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| Report for: | Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| Date of meeting: | 9th October 2019 |
| Part: | 1 |
| If Part II, reason: | |

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| Title of report: | Supported Housing service: Update |
| Contact: | Cllr Margaret Griffith, Portfolio Holder for Housing Author: Oliver Jackson, Team Leader Supported Housing |
| Purpose of report: | To inform members of prominent areas of the key areas impacting the service and the response to these. |
| Recommendations | That members of the key areas impacting the service and the response to these. |
| Period for post policy/project review | 12 months |
| Corporate objectives: | Affordable Housing Delivering an efficient and modern Council |
| Implications: | <u>Financial</u> Identifying the demand and adapting the service to meet the needs of older tenants will ensure that Dacorum's Housing Service can maintain it's financial position and demonstrate a sound financial long-term plan for the Housing Revenue Account. <u>Value for money</u> Reviewing the quality of schemes and the charges for the Supported Housing Services will allow Dacorum to achieve better value for money from contracts and services we provide to our tenants. |
| Risk implications | We have a legal obligation to follow national guidance and these will be considered prior to decisions being made about the service to ensure these and best practice are upheld. |
| Community Impact Assessment | An assessment will be carried out prior to decisions being made that will impact the service |

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| Health and safety Implications | Housing policies, procedures and contracts build in a requirement that all health and safety requirements are met and any higher risk matters are included in our risk register, which identifies specific mitigating actions. |
| Consultees: | Layna Warden – Group Manager, Tenants and Leaseholders Fiona Williamson – Assistant Director, Housing Mark Gaynor – Corporate Director, Housing and Regeneration |
| Background papers: | Older Person Strategy – Appendix 3 |
| Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report: | DBC – Dacorum Borough Council PSTN - Public Switched Telephone Network SH – Supported Housing NPV – Net Present Value |

1. Introduction and executive summary

1.1 The supported housing service consists of 1915 properties, approximately 20% of the total housing stock owned and managed by Dacorum Borough Council.

1.2 There are 29 designated supported housing schemes, with a range of communal facilities, central community alarm system and a supported housing officer based at each location. Further to this there are 707 dispersed properties within the community that receive support from one of the supported housing officers.

1.3 In addition to the accommodation based support, provided to tenants, the service also provides the Lifeline and Telecare service (Appendix 1) to 720 individuals living in the private sector, owner occupiers and general needs council housing tenants.

1.4 The purpose of this report is to inform members of some of the current issues the service is experiencing and to provide a summary on the main areas of work the supported housing service is involved in at present.

2. Key issues

2.1 Ageing population

2.1.1 National data illustrates that with longer life expectancy the proportion of the population over 65 is increasing. In 1991 15.8% of the population was aged 65+, this increased to 18% in 2016 and projections forecast that this will have increased to 26% in 2041. It is predicted that the fastest increase will be in those 85+. The local picture broadly mirrors the national projections

2.1.2 The ageing population presents challenges to the service. With it comes more tenants with lifelong medical conditions and increasing care needs. The reduction in an individual's mobility means they are more likely to suffer from falls and social isolation and be unable to remain involved in their local communities.

2.1.3 The ageing population in the borough is mirrored within the supported housing service. There is a proportion of tenants who are aged below 60 who are still very independent, often in full time employment and able to meet their own social needs. As stated earlier there are also a significant amount of tenants who are classed as 'very elderly' within the service. Many of the supported housing schemes have a communal element in it and this widening age range can at times present challenges to the service due to a clash of lifestyles – the age differences can be more than 30 years.

2.2 Complex needs

2.2.1 Like many areas of housing there has been an increase in the complexity of the support needs of tenants living in supported housing. The team have well established working relationships with Adult Care Services, safeguarding teams and a range of voluntary agencies. However the changing needs of tenants has meant the team have had to develop links with a range of other statutory and voluntary agencies.

2.2.2 The prevalence of mental health conditions amongst tenants is significant. There has been, and will continue to be, a growing number of tenants with Dementia which creates challenges to keep people safe within their homes. A lack of residential care spaces means that planned and coordinated 'move on's', at the appropriate time for the individual, are becoming increasingly difficult. However the service is also

supporting many people with mental health conditions other than Dementia and the need for the service to continue developing our relationship with community mental health services have never been higher.

2.2.3 Supported housing is allocated to applicants on an age based eligibility and therefore the service is experienced in providing support to issues commonly faced by those over the age of 60. However there has been a significant increase in tenants having a secondary support need such as mental health, substance misuse, homelessness or offending backgrounds. The skills required to respond to these support needs must therefore be far broader than before and there is a continued need to develop links with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies.

2.3 Demand for supported housing

2.3.1 Despite the projected ageing population, there are times when there is a lack of demand for supported housing. Despite the best efforts of the housing allocation teams there are instances where bids from those over the eligibility age are not forthcoming. This creates concern for the wider housing team due to rental loss throughout these void periods.

2.3.2 This lack of demand has been attributed to a number of assumptions over time. The size of properties, the stigma associated with supported housing, the perceived reduction in tenant's independence on moving into the service and a lack of information have all been recognised as potential obstacles for letting properties. However there is a need to truly understand the situation, based on factual information and insight from potential and current tenants to ensure that an effective approach to resolving the issue

2.3.3 The service is designed to meet the needs of a range of individuals, yet in many cases moving to supported housing only becomes an option when an individual's circumstances change, be it following bereavement or declining health. In many cases this is too late for it to be a viable option due to the practicalities involved in moving such as registering on the housing register, bidding on properties and clearing belongings, particularly when that individual does not have a support network around them. The emotional impact of leaving what in many cases was the family home, should also not be underestimated, so too should the fact that those who have started to claim their state pension do not face the same financial impact of under occupying properties as those below this age.

2.4 Community alarm:

2.4.1 The supported housing service provides community alarm services to all those tenants living within supported housing and to the customers of its Lifeline service, which in total is approximately 3000 individuals. This amount of people using the service generates a significant amount of call volume with over 10,000 calls made to the monitoring and response centre over the last quarter. This total does not include all the calls made by tenants living within the schemes that are answered when staff are on site at the scheme.

2.4.2 Ensuring that each of these alarms is operational, are regularly tested and are replaced appropriately to ensure functionality is challenging. So too is the need to ensure that the response individuals receive once they press the alarm is timely, thorough and appropriate to the nature of the call. A significant amount of time is spent reviewing call response times and investigating individual calls when required

to ensure that the service is constantly improving the experience of our tenants and customers.

2.4.3 Both scheme and individual alarms work using analogue telephone lines. Telephone services in the UK have traditionally been provided using the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). BT Open reach, have committed to switching from the PSTN to digital by December 2025 meaning that any telephone service that is not upgraded to a digital solution prior to the upgrade, will no longer be functional. There will need to be a significant focus on ensuring that all equipment is digitally ready by December 2025 to ensure that this critical service, that many vulnerable people rely upon, is not adversely impacted.

2.5 Properties

2.5.1 A significant proportion of all supported housing properties were built over 50 years ago. The design standards popular at this time are not necessarily what desirable for the generation of our tenants today, a prime example being limited resident car parking spaces.

2.5.2 Regular cyclical works and maintenance programmes are carried out to ensure that the fixtures and fittings of the properties are replaced and that communal areas of the buildings are maintained to a good standard. The carpet and communal furniture are also replaced on a rolling programme. However, there are a number of schemes that have poor access to all or part of the building and others where the properties are not suitable to be adapted for those with a specific physical need. With the ageing population mentioned earlier this is likely to become an increasingly prominent issue for the service

2.5.3 There are areas of the borough that have a high density of supported housing properties and others that have no provision at all. For example over a 1/3 of the total number of supported housing properties are located in Highfield and Adeyfield, conversely there are no supported housing properties in Woodhall Farm, owned by Dacorum Borough Council

3. What are we doing about it?

One of the objectives included in the housing service plan is a review of supported housing. This review will see a number of teams across the service working together to review different elements of the service and to provide a strategic approach to providing housing and support to older people both now and in the future. Below is a summary of some of the key projects being undertaken:

3.1 Meeting need:

3.1.1 Pre tenancy assessments for supported housing applicants are being introduced. This will allow the team to identify needs at an earlier stage and also an opportunity to provide applicants with enhanced information that will assist them to make informed decisions about the type of property they would like to bid on.

3.1.2 The team have recently started using a new housing support IT system called In-Form. The system has a comprehensive needs assessment element embedded into it that provides the opportunity to link with the pre tenancy assessment and allow

the team to provide more targeted and proactive support to individuals. The system also uses the Outcome STAR to identify support goals and monitor progress against them, an effective tool when encouraging vulnerable people to retain their independence.

3.1.3 The reporting function of the system gives the team the opportunity to show the true value of the support they provide by utilising a suite of standard and tailor made reports on all data contained within the service. For example, in time, we will be able to demonstrate how many people feel more secure in their homes due to the support they have received or how many people have been able to maximise their income. The system will also allow us to monitor changing support needs and to effectively manage the workloads of officers.

3.1.4 In April 2019 the supported housing team launched its own Telecare service. As Appendix 1 shows Telecare is a range of sensors that can be programmed to a central unit to raise an alarm in certain circumstances such as someone falling or leaving a property should they be prone to wandering. While Telecare is not a new development it is the first time that Dacorum Borough Council have provided its own service. This is of significant benefit to tenants and residents of the borough as other providers were becoming increasingly expensive and the standard of service was not to the standard required for equipment that provides such a critical service.

3.2 Property:

3.2.1 As stated earlier much of the current supported housing stock is over 50 years old and as such there are doubts over the long term suitability for housing for older people. To respond to this there are several work streams being carried out to gain a view as to how suitable the stock is.

3.2.2 A comprehensive review of our dispersed supported housing stock has been undertaken which considered location, provision of local amenities, opportunity to adapt the property and, having reviewed bidding sequences over the past 12 months, demand for the properties. The aim of this was to take a planned approach to re-designating some unfit dispersed supported housing properties. It is currently being proposed that 30 properties should be changed from supported housing for older people to alternate use.

3.2.3 To gain a view as to the long term viability of the supported housing schemes we have been working with a team of consultants to carry out a review of each scheme. This review has considered the 5 and 30 year Net Present Value (NPV) of each building to understand which buildings can continue operating as business as usual and which schemes may require intervention in the longer term. The review has also considered issues such as location, access to and within the buildings, proximity to local services and nearby transport links. Having received the data a team of officers and managers are currently working through the data to add any more 'localised' knowledge to the findings with the aim of informing the organisation's long term view of the schemes.

3.2.4 Some of the schemes are on large sites, which have the potential for extending or consolidation of some schemes, which would free up land for potential development. It is acknowledged that any project of this nature would need to be financially viable and that in order for any scheme to be decommissioned a long lead in time would need to be carefully planned and managed, so as to reduce disruption for the residents.

3.3 Demand:

3.3.1 Using the data available from a range of systems we intend to look in more detail at the demand for supported housing properties. Currently there are a number of assumptions as to why particular properties are not being let within the target 'key to key' times and the review of the data will challenge those assumptions. A small scale project has already been undertaken that has produced some potential themes and the intention is to conduct a more comprehensive, service wide interrogation of the data available.

3.3.2 There are currently in excess of 400 people on the housing register over the age of 60 who are not actively bidding on supported housing properties and understanding the reasons behind this inactivity should point towards some of the issues impacting on the demand for the service. The outcome of this will supplement the review of schemes to provide a more comprehensive view of the buildings long term viability.

3.3.3 A series of open days at schemes were carried out in Spring of this year which were well attended by members of the public, suggesting that there is interest in the service from potential applicants. However this approach to marketing the service is resource heavy and the long lasting impact upon demand are limited. We are therefore currently working with the Strategy, Improvement and Engagement Team to develop a communication plan that will allow us to more effectively promote the services. Initial ideas include testimonials from tenants and officers with the aim of removing some the stigma referred to earlier within this report.

3.4 Community alarm equipment

3.4.1 A programme is underway to replace the existing community alarm systems within the supported housing schemes, with 11 of the 29 schemes having already been upgraded. The new systems are digitally ready for the switch from analogue to digital and offer enhanced security and fire safety capabilities. They are also fully telecare compatible and can support a range of sensors being programmed directly into the call system.

3.4.2 The development of technology offers providers of community alarms a number of opportunities. Examples include alarms that use SIM card to place calls and enhanced sensors that are less reactive and can identify concerns at an earlier stage. The team are working with Hertfordshire County Council to trial some assistive technology devices and are staying abreast of technology that can help people retain their independence, however these options must remain affordable and therefore the need to balance the benefits against existing budgets is constantly being reviewed.

4. Next steps

4.1 Appendix 2 is a project plan that details the steps that are being taken to respond to the challenges summarised in this report.

4.2 A submission has been made to the Local Government Association for funding. If successful the funding will be used to work with consultants to collate data relating to local need and engage with older people in the area. This project will bring specialised knowledge and will supplement our existing focus.

4.3. The Council are represented on the Hertfordshire Supported Housing Accommodation board to influence decisions made at a county level and to stay abreast of developments in the supported housing sector.

4.4. The Council will continue to play a key role in the Dacorum Accommodation Board which brings together a number of key teams from local agencies and is used as the vehicle to progress local priorities.

5. Conclusion

5.1 It is recommended to return to update members once the various work streams progress further. Comments and suggestions from members are welcomed.