



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	Review of Older Persons Housing
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	7 September 2016
Key Decision:	Yes
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	No
Directorate:	Chief Executive's
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Ward(s)	All

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask Cabinet to consider Northampton Partnership Homes' review of the Council's older persons' housing and to approve changes to the housing allocations policy and the classification of some of the housing stock in order to improve the suitability and quality of older persons' housing.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the findings of Northampton Partnership Homes' review of the Council's older persons' housing (set out in its Older Persons' Housing Strategy, which is attached to this report as Appendices 1 and 2);
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the rebranding of the Council's 'sheltered housing' as 'older persons' housing' and authorises changes to the housing allocations policy (as set out in Paragraphs 3.2.5 - 3.2.7 of this report) in order to define these properties as being suitable for people aged 55 or over and determine the circumstances in which they may be let to people with disabilities who are under the age of 55;

- 2.3 That Cabinet approves the reclassification of its 'general needs' bungalows to 'older persons' housing', when they become vacant and are assessed as suitable for older people, in order that all future lettings are made to people who are either aged 55 or over or have a disability, require accessible housing and are under the age of 55; and
- 2.4 That Cabinet approves, in principle, the reclassification (to 'general needs housing') of up to 600 flats and bungalows that are currently designated as 'sheltered housing' but are assessed as being unsuitable for older people, and authorises Northampton Partnership Homes to consult with the affected residents, in three phases, in order to establish their housing preferences and their current and future needs, and to recommend to the Council which schemes should be reclassified and when;
- 2.5 That Cabinet delegates to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing and the Section 151 Officer, the authority to approve the reclassification of the older persons' housing schemes to 'general needs housing' after Northampton Partnership Homes has consulted with the affected residents and following consideration of Northampton Partnership Homes' recommendations; and
- 2.6 That Cabinet receives further reports on the implementation of Northampton Partnership Homes' Older Persons' Strategy and the Council's development of a Multi Agency Older Persons' Housing Strategy that takes into account the views of a wider range of stakeholders, including Registered Providers, private sector developers and housing providers, health and social care, and the voluntary and community sector.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 Building on an external strategic review of Northampton's sheltered housing undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) in 2012, Northampton Partnership Homes analysed the CIH's recommendations, developed a vision for designated older persons' housing and support services and commissioned the development of an Older Persons' Housing Strategy (see Appendix 1).
- 3.1.2 As part of this work, Northampton Partnership Homes and the consultants it employed to develop its Older Persons' Housing Strategy reassessed the outcomes of the research undertaken by the CIH in 2012 – which identified properties within the Council's housing stock that would not meet the needs of older people – and carried out 'concept testing' to obtain the views of sheltered housing tenants' on the options they would choose if their scheme ceases to be designated as older persons' housing.
- 3.1.3 Although Northampton Partnership Homes' Older Persons' Housing Strategy also considers other matters – including NPH's role in the development of Extra Care Housing and mixed tenure housing, and in the delivery of housing related support and preventative services – this report focuses on the need for changes to be made to the classification of the Council's housing stock in order to improve the suitability and quality of older persons' housing in the borough.

A Vision for Older Persons' Housing

3.1.4 The key objectives of Northampton Partnership Homes' review of the Council's older persons' housing and the development of its Older Persons' Housing Strategy are to:

- Enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible;
- Improve the quality of older persons' housing to enable people to live happy and healthy lives in an enriched community;
- Offer housing choices to meet the needs of current and future generations of older people; and
- Ensure that specialist housing and support is targeted to those most in need.

Older Persons' Housing in Northampton

3.1.5 At present, there are a total of 2,589 units of sheltered housing in the borough and, of these, 2,047 (79%) are owned by the Council and 542 (21%) are owned by Registered Providers. In addition to these homes, there are 559 units of leasehold retirement housing and 387 units of Extra Care Housing.

3.1.6 In addition to the council tenants who are aged 55 or over and living in the 2,047 units of sheltered housing, 3,863 (38%) of the tenants living in the Council's general needs housing stock are aged 50 or over.

Changes affecting Designated Older Persons' Housing

3.1.7 Over the years, more and more of the Council's stock of designated older persons' housing has been occupied by mixed age groups due to changes in the way in which tenancies have been allocated and support services have been delivered.

3.1.8 In order to meet the urgent housing needs of younger people who have a disability – and, sometimes, to prevent homes being left empty – a significant proportion of the designated older persons' housing has been allocated to people under the age of 55, resulting in many of the designated blocks being occupied by mixed age groups.

3.1.9 The problem has been compounded by the fact that the standard sheltered housing support service has been replaced by a housing related support service that is provided to those tenants who are assessed as needing it and is not age specific.

3.1.10 These changes have proved unpopular with some tenants who have said that their enjoyment of their homes has been reduced, have raised concerns about their personal security and have stated that “this is no longer sheltered housing”.

3.1.11 For these reasons, Northampton Partnership Homes is very keen to address the problems caused by housing allocations and the inconsistency of service delivery, and to set a clear direction for the Council's designated older persons' housing.

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 In order to achieve its 'Vision for Older Persons' Housing' and improve the suitability, quality and accessibility of older persons' housing, NPH has recommended that:

- 'Sheltered housing' is rebranded as 'older persons' housing';
- The housing allocations policy is changed in order to define older persons' housing as being suitable for people aged 55 or over and determine the exceptional circumstances in which it may be let to people with disabilities who are under the age of 55;
- All of the Council's 'general needs' bungalows are reclassified as 'older persons' housing' (if they are assessed as being suitable for older people) when they become vacant and are then re-let;
- Up to 600 flats and bungalows (currently classified as 'sheltered housing / older persons' housing') are reclassified as 'general needs housing' (if they are assessed as being unsuitable for older people) following consultation with the affected tenants and consideration of their housing preferences and their future housing and support needs; and
- A new 'standard' is set for all designated older persons' housing.

Rebranding 'sheltered housing' as 'older persons' housing'

3.2.2 In light of the review and the feedback received from tenants, staff and other stakeholders, NPH has concluded that the term 'older persons' housing' more accurately reflects the housing and services that it is providing for older people than the current term, 'sheltered housing'.

3.2.3 Although some exceptions may need to be made in the case of younger people who have a disability and require accessible housing, it will be made clear that designated older persons' housing is specifically for people who are aged 55 or over.

3.2.4 New marketing material will be produced to reflect the new terminology and set out very clearly what housing and support services are provided in older persons' housing.

Changing the housing allocations policy

3.2.5 In order to prevent, or at least limit, the extent to which designated blocks of older persons' housing are occupied by mixed age groups, NPH has proposed that the housing allocations policy is changed to reflect the fact that designated 'older persons' housing' should normally only be let to people who are aged 55 or over.

3.2.6 Acknowledging that there will be occasions when someone under the age of 55 has an urgent need for accessible housing, NPH has suggested that the housing allocations policy allows older persons' housing to be allocated, as an exception, to people who are under the age of 55, have a disability and an urgent need for accessible housing but no other suitable accommodation can be made available to them.

3.2.7 It is proposed, therefore, that the wording of the housing allocations policy is changed to identify the circumstances in which older persons' housing may be offered to a younger person who has a disability and an urgent need for accessible housing.

Reclassification of the Council's bungalows as 'older persons' housing' when vacant

3.2.8 From discussions with older tenants who are contemplating a move to alternative accommodation – including tenants who are under-occupying family homes – it is clear that a significant proportion of them would prefer to move into a bungalow.

3.2.9 In order to make optimum use of the Council's stock of 444 'general needs' bungalows, Northampton Partnership Homes has recommended that, when these homes become vacant, an assessment is carried out to establish whether or not they are suitable for older people and, if they are, that they should be reclassified as 'older persons' housing' before they are re-let.

3.2.10 This means that, in future, all bungalows that become vacant will be let to people who are aged 55 or over or, exceptionally, to people under the age of 55 who have a disability and an urgent need for accessible housing but no other suitable accommodation can be made available to them.

Reclassification of up to 600 homes as 'general needs housing' when vacant

3.2.11 When it undertook its external strategic review of Northampton's sheltered housing in 2012, the Chartered Institute of Housing identified properties within the Council's housing stock that would not meet the needs of older people.

3.2.12 As part of their review of older persons' housing, NPH and its consultants have reviewed the Chartered Institute of Housing's assessment of the suitability of the Council's sheltered housing stock and identified 600 homes that appear to be unsuitable for use as older persons' housing.

3.2.13 Although detailed consultation will need to take place with all of the affected tenants and their relatives / advocates (to establish their housing preferences and their future housing and support needs) before the Council decides how, when and if each scheme is reclassified as 'general needs housing', NPH has proposed that the 600 properties are considered for reclassification in 3 phases, starting with the sheltered housing that is assessed as being the most unsuitable for older people.

3.2.14 Throughout the review – and on a number of occasions in the Older Persons Housing Strategy – Northampton Partnership Homes has stressed the importance of continuing with the 'concept testing' that it has piloted, in order to fully understand the views of those tenants whose homes are being reclassified.

3.2.15 All tenants affected by the reclassification of their homes will be consulted (to establish their housing preferences and their future housing and support needs) and will be asked to choose one of 3 housing options:

- Move to another designated older persons' property that meets their needs;
- Remain in their existing home with a dispersed alarm (and a housing related support service if they are assessed as needing the support); or
- Remain in their existing home as a 'general needs' tenant.

- 3.2.16 NPH will work with tenants whose homes are to be reclassified in order to assist their decision making, and staff will identify suitable homes for affected tenants to consider. Tenants will also be given the opportunity to change their minds and choose a different housing option if they do so within a reasonable period of time.
- 3.2.17 NPH has stated that, based on its initial 'concept testing' pilot with tenants, a very small proportion of tenants (less than 5%) would want to move and most would be happy to remain in their existing home with a dispersed alarm (and a housing related support service if they are assessed as needing the support).
- 3.2.18 Over time, however, NPH expects that a larger proportion of older tenants will decide to transfer to alternative, more suitable older persons' housing when they see the homes that are on offer and are confident they will be helped to organise their move.

A new 'standard' for all designated older persons' housing

- 3.2.19 A new lettings standard has been developed to ensure that all designated older persons' housing is not only accessible but it also represents an attractive 'offer'.
- 3.2.20 The specification for the new lettings standard has been developed by Northampton Partnership Homes and has been considered and approved by its Tenant Improvement Panel and Operations Committee. When older persons' housing is let, it will have a level access shower, it will be decorated throughout, it will have lowered door thresholds (so that a ramp can be installed if needed), it will have sensor activated security lighting to the front of the property and floodlighting to the rear and, in the case of bungalows, it will have ramp access at the front and back.
- 3.2.21 Although NPH has not yet made any detailed assumptions or estimates of the additional financial costs that are likely to be incurred as a result of introducing the new lettings standard or, indeed, the likely impact on the level of voids and refusals, financial modelling is planned and will be taken into account in the revised Asset Management Plan and the HRA Business Plan.

3.3 Choices (Options)

- 3.3.1 Cabinet can note the findings of Northampton Partnership Homes' review of the Council's older persons' housing (set out in its Older Persons' Housing Strategy).
- 3.3.2 Cabinet can note the findings of Northampton Partnership Homes' review of the Council's older persons' housing (set out in its Older Persons' Housing Strategy) and approve changes to the housing allocations policy and the classification of the Council's stock of bungalows.
- 3.3.3 Cabinet can note the findings of Northampton Partnership Homes' review of the Council's older persons' housing (set out in its Older Persons' Housing Strategy), approve changes to the housing allocations policy and the classification of the Council's stock of bungalows, and delegate to the Chief Executive (in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing and the Section 151 Officer) the authority to approve the reclassification of up to 600 units of older persons' housing.
- 3.3.4 Cabinet can choose to do nothing.

- 3.3.5 As Northampton Partnership Homes' comprehensive review of the Council's older persons' housing has highlighted the need for a fresh, more strategic approach to the provision of suitable, better quality housing that enables older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible, doing nothing or just noting the findings of the review are not recommended as an option because they will do nothing to reduce the number of older people living in unsuitable council housing.
- 3.3.6 Although consideration was given to taking only limited action – by making changes to the housing allocations policy and reclassifying the 'general needs' bungalows (where suitable) to 'older persons' housing' – this option is not recommended because it would not deal with those housing schemes that are currently designated as 'sheltered housing' but are unsuitable for older people.
- 3.3.7 The option described in Paragraph 3.3.3 is recommended because it will enable Northampton Partnership Homes to review the suitability of the Council's older persons' housing and ensure that it is suitable, of a high quality and enables older people to live independently in their own homes (and to live happy and healthy lives in an enriched community) for as long as possible;

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

- 4.1.1 The action that the Council is proposing to take is in line with Council policy and reflects the priorities in the Corporate Plan 2016-20.

4.2 Resources and Risk

- 4.2.1 Although Northampton Partnership Homes has not yet assessed the cost of any reconfiguration or adaptations work as a result of reclassifying the older persons' housing as 'general needs housing' and reclassifying the Council's stock of bungalows as older persons' housing, the overall cost is expected to be significant and will have to be factored into the revised Asset Management Plan and the impact on the current HRA Business Plan will need to be reviewed and reported on.
- 4.2.2 As the tenants who choose to move out their homes have the option of remaining in their existing home with a dispersed alarm – and a housing related support service if they are assessed as needing the support – they will not be entitled to a home loss payment. They will, however, be provided with financial and practical help with removals, the disconnection and reconnection of white goods, 12 months' post redirection and, if they are vulnerable, packing and unpacking. Although this assistance is unlikely to cost more than £1,000 per move, the cost of reclassifying the older persons' housing could be substantial if a large proportion of the tenants affected by reclassification elect to move rather than stay put.
- 4.2.3 The cost of upgrading the older persons' housing to a higher lettable standard (including provision for the storage of mobility scooters) may also be considerable. Although Northampton Partnership Homes has confirmed that the extra cost can be met from within the current voids budget and the annual capital programme, this may require some reprioritisation of the works.

4.2.4 Although the Cabinet is recommended to approve, 'in principle' the reclassification of up to 600 units of older persons' housing, formal approval will be considered, on a scheme-by-scheme basis, by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing and the Section 151 Officer. Before making a decision on whether or not to approve the reclassification, the Council will receive full details of the tenant consultation and the financial implications of reclassification.

4.3 Legal

4.3.1 Pursuant to section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948, the Council may make arrangements for providing residential accommodation for persons aged 18 years or over who by reason of age, illness, disability or any other circumstances are in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available to them. In making such arrangements, the Council is required to have regard to the welfare of all persons for whom accommodation is provided, and in particular to the need for providing accommodation of different descriptions suited to different descriptions of such persons.

4.3.2 Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 provides that a local authority landlord must maintain such arrangements as it considers appropriate to enable those of its secure tenants who are likely to be substantially affected by a matter of housing management to be informed of the authority's proposals in respect of the matter and to make their views known to the authority within a specified period. Before making a decision on the matter, the authority shall consider any representations made to it in accordance with those arrangements.

4.3.3 Section 11A of the Housing Act 1985 provides a local housing authority to provide welfare services in connection with the provision of housing accommodation by them as accord with the needs of those persons.

4.3.4 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 sets out the new public sector equality duty replacing the previous duties in relation to race, sex and disability and extending the duty to all the protected characteristics i.e. race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership and gender reassignment. The public sector equality duty requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity; and
- Foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

4.3.5 The Equality Duty must be complied with before and at the time that a particular policy is under consideration or decision is taken - that is, in the development of policy options, and in making a final decision. A public body cannot satisfy the Equality Duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.

4.3.6 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 impose specific duties on certain public bodies to enable them to perform the Equality Duty more effectively, including a requirement to publish information to demonstrate its compliance with the duty imposed by s.149 Equality Act 2010 and also to publish its equality objectives.

4.3.7 By virtue of Section 168(3) of the Housing Act 1996 “when the authority makes an alteration to their allocations scheme reflecting a major change of policy, they shall within a reasonable period of time take such steps as they consider reasonable to bring the effect of the alteration to the attention of those likely to be affected by it.”

4.3.8 Accordingly the Council will need to publicise these changes.

4.4 Equality and Health

4.4.1 A full Community Impact Assessment has been completed.

4.4.2 By ensuring that tenants are housed in accommodation that is suitable for their needs (in terms of size, type and accessibility), NPH’s Older Persons’ Housing Strategy will improve the wellbeing and life chances of people with protected characteristics, including older people and people with disabilities, and it will, therefore, have a positive impact on Equality and Diversity.

4.4.3 The review of older persons’ housing and the development of this Strategy is part of the Council’s commitment to improving communities and our town as a place to live. During all stages of this project, the Council will work closely with NPH, have due regard to its Public Sector Duty and continue to work to tackle discrimination and inequality and contribute to developing a fairer society.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

4.5.1 As explained in its Older Persons’ Housing Strategy, Northampton Partnership Homes has consulted extensively with a wide range of stakeholders, including tenants.

4.5.2 All sheltered housing tenants were consulted by way of a questionnaire, and approximately 40 tenants in some of the blocks that have been identified as no longer suitable for older people were visited and questionnaires completed. In January 2016, NPH consulted almost 800 general needs tenants aged 50 or over (20% of the total). Of those who completed the questionnaire, more than two thirds expressed no desire to move in the future and, of those who expressed an interest in moving, the vast majority said that they would prefer to live in a bungalow.

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

4.6.1 The action proposed will help meet 3 of the priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- **Safer Communities:** It will help older people to feel safe and secure by ensuring that they are able to access suitable older persons’ housing and achieve and maintain their independence.

- **Housing for Everyone:** It will improve the suitability and quality of older persons' housing and, by reclassifying up to 600 units of older persons' housing and increasing the supply of bungalows that are offered to older people who are seeking to 'downsize' from their under-occupied council homes, it will release much needed family accommodation.
- **Working Hard and Spending your Money Wisely:** It will help Northampton Partnership Homes to make better use of the Council's housing stock, and to manage and maintain the housing stock more efficiently. It will also provide more flexibility if Housing Benefit rates for supported housing are 'capped' at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Northampton Partnership Homes' Older Persons' Housing Strategy

Appendix 2 – Northampton Partnership Homes' Older Persons' Housing Strategy Appendices

Background Papers

Community Impact Assessment

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