

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL
PORTFOLIO HOLDER DELEGATED DECISION
by
COUNTY COUNCILLOR JAMES EVANS
(PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, HOUSING & PUBLIC
PROTECTION)
June 2018

REPORT AUTHOR: Alan Corbett & Rebecca Mills (Project Officers, Housing)

SUBJECT: Proposed Re-designation of properties from Older Persons to General Needs / Flexible Letting

REPORT FOR: Information and Decision

1. Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise about the methodology adopted by the Housing Service to assess the suitability of its older persons accommodation and proposals to re-designate some older persons properties as general needs housing, to ensure that the council's older persons accommodation is suitable for the next generation of older residents and investment under the level access project is allocated appropriately.
- 1.2. According to the Powys County Council Housing 'Fit for Purpose' report, "All bungalows and almost all ground floor flats are designated for older people. In total 618 out of 994 Council flats are designated 'Older Person's Accommodation' to be let to over 60 years old tenants only. Location or suitability for older people seems not to be taken into account for each individual property. The figures show there is a large quantity of properties designated for older people, but we question how suitable these properties really are for older people who have difficulties with mobility, long term illness restricting day to day activities, visual impairments or no own means of transport." (Powys County Council, Fit For Purpose Report 2015).
- 1.3. The Council currently have 2,000 bungalows and flats designated for older people. The 'Fit for Purpose' project analysed the benefits of improving standards of older person's accommodation. It identified that some of the council's older persons' accommodation was not suitable for older people, no matter how much investment was made. The stock is at least 30 years old and since they were built life expectancy has increased significantly. In addition the older person's designation given to such a high proportion of the stock reflected the intention to protect the stock from the "Right to Buy", rather than reflecting its location, facilities or accessibility.

1.4. The Housing Department proposes re-designation of these properties to general needs / flexible letting to allow them to be sensitively let to a wider demographic.

2. Proposal

2.1 The Housing Service has recently commenced a level access project, whose purpose is to upgrade existing older persons' accommodation. Investment to date has focused on ground floor flatted accommodation or bungalows, as these offer easier access for older people who may have reduced mobility and enables even those with poorer mobility to easily maintain their independence. However, some of our existing older persons designated accommodation may not be fit for older people in the 21st century, for reasons such as a lack of level access and that the properties are in very rural locations with poor transport links which can make it difficult for older people to get access to good health care, amenities and social events. As part of the level access programme the two Housing Project Officers have worked alongside other housing staff and Occupational Therapists to assess the suitability of our older persons housing stock. Each property has been placed into one of three bands, based on their location, proximity to services and accessibility.

- Band 1 is for high quality accommodation that is close to town centres, doctors and/or residential care schemes. Assessment will be made of these properties around suitability for adaptation for those with more serious mobility needs and prioritised for investment under our level access improvement programme. It is anticipated that approximately 10% of older persons' accommodation would be placed into this band. Details are included in appendix A highlighted in orange and categorised in column G as "Let By Panel".
- Band 2, approximately 80% of our older persons stock meets the majority of our older persons' needs, some work will be undertaken on these properties through the level access programme where improvements have been identified. These are the properties shaded blue in appendix A.
- Band 3 approximately 10% of older persons stock is accommodation that is considered not to be capable of adequately supporting older people because of its location and accessibility. The proposal is to lower the age limit in the majority of cases and to let the properties sensitively, to prevent clashes of lifestyle. Improvement works will still be undertaken to ensure that properties achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and properties will be adapted where a personal need is identified and the adaptation is appropriate. These properties are shaded red in appendix A and classed as "Sensitive" in column G.

2.2 Where a property is placed into Band 3, it will be designated as general needs and will be let in accordance with a local lettings policy which will take into consideration existing residents and the housing needs of the

community. The Housing Service will also take into consideration the re-designation of properties in its new build programme.

- 2.3 In areas where properties are re-designated reducing the supply of older persons' accommodation, priority will be given where it is appropriate, for the development of additional purpose built older persons' housing.
- 2.4 This proposal to re-designate older persons' accommodation will not affect existing tenants or the services offered to them in their homes. Where older persons' accommodation is re-designated, the re-designation will take effect when the property next becomes vacant and is available for re-letting. There is nothing to prevent older people from applying for re-designated accommodation.
- 2.5 The proposal aims to ensure that moving forward:
 - our designated older person's accommodation is fit for current and future generations of older people.
 - property re-designated as general needs accommodation is available to let to a wider group of applicants.
 - re-designating difficult to let older person's accommodation will reduce void times.

3. Options Considered / Available

- 3.1 Option 1 -continue with older persons' designation as it remains currently. Housing officers have highlighted difficulty in letting above floor accommodation to older people who have concerns over their mobility, as well as very rural locations. There are also concerns surrounding the ability of people with poorer mobility to evacuate blocks of flats in case of emergency. We are required under recent legislation to consider the suitability of accommodation for intended occupants and their future wellbeing. Investment via the Fit for Purpose scheme is not economically viable for some properties.
- 3.2 Option 2 is to re-designate Band 3 properties to general needs or flexible letting to allow them to be sensitively let to a wider demographic. This proposal will not affect existing tenants and in all cases re-designated accommodation is not barred to people over 60. The proposal aims to let accommodation to those who are best suited to it, as well as prioritising investment to more suitable properties for older people, either existing or new build.

4. Preferred Choice and Reasons

- 4.1 Option 2 – this will enable investment in appropriate property, aligned with the new build programme the Council will have fit for purpose accommodation for older persons and a choice of accommodation for a

wider demographic across the County. The service provided will also benefit from efficiencies in reducing void times for unsuitable older persons designated properties.

5. Impact Assessment

- 5.1 Is an impact assessment required? Yes
- 5.2 If yes is it attached? Yes

6. Corporate Improvement Plan

- 6.1 Recent legislation changes such as the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 all place emphasis on preventative measures to aid vulnerable people, rather than reactive measures for when people have already reached crisis. Landlords are obliged to consider the suitability of accommodation for the intended occupant(s). The legislation also requires landlords to consider the impact of their actions on future generations as well as current needs. There has been a significant increase in efforts to integrate Housing, Health and Social Care, as the benefits of good quality housing is reflected in improved health of tenants.
- 6.2 By removing the Older Persons designation from property that is not suitable we are able to allocate homes to those most in need and most suited to this type of accommodation. This will have a positive impact on waiting lists. Many of this accommodation is difficult to let already. The proposal will therefore also have the added benefit of reducing void times on hard to let properties by opening up to a wider market, maximising revenue and utilising resources to their full benefit.
- 6.3 Where designation has been removed, future resources can be dedicated to providing new or improved older persons' accommodation to where it is most needed.

7. Local Member(s)

- 7.1 This proposal is countywide.
- 7.2 It is proposed that local members are advised of the properties that maybe be re-designated in accordance with appendix A "sensitive" and that they will be advised of the re-designation of properties in their wards as they arise.

8. Other Front Line Services

- 8.1 Does the recommendation impact on other services run by the Council or on behalf of the Council? Yes
- 8.2 It has been recognised that re-designation of properties may affect the warden service provided to some properties.
- 8.3 “The warden is a person centred service, but at present they offer the service to people living in the designated properties. Any redesign which means that the schemes will not be allocated to older people may result in no one taking up the service and therefore we will need to consider the future of any warden service affected by low take up”.
(Mair Preece, Older People Services Provider Manager, 28/12/17).

9. Communications

- 9.1 Have Communications seen a copy of this report? No

10. Support Services (Legal, Finance, Corporate Property, HR, ICT, Business Services)

- 10.1 Legal: the recommendations can be supported from a legal point of view.
- 10.2 Finance – the Finance Business Partner notes the content of the report and the proposal to re-designate some older person’s properties as general needs housing, as not suitable for older people, no matter how much investment is made. There will be efficiencies in reducing void times.

In areas where properties are re-designated reducing the supply of older persons’ accommodation, priority will be given where it is appropriate, for the development of additional purpose built older persons’ housing. This expenditure is budgeted for in the Housing Business Plan.

11. Scrutiny

- 11.1 Has this report been scrutinised? / No

12. Statutory Officers

- 13.1 The Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer) commented as follows : “ I note the legal comments and have nothing to add to the report.”
- 13.2 The Head of Financial Services (Deputy Section 151 Officer) notes the comment from the Finance Business Partner.

13. Members' Interests

14.1 The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If the Portfolio Holder has an interest, he/ she should declare it, complete the relevant notification for and refer the matter to Cabinet for decision.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
The re-designation of Band 3 older person's properties in accordance with appendix A to general needs / flexible letting.	- the Housing Service meets its commitment to ensure Older Persons are housed appropriately and that suitable accommodation is available for a wider demographic. -To make best use of current resources and prioritise investment where needed.

Relevant Policy (ies):			
Within Policy:	Y	Within Budget:	Y

Relevant Local Member(s):	
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Alan Corbett / Rebecca Mills
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	

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Background Papers used to prepare Report:

Powys County Council. (2015). 'Fit for Purpose Older Persons Accommodation'. Powys County Council.

Powys County Council. (2016). 'A Local Housing Strategy for Powys'. Powys County Council.

Institute of Public Care. (2017). *Planning for the future of older people accommodation in Powys - a case study.*
Oxford Brookes University.

Appendix 1: List of Older Persons properties for Redesignation