

South Cambs response to the Sheltered Service Scrutiny Review

01/10/2015

Review Started: November 2014

Completed: June 2015

Final report from the Scrutiny Review Team presented to staff, Councillors and sheltered residents on 16/06/2015

Set out below is the Council's response to the 18 recommendations set out in the report. For clarification and to help monitoring and feedback going forward the recommendations have been placed in five main areas of work being:

A = Strategic

B = Policy/procedures

C = Service review areas

D = Cross Tenure Themes

E = Outside of our influence

	Conclusions	Recommendations	Councils Response
A	Strategic		
1	The Sheltered Housing Service suffers from a lack of clarity, coherence and focus about its purpose, aims and objectives and this could be helped by the Council developing a Sheltered Housing Policy or Strategy. There is also no real forward thinking about how to future proof the service to make it viable and sustainable after the withdrawal of Supporting People Funding.	The Council should set up a working party to develop a Sheltered Housing Policy and consult the Sheltered Housing Forum over its content. The Policy needs to clarify the purpose and role of the Sheltered Housing Service and show how the Service meets the four aims of Cambridgeshire's Older Peoples Policy so that it can be used to attract funding from other organisations, including Cambridgeshire County Council.	The Supported Housing Manager is currently working on developing and an Older Persons Strategy for the Council which will draw on the County Councils Strategy. The draft strategy and action plan will be widely consulted upon. The focus is not primarily on sheltered housing although it will form a significant proportion of the strategy.
14	The Support Service is currently running with three vacancies but is keeping up with current demand. Staff are convinced that the Service is performing well and the new way of working works better than pre-2012	The Council should recruit to the full complement of Visiting Support Officers specified in the contract and talk to Cambridgeshire County Council about the option of employing a mental health specialist to	Ensure that this is encompassed within the strategy. Agree need to keep the service fully staffed. Consider employing a mental health specialist.

	<p>arrangements. The Team is encountering a high number of mental health referrals, including alcohol and drug related cases and remote working could be better supported by investment in IT.</p>	<p>help open up statutory and voluntary mental health services and networks for the benefit of residents using the Support Service.</p>	
15	<p>The Council undertook a comprehensive assessment of needs ahead of the changeover to the new working arrangements but this was not kept active and is now likely to be badly out of date.</p>	<p>The Council should revisit and update the needs assessment to gain a better understanding of the current needs of residents and what type of service they are likely to require in the future. This could help to support the development of a reinvigorated model for sheltered housing.</p>	<p>Linked to Point 1.</p>
B	Policy/Procedures		
2	<p>There are very few written procedures/guidance for staff and this leaves huge grey areas open to interpretation by front-line staff resulting in inconsistency in service delivery. Currently the only procedures that are available are for undertaking health and safety checks and guidance on running bingo and raffles.</p>	<p>The Council should develop a procedure guide for front- line staff that is available through the intranet that can be viewed through their tablets and laptops. The procedures should clearly and concisely set what staff are expected to do and cover any health and safety or legal requirements. This would provide staff with a framework to consistently deliver quality services.</p>	<p>Agreed and updates in progress.</p> <p>This is being worked on by the Supported Housing and Strategy Team.</p>
3	<p>The absence of explicit service standards and performance measures helps to fuel dissatisfaction with the Sheltered Housing Service. Residents do not have any idea of what level of service they should expect to receive and there is no performance culture to support continuous improvement. Residents want to be seen as “customers” and not patronised as “only tenants”.</p>	<p>The Council should develop a set of explicit service standards and performance measures in consultation with the new Sheltered Housing Forum. These should be agreed with residents and widely promoted through the Council’s website, newsletters, and scheme notice boards. They should also be regularly reviewed through resident- led coffee morning-style focus groups.</p>	<p>Agreed that service standards are a great idea. We suggest this is an area where sheltered forum members can put forward ideas for service standards.</p>

6	<p>The new working arrangements for the Sheltered Estate Officers have not been reviewed since they were introduced in 2012. Residents want to see their Sheltered Estate Officers more often and are consequently dissatisfied with the service they currently receive and there is real concern over alarm response times. They also question the value of the new housing surgeries.</p>	<p>The Council should carry out a review of the Sheltered Estate Officer role in terms of how well the role's responsibilities meet the needs of residents in practice, how realistic it is to expect them to cover three or four schemes and check average alarm response times and any exceptions. Residents would prefer a more compassionate, community development- type role with a title which reflects this. Any resulting changes to the role should be made in consultation with residents, communicated to all affected and incorporated into the service standards. Review the effectiveness of the housing surgeries in six months' time after they have had a chance to bed in.</p>	<p>The Council has carried out an internal staffing review which will inevitably impact on the role of the Estates Officers. The Council agrees that they should be visible on the estates they are responsible for. The Council will consult on the results of the review and what residents should be able to expect. The Estates Officers are paid for through the HRA therefore there is a restriction on what can realistically be achieved.</p>
13	<p>The allocation of Sheltered Housing to people that have no immediate need for it, for example those people who traditionally moved into sheltered housing as an insurance policy against their support needs in later life, ultimately undermines the case for funding the service. Also, the allocation of bungalows to families trying to escape the bedroom tax is understandable but regrettable and short termism.</p>	<p>As part of the development of the Sheltered Housing Policy consideration should be given to changing the criteria for allocating sheltered housing to people who have a recognised support need or people with disabilities. The possible implications for the workload of staff and the social life at schemes would have to be factored in.</p>	<p>Link into Lettings Policy. Anyone moving into sheltered has an assessment. Sheltered housing for vulnerable people not just old people. Link into health and the need to support older people in our stock e.g. intermediate care</p>
C	Service Review Areas		
4+11	<p>In 2015, residents now expect a full breakdown of their rent and service charges in a comprehensive and easy to understand statement. They want the format of these statements to be more detailed and clearer than the ones currently produced for leaseholders. Residents are concerned about the fairness of some of the service charges and whether</p>	<p>The Council should work with a small group of SRT members to develop a new customer friendly format for the statements and then consult residents through the Sheltered Housing Forums. These statements would help to drive VfM in the Sheltered Housing Service though increased transparency and accountability to residents. The Council should undertake a VFM appraisal</p>	<p>Agreed. Work has already started on this. There has been three staff meetings to take forward an overall review of service charges. From these meetings the leaseholder working group has been set up. They have met with the second, scheduled for 14 October 2015. Service review well underway</p>

	<p>or not they are getting VfM. Without explicit service standards spelling out what level of service residents should receive or a full breakdown of what their rents and service charges are paying for, residents feel in the dark and this increases their level of dissatisfaction with the service.</p>	<p>similar to that required of Housing Associations in partnership with TPG and publicise the findings through the Council's website, newsletters and the Sheltered Housing Forums.</p>	<p>involving key residents, staff including finance staff. Opportunity for benchmarking possibly through Housemark</p>
8	<p>While some of the communal rooms at Sheltered Housing Schemes are well used, others are underutilised and some have been almost completely abandoned by residents. There is evidence that tenant involvement in planning, organising and running social activities helps to ensure communal rooms are well used, but they need support to do this.</p>	<p>The Council should resurrect its review of communal rooms which has been put on hold due to staffing capacity issues and broaden the remit of the review to embrace more radical thinking to include things like social enterprises running community cafes from communal rooms. The way forward will differ from scheme to scheme and residents should be consulted before any decision is made for their scheme. Officers and TPG to play a role in sharing good practice between those schemes with thriving communal rooms and those that are struggling, including TPG providing some practical help, advice and support to turn things around.</p>	<p>This review is well underway with initial outcomes from a desk top review Communal Rooms that are working well can be grown through computers going in, training sessions, EOs doing coffee mornings and support from the TPG.</p> <p>It would be good to have a sub-group of Sheltered forum members to take this forward with Officers.</p>
9	<p>The Sheltered Housing Forums are not working for either the Council or residents as an effective two-way communication mechanism. They do not have a Terms of Reference and therefore lack purpose and focus. Residents believe the Forums are top heavy with staff and concentrate on almost exclusively on organisational issues rather than their needs. They do not get straight answers to their questions and therefore things just go round in circles.</p>	<p>The Council should implement the recent decision to create a single Sheltered Housing Forum that meets quarterly in locations around the District. Over time the Forum should be encouraged to become resident-led in the same way as TPG. A Terms of Reference should be developed for the new Sheltered Housing Forum and publicised to encourage more residents to attend and have a voice. Sheltered Forum should elect a tenant representative to attend TPG meetings, as happens with the Leaseholder Forum. This will improve communication and support for the Forums and TPG.</p>	<p>Review complete. From July 15 there is one central team with an elected chair moving around the district.</p>

12	Residents want a more straightforward charging policy for hiring communal rooms and see opportunities for generating more income than it is anticipated the new charging policy would bring in.	The Review of communal rooms should take another look at the charging policy for hiring communal rooms and consider ways to generate enough income to remove rather than simply marginally reduce the service charge paid by residents for the communal room.	Linked to point 8. Need to consider our consultative process and involve residents more in our decision making.
16	The provision of Broadband in the communal rooms at Sheltered Schemes is seen by residents as a cost rather than a valued service at present. Residents do not think the monthly charge of £34 offers VfM and much more needs to be done to encourage residents to use the service.	The Council needs to provide desktop computers at all of the schemes that currently have Broadband but do not have computers to access the service. Training also needs to be provided, initially concentrating on how to do online shopping, stay in contact with family members and search the internet.	Linked to point 8. We have started to deliver PC's to sheltered schemes. Gifted. Looking to deliver training to support this.
17	Some time ago the decision was taken to decommission the offices in Sheltered Schemes to avoid having to pay Business Rates, but this process has not been completed. Staffing capacity issues and Business Rates are still being incurred.	The Council should investigate what needs to be done to complete the decommissioning process and if it can be backdated to the time that the offices physically ceased being used. Residents should be reimbursed for any overpayments.	Complete, needs clarification Links in with service charge review.
18	Communication is widely considered to be a problem both over bigger service changes such as the replacement of alarm systems and day to day issues such as notification of staff sickness.	The Council should build more time into consultation exercises with residents, creates more effective two way communication through the new Sheltered Housing Forum and other mechanisms and develops a customer service culture that treats residents as customers.	Service Review. Survey completed, results are being collated and we will be feeding back the results.
D	Cross Tenure Themes		
5	Residents would welcome the opportunity to be consulted over the possibility of paying for services such as support, ahead of them simply being withdrawn because the Council does not have any money to pay for them or an external income stream has been pulled. Residents would prefer to be given the option of paying themselves	In the development of a Sheltered Housing Policy the Council needs to involve residents in exploring the options for funding the service, including making use of the intensive housing management Housing Benefit loophole, paying for, or at least contributing towards, the cost of providing support, etc. This would help to future proof the sheltered housing service and manage	All options on how to support older people is being addressed at a County level involving health and social care. This will be addressed in the strategy however whatever the outcome it does need to be equitable. Not just for those that can pay.

	<p>but would want to know exactly what they would get for their money and how much they would have to pay. There is a growing acceptance amongst residents that the viability and sustainability of sheltered housing depends on the willingness of residents being open minded about the possibility of at least contributing to the cost of funding support where it cannot be provided freely.</p>	<p>the risk of the Visiting Support Service becoming over stretched and the Third Sector plundered due to a growing older population with increasing support needs.</p>	<p>Lifeline+ will feed into this</p>
7	<p>On the surface the Visiting Support Service appears to be working well and the model of signposting the availability of support in the Third Sector has real merit. However, residents have concerns about demand outstripping supply and the Support Service becoming overstretched as more and more people and agencies get to hear about it or if or when it is advertised. The Supported Housing Manager has done a lot of good work promoting the service to GP's, Hospital Discharge Teams, Social Workers, etc. but many sheltered residents are either unaware about the availability of the service or unclear about the role of Visiting Supporting Officers or how to access the service. There is real concern that some sheltered residents are slipping through the net due in part to the reduction in the number of visits residents now receive from the Sheltered Estate Officers.</p>	<p>Cambridgeshire County Council to be asked to share and / or present the outcomes of their proposed management review of the Visiting Support Service. The Service should be advertised to empower residents to self- refer even though this runs the risk of greatly increasing demand and put more pressure on the Support Service. Needs assessments need to be regularly updated to ensure that vulnerable Sheltered Housing residents are not falling through the net. Current vacancies need to be filled to ensure the team is fully resourced.</p>	<p>Good to hear that the Visiting Support service is working well. The team capacity is being reviewed and temporary/agency staff can be used if needed to support the service. Links in with Lifeline+.</p>

E	Outside our Influence		
14	<p>Across the country Sheltered Housing has come to be widely seen as a flawed model that no longer works in an age when it's reported older people want to stay in their own homes for as long as they can, that only a third of sheltered residents need regular support, there is no way for landlords to provide support as the funding has been cut and sheltered housing accommodation is of an inferior quality that does not meet the expectations of the next generation of prospective residents.</p>	<p>This Scrutiny Review acts as the catalyst for TPG to launch a campaign to reinvent Sheltered Housing as a form of retirement housing for older people with recognised support needs and people with disabilities. TPG would look to engage the support of Age UK and a campaigning organisation such as 38 Degrees to organise an online petition to get 100,000 signatures so that Sheltered Housing has to be debated in Parliament and receive wider media exposure.</p>	<p>F – outside of our influence.</p>

Going Forward:

- SCDC feedback to Scrutiny Review Team – 01/10/15 12pm to 1pm
- Develop an action plan which operational staff will update and report back to Sheltered Housing Forum (meets quarterly with the next meeting being on 15th October).
- Staff and residents to set up sub-groups/working groups as appropriate to look at specific areas of the service – e.g. to look at use of communal rooms.