

Bolsover District Council

Executive

31st October 2016

Hard to Let – Sheltered Housing Update.

This report is public

Report of the Leader of the Council

Purpose of the Report

To obtain delegated authority for the Assistant Director Housing and Community Safety to procure and appoint an appropriate contractor to undertake the upgrade of the heating systems at Victoria House, Creswell and Woburn House, Blackwell as the initial phase of a wider scheme to upgrade the Council's Sheltered Housing schemes.

1 Report Details

Background

1.1. The Council has undertaken a significant amount of work in respect of developing a strategy for Sheltered Housing. A comprehensive report on that Strategy will be brought to a future meeting of this committee. On the basis of the work that has been undertaken and in particular work with tenants it is clear that two issues need to be addressed to promote the sustainability of the Sheltered Housing schemes and to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of local residents. The key issues that have been identified are:

- The current schemes all feature communal heating with costs recovered by way a standard charge to all residents. These communal heating systems have been installed for a number of years, are inefficient against current standards and are now approaching the stage where they will be beyond economic repair. In addition to the increasing difficulty with maintaining the systems they lack what are now seen as essential features such as individually controlled thermostats and individual occupier accounts reflecting usage at each property.
- Secondly, of the 198 sheltered housing units managed by the Council some 88 are bedsits with the remaining 110 being single bedroom flats. Bedsits no longer meet the expectations or aspirations of either our tenants or our potential tenants.

One of the results of not fully meeting tenant expectations is that the majority of the sheltered housing schemes are affected by a relatively high level of hard to let properties or voids. This reduces income and represents a lost opportunity to meet

the needs of elderly local residents who require the support and appropriate facilities to allow them to benefit from a more independent lifestyle.

- 1.2. In the light of the above the Council has adopted an approach of modernising our sheltered properties to provide more efficient and individually controlled heating systems, whilst looking to convert the existing bedsits into one bedroom flats. All seven of the Sheltered Housing schemes need upgrading to meet the Bolsover Safe and Warm Scheme, while five of the schemes need some degree of remodelling in order to convert existing bedsits into one bedroom flats. This amounts to a major refurbishment programme which will require a two to three year period to implement. Given the extent of the work that needs to be undertaken the Council has identified the two highest priority schemes where it is seeking to commence work within the next six months. The two schemes concerned are detailed in the sections below.
- 1.3. The first priority is Victoria House at Creswell which is in urgent need of a heating upgrade. The existing system is beyond economic repair and is currently being operated by way of a temporary heating rig that has been purchased by the Council. The proposals for Victoria House include replacing the boiler together with the internal pipework. Each flat will be fitted with a controllable heating system with a heat meter, while bathrooms will be upgraded to include a level access shower. The fire alarm system will be upgraded with redecoration of the communal areas following on from the other work being completed. An additional sum has been included to install a false ceiling, and for a specialist contractor to remove patches in the current roof which is required as there is asbestos present on site. The contract to carry out the works detailed is currently being progressed by way of utilising existing framework agreements through East Midlands Efficiency at an estimated cost of £0.6m. This estimated cost excludes the scheme of redecoration which will be undertaken through existing contractual arrangements.
- 1.4. The second priority is the work at Woburn House Blackwell where a heating upgrade in line with the improvements proposed at Victoria House is recommended. Currently one of the four boilers in the current system is beyond economic repair and it is important to progress with a new system before the position deteriorates any further. Although there are a number of bedsits at Woburn, the design and construction of the building is different than the Council's other sheltered schemes. Moreover, there remains a demand for the properties and therefore the alterations are not considered to be as high a priority as work at other Sheltered Accommodation. It is therefore recommended that the heating is prioritised, but the building alterations are not considered until the remainder of the upgrades to the Sheltered Housing schemes have been completed. It is proposed that this work will be undertaken under the same contractual arrangements as that at Victoria House at an anticipated cost of £0.4m.
- 1.5. The recommended work set out within the current report constitutes the first phase of the upgrade of Sheltered Accommodation which should improve and maintain the levels of occupancy, providing local people with a type of accommodation which is well suited to the needs of many of our residents. It should be noted that the schemes contained within the initial phase have been agreed on the basis of the urgency of the work on the heating systems, but they also reflect the fact that this work can be procured through exiting framework agreements whilst it may be more appropriate to seek specific tenders for the remodelling work necessary to convert existing bedsits into one bedroom flats. The cost of both the work outlined within

this report and of the wider Sheltered Housing Accommodation upgrades is contained within the Council's currently approved capital programme.

2. Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1. The Council has a long standing commitment to providing accommodation which meets the needs of our local residents. The improvements and upgrades recommended in this report will help to ensure that our Sheltered Accommodation schemes continue to meet the needs of our local residents. Meeting local needs should also ensure that we are able to maintain and improve existing levels of occupancy thus helping ensure the financial sustainability of both the Sheltered Housing schemes and of the Council's overall Housing Revenue Account.

Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.2. To meet tenant expectations by providing a modern and efficient heating system in the identified Sheltered Schemes.

3. Consultation and Equality Impact

Consultation

- 3.1. There are covered throughout the report..

Equalities

- 3.2. These are covered throughout the report.

4. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1. The main option is not to undertake the recommended work in respect of heating upgrades. Given that the current heating systems are approaching the end of their economic life the Council would be failing in its obligations to our tenants, whilst until this work is undertaken the number of empty properties is likely to continue to increase leading to increased pressure on the financial sustainability of the Council's HRA.

5. Implications

5.1. Finance and Risk Implications

Financial

- 5.1.1 There are covered throughout the report with the total cost of renewing the identified heating schemes anticipated to cost approximately £1m. These costs can be met from within the existing Approved Capital Programme. Executive should note that undertaking this work is essential if we are continue to provide an housing that meets the needs of local people and to secure a high level of occupancy. These schemes provide a significant revenue stream to the Housing Revenue Account and are an important element in maintaining the financial sustainability of that account.

Risk

- 5.1.2 There are covered throughout the report.

6.2. Legal Implications including Data Protection

6.2.1 There are no legal or data protection issues arising directly out of this report.

6.3. Human Resources Implications

6.3.1 There are no human resource issues arising directly out of this report.

7. Recommendations

7.1. That Executive grant delegate authority to the Assistant Director Housing and Community Safety in consultation with the Portfolio Member to procure and appoint an appropriate contractor to undertake the upgrade of the heating systems at Victoria House, Creswell and Woburn House, Blackwell as the initial phase of a wider scheme to upgrade the Council's Sheltered Housing.

7.2. That the Assistant Director Housing and Community Safety bring a report back to a future meeting of this Executive to progress the work to upgrade the Council's Sheltered Housing schemes as outlined within this report.

8. Decision Information

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| Is the decision a Key Decision? (A Key Decision is an executive decision which results in income or expenditure to the Council of £50,000 or more or which has a significant impact on two or more District wards) | Yes |
| District Wards Affected | Creswell,Blackwell. |
| Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework | Supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Providing good quality council housing where people choose to live |

9. Document Information

| Appendix No | Title |
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| Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers) | |
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