

Sheltered Housing Forum

Notes on third meeting: 27th August at Shilaker Court

25 Residents attended the second meeting of the Forum:

Alan Gillan	Geoffrey Crimes
Pat Foxwell	Frederic Haworth
Pauline Melson	Patrick Beirne
Peter Anderson	Mr Gray
Kanthi Gunassekera	Ron Kirkwood
David McKay	Chris Majczyk
Norman Moulden	Angela Sinclair
Mrs Ahmad	Mrs P Stretch
Pat O'Gallaghan	Y Min
Joan Browne	Cynthia Stone
Tom Brown	L Belan
Jerzey Zusin	J Kerketta
K Burgess	

They represented 12 different schemes

24 Creswick Rd	Ditchley Court
St Andrews Rd	Lindsey House B
Shilaker Court	Arundel House
Harleyford Manor	Pembroke House
13 Bedford Rd	Bakers House
Ellis Court	Hawthorne Court

Also present

Michael Wheatley	Strategic Involvement Officer (Ealing Homes)
Sharon Manners	Acting Lettings and Support Manager (Ealing Council)
Diana Ohanian	Community Housing Officer (Ealing Council)

Item one: Allocations policy and decant arrangements

Sharon Manners (Acting Lettings and Support Manager) spoke to the group. She said that last year 190 sheltered housing flats/bed-sits were let to new tenants. On average it takes 3 months to find a new tenant when a property becomes empty.

Some schemes are easier to let than others. Bed-sits can take up to four months before a new tenant can be found.

Efforts have been made to encourage people to move into sheltered housing including an approach to Age Concern and other similar agencies. However, these have not been very successful.

As a result of the low demand a review of sheltered housing is currently under way. A result of this review is likely to be the closure of some schemes. Some members expressed surprise that flats in London could remain empty for so long given the demand for housing generally.

The question was asked, "What is sheltered Housing?" Sharon replied that to qualify for sheltered housing there must be a support need that requires daily contact with the CHO (warden). Several members queried this statement saying that they did not have daily contact with the CHO. Sharon replied that the CHO had probably decided that less frequent contact was necessary and this would be in the individuals support plan.

The suitability of new tenants was also raised. An example was given of one new tenant being very abusive to other residents and nothing seems to be done about it. Diana assured the group that action is being taken but there are issues of confidentiality that mean individual cases cannot

be discussed. Other examples of anti-social behaviour were then forthcoming.

It was agreed that due to confidentiality it is not possible to discuss individual cases. However, where residents are affected by ASB a way needs to be found to reassure them that action is being taken against the perpetrator. In answer to a question Sharon said that introductory tenancies had been considered in the past. However, they had not proved effective in reducing the time taken to evict an unwanted tenant. The Council may consider reintroducing them in the future.

There are three routes to becoming a sheltered housing resident:

1. A transfer from another non-sheltered council home.
2. Via the application process.
3. Via homeless families.

Sharon was asked about what checks are carried out on the suitability of prospective tenants. In some cases this is difficult, as people do not always tell the truth. More is known about tenants requesting a transfer but information on cases dealt with by Homeless families is often limited.

The group felt that more could and should be done by the homeless families section to find out about a possible new tenant. This could save a lot of problems in the long term.

Sharon then talked about the policy for assisting sheltered housing tenants who will be required to move if the scheme that they live in is "decommissioned", meaning that it will no longer be used for sheltered housing.

Copies of the “Decant Policy” were made available and Sharon can provide further copies on request. The “Decant Policy” sets out what tenants are entitled to if they are required to move by the Council. It covers such matters as:

- The type of property you can expect to be offered
- The practical support you will receive
- The financial assistance you will be entitled to and
- Any special help you may receive.

Sharon said that she would expect the process to take six to twelve months once a decision to “decommission” a scheme had been made.

When asked how many offers of alternative accommodation would be made? Sharon replied as many as necessary until a suitable property could be found. Could this be outside of the borough? Yes.

Sharon said that, as residents moved out of sheltered housing the flats they are leaving will not be left empty. They will be used for general housing. Currently sheltered housing is only being offered to applicants who meet the criteria and they are not necessarily being made aware of the sheltered housing review. Should these people be required to move they may not qualify for home-loss payments if they have not occupied their home for twelve months.

As there were no more questions for Sharon, Michael thanked her for attending the meeting.

Item two: visit to Gloucester

As it had not been possible for anybody from Ealing Homes or the Council to attend the meeting to discuss

Grounds Maintenance issues the meeting went on to discuss the report on the fact-finding visit to Gloucester. A copy of the report was circulated to all members and some of the “Action Points” were discussed.

1. **Changing the name of the Forum:** It was agreed that a different name should be adopted. Michael said that he would write to all the Forum members asking them to put forward suggestions. These could be considered at the next meeting and the best one adopted along with the constitution.
2. **Senior Management support for the group:** Members felt that at the moment they were receiving support from management but this needs to continue. There needs to be evidence that managers are taking notice of what the group is saying otherwise what is the point of meeting.
3. **Small Estate Scheme Budget:** It was agreed that a part of the Small Estate Scheme Budget should be set aside specifically for sheltered housing schemes. Deciding which projects are approved should be a function of the Sheltered Housing Forum.
4. **Sheltered Housing Handbook:** A new sheltered housing handbook and directory of sheltered housing could help generate interest in becoming a resident in a sheltered housing scheme. Residents should be involved in developing these.

Item three: Issues for next meeting and venue.

The next meeting is due to be held on 8th October. It was agreed that the group would still like somebody to come and talk to them about the problems with grounds maintenance. However, it is more important that

information on the Sheltered Housing Review is heard as soon as possible. It was agreed that Michael would contact Amanda Dade and ask her if she will have anything to report by 8th October. If necessary the date of the meeting may be changed in order to ensure information is received at the earliest opportunity.

Two possible venues were put forward for the next meeting, Ditchley Court and Lindsey House.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Wheatle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Strategic Involvement Officer

28th August 2008