

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 JULY 2010

PETITIONS - ROTATION OF SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEME MANAGERS

Report from: Deborah Upton, Housing and Corporate Services

Author: Derrick Singleton, Head of Landlord Services

Summary

The purpose of this report is to update members regarding the proposal to rotate Sheltered Scheme Managers every two years. This follows on from petitions presented to Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 January 2010, from tenants at Marlborough House, Longford Court and Esmonde House.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1. This policy is within the council's budget and policy framework and helps support the following objectives set out in the Council's Housing Strategy.
- to enable vulnerable people to live independent lives;
 - to improve the quality and energy efficiency of housing;

2. Background

- 2.1. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) housing service was restructured in 2007. As part of these proposals the existing Sheltered Housing Manager posts were re-evaluated from grade C1 to B1. This reflected the additional responsibilities for tenancy management functions relating to rent arrears and anti-social behaviour. Prior to this change the Housing Officers undertook these tasks.
- 2.2. As part of this change staff undertaking the role of Sheltered Scheme Manager were told that they would be rotated very two years from one scheme to another.

- 2.3. The decision to rotate Sheltered Scheme Managers at the time was based on safeguarding the tenants and staff in our sheltered schemes from issues of favouritism, bullying and potential abuse, particularly for those tenants who are more vulnerable.
- 2.4. MeRGe (Medway Residents Group) were consulted about the proposal to rotate Sheltered Scheme Managers at the time of the restructure but sheltered housing tenants were not.
- 2.5. As the proposal to rotate the Sheltered Scheme Managers was due to be implemented in early 2010 and tenants had not been consulted about the idea petitions were sent into the council asking for this proposal to be stopped.
- 2.6. On 21 January 2010 petitioners were invited to a meeting of Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the following recommendation was made:

“That the Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services is asked to take no further action at present to implement the policy of rotating scheme managers every two years until such time as she has conducted further investigations with all eight sheltered housing schemes managers and residents, investigated the suggestions made by the Committee with regards to shadowing, photographs in the foyer and joint social events and reported back to this Committee”
- 2.7. The petitions were brought to that Committee on the grounds of their being related to staffing in sheltered housing. However, the matter was subsequently raised at a meeting of this Committee and it was felt that the matter was more appropriately dealt with at Business Support O&S Committee as they related to what was predominantly a housing matter.

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1. Housing Services subscribes to the Sheltered Housing Network (SHN) and advice received from them in relation to the proposal to rotate Sheltered Housing Managers is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.2. The eight sheltered schemes can be naturally grouped in two areas with four schemes in each area as set out below.

Gillingham	Rainham
Esmonde House	Woodchurch House
Mountevans House	Suffolk Court
St Marks House	Marlborough House
Brennan House	Longford Court

- 3.3. At the moment each of the schemes is twinned with another scheme to enable staff to buddy up and work together for cover, help and support, etc. The table below shows the schemes that are currently paired together.

Gillingham	
Esmonde House	St Marks House
Brennan House	Mountevans House
Rainham	
Marlborough House	Longford Court
Suffolk Court	Woodchurch House

- 3.4 This works well at the moment with Scheme Managers rotating the weekend 'buzz rounds' that are undertaken and covering each other for holidays, sickness, training courses etc. The cover provided when a Scheme Manager is absent for a day is in the form of a check on tenants in the twinned scheme in the morning. For longer term absence the buddy Scheme Manager will alternate the days spent at each Sheltered Scheme unless temporary cover is required.
- 3.5 The future proposal is to expand on this idea and rotate the managers every two years as set out below as an example for the sheltered schemes in the Gillingham Area.
- 3.6 This principal, if agreed will be applied to the sheltered schemes in the Rainham Area.
- 3.7 Tenants in the Council's sheltered schemes already know the other Sheltered Scheme Managers for their area due to the buzz rounds that take place and the cover that is provided.
- 3.8 The table below shows that the schemes paired up with each other will change every two years to enable tenants to get used to the new buddy Sheltered Scheme Manager to help facilitate the change over of Sheltered Scheme Managers in two year time.
- 3.9 This will promote more team working within the Sheltered Housing Team, better coverage within the two areas and the cross working will also bring ideas from scheme managers to the other schemes which will standardise the service in each of the Sheltered Schemes.

Cycle	Gillingham	Sheltered Scheme	Scheme Manager
Cycle 1	Buddy	Esmonde House	A
		St Marks House	B
	Buddy	Brennan House	C
		Mountevans House	D
Cycle 2	Buddy	Esmonde House	B
		Mountevans House	C
	Buddy	St Marks House	A
		Brennan House	D
Cycle 3	Buddy	Esmonde House	C
		Brennan House	A
	Buddy	St Marks House	D
		Mountevans House	B
Cycle 4 (Starts Again)	Buddy	Esmonde House	A
		St Marks House	B
	Buddy	Brennan House	C
		Mountevans House	D

4 Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Differing service standards	Service standards may differ from scheme to scheme if staff stay on one site for a long period of time	Rotate Sheltered Scheme managers to develop standardised working practises in each scheme
Personal attachment to tenants	Sheltered Scheme Managers may form personal relationships with tenants that mean policies and procedures are not adhered to. Favouritism for some tenants may mean other tenants do not receive comparable treatments	Rotate Sheltered Scheme Managers to ensure caring professional behaviour is maintained.
Personal Attachments to Sheltered Scheme Managers	Tenants see the Sheltered Scheme Managers as the service rather than the service that is provided in each scheme and become reliant on the Sheltered Scheme Manager.	Rotate the Sheltered Scheme Manager to reduce the dependency of tenants on an individual staff member.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 MeRGe, Medway Residents Group have been consulted in respect of this policy and are supportive of the scheme.
- 5.2 The Assistant Director (Housing and Corporate Services) has begun a series of visits to all the Sheltered Schemes to speak to tenants about the proposals to move Sheltered Scheme Managers and to discuss the team/area based approach to managing the sheltered schemes.
- 5.3 Tenants at St Marks House, Woodchurch House and Esmonde House have been consulted so far and are broadly supportive of the proposal set out in section 3 for rotating the Sheltered Scheme Managers.
- 5.4 By 8 July 2010, six out of the eight sheltered schemes will have been visited and further feedback will be given to members during the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

6. Financial and legal implications

- 6.1 The proposals set out in the report can be carried out within existing budgets.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 That the proposals set out in section 3 are adopted, for the reasons outlined in section 4.

Lead officer contact

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Appendix 1

From: Ray Sawyer-James
Sent: 09 October 2009 12:53
To: koleowo, mide
Subject: RE: Scheme changes

Hello Mide

Thank you for your enquiry regarding Best Practice in relation to staffing on sheltered housing schemes.

The Sheltered Housing Network (SHN) have been promoting a move away from individual staff being based on one site. SHN believe that one person working in isolation within a single sheltered scheme has a number of negative connotations including:

- Clients (tenants) tend to see that individual as the service rather than recognising the service as a whole. This can lead to clients not utilising the whole of the service but instead only utilising the services of the individual staff member.
- The staff member often has little or no routine interaction with other members of the team.
- There is a greater possibility of the staff member being placed in a vulnerable situation as often there is no on-going monitoring as to the staff members whereabouts or well being. In this working situation, staff often make little or no routine contact with the service during any working day. The most common practice is that the staff member logs on and off site through a call centre at the beginning and end of the day. This being the case, there is no monitoring as to the staff members whereabouts or well being throughout the day. A point criticised in cases that have been made regarding stress related illness that has been cited as work related.
- There have been growing concerns regarding stress related issues where staff work in isolation within sheltered housing. More recently, there have been a number of cases of compensation made by staff who are based on one sheltered housing site and work in isolation. These cases have focused on staff being caused unreasonable stress due to the lack of daily monitoring and support. Whilst many cases have been seen as unfounded, some have been successful and in extreme cases have led to constructive dismissal awards. Although it is possible for most services to identify appropriate support and monitoring, SHN take the view that removing staff from the possible isolation of working alone on one sheltered housing site is beneficial.
- Evidence suggests that staff working on their own, especially if based on one site for many years, may be more inclined to become personally attached to clients and adopt practices that may not adhere to the organisations policies and procedures.
- Evidence suggests that where one member of staff works on one site, especially for a number of years, there is a greater likelihood that service standards can differ considerably from scheme to scheme. Whereas if there is a team approach this tends not to be the case.

- There is less accountability of staff actions where staff work on one site in isolation compared to where staff work within a team setting.

Whilst the concept of moving staff from one sheltered scheme to another after a set period of time can help to alleviate some of the above issues, it has its own difficulties. Primarily, the concept of moving staff after a set period of time can feel like continuing change to clients who may see this as an unnecessary disruption with little or no benefit to them. Staff may also not always view this in a positive way. After the proposed period of two years, it could be that the staff member has already bonded to that particular scheme and may view the move as a negative one. Also, this system does not address the issue of a staff member working in isolation with little or no routine interaction with other members of the team.

A number of organisations have applied this concept only to find that it has created greater negativity within the staff team and with the clients that they serve.

It is SHN's experience that on the whole, clients view change negatively, even if this leads to an improvement in the service. We therefore suggest that sheltered housing providers should work towards creating a 'seamless service' where the delivery and staffing of the service is provided in a way that enables clients to feel it is the same even when there are changes within the staff team.

SHN recommend a 'team approach' is taken when delivering service to clients in sheltered housing. The model most favoured by SHN is the 'Hub & Spoke' model. Basically, this works by grouping sheltered schemes into catchment areas. Staff in those areas work as one team and the team as a whole provide service to each of the sheltered schemes. This model is also popular with a number of Supporting People Administering Authorities.

Some of the benefits to The Hub & Spoke Model are:

- Clients get to know all team members and so there is no feeling of 'it's not my warden'.
- Clients are more likely to engage with the service as a whole rather than viewing one individual as the service provider.
- The team as a whole can provide peer support to each other (e.g. discussing strategies for support etc.)
- The team can adopt a more flexible approach to appropriate service delivery (e.g. if one scheme has significant issues requiring greater staffing presence on occasions).
- It is easier to arrange a joint visit if this is deemed to be required (e.g. under lone working safety etc.).
- If one member of the team is off (Annual Leave, Sickness, Training, etc.) another member can cover essential work and as clients are familiar with all team members the client views that the service continues as normal.
- If a new staff member joins the team, there is a greater opportunity for a thorough induction into the organisations procedures and policies, which other team members can be involved in.
- As staff work in a team, team members become accountable to each other. Our experience is that this often addresses situations where a staff member has not followed procedure - a form of 'team policing'.

The team themselves can address this in a supportive and constructive way.

- Individuals can draw from team strengths (e.g. one may be effective in liaising with other professional agencies whilst another may be effective in addressing anti-social behaviour etc.). Our experience is that this provides for a higher quality of service than individuals working in isolation.
- The teams performance can be evaluated as a whole. Although this would not remove the importance of evaluating individual performance, evaluating the team performance can focus on service performance as a whole. This in turn can create a high motivation for the team to perform effectively in line with the organisations objectives.

The Hub & Spoke model relies on the locations of grouped sheltered schemes being of reasonable commutable distance. There would also be the requirement for staff to travel from one scheme to another. This may be a change to existing working practice and could involve such points as the requirement for the organisation to provide a car users allowance. If your service is more rural, it may be that the Hub & Spoke model would not be the best fit for your service. There are a number of variations on the original Hub & Spoke model, one of which is likely to meet the requirements of your service. SHN have worked with a number of organisations in assisting them to introduce the Hub & Spoke model.

I hope that the information that I have provided in my reply to your e-mail is helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you feel that SHN can be of any further assistance to you in this matter.

Kind regards

Ray

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The Sheltered Housing Network