

We explained that Scheme Coordinators would liaise with contractors to arrange appointments for repairs and ensure that a member of staff was on site – as should happen now.

- Where will staff be based?

We explained that although staff would have a base at Watkins House they would be expected to spend most of their time out at individual schemes. The Watkins House base allows us a space for team meetings and an environment where staff can share things like good practice etc.

- How will tenants contact staff?

A Scheme Coordinator will have a fixed on site presence at each scheme every day from Monday to Friday. Support Coordinators will be available for appointments with individual tenants as required by tenants. In addition to this, Support Coordinators will hold weekly support surgeries at each scheme. Should a situation arise where a tenant needs to speak to a member of the Sheltered Housing Team (during office hours from Monday to Friday) and there isn't a member of the team on site, they will be able to telephone the staff base at Watkins House. As we will keep a record of what staff are where we will be able to send the nearest member of staff to the scheme if necessary. Further, Helpline will still be available for emergencies – as is currently the case.

- Will staff be able to talk to people sensitively about things like neglect and abuse?

We explained that all staff receive training and guidance in adult protection and that going forward, this will continue. However, one of the benefits of separating the Warden functions of housing management and support is that it allows better focus on each of these areas.

3.3.7 Tenants were able to understand the merits of the proposed restructure on explanation but were keen that management attend each scheme individually to explain the proposal and answer questions.

3.3.8 Many tenants said that any period of change would be stressful but they were confident that the service would be improved as a result of the restructure.

3.4 Further consultation January & February 2012

3.4.1 In January 2012 we wrote to tenants informing them that we wished to proceed with the proposal to restructure and asked for their views.

3.4.2 In January and February 2012 we visited each scheme to explain the proposal and answer questions. 259 tenants (nearly 50% of all tenants) attended these meetings. Questions included:

- What is the financial impact on Tenants?

We explained that there was no financial impact on tenants. Tenants receiving Housing Benefit will have the new service charge paid by Housing Benefit. Tenants who pay a Support Charge will cease to pay the Support Charge but will pay the new service charge which is exactly the same amount (£15.25 per week).

- How will the service make sure that the needs of the most vulnerable are met?

We explained that all tenants will have their needs reviewed prior to implementation of any changes and that our procedures for assessing support needs & providing support are reviewed to ensure that they meet the needs of the new service. Further, there will be a transitional period of 3 months, during which the new structure would be phased in and individual support needs reviewed; a 12 month Review Period to enable us to review and improve operational arrangements; Establishment of service improvement working group involving tenants and staff to seek regular engagement with service users.

3.4.3 Several tenant's relatives attended meetings held at individual schemes. Some were present because they were concerned that the proposed changes impact negatively and some were present because they were unhappy with the service provided by the current Warden.

3.4.4 In January / February 2012 we received 3 letters from tenants asking questions about the proposed restructure. (One letter each from Sinclair House, Harkett Court and Alma Court.)

- Sinclair House – The author agreed to use the contents of her letter as a basis for discussion at the scheme meeting with tenants. Gujarati speaking tenants complained that information provided in Gujarati was not easy to understand (we were unable to complete our investigation on this as the tenant was unable to assist us in taking forward a complaint and the organization responsible for the translations has closed.). We will ensure that any further translations are fit for purpose before general release. Other concerns related to staff presence at individual schemes and how tenants would contact staff – as previously outlined in this document.
- Harkett Court – The author questioned the functions of Scheme and Support Coordinators, the hours that staff would be on site and who to contact in an emergency – these issues were discussed at the scheme meeting with tenants. The author asked for clarification of the purpose of the Tenant Involvement and Participation Coordinator. At the meeting with tenants we explained that the purpose of the post was to ensure that tenants take as much of a lead as possible not just on their support plans but on the development of the service and also to ensure that a wide range of activities are available to all tenants. The author also commented “I feel, personally, that despite having to overcome the present funding cutbacks, there is now an excellent opportunity to make sheltered housing a great place to live and hope that this opportunity will be maximized as far as it is possible for Harrow Council to do so.”
- Alma Court – The author was concerned that staffing hours would be reduced in the restructure and at the meeting with tenants we explained that this was not the case – frontline staffing hours actually increase (as previously described in this document).

3.5 Petition received April 2012

3.5.1 We received a copy of a petition addressed to Councillor Currie, dated 26th April 2012 and signed by most tenants of William Allen House.

3.5.2 The petitioners asked that we delay or stop the proposed restructure and listed a number of objections to the proposal. As it was clear that many of the objections stemmed from a misunderstanding of the proposal, a further scheme meeting was held on 9th May 2012 with all tenants.

3.5.3 At that meeting we addressed and clarified each of the concerns raised in the petition. These included proposed staffing, emergency contact and funding arrangements as previously described in this document.

3.5.4 Following the meeting, Councillor Currie wrote to all tenants at William Allen House to reassure them of the intentions of the proposal. There has been no further contact or correspondence from tenants of the scheme regarding the proposed restructure.

4.0 Amendments to the original proposal following consultation

4.1 As a result of the consultation, we have increased the number of Scheme Coordinators from 9 to 10 and reduced the number of Support Coordinators from 9 to 8.

5.0 Summary

5.1 The key concerns of tenants are:

- The potential loss of their designated Warden.

We have explained that, depending on whether existing staff fill the new roles, most tenants would continue to see their existing Warden, either in their capacity of Scheme Coordinator or Support Coordinator and that in addition, tenants would also be able to see other members of staff if they choose to. The Supporting People Older People's sub group has also confirmed that some tenants who may feel unhappy with the current service find it difficult to express themselves.

Whilst each scheme may not have a designated individual warden, individual tenants would still have access to a designated scheme co-ordinator and also access to a support co-ordinator who is best placed to support their individual needs. This should provide a more enhanced flexible service.

- Reduced staff presence at each scheme.

There will actually be an increase in frontline staffing hours. Currently, because Supporting People funding is insufficient, we typically provide 553 frontline hours per week (office hours, Monday to Friday). Under the proposed structure this will increase to 648 hours – the equivalent of more than 2.5 full time posts.

- Our ability to identify and meet the needs of the most vulnerable / suddenly vulnerable.

New Support Delivery mechanisms introduced in 2011 are aimed at identifying and meeting the support needs of tenants. These mechanisms, along with each tenant's individual support needs, will be reviewed prior to any changes being implemented.

- Access to the service for tenants who speak a language other than English.

Access to staff who speak a language other than English will be improved because Support Coordinators will float across the schemes. We will also ensure that all tenants are able to telephone the office at Watkins House.

- 5.2 We have endeavoured to address these concerns and reassure tenants. However, it is perhaps inevitable that some tenants will continue to be anxious about any changes to the service and we are mindful of this.
- 5.3 There will be a transitional period of 3 months, during which the new structure would be phased in and individual support needs reviewed; a 12 month Review Period to enable us to review and improve operational arrangements; Establishment of service improvement working group involving tenants and staff to seek regular engagement with service users.