

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET – 16 JUNE 2015

Title of report	RE-DESIGNATION OF SUPPORTED HOUSING PROPERTIES
Key Decision	a) Financial Yes b) Community Yes
Contacts	Councillor Roger Bayliss 01530 411055 roger.bayliss@nwleicestershire.gov.uk Director of Housing Tel: 01530 454819 glyn.jones@nwleicestershire.gov.uk
Purpose of report	To seek Cabinet approval for the proposed approach to re-designating supported properties within the housing stock.
Reason for Decision	To provide a framework that enables the prompt letting of properties, an efficient use of the housing stock, and effectively meets current and future housing demand within the District.
Council Priorities	Value for Money Business and Jobs Homes and Communities Green Footprints Challenge
Implications:	
Financial/Staff	Financial implications associated with the adoption of the proposed approach include maximising the amount of collectable rent by minimising void periods and letting empty properties more quickly. Council tax obligations on long term void properties will also be minimised.
Link to relevant CAT	None
Risk Management	The approach provides a robust methodology for the allocation and letting of empty properties currently designated as 'supported'.
Equalities Impact Screening	Freeing up some empty properties to be allocated on the basis of general housing need will allow more people in housing need to be rehoused.
Human Rights	No implications

Transformational Government	No implications
Comments of Head of Paid Service	The report is satisfactory
Comments of Section 151 Officer	The report is satisfactory
Comments of Monitoring Officer	The report is satisfactory
Consultees	Housing Choices Team Housing Services Management Team Housing Management Working Group Tenant and Leaseholder Consultation Forum Corporate Leadership Team
Background papers	None
Recommendations	<p>IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT CABINET:</p> <p>A) REMOVE THE ‘SUPPORTED’ DESIGNATION OF THE FLATS AT CHERRY TREE COURT, MOIRA AND</p> <p>B) DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING TO RE-DESIGNATE THESE PROPERTIES, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING.</p> <p>C) DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING TO RE-DESIGNATE OTHER PROPERTIES IN FUTURE, AFTER CONSULTING WITH TENANTS AND WARD MEMBERS, AND IN CONSULTATION WITH THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING.</p>

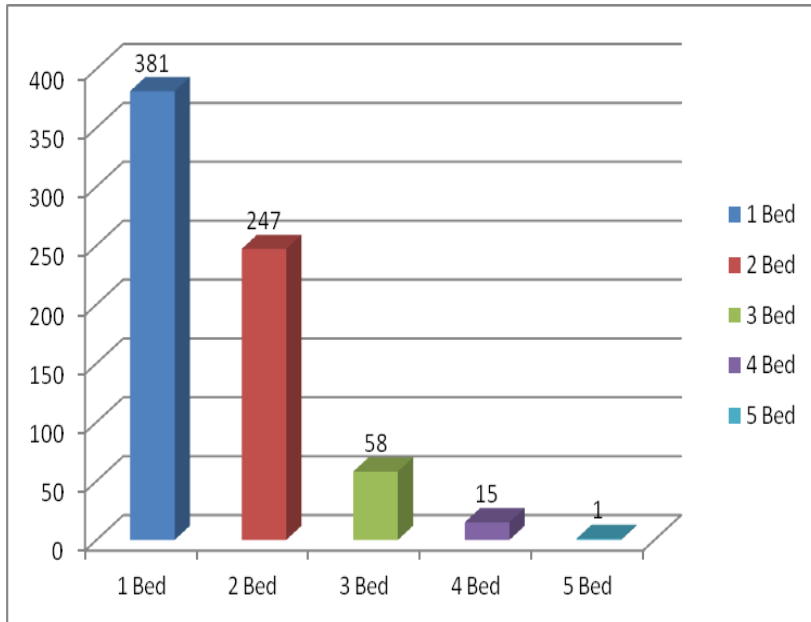
1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 We have 720 supported housing properties, 326 flats and 394 bungalows which were originally allocated to people over the age of 60 years, or over 55 years if they were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. This changed in 2010 with the introduction of Choice Based Lettings to people with a support need. The tenants are able to access the services of the Older Persons Team and were ‘designated’ as ‘supported’ for the purpose of Supporting People Funding in 2004.
- 1.2 The majority of the properties designated as supported have a hard wired pull cord system which links to the council’s 24/7 control centre.

- 1.3 A support need of existing tenants vary significantly from those who are simply over the age of 60 to those of any age who have recognised medical conditions, including mental health, substance abuse and those who have mobility problems.
- 1.4 Although initially our change of approach in 2010 did result in some empty properties being allocated, we are now experiencing an increase in the number of supported properties with low or no demand. There are currently 33 supported properties empty with no demand.
- 1.5 When allocating any property, we use the sub-regional choice based lettings scheme and initially advertise the properties locally. If we are unable to allocate a property due to low or no demand, we then advertise it on a sub-regional basis throughout Leicestershire, again through the choice based lettings scheme. This means eligible home seekers with a connection to one of the other councils participating in the sub-regional scheme but without a local connection to North West Leicestershire are able to express an interest in our available properties. However, even after opening up the properties more widely, we are still unable to let some of them which are mainly one and two bedroom flats.
- 1.6 In August 2014, we commenced a pilot scheme for hard to let properties of using Home Finder which is an on line system, predominately for private landlords to advertise their available properties. This enables home seekers without a local connection to any of the councils participating in the sub regional scheme to express an interest in our properties. To date, 13 properties have been let through Home Finder.
- 1.7 For the past three years, we have offered a financial incentive to households who are eligible to move to supported or sheltered accommodation and release family homes. Initially the financial incentive was £3,000 which was reduced to £2,000 in November 2014 to enable a financial incentive to be offered to people affected by the under occupation charge to move to smaller accommodation. To date 27 households have moved from larger properties to sheltered or supported properties, with little movement to supported flats as most people wishing to downsize have a preference to move to a bungalow.
- 1.8 In December 2014, we commenced a pilot scheme of using 'To Let' boards to advertise properties with low or no demand, but unfortunately this has not yet generated any direct interest from eligible home seekers.
- 1.9 On occasion, intensive housing management has been required where a number of tenants, often younger and with high support needs, have lived in supported flats in close proximity to each other. The proposed approach is intended to encourage more balanced communities at a local level.

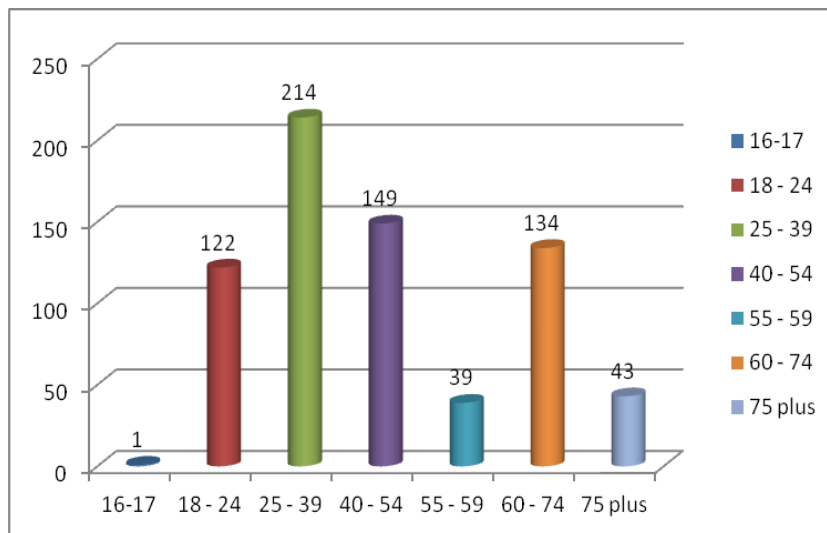
2.0 DEMAND

- 2.1 More than half of our waiting list demand (54%) is for one bedroom properties with a further 35% eligible for two bedroom properties. A breakdown is shown in the table below:



2.2 Our largest cohort, age-wise, is the 25-39 year olds who account for almost one-third of the waiting list. A breakdown is shown in table below. The average age of the main home seeker is 44 years old without a support need and under the current arrangement, they would not be eligible for the supported properties we currently have empty.

2.3 Although 25% of our waiting list are aged 60 years or over, the preference for many is to move to a one or two bedroom bungalow.



3.0 OPTIONS

3.1 There are a number of options available to address the issue of low demand, supported properties as detailed in the table below. Furthermore, the end of the Supporting People funding programme for older persons support in September 2015 provides an opportunity

to remove the requirement to live in a supported / sheltered property to be able to access support from the Older Persons Team.

Ref	Option Detail	Comments
A	Continue to advertise the properties through the sub regional choice based lettings scheme and Home Finder.	This is the 'do nothing' option. We do not expect demand for supported properties to increase and this option will result in homes remaining empty and a reduced income to the council.
B	Remove the designation of 'supported' from all flats and bungalows and allocate all properties on the basis of housing need.	This blanket re-designation would increase the availability of properties to home seekers, particularly those with a housing need, irrespective of age and vulnerability. There would be no preferential access to housing provision for older people.
C	Remove the designation of 'supported' from all flats, and retain the designation of 'supported' for bungalows, specifically for people over the age of 60 years or with a medical need for ground floor accommodation.	The re-designation will increase the availability of properties to home seekers, particularly those with a housing need, and retain a housing provision specifically for older people or people with a medical/mobility need for ground floor accommodation. A local lettings plan will be introduced.
D	Remove the designation of 'supported' properties on a street by street basis where there is no or low demand from eligible home seekers and where there is clear demand for general needs accommodation.	The re-designation will increase the availability of some properties to home seekers, particularly those with a housing need, irrespective of age and vulnerability. It will also retain a housing provision specifically for older people or people with a medical/mobility need for ground floor accommodation. A local lettings plan will be introduced.

- 3.2 Option D is the preferred option as it enables a street by street approach to be taken and provides the flexibility to remove the designation of 'supported' properties where there is low or no demand, following a period of consultation.
- 3.3 It is proposed to introduce a local lettings plan for each scheme or area to include a sensitive approach to lettings to ensure we achieve a balanced community based on household type and economic activity, and for the plan to be reviewed and if necessary refreshed after a twelve month period.

4.0 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Landlords considering changing the designation of properties are expected to consult with existing residents before re-designating the properties. A landlord who did not consult the tenants residing in the properties to be re-designated was referred to the Local Government Ombudsman who concluded there was maladministration by the landlord.
- 4.2 During a workshop on 25 March 2015, the views of the tenant representatives at the Housing Management Working Group were obtained on the allocation of supported properties. Tenants unanimously supported the recommendation to undertake a pilot in two locations and to consult with existing tenants regarding the removal of the 'supported' designation for flats. The two locations are Cherry Tree Court in Moira and Central Avenue, Ibstock. There are currently several empty flats at Cherry Tree Court, and difficulty was recently experienced allocating empty flats at Central Avenue.
- 4.3 The Tenants and Leaseholder Consultation Forum were verbally informed of the outcome of the workshop, and received a report on this proposal at its meeting on 18 May 2015. The Forum supported the approach being proposed (Option D).
- 4.4 Consultation with the tenants at Cherry Tree Court Moira has been undertaken and 83% of residents were in favour of the proposal to remove the 'supported' designation for flats. Details of the comments received are contained in Appendix A.
- 4.5 Consultation with the tenants at Central Avenue Ibstock is due to be completed by the end of May 2015 and a recommended way forward will follow consideration of the outcome of this consultation.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The key financial implication is the rent loss from empty properties. In 2014/15 the total rent loss was £86k for supported properties.
- 5.2 Each supported property attracts a weekly service charge of £0.46p/w or £23.09 per annum and this could no longer be charged if properties were allocated on a general needs basis and the occupants did not require the hard wired lifeline service through to central control 24/7. For Cherry Tree Court the loss of income would be £554.16 per annum (24 properties x £23.09). However, if one empty property was let this amount would be recovered in less than 9 weeks as the gross rent is £63.00 per week. We currently have three long term voids which have a combined total rent loss of £16,000 to date.
- 5.3 If the three properties at Cherry Tree Court are let, the combined annual rental income will be £10,296.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 If the proposal to redesignate Cherry Tree Court, Moira is approved, the impact will be assessed, and subject to a positive outcome, we will consider the re-designation of other properties at Central Avenue, Ibstock and a range of other locations across the district.

Instead of seeking Cabinet approval for each and every re-designation, it is being proposed that Cabinet delegate authority to the Director of Housing to make these decisions after consulting with tenants and local Members, and in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

Cherry Tree Court Consultation

A letter was sent to the 24 residents of Cherry Tree Court on 17 April 2015, informing them that the council was considering changing the designation of the properties and that we would be visiting them on 24 April 2015.

20 of the 24 tenants were seen on 24 April 2015 and one telephoned to provide their comments.

20 (83%) agreed with the proposal to remove the 'supported' designation
1 (4%) did not agree the proposal to remove the 'supported' designation
3 (13%) chose not to take part in the consultation

The comments received were:

- Better idea as properties will not stand empty, stop squatters.
- OK with change to general needs. Concerned people will not take the flats due to rubbish and Woulds Court (empty sheltered housing schemes) being empty.
- Can't see why not. Hope the new tenants will look after the properties.
- Undesirables put off decent people from staying in the area.
- That's alright if decent people. The place needs tidying to make it look more presentable.
- Generally the support is not there like it used to be. No problem with proposal
- No objections with the proposal.
- May cause anti-social behaviour problems with noise.
- Doesn't want issues in relation to drug taking in the area.
- No problem with the proposal.
- What will happen with the pull cord system? Should change to fill the empty properties.
- Not bothered if we change them
- Doesn't mind them changing
- Would prefer over 40 years. Afraid younger people will have wild parties, drugs and neighbour problems.
- Would I be able to opt out of support and not pay? Have had noise problems and this could happen again.
- Happy for the properties to be re-designated. It would not affect me unless they were noisy.
- No objections to going general needs. Worried about teenagers moving in.
- No objections.
- Will I lose my support?
- I would like the empty properties to be occupied. It would be nice to see some more residents in the area.