

To: Cabinet

Date: 6 March 2024

Report/Comments of: Scrutiny Committee

Title: Scrutiny feedback to Cabinet – Housing Support Review

SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP UNDERTAKEN	
Workshop Title:	Housing Support Review
Purpose/Description of Workshop:	To present to Members the proposals for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An independent living support service for Sheltered Housing schemes; • Arrangements to facilitate alternative access to support and lifeline services for tenants of dispersed housing; • Developing a framework for independent living to provide clear information to tenants, prospective tenants and their families.
Key Decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Cllr M Brown, Scrutiny Committee Chairman
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	Cllr P Allnatt, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services

1. Introduction and Overview

A Scrutiny Committee workshop was held on 14 February 2024 to consider a presentation on the Housing Support Review. During the workshop, Members considered and commented on proposals for the following:

- An independent living support service for Sheltered Housing schemes;
- Arrangements to facilitate alternative access to support and lifeline services for tenants of dispersed housing;
- Developing a framework for independent living to provide clear information to tenants, prospective tenants and their families.

It was noted that feedback from Scrutiny Members would help shape the proposals ahead of Cabinet consideration on 6 March 2024.

2. Summary of Feedback/Recommendations for Cabinet Consideration

a) An Independent Living Service for Sheltered Housing schemes:

- The comment was made that the wording/language of the proposal needs to be clear that is focussed on support and Independence. Members commented that it is crucial that tenants feel empowered and want them to feel that they are independent but are able to have access to support when required.
- The service needs to be clear and welcoming and outlined clearly to a tenant before they move into a sheltered housing property.
- Some committee members felt there should be opportunity to 'opt out' of the proposed Independent Living Service. It was explained in response that a service would need to apply to all 'in scope' properties to enable this to be eligible for a housing benefit contribution eligible tenants and to be clear about the sheltered housing 'offer'. Members felt that a pragmatic approach would be needed for tenants who are already living in sheltered housing.
- A Member commented that as a provider of the service there has to be universality about it, in order for it to be affordable to deliver, but that scope needed to be clear and focussed.
- It was noted that other costs include the charge Harborough levy in answering lifeline calls and the cost of cover when officers are on leave.
- In relation to staffing costs, the query was raised as to whether there is scope to have one Officer on band 5 instead of band 6, however Members were informed that the saving was negligible and that for resilience purposes, it was better to have two band 6 Officers. The proposed service had been designed based on a deliverable model.
- Members were concerned that the proposal does not provide value for money, as it reduces the amount of time that people are left without contact. Visibility and presence on site is important and could it be as simple as people knowing that someone will be in a building at a particular time for an hour. In response, reassurance was given that officers would have presence across the sheltered schemes each day, but not on a fixed basis.
- Members commented that it is important for tenants to have contact with officers. The arrangements for visits and tenants drop-in surgeries were noted.
- The comment was made that it would be helpful if an officer could attend to a tenant who needs medical attention. It was noted that lifeline does send out a paramedic if assistance is needed urgently. Members were reminded that the Council is a landlord who provides additional assistance and not a care provider.
- The comment was made that Officers should be aware of what other supported accommodation is available within the Borough, what are they offering and how are they managing the service and costs.
- It was noted that the costs could seem a lot for tenants – members noted that any way to reduce costs to tenants would be welcome.
- Transitional arrangements for the Independent Living Service were discussed, and a pragmatic approach was requested to avoid any risk

of 'forcing tenants out of their homes'. Members were reassured on this point. Members also noted that there may some instances where tenants may benefit from alternative accommodation, on a case by case basis.

- Members recognised that tenants in communal blocks are a part of a community and noted that that the Council should ensure that tenants can afford the service.
- Members considered it beneficial to include Bradgate Bungalows into the Independent Living Service scope.
- In regard to the proposals regarding housing support arrangements for sheltered housing, Members commented that it broadly feels right.
- It was recommended that Ward Members need to be fully engaged on the proposals to be able to manage resident enquiries.
- Members stated that the increased charges for sheltered schemes should be phased in.

b) Arrangements to facilitate alternative access to support and lifeline services for tenants of dispersed housing:

- Concern was raised that tenants do not know who their housing officer is. In response to update that information is in the tenant newsletter, members pointed out that newsletters don't often get read and that a wallet sized card or fridge magnet with the housing officer's details to give to residents might be better and have less chance of being lost.
- Members noted the importance of having services linked to people rather than properties, so that they can access the right service and not pay for things they do not want or need.
- Concern was raised regarding exit interviews and how to process them in a timely manner. Members suggested that all interviews should be done within three months because once the process has commenced then the information will become widely known and needs to progress in a timely way, even if this requires additional resource.
- Dealing with tenants who may not realise or agree that they need any support or guidance was raised, although Officers comments that there are safeguarding assessments and Officers can refer appropriately.
- Regarding the questionnaire, Members commented that it must also include consideration of softer aspects such as 'how a resident feels living here' or 'whether they feel safe' or whether there is anything else they need.
- Members cautioned that the council will need to be clear on what they are asking for information from tenants and how this will be used. Suggested that there needs to be somewhere to sign the form in order to make the tenant feel empowered and ideally to give the tenant a copy of the form.
- It was suggested that tenants should be informed of what other support is available.
- Members agreed that the current priority should be to ensure that existing residents are properly supported in a way that is relevant to their needs.

- Members commented that forms are often complicated for tenants to fill out.
- It was recognised that the service has been a reactive service, and that there is a level of frustration from some customers. It was noted that there had been some requests for refunds from customers and that there is analysis of this underway. Members noted this as a risk.

c) Other comments:

- A comment was made that the service officer at Gretton Court needs to be defined as part of the proposed Independent Living Framework, so tenants know what to expect.
- Members were pleased that Officers are constantly improving performance.
- Officers were thanked by Members for their hard work.

Written by: Scrutiny Committee Chairman in consultation with Members of the Scrutiny Committee