

## Community Alarm Provision in Sheltered Housing (Adur Homes)

### Report by the Director for Communities

#### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report looks at the cost of retaining a Community Alarm and Telecare Service (CATS) for all Adur Homes residents living in sheltered housing, following the withdrawal of a 'housing related grant' on a scheme by scheme basis by West Sussex County Council. The report considers options on how the service can be funded in future and makes recommendations for the Executive Member for Customer Services to approve under delegated authority.

#### 2.0 Background

- 2.1 In November 2015, West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) initiated consultation on how support would be provided to older people living in social housing across the County. In April 2016, this concluded in a report to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, whereby the funding for scheme related support was withdrawn. In mitigation, a new floating support service was to be commissioned, providing fixed term support for those households in greatest need, irrespective of whether they lived in sheltered housing.
- 2.2 One of the outcomes of this decision was that scheme based officers, previously providing a low level of support, would no longer be required to do so. The service has subsequently been restructured, with a total of four Sheltered Housing Officers providing an enhanced housing management service across 10 sheltered housing schemes. This comes into effect when the WSSCC funding is withdrawn, from 1 October 2016, and was supported in a report presented to Joint Strategic Committee on 13 July 2016.
- 2.3 Another impact of having the 'housing related support' withdrawn, was that the social alarm system provided by CATS to all Adur Homes sheltered housing tenants, would no longer be subsidised as this was not eligible for Housing Benefit (sic) and had been funded through the WSSCC. In effect, this then replicates the same provision available across all other tenures and occupation.

- 2.4 Options have been explored to assess whether there are other opportunities to fund CATS for Adur Homes sheltered housing residents, either in part or in full (section 3.0). However, the reality is that there is not a mechanism to fund this on a permanent basis, unless this is paid for by the HRA (i.e. other tenants would be picking up the cost).
- 2.5 CATS for Adur Homes sheltered housing residents ceases to be funded from 1 October 2016. This paper provides options about future funding and enhancement of the service.
- 2.6 In addition to the funding issue, there are two other issues to consider. The first and most important relates to fire safety.
- 2.7 In the United Kingdom, around 80% of all fire deaths and injuries occur in domestic premises, over 300 deaths and around 9 000 injuries per annum. Many of those who die are the most vulnerable in the community, namely elderly and socially deprived people. The installation of a fire detection and fire alarm system in premises can substantially reduce the risk of death or serious injury from fire. Indeed, the overall downward trend in annual fire deaths in domestic premises since smoke alarms in domestic premises were first given recognition in BS 5839-1 in 1988 is almost certainly attributable in part to the increasing use of smoke alarms.
- 2.8 The level of deaths and injuries remains, however, above a level that society regards as acceptable. It has been estimated that, in premises without smoke detectors, a substantial proportion of the fatalities from fire could be avoided if smoke detectors were installed. The fatality rate in fires in premises in which there is no working smoke detector is between two and three times the fatality rate in fires in premises in which a smoke detector is present and functions correctly.
- 2.9 At present, the fire detection systems (FDS) within the Sheltered Schemes are being reviewed as part of the mandatory Fire Risk Assessment. Preliminary findings indicate that the current FDS are not compliant with acceptable standards and will need to be replaced and/or upgraded to provide acceptable levels of protection to residents. There are opportunities to provide the FDS in conjunction with the social alarm system to offer an enhanced service to the Scheme residents and reduce overall costs.
- 2.10 The second issue then relates to whether a social alarm system should be compulsory for Sheltered Scheme resident, who receive housing benefit, and so previously had the alarm charge of £3.42 a week paid through the supporting people subsidy.
- 2.11 It remains the case that residents in Sheltered Schemes not in receipt of housing benefit (about 20%) will continue to pay directly for a social alarm system ('self-fund').

- 2.12 From a fire safety point of view unless it is compulsory for all residents to have the social alarm system combined with the fire detection system, anyone who opts out of having the system would be putting themselves and neighbours at risk. This is because their fire alarm system would not be tested by the Housing Support Officer and it would not be linked to Chichester Control. This would not satisfactorily meet the requirements of BS 5839-6:2013 'Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings'.
- 2.12 By making the alarms compulsory and requiring all sheltered residents pay the charge direct, we avoid this and greatly ease the task of checking and maintaining the fire alarm system although those residents who, up until now have received the supporting people subsidy, will have to pay an additional charge for the alarms and this may be unpopular.
- 2.13 Initial consultation with residents has shown that the alarm service is a much desired element of sheltered housing that they wish to retain in order to protect the sheltered status of their accommodation as well as the safety benefits of the pendant and smoke detection link to a control centre

### **3.0 Service Options**

#### **3.1 Service Option 1: Install compulsory new social alarm system to be combined with fire detection system.**

- 3.1.1 Where there are existing hardwired Community Alarm units in a flat, these would be decommissioned prior to a new resident moving in, with that new resident being given the new Community Alarm and Telecare unit.
- 3.1.2 Thereafter, all existing hardwired units would be decommissioned and replaced with new alarm units that are combined with a fire detection system, operating on a mobile network, on a scheme by scheme basis, over a two year period.
- 3.1.3 Social alarm systems combined with fire detection systems are partially eligible for Housing Benefit (sic), on the basis that fire detection is a 'housing management' function, rather than a 'support' function. Analysis indicates that 32p per week per property, could be claimed through the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), meaning that eligible sheltered housing residents would then only have to contribute a further £3.20 per week.
- 3.1.4 Tenants already paying directly will continue to do so.
- 3.1.5 The charge would then incorporate an enhanced out of hours response for fire alarm activations, for no responses and for lock outs
- 3.1.6 Unless the new system is compulsory, an individual resident could decide not to make the additional contribution, and therefore opt out of CATS. Adur Homes would then have to provide a bespoke mechanism for fire detection in individual properties. This is likely to both increase costs as two different systems would need to be procured and maintained, and add a layer of complexity to a matter that is a

fundamental health and safety consideration for the landlord (i.e. the two different systems would need to be administered, monitored, tested, etc). The resultant system would be unlikely to meet the requirements of BS 5839-6:2013.

### **3.2 Service Option 2 : Maintain an enhanced existing social alarm systems for customers willing to pay, and install separate fire detection systems to sheltered schemes.**

3.2.1 As indicated, initial consultation with residents has shown that the social alarm system is a much desired element of sheltered housing that they wish to retain in order to protect the sheltered status of their accommodation. It is not unexpected that CATS could retain 90% of customers. There will not however be an improvement in the coverage and reliability of the service that could be expected through a new system.

3.2.2 Adur Homes would then need to arrange for the upgrading and installation of a suitable FDS within common parts and individual flats to meet their statutory requirements. In effect, Adur Homes would therefore pay for the FDS and arrange for the administration, monitoring and testing of the system. The FDS would also need to communicate with an alarm monitoring service to enable the early summoning of the Fire and rescue Service.

3.2.3 This option increases the costs to Adur Homes and, consequently, their tenants due to the duplication of the monitoring service and the cost of SIM cards or line charges to maintain the FDS, as well as the cost of maintaining and checking both systems.

## **4.0 Charging Options**

### **4.1 Charging Option 1 - Do not charge residents on Housing Benefit for the cost of CATS**

4.1.1 CATS continues to be provided to all Adur Homes residents living in sheltered housing.

Those who are currently paying for the service will continue paying. For residents who are on housing benefit and previously had the cost paid for from the Supporting People funding we would apply a credit to their account so they do not have to pay the charge This would effectively result in other Adur Homes residents subsidising the service, potentially at the detriment of services they themselves may receive.

4.1.2 This would equate to an annual loss to the CATS, or to the HRA, in the region of £54,000, and would also create disparity across all other forms of housing, where residents only receive the service if they pay for it. This would also fail to address the fire safety issue.

## **4.2 Charging Option 2: Charge all Adur Homes sheltered housing residents for the full enhanced Community Alarm and Telecare Service from 1 October 2016**

- 4.2.1 There has been previous precedent of this approach, when 'supporting people' funding was first introduced in 2003, the outcome being that the vast majority of residents chose to continue to pay for the service themselves. If that were to be the case in this instance, then any financial loss would be minimised.
- 4.2.2 However, the decision of whether to charge Adur Homes sheltered housing residents for the Community Alarm and Telecare Service should not be taken in isolation. This option would come into effect at the same time as the sheltered housing residents were seeing their scheme based support being moved to a floating support service. It may be perceived by some that they are having a reduction in a service, whilst at the same time being charged for something that they previously had subsidised.

## **4.3 Charging option 3: Provide an enhanced Community Alarm and Telecare Service, free for an initial 13 weeks.**

- 4.3.1 New customers of the CATS on other tenures are currently offered an initial 13 weeks where they receive the service for free. This is intended to provide a 'taster' of the service, without the customer having to commit. In reality the vast majority (if not all) customers continue to pay for the service once the initial 13 weeks elapses.
- 4.3.2 If sheltered housing residents in receipt of housing benefit are offered 13 weeks free from 1 October 2016, then this would have a financial impact to CATS around £13,500 in 2016/17. However, all such residents would then start to pay directly for the first time from 1 January 2017.
- 4.3.3 The Sheltered Housing residents are not new customers and, although it may soften the blow of being charged for a service that was paid through other means, it does not reflect the reality that in order to meet safety and quality standards there must be a requirement for everyone to participate in the scheme and that the scheme costs.
- 4.3.4 Sheltered Housing Officers will assist customers with maximising income to help meet this charge if required.

## **5.0 Other Matters**

### **5.1 New tenants**

- 5.1.1 Any new tenants into an Adur Homes sheltered housing scheme would automatically be required to be part of the CATS service as part of their tenancy agreement.

## **5.2 Smoke Detection**

- 5.2.1 The smoke detection units in the communal areas will continue to be hardwired, with responses being directed through to the call centre at Chichester, until all the systems are upgraded in compliance with the ongoing fire risk assessment process. as is currently the case. These units will be replaced throughout the year. The residents will receive a free linked smoke detector as part of the package, which will still be routed through to the Call Centre.
- 5.2.2 Any advice and guidance to the resident in terms of how to respond in the event of a fire alarm sounding, will be given by the Sheltered Housing Officer, when they first become a resident, and thereafter on an annual basis (or should any arrangements in a particular scheme alter.

## **5.3 Courtfields**

- 5.3.1 Courtfields is a sheltered scheme that consists of 50 leaseholders. As a leaseholder, the resident is not eligible for LHA, and it is a requirement of their lease that they receive the Community Alarm and Telecare Service, and that they pay for this as part of a service charge. This report proposes no change to the existing arrangement.

## **5.4 Options for 'daily wake-up calls', mobile sensors, etc**

- 5.4.1 As part of the independent review of sheltered housing, carried out on behalf of Adur Homes by Support Solutions, options were considered, which could be covered by Local Housing Allowance, and may be able to provide functionality, such as daily wake-up calls, mobile sensors, etc. The reality is that these are all commercial interests, that would require an appropriate route through procurement, as well as an ongoing obligation of maintenance, repair and upgrade. It may also be necessary to tailor to individual circumstances, wishes of the individual, family members, etc. It is therefore proposed that this is not a service provided by Adur Homes (or the CATS) at present although this option may be kept under review.

## **5.5 Calls through to the call centre**

- 5.5.1 When the alarm is activated this is directed through to the call centre in Chichester. The alarm is intended to be activated in emergency circumstances, although may sometimes be activated by mistake. However, it is not intended to support an enhanced housing management function, report repairs, etc. The Chichester call centre will be instructed to only respond to either fire emergencies or matters that would be appropriate for the Community Alarm and Telecare Service, and during office hours direct these enquiries through to the CATS team. Outside of office hours, these will be directed to the Mobile Response Out of Hours service. A single number, through to the Sheltered Housing Team, will be provided

## **6.0 Legal**

- 6.1 Section 1 Localism Act 2011 provides the Council with the power to do anything that an individual may do, for charge or without charge, and for the benefit of the community or otherwise.

## **7.0 Financial implications**

- 7.1 Customers of the Community Alarm and Telecare Service are currently charged £3.52 per week. There are 295 sheltered housing tenants, so the annual income generated through sheltered housing tenants is:

£3.52 x 52 weeks x 295 tenants	= £53,996
Less 20% self-funding tenants	= £10,799
	= £43,197

Therefore Charging Option 1, would result in a financial income loss to the Community Alarm and Telecare Service, or the HRA, in the region of £21,598 for 2016/17, and £43,197 in 2017/18. This loss would reduce slowly as new tenants replace existing housing benefit tenants.

- 7.2 Charging Option 3 would result in a loss to CATS of £13,500 in 2016/17.
- 7.3 Service Option 1 will require the procurement of new units for social alarm systems combined with fire detection across all the sheltered schemes. The cost is likely to be an investment of circa £170,000 over a 2 years contract period. The investment will, however, generate continued income over the extended lifetime of the equipment, be future proofed and helps offset the cost of providing additional compliant fire detection systems within the sheltered schemes.
- 7.4 Service Option 2 would require the procurement of new compliant fire detection within individual living units, in addition to the social alarm system, across the sheltered schemes at an initial cost to Adur Homes of £23,600 with related on-costs for installation, maintenance and testing.

## **8.0 Recommendations**

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Executive Member for Customer Services approves Service Option 1 and Charging Option 3 as the preferred options to meet service and safety standards.

### **Local Government Act 1972**

#### **Background Papers:**

Review of Sheltered Housing (Adur Homes), Joint Strategic Committee, Adur and Worthing Councils (13 July 2016)  
Commissioning Housing Support Services, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, West Sussex County Council (April 2016)  
BS 5839-6:2013 'Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings'

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## **Schedule of Other Matters**

### **1.0 Council Priority**

1.1 Protecting front line services - Fulfil statutory obligations for delivery of front line services.

### **2.0 Specific Action Plans**

2.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **3.0 Sustainability Issues**

3.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **4.0 Equality Issues**

4.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **5.0 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)**

5.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **6.0 Human Rights Issues**

6.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **7.0 Reputation**

7.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **8.0 Consultations**

8.1 (A) Fire Safety officers in Building Control, Adur Homes managers and residents groups.

(B) Matter considered and no issues identified

### **9.0 Risk Assessment**

9.1 The combined fire and social alarm system helps meet the Council's responsibility as a landlord and also provides emergency cover for vulnerable people.

### **10.0 Health & Safety Issues**

10.1 A fire alarm system is a legal requirement for the Council as a landlord to protect the health and safety of residents.

### **11.0 Procurement Strategy**

11.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

## **12.0 Partnership Working**

12.1 Matter considered and no issues identified