

Scrutiny and Overview Committee 6 February 2012  
Leader and Cabinet 9 February 2012  
Housing Portfolio Holder 15 February 2012

# Sheltered Housing Support Service

## Scrutiny Report

## February 2012

South Cambridgeshire District Council

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## **Foreword by the Chairman of the task and finish group**

This report sets out the findings of a task and finish group that was set up to make recommendations regarding delivery of the sheltered housing service following externally imposed changes to funding.

South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) has always regarded the sheltered housing service as a crucial part of the housing function and taken pride in the quality of the service. The sheltered housing schemes offer support of a high standard to enable residents from a wide range of physical abilities and ages to live active and rewarding lives.

People are living longer and remaining fitter, so the Council's sheltered schemes are likely to become increasingly important. This is why the task and finish group has stressed the need to maintain the quality of the support service.

It was hoped that despite the economic climate, the County Council would recognise the ongoing importance of the support service and would maintain funding levels to enable proper provision to be made. However, the task and finish group was very concerned to hear early on in the review, that the funding would be reduced by around 34% in 2012/13. The group made very strong representations to have this restored, stressing the importance of the sheltered housing support service and the impact on the residents and wider community if the reduction went ahead. We also pointed out that the schemes offered very good value for money by preventing people needing more expensive forms of accommodation such as hospital or residential care.

The County Council has not reversed its decision, but it has undertaken to learn from our experiences over the coming months and revisit the funding decision if necessary.

In considering the various models of support, the group felt that the current model offered the best arrangement for safeguarding the core principles outlined in this report; and the "hub and spoke" model, although better than some other options, could offer only a diluted level of service.

Personally I feel that we must try to find a way to restore funding levels to something like the present level, either through the County or District Council or some other agency.

SCDC officers have put a lot of effort into devising the proposed structure described in this report. It will go quite a long way to maintaining significant elements of the present service and I would like to thank them for achieving a considerable amount with greatly reduced funding. But the fact remains that as a councillor, I would still prefer to try and maintain our sheltered housing support service in a form much closer to where it is now, rather than embarking on a journey where the destination is unclear, from which we will be unable to return, and which will I fear will result in a poorer level of service.

Finally I would like to thank the four residents who took part in all our meetings. They added a vital element of first-hand experience and constructive ideas. My thanks also to those councillors who participated.

Cllr Nigel Cathcart  
Chairman of the task and finish group

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Corporate Manager for Affordable Homes advised the Housing Portfolio Holder early in 2011 that funding changes were likely to be implemented affecting the sheltered housing service in 2012. The Portfolio Holder had already requested that any proposed changes to the sheltered housing service should have the benefit of both member and resident consultation before considering any report on the topic.
- 1.2 Supported by the Housing Portfolio Holder, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee therefore set up a task and finish group to help review the options. The group met eight times between July and December 2011.
- 1.3 During the course of the group's work, South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) learned in the autumn of 2011 that Cambridgeshire County Council would be reducing the Supporting People grants paid throughout the county for those sheltered housing residents entitled to benefits during 2012. For SCDC this would be a reduction from £13.63 to £9 per week per property.
- 1.4 The group was concerned to discover the County Council's limited consultation on this decision, leaving SCDC with no opportunity to contribute to it. It was not clear how or where the decision had been made within the County Council nor where the redirected funding would be spent.
- 1.5 The task and finish group voiced their fears that this cut was too harsh and might lead to people being put at risk. They voiced these concerns to the County Council, supporting calls for the decision to be changed.
- 1.6 The County Council later announced that the decision would stand, and that the sheltered housing contract would have to go through a competitive tendering process, with the new contract due to start in April 2013. This could mean that another organisation might provide the service in future.
- 1.7 The task and finish group consisted of nine members drawn from all political groups within the Council, and four sheltered housing residents.
- 1.8 The group initially comprised of:  
  
Cllrs: Richard Barrett, Val Barrett, Nigel Cathcart (chair), Alison Elcox, Jose Hales, Roger Hall, Liz Heazell, Deborah Roberts and David Whiteman-Downes (some members were unable to maintain attendance)  
  
Residents: Peter Abrahams, Wendy Head, Thora Saunders and Joan Spencer  
  
The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Mark Howell had an open invitation to all meetings of the task and finish group and was copied on all paperwork.
- 1.9 The terms of reference were "to make an evidence-based recommendation to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Cabinet regarding a fresh approach to delivering the sheltered housing service in light of externally imposed changes".

## 2. Setting the scene

- 2.1 Supporting People (SP) funding is provided by central government to the County Council to support people who are elderly, single-homeless, at risk of domestic violence, suffering mental health problems and so on, thus enabling residents to sustain their tenancies and remain independent.
- 2.2 A proportion of this is passed on to SCDC to help those residents in the Council's 43 sheltered housing schemes who are eligible for housing benefit. Other funding comes from the Housing Revenue Account and income from self-funding residents.
- 2.3 Approximately 1500 residents live in the council's sheltered housing schemes with a high proportion being single occupants. The sheltered housing service and support service are currently provided by 26 sheltered housing officers working in 3 teams across the district and each team is managed by a sheltered housing team leader.
- 2.4 The cost of the 24-hour alarm service in the sheltered properties and communal rooms forms part of the support charge.

## 3. Evidence gathering and research

- 3.1 In preparation for the review, the group read a number of publications including [\*More than just a few kind words!\*](#), from the National Housing Federation. This sets out some examples of successful sheltered housing support services around the country where significant savings had been made, whilst still achieving a high standard of service for those who needed it. The report also provides a useful summary of the national changes that sheltered housing has undergone in recent years and summaries the core values as well as options for service structures. This report was therefore used to help shape the thinking of the group.
- 3.2 A face-to-face support needs assessment was completed during the period December 2010 to April 2011 with 91% of the sheltered housing residents. This revealed:
  - 90% of residents rate the 24-hour alarm system as very important or important
  - 93% of residents rate living in a property suitable to their needs as very important or important
  - 54% of residents say that daily contact with a sheltered housing officer is not important (however the task and finish group wondered whether residents may only realise how much they valued the service once it was gone)
  - Of the 80% that currently have regular contact with the sheltered housing officer, only 39% see an officer 5 times per week
- 3.3 The findings led the task and finish group to consider whether some units needed to be 'de-designated'. The research also showed that those with support needs lived in broadly equal numbers across all of the schemes. Any attempt to de-designate a scheme would therefore need to be part of a long-term process and could not form part of this review.

- 3.4 The group considered whether the support service needed to be re-designed so that people who did not need it did not get it, or pay for it. Given the reducing funding, should the service be redirected to focus on those who actually needed it. The group heard that Supporting People funding would be contingent upon residents needs being assessed.
- 3.5 The effect of the 34% reduction in funding from the County Council would be compounded by the need to stop charging the current self-funders. The total budget for the support service would in effect be halved.
- 3.6 The group also considered the type of accommodation provided within the sheltered housing stock and the eligibility criteria for new residents. However, the group recognised that this was out of scope for this review and the focus needed to remain on the support service. There was also not enough time to do other work, such as formal benchmarking due to time pressures created by the funding and tendering deadlines.
- 3.7 The group acknowledged the need for extra-care housing and, noted that the Extra Care Strategy developed with the County Council, district councils and other registered providers, had identified as a priority up to three new schemes for South Cambridgeshire in the next five years.

**4. Core values for redesigning the future service**

- 4.1 The task and finish group developed a set of core values, which they felt should be applied to any redesigned support service:

Value	Notes
Community Links	Serving the wider community – organised and informal activities, value of communal rooms. There are some good examples locally but this can be explored and strengthened
Dignity	Essential for maintaining quality of life and independence
Human contact	Essential for health and wellbeing
Local hub	Particularly with communal rooms – base for delivery of other relevant services e.g. by County or NHS
Mutual support	Developing interdependence between people is more beneficial to health than independence. Sheltered housing schemes can be developed as mutually supportive communities.
Prevention	Promotes residents’ well-being; protects welfare, dignity and ability to stay in own home. Also low cost intervention could save significant sums for County (adult social care) and the NHS

- 4.2 The following table identifies the key elements of the proposed new service structure and shows how they link to the core values identified by the group.

### Sheltered Housing Support Model

Proposed Element	Possible team size	Matters arising	Link to core value	Funding notes
<p>The establishment of a visiting support team providing a targeted visiting support service to elderly and vulnerable people, within the sheltered schemes and the wider community.</p>	<p>9 officers – 3 per team</p> <p>The teams will be based at 3 hub offices within the district</p>	<p>This seeks to capture some of the benefits of a community based support model in which people are supported on their own homes</p> <p>The support will be focused on people who need* it rather than everyone who happens to live on that sheltered scheme.</p> <p>Better able to respond flexibly to individual's crisis, e.g. hospital discharge etc if officers not undertaking other routine duties, visits or social activities.</p> <p>The establishment of the visiting teams is a step towards supporting older and vulnerable people in the wider community to remain independent and preventing or delaying the need to move to extra care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping to prevent falls and ill health and promoting older people's welfare,</li> <li>• Supporting independence and promoting dignity</li> </ul>	<p>SP has decided that they want to move to a lump sum grant rather than individual grants from April 2012. This will be based on £9pw per property (£13.63 in 2011/12). The lump sum will only be for those entitled to benefit and represents less than £6.50 per property. Part of the support provided is for the alarm system monitoring, if we move to providing home visits only on a needs basis we should still be able to charge around £3pw for the alarm service (as it is provided for every property).</p>

\*'Need' is currently determined by the resident; in future it will be determined by a needs assessment. The task and finish group was concerned that some residents may slip through the net and lose the visits that they currently value and depend upon for regular human contact. Need should be defined in such a way that residents' quality of life is protected, at least at the present level.



Proposed Element	Possible team size	Matters arising	Link to core value	Funding notes
<p>Establish a team of officers to undertake estate management of a number of sheltered schemes within these same three areas, including the management of the communal facilities, testing of alarms and letting of sheltered properties.</p>	<p>12 staff and one team leader</p>	<p>Working with residents to ensure best use of the communal rooms, encouraging social interaction within the scheme and the wider community, including facilitating activities and events.</p> <p>This retains the current local knowledge and familiarity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting independence and promoting dignity</li> <li>• Promoting mutual support</li> <li>• Providing links to the wider community</li> </ul>	<p>The costs of these officers would fall partly on support (for the alarm checking) and partly on HRA general administration and partly on the Tenant Participation cost centre. More than half would still be charged to Sheltered and could be reflected in the service charges. In order to fund this service, it is important to move to actual service charges for residents. As, even with this a higher service charge there would be a considerable reduction in the total amount paid by residents, this is the best opportunity for moving to full cost service charges.</p>

Proposed Element	Possible team size	Matters arising	Link to core value	Funding notes
Expansion of the community Telecare team	TBC	To develop the use of community lifelines, including continued working with Cambridgeshire Community Services assistive technology team Many vulnerable people in the wider community already access these services and may well be the people the expanded service is offered to		Whilst there could be some set up costs, any additional service would be expected to attract additional income so there should not be any funding issues.
The hub spaces can be promoted to health and social care services to provide 'hot-desk space' to encourage a one-stop approach to the provision of services for elderly and vulnerable people within the sheltered schemes and the wider community	N/A	Service can be concentrated on some locations and delivered to others nearby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acting as a hub for the local delivery of wider services</li> </ul>	A charge would need to be made for any non-sheltered use of the communal facilities. This would need to recover any additional costs for utilities and make a contribution to the other costs of running the communal room. Residents will expect some financial benefit to be reflected in their service charge
Explore options of offering a 'menu service' to elderly and vulnerable people within sheltered schemes and the wider community, for example help with shopping, visits to GPs, a weekly, monthly or more frequent home visit etc.	Explore alongside work with voluntary sector e.g.; community wardens	This would need to be priced accordingly and will need more work, however could be explored with residents during consultation It would need to complement the work of existing organisations such as village wardens or car schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helping to prevent falls and ill health and promoting older people's welfare,</li> <li>Supporting independence and promoting dignity</li> </ul>	These would need to be at cost, minus any contribution that the General Fund could offer. At present around £17K pa is contributed towards "village warden schemes" operated by parishes and/or the voluntary sector.

## 5. Sheltered Housing Support Contract

- 5.1 The task and finish group was concerned to learn from the County Council that the sheltered housing support contract currently fulfilled by SCDC was to be put out to tender in 2011 to start from April 2012.
- 5.2 The group added their support to the discussions being held between senior officers and the County Council to seek more time. They invited the County portfolio holder to a meeting; however the group did not feel that they had the benefit of all the information they needed as he was new in post and was not accompanied by an officer.
- 5.3 The need for a delay in tendering the new support contracts for sheltered housing was discussed, and the lack of consultation so far. The County Council subsequently agreed to extend the current contract for one year and will now be tendering the service during 2012 to have a new contract in place for April 2013.

## 6. Summary of Review

Objectives of review	Achievement of review
Review findings of 2011 support needs assessment	Findings considered by group in July 2011 and used to inform the discussions on new service structures.
Review implications of the Supporting People changes	Updates given at each meeting of task and finish group  Met with County Portfolio Holder during October to raise concerns  Financial implications considered by the group
Examine current value for money indicators	Considered best way to deploy staff in relation to results of support needs assessment  Group considered ways to maintain the critical aspects of the service whilst adjusting lower level of funding.
Developing options for the Council in shaping its service delivery	Core values identified and adopted  Emerging model discussed September and further developed in October
Evaluate options and make recommendations	Group considered the responses to emerging model from consultation exercise held with staff teams and with the sheltered housing forums.  A model for sheltered housing recommended as way forward for South Cambs

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 The task and finish group has developed a number of recommendations. It should be noted that, apart from A and B, these recommendations are in response to changes imposed by the County Council and would not necessarily have been made otherwise.
- A. The quality of the support service provided to sheltered housing residents must be preserved in any new structure that is adopted
  - B. Work should continue towards increasing efficiency and value for money in the sheltered housing support service
  - C. Before the change to the Supporting People funding is formally implemented by the County Council, or changes to the service are made by SCDC, the portfolio holder and relevant director should attend a formal meeting with the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and Housing Portfolio Holder to pursue the case for a reversal of the decision, stressing the concerns of the task and finish group.
  - D. Any redesign of the sheltered housing service should encompass the core values of community links, dignity, human contact, local hub, mutual support, and prevention.
  - E. If a service redesign is necessary it should build on the model presented at section 4 of this report, and incorporate the best features of the existing model. It should seek to correct any shortcomings in the existing system and improve the overall quality and effectiveness of service.
  - F. The Portfolio Holder should consider developing a menu of options for paid-for support services to residents, whether living in sheltered accommodation or not. These would be in addition to services already provided and could be delivered by for example increasing the Council's support of those village warden schemes who can meet the required standard.
  - G. Cambridgeshire County Council should publish a full assessment of the impact on the residents of the District of the reduction in Supporting People funding.
  - H. Cambridgeshire County Council should fully consult with residents, SCDC and other organisations on future funding proposals before decisions are taken.