

**SHELTERED HOUSING TASK GROUP held at PRIORS WOOD COURT,
PRIORS WOOD ROAD, TAKELEY AT 10.30am ON 1 JULY 2010**

Present: Councillor J A Redfern - Chairman
Councillor J E Hudson

Also attending: Uttlesford District Council officers: Heather Duncan (Sheltered Housing Officer), Helen Harvey (Senior Sheltered Housing and Lifeline Officer), Natalie Leatham (Housing Programming and Health & Safety Officer), Elizabeth Petrie (Housing Management Manager), Rebecca Procter (Democratic Services Officer), Nicole Shephard-Lewis (Tenant Participation Officer); Tenant Forum representative: John Maddams; Essex County Council Social Care: Karen Patient (Operational Team Manager – Uttlesford CAT Team)

SH1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Bellingham-Smith, D J Morson and S V Schneider, Maureen Cox, Jill Jackson, Sue Russell, Suzanna Wood and Paul Simpson.

SH2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman referred to Minute SH46, regarding provision of the sheltered housing handyman service. She said it was now important to make progress in drawing up a policy for what should be covered, and how residents would access the service.

Helen Harvey said Terry Rosamond would take on the role of sheltered housing handyman. Previously his work had included health and safety duties, and new arrangements were now in place, giving this responsibility to another officer. Therefore, a meeting could soon take place with Terry Rosamond, to draw up a list of his duties under his new role. These duties would need to be clearly identified, as it was important to manage tenants' expectations. He would be responsible for minor ad hoc jobs such as changing light bulbs, and fixing leaking taps, and would refer major repairs to Building Repairs.

Councillor Redfern asked for a list of the handyman's duties to be provided to the Task Group.

The Task Group discussed various aspects of the handyman's role which needed to be addressed, such as whether it would be up to the handyman to decide which work he was responsible for? Councillor Redfern stressed the need to ensure his time would be managed efficiently, asking whether he would visit the sites on a rota system. She said it would be important to avoid disproportionate travelling as against workload, e.g. making a journey across the district to change a light bulb. She suggested it might be more cost effective for all light bulbs in each building to be changed at once, to reduce travelling costs.

The Task Group agreed that there would be occasions when certain tasks would need to be treated as emergencies. The handyman would therefore need to be able to give priority to work where appropriate.

In reply to a question about how tenants would ask for jobs to be done, officers suggested they could add their requests to a list on a communal notice board. It would be up to residents to submit requests, although Sheltered Housing Officers would assist those who were less able.

Officers agreed to discuss the requirements of the role with Terry Rosamond.

The Chairman stressed the need for time management of the role. The Housing Management Manager said the role would be closely monitored.

The Chairman then signed the Minutes of the previous meeting.

SH3

LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

The Task Group considered a report updating the Group on the new sheltered housing service. The Housing Management Manager said it was expected there would be a few teething problems. However, it was pleasing that Carecall had been in place since the beginning of May, and initial feedback had been very positive. Over the next two to three months the Housing Management Manager and the Senior Sheltered Housing and Lifeline Officer would visit each sheltered housing scheme to consult residents about the new service.

Karen Patient asked what the 'niggles' so far had been. Officers replied there had been no problems with the change in the service itself, but it had soon become apparent the staffing rota originally drawn up should be adjusted. The reason for this was a rota based on a 7 week cycle had been set up, but residents preferred the familiarity of seeing the same person on a more regular basis, and a two week rota had been introduced.

Some residents had expressed concern about how they would manage at weekends in the absence of Sheltered Housing Officers, as officers had tended to help with small routine tasks for some people. However, officers were aware of the ability of these residents to manage, and were doing their best to encourage them to be independent.

The Sheltered Housing Officers had been encouraged to visit schemes with a 'buddy', to enable those with experience of certain sheltered housing schemes to accompany those who were not familiar with that location.

Heather Duncan said the new service was working out well, and in her view the service was much better now. Sheltered Housing Officers now had more time to chat to residents, and to organise social activities.

Helen Harvey said she kept in regular contact with Carecall, and was monitoring the progress of this year-long trial in preparation for when a decision would have to be made.

MOBILITY SCOOTERS

The Housing Management Manager introduced a draft report on use of mobility scooters in sheltered housing schemes. Over the last two or three years more residents of sheltered housing were using such scooters, with implications for storage, insurance and safety. There were some difficult decisions to be made regarding some of these issues, and she invited the Task Group to comment on a draft policy document prepared by the Housing Programming and Health & Safety Officer and the Tenant Participation Officer.

The Group discussed various aspects of ownership of mobility scooters, in particular problems arising from storage. It was noted that the District's 18 schemes differed greatly from one another, and it would not be possible to find a 'one size fits all' solution. Storage of mobility scooters tended to be required close to the homes of those who wished to use them. However, there were currently problems with incorrect storage in corridors, in breach of fire regulations. There had unfortunately already been some incidents of damage to the Council's buildings such as scraped walls and damaged electronic gates.

A further significant issue was safety, as some people were keeping their mobility scooters in their rooms. This caused safety problems for other people when scooters were driven down corridors. Another issue was charging of scooters kept in residents' rooms which could lead to increased fire risk for the whole building, as some people were using extension leads incorrectly. There was also increased risk of tripping over leads.

Another problem was the cost to the Council of use of communal area electrical points by some residents when charging their scooters.

Officers referred to expected legislation on requiring compulsory insurance for those using mobility scooters. The premium level would be approximately £33 pa, which did not seem excessive, and therefore it seemed appropriate that the Council should require residents with scooters to take out such insurance.

The Task Group considered whether it might be necessary to advertise some sheltered housing schemes, e.g. John Dane Player, as unsuitable for mobility scooters. The draft policy would include advice to prospective sheltered housing tenants to consider this factor when choosing to apply to a scheme.

The Task Group also discussed charging mobility scooter owners for renting storage sheds and for the costs of electricity to charge the vehicles. The Tenant Participation Officer reported that the approximate cost for residents wishing to buy a scooter cover was £800.

The issue of where to install sheds was considered, and no firm conclusions were reached, in view of the different nature of the sheltered housing schemes. John Maddams described a situation at Four Acres where a resident had paid for a cable extension to be installed, when she bought a scooter from another resident's family after he had died. He said there were two scooter-owners who lived on the first floor, and they required outside

storage facilities. In his view the Council should not pay for constructing such shelters.

The Chairman said in her view no scooters should be permitted to be taken inside buildings, for a number of reasons. There needed to be a uniform approach to charging points. Officers said there might also be issues arising from planning or listed building considerations. Other comments included the unsightly nature of electricity cables running from windows, and scooters parked on grass outside buildings.

The possibility of renting a scooter was briefly discussed, although the spontaneity associated with using a scooter could be lost.

The Chairman expressed concern about the absence of any training requirements for driving these vehicles, and officers reported there had unfortunately been several deaths caused by mobility scooters, including three instances in Essex.

The conclusions reached during discussion were as follows:

- A policy for owning mobility scooters in sheltered housing schemes was certainly required, but consultation with residents should be carried out before a policy was introduced and officers should obtain information on policies of other councils in order to assist the Task Group to formulate a recommendation to Community and Housing Committee.
- There was concern about any retrospective introduction of a ban on keeping scooters in residents' rooms, as there were equalities issues to take into account. Sue Locke, the Council's Equalities Officer, had advised it would not be possible to prevent residents storing scooters in their rooms.
- Obstruction of corridors by mobility scooters could not be permitted, as this was a breach of fire regulations.
- Information should be sought from other councils as to their policies regarding mobility scooters.

The Tenant Participation Officer said two tenant representatives were visiting a number of sites with officers to discuss the impact of scooters. The draft policy document had been mentioned but not discussed in full at the previous Tenant Forum meeting, and there was little feedback at this stage. The possibilities of obtaining finance which could address some of the issues arising from scooter ownership were also being explored.

The Task Group noted there were new lead-in times for preparation of committee reports, and accordingly it was decided to conduct consultation during the summer, with a report from the Task Group to Community and Housing Committee at its November meeting. This would enable the Tenant Forum to discuss the draft policy at its meeting on 19 September. A meeting of the Sheltered Housing Task Group would be arranged to consider the consultation responses and make a recommendation to Committee.

SH5

ADAPTATIONS POLICY

The Housing Management Manager referred the Task Group to the recent adoption by the Community and Housing Committee of the new Adaptations Policy, which was attached to the agenda in full for information. She said this policy was realistic and honest about what the Council would do for people requiring adaptations. The Chairman replied she had been shocked at the financial impact of carrying out all adaptations requests, and it had been essential to bring that situation to a halt. Members of the Task Group agreed.

Karen Patient said 60 to 70% of those presenting to Social Services were looking for adaptations to bathing, and there was a long list of 'interested parties'. Officers advised the Council's waiting list was currently about 18 months.

SH6

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Senior Sheltered Housing & Lifeline Officer said an open day would take place at Reynolds Court on 28 July. A show flat would be prepared and people on the housing register would be invited to consider sheltered housing.

The Chairman asked that this information be emailed to the Group.

The meeting ended at 12.30pm.