



# **Review of Sheltered Housing Communal Rooms**

**December 2016**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Scrutiny Project Team have undertaken a detailed review into the use of the Sheltered Housing Communal Rooms in 41 of the 43 Sheltered Housing Schemes. This included looking into the hiring policy and booking form, the hiring fee and future use of the rooms.

We identified a number of areas for improvement. This report details our findings and presents a number of recommendations for improvement.

We would like to thank all the South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) Sheltered staff, the group mentor and the tenants who were involved in the scrutiny process. Particular thanks to Helen Pagram and Chelsea Hilliam from the Resident Involvement Team for providing information requested.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Desktop Review of Policies and Procedures**

The purpose of this exercise was to review the policies and procedures used by SCDC when hiring out the sheltered scheme communal rooms, and compare them with those of other organisations. A list of the organisations is available at Appendix A.

### **2.2 Sheltered Housing Resident Survey**

#### **2.2.1. Sheltered Housing Forum and Leaseholders Forum**

We attended these meetings and invited members of the two forums to complete a survey to find out if they used the communal lounge at their schemes, their views regarding the hiring fee, future use of the room and other communal facilities.

Twelve members of the Sheltered Housing Forum and one member of the Leaseholder Forum completed a survey form

#### **2.2.2 Sheltered Housing Residents Coffee Mornings**

The Scrutiny Project Team produced a leaflet inviting all sheltered housing residents to attend coffee mornings at six venues across SCDC. Again we were looking to find out whether they used the communal lounge at their scheme, their views on the hiring fee, future use of the room and other communal facilities. 1500 leaflets were delivered by hand. 63 residents attended the coffee mornings and completed a survey form.

#### **2.2.3 Sheltered Housing Questionnaire sent to all Residents**

As only 63 residents attended the coffee mornings, a questionnaire was sent to all sheltered housing tenants to get a better overall view on hiring fees, use of the communal rooms and other facilities and if they used the room themselves.

### **2.3 Interviews with Estate Officers**

We interviewed 6 of the 11 Estate Officers to establish what their role was with regards to the communal rooms and how the booking system worked, how they would like to see the communal rooms used in the future and whether they would be prepared to facilitate any activities in the communal lounges.

### **2.4 Interview with Community Impact Team Leader**

We interviewed the Community Impact Team Leader, to establish what records are kept with regards to the hiring of the communal lounges, how they saw the future of the communal rooms, what they thought about the fee charged for hiring the communal lounges and their views on the use of the laundry facilities.

## **3. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **3.1 Desktop Review of Policies and Procedures**

#### **Findings:**

- The SCDC Communal Facilities Use and Charging Policy is a comprehensive document for use by staff. However, the same document is given to tenants and residents hiring the communal rooms and is felt to be too long and contains details that people may not read, and may indeed put people off hiring the room.

#### **Recommendations**

- We particularly liked the information sheet produced by Hanover Housing and would recommend that SCDC produce something along these lines in consultation with the Tenant Participation Group (TPG) and the Sheltered Housing Forum.
- Use of communal lounges by residents – no charge for residents living on the scheme who organise activities themselves such as coffee mornings, bingo.
- Use of communal lounges by community groups – a hire fee should be paid by groups who are providing a service to our residents and other local people e.g. hairdressers, chiropodists, fitness groups etc.
- Use of communal lounges by external groups – a hire fee should be paid by all external groups e.g. bridge clubs, crib clubs, Women's Institute, drama groups etc.
- Use of communal lounges by SCDC – a hire fee should be paid by SCDC when they make use of lounges for residents meetings (TPG, Leaseholder Forum, Sheltered Housing Forum, Focus Groups) and staff meetings

### **3.2 Sheltered Housing Residents Survey at Coffee Mornings**

#### **Findings**

- 65 residents said they used the communal rooms – mainly for social events and coffee mornings
- 17 residents would like to see more use made of the communal lounges
- 48 residents were in favour of the communal lounges and would not like to

- see them closed
- 47 residents said that the hiring fee should be at least £10 an hour
- 55 residents said they didn't use the computer provided in the communal room. This was because they didn't know how to use it or had their own computers and that they were a waste of time and money.
- 44 residents said that they use the other communal facilities (laundry, dryer, shower room etc.)
- 63 residents surveyed were aware that they pay a service charge for the communal facilities and said they would like a more comprehensive breakdown of their service charges.

### 3.2.1 Sheltered Housing Questionnaire (500 replies)

#### Findings

- 334 (66.8%) said they use the communal rooms, 210 (42%) use the laundry and 273 (54.6%) for social activities.
- 259 (51.8%) keep the laundry payment as it is and 153(30.6%) said change to tokens.
- 210 (42%) said resident use the room enough and 193(38.6%) said they don't use it enough
- 237 (47.4%) said it wasn't used enough by outsiders.
- 228 (45.6%) said keep the fee at £5 an hour and 184 (36.8%) said raise it to £10 an hour

#### Recommendations

- Keep the hiring fee at £5 an hour.
- Those paying to hire a communal lounge, should pay a £25 deposit which is only returned to them if the room is left clean and tidy, and there are no breakages.
- All bookings are to be shown on the notice board at the entrance to the communal lounge, with the amount charged for each hire.
- SCDC should review the use of the computers in the communal lounges in 12 months time.

### 3.3 Interviews with Estate Officers

#### Findings

- There was inconsistency in the responses from the Estate Officers with regards to their role with the communal rooms.
- All the estate officers said they promoted the rooms and took bookings for the rooms. Bookings are recorded on the calendar and a record kept on a spreadsheet at SCDC. However whilst holding the resident coffee mornings, we observed that in fact not all bookings were recorded on the calendar.
- Five of the six estate officers said they would be prepared to facilitate activities in the communal lounges if they had time

## **Recommendations**

- **All** bookings (including coffee mornings) with payment details where appropriate, must be entered onto the calendars in the entrance to the communal lounges.
- On a quarterly basis the spreadsheet of bookings and fees paid for the use of communal lounges, should be presented to the Sheltered Housing Forum for monitoring purposes.
- On a six monthly basis the Sheltered Housing Team, should provide the Sheltered Housing Forum with details on how they have been promoting the communal lounges to residents, the wider community and community groups.

### **3.4 Interview with Community Impact Team Leader**

#### **Findings**

- Records are kept of bookings that incur a fee but not those that don't incur a fee.
- The communal rooms could be used for more community based functions, e.g. doctor's and nurse's surgeries, day centres etc.
- Agreed that £5 an hour hire charge is too low. A three tier hire scheme is due to be piloted in Bassingbourn.
- The cost of the laundry facility is currently included in the service charge but could be replaced with a token slot machine.

#### **Recommendations**

- Records are kept of all bookings not just those that incur a fee.
- The hire fee is kept at £5 an hour for all hirers. It is our view that the use of a three tier payment system is not practical and open to abuse.
- The use of the laundry facilities is removed from the service charge and token slot machines be introduced to all schemes.
- SCDC should actively promote the use of the communal rooms to community based organisations.

## **4 NEXT STEPS**

- Meet with the Community Impact Team Leader on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017 to discuss her comments on the report
- Present the report to the portfolio holder for housing
- Agree an action plan to implement the agreed recommendations with the Community Impact Team Leader
- Article on the scrutiny review findings and recommendations to go in tenants newsletters
- SCDC to place a copy of the report on their website