



HILLINGDON

LONDON

Social Services, Health & Housing Policy Overview Committee

Housing Support for Vulnerable People

January 2007

Members of the Committee:

Cllr Catherine Dann (Chairman)

Cllr Sid Garg

Cllr Pat Jackson

Cllr Peter Kemp

Cllr John Major

Cllr Michael White

Cllr Kay Willmott-Denbeigh



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

HOUSING SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review aimed to identify whether any changes are needed to the Council's provision of housing support to two groups of vulnerable people: those in sheltered housing and those helped in live in their own home. We found that the service is generally performing well and the service users we spoke to were highly complimentary of the service they receive.

Following the evidence we received, we make the following recommendations which we believe may enable the Council to help more people at little or no extra cost:

1. That Housing Services ensure that the three private sector leasing agents (Orchard and Shipman, Acton Housing Association and Frays Housing Association) carefully monitor rent arrears within the temporary accommodation portfolio. Action must be pro-active, taken as soon as rent arrears develop and focused on the support that can be provided to the tenant. The council should also examine whether portable computer equipment now available to Housing Benefit officers could be utilised to visit people at home who are in need of support but have not met with the Private Sector Leasing agents to discuss their situation.
2. That the Council takes a similarly proactive approach in relation to the Finders Fee scheme to help prevent vulnerable private sector tenants building up rent arrears. In particular, officers should reinforce to private sector landlords the importance of notifying the Housing Service as soon as a tenant is building up rent arrears. This will enable Housing Services to refer these tenants to the housing support service now available so that appropriate advice and support can be provided to the tenant before eviction is threatened. It is recognised however that this is a direct relationship between the private landlord and the tenant, that the Finders Fee scheme does not guarantee rents to landlords and that the council does not have a liability for the rent.
3. That following the temporary night shelter opened in January 2007, Cabinet ensures the Council continues to support the voluntary sector in establishing a winter night shelter for 2007/8; in particular the money allocated for this purpose in the current homelessness budget be rolled forward to 2007/8 if the need for such a facility is shown to continue to exist.
4. That Cabinet endorses our acknowledgement of the excellent work undertaken by the voluntary sector in Hillingdon and asks officers to examine how the Council can further aid groups such as Frays who provide housing support services to Hillingdon residents.

5. That Cabinet asks officers to develop proposals that ensure a financially sustainable strategy for delivering extra care housing support at a range of sheltered housing locations across the Borough.
6. That officers ensure that existing residents of sheltered schemes are provided with general information on living alongside tenants with higher care needs. Information will assist a general understanding of residents' needs within a scheme. Although not required to, there are also a number of residents who wish to assist neighbours with higher support needs. This information should be designed to support their efforts.
7. That Cabinet asks officers to investigate proposals to enable home-owners to benefit from extra care sheltered housing, particularly whether not-for-profit organisations could play a role in delivering extra care sheltered housing.
8. That Cabinet asks officers to explore proposals to ensure high-quality communal facilities in sheltered housing are utilised to their full potential e.g. by enabling non-residents to use the assisted bathing facilities under the supervision of care staff and extending the use of drop-in centres and social events for non-residents in the communal lounges.

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD



It gives me great pleasure to introduce the first report of the Social Services, Health & Housing Policy Overview Committee. The Committee was created after the May 2006 elections, and we have made a good start in working together to support Cabinet's objective of ensuring the Council provides high quality adult social care and housing services to vulnerable Hillingdon residents.

This, our first review, has sought to examine two areas of the Council's provision of housing support to vulnerable people and identify whether any changes are required. I am pleased to say that we did not find any major gaps or weaknesses. It was excellent to hear directly from those people who receive services from the Council - people who would not usually have the opportunity to contribute to a strategic review of Council services. As such, this review demonstrates the role Policy Overview Committees can play in seeking a cross-section of views when reviewing the Council's work. It was even more pleasing to hear that service users are highly complimentary of the services they receive.

I commend our recommendations to Cabinet for I believe that they will help ensure that action is taken to ensure the Council's resources are used to their fullest potential and that as many people as possible benefit from these excellent services.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee I would like to thank all of those who attended our review as witnesses. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to the work of the voluntary sector who play an outstanding role in helping vulnerable Hillingdon people and are operating in an ever more difficult financial environment. As always, my thanks go to the officers in Adult Social Care, Health & Housing and in Democratic Services without whose support and advice this review would not have been possible.

Cllr Catherine Dann

INTRODUCTION

1. Supporting people to live at home is a key priority both locally and nationally. Most people prefer to live in their own home rather than move into residential care. This is also usually much less costly and therefore maximises the value that can be gained from the Council's resources.
2. We chose this topic for a review as it features in the Council's plans and strategies. For example, one of the priorities in the Leader's Statement in the Council's Plan refers to grants to enable vulnerable people in private sector accommodation to live independently.
3. Housing support refers to a wide range of services that seek to develop or sustain an individual's capacity to live independently. It may include some or all of the following:
 - Setting up a home
 - Developing life and domestic skills
 - Managing finances and benefit claims
 - Gaining access to other services and community organisations
 - Establishing social contacts and activities
 - Establishing safety and security
 - Monitoring health and well being

Housing support is therefore a huge topic, and we decided to focus upon two client groups: support services for people in the private sector and sheltered housing.

4. In relation to these two services, our review sought to:
 - i.) examine the current housing support services provided to vulnerable people in Hillingdon and the impact of such services on residents' independence;
 - ii.) identify any gaps in services and areas of poor performance;
 - iii.) review current and future strategic issues facing housing support services;
 - iv.) identify potential improvements/actions in light of the above investigations.
5. This report presents our findings. It first outlines the methodology for the review and then a summary of our conclusions with recommendations for Cabinet action where we feel this is appropriate.

METHODOLOGY

6. We began the review with a background report from Housing officers which introduced our two areas of work. We then held a witness session on each of these areas and heard from a varied range of stakeholders who would not usually contribute to the development of Council policy.
7. On support services for vulnerable people we heard from:
 - Kaks Chahal – Housing Advice and Options Team, London Borough of Hillingdon
 - Natalie McLean – Supporting People service user
 - Linda Lancaster & Teresa Simmonds – Frays Housing
 - Daniel Haigh & Mark Jolly – West London YMCA
8. On sheltered housing we heard from:
 - Phillip Sharpe – Head of Older People’s Services, London Borough of Hillingdon
 - Jan Lynn – Elderly Services Co-ordinator, Hillingdon Homes
 - Mr Bryan Steeples - sheltered housing resident
 - Siobhan Moore - Housing 21

EVIDENCE & RECOMMENDATIONS

Support Services for People in the Private Sector

Introduction

9. Housing support is aimed at developing or sustaining someone's capacity to live independently. We decided that our review would look at support services to people in the private sector, particularly young people. We were concerned that this group of vulnerable people may often get overlooked or 'slip through the net'; young people leaving care and setting up home for the first time may need help with managing bills and understanding tenancy conditions, for example. Our review focused on:
- i.) The advice offered by the Council and voluntary organisations to help people remain in their homes;
 - ii.) The support which could be offered to homeless people during the winter months;
 - iii.) The work of the voluntary sector to support young people and prevent homelessness.

The importance of housing support and advice services

10. The Housing Advice and Options Team seeks to prevent people becoming homeless through offering an advice service. The team provides drop-in sessions at both the Civic Centre and in the community, which seek to promote the services that are available and offer advice on how to access these.
11. The Team provides general housing advice on a wide range of areas including matrimonial and relationship breakdown, violence, mortgage arrears, tenancy rights, illegal eviction, repair and overcrowding issues, homelessness, and obtaining accommodation. It operates or makes referrals to a wide range of schemes and services. Services referred to include: the Emergency Housing Unit; the Housing Assessment Team; Private Sector Housing; Family Mediation Services; Social Services; Anti-Social Behaviour Team; Citizen's Advice Bureau; Navigator; Project 2041; YMCA and Stonham schemes at Ventura and Jupiter houses; Yeldall; Connexions; Radicle; YMCA St Andrews hostel; SOLO at Frays; and the Single Persons Drop in at St Andrews.
12. Overall, the Team sees about 650 clients per month, of which 300 are new clients. The Council has an annual homelessness prevention target of 605, which will be met, and a guideline referral target of 480 homeless clients to Emergency Housing. We heard that this target will not be exceeded at current rates.
13. The Supporting People programme delivers a wide range of support to diverse sections of Hillingdon's population. These services are tailored to the specific needs

of client groups and are commissioned to meet identified needs, e.g. floating support has been established specifically for people with mental health problems from black and minority ethnic groups.

14. Our review sought to move beyond statistics and we directly heard about the significant positive impact this support can make to people's lives. We were very grateful to Natalie McLean for giving up her time to come and tell us about the dramatic changes she was able to make to her life following the help of a support worker. The support worker enabled Natalie to take a series of steps to overcome the problems caused by large debts and low confidence. We were struck by Natalie's view of the positive impact of the Supporting People programme and the significant difference this has made to her life and well-being.

Ensuring people are aware of the available advice and support at an early stage

15. We heard the real difference these services can make to people's lives. Problems often develop over time, and the sooner someone receives advice, the earlier steps can be initiated to address the problems. Natalie advised us that she would have benefited if the services had been available at an earlier stage, and our other witnesses suggested the same is true for most other people approaching the Council or other sources of advice. We believe that advice and support should be offered as early as possible for this can help prevent more expensive intervention at a later date to address problems that have worsened.

16. We understand that Housing Services already works hard to promote the advice and support services on offer. As stated earlier, advice sessions are well attended and many people receive information and support. However, we are concerned to ensure that vulnerable people requiring support and facing potential eviction are offered advice at an early stage. Housing Services told us that they send out letters inviting tenants placed in temporary accommodation to come and discuss their situation once rent arrears accrue. This is sensible and we welcome this. However, it is vital that this letter is sent at the earliest opportunity. In addition, not all tenants will respond to this letter and may prefer to 'bury their heads in the sand'. As discussed above, it is vital that problems are tackled at an early stage and therefore the Council must adopt a proactive approach to offering support, i.e. by following up the initial letter and potentially visiting people who may be reluctant to visit the Civic Centre.

Recommendation 1:

That Housing Services ensure that the three private sector leasing agents (Orchard and Shipman, Acton Housing Association and Frays Housing Association) carefully monitor rent arrears within the temporary accommodation portfolio. Action must be pro-active, taken as soon as rent arrears develop and focused on the support that can be provided to the tenant. The council should also examine whether portable computer equipment now available to Housing Benefit officers could be utilised to visit people at home who are in need of

support but have not met with the Private Sector Leasing agents to discuss their situation.

17. We understand that this may place an additional burden on Housing Services, but we firmly believe that problems are best tackled at an early stage. A proactive approach will help protect vulnerable Hillingdon people from homelessness and may save the Council money.
18. These recommendations seek to ensure tenants building up rent arrears in Hillingdon Homes' property are offered advice on support options at an early stage, before the situation worsens. However, given that demand outstrips Hillingdon Homes' available stock, many vulnerable Hillingdon residents are located in private sector housing.
19. One of the main schemes available through the Housing Advice and Options Team is 'Finders Fee' accommodation. This is a landlord incentive scheme offering Assured Shorthold Tenancies to statutorily homeless clients. We heard that many people prefer this route than wait several years in Temporary Accommodation for a Council or Registered Social Landlord tenancy. Over 900 clients are now housed in Finders Fee properties.
20. We heard that the Council might not be aware of supported private sector tenants building up rent arrears until a later stage than would be the case with Hillingdon Homes' residents. We understand that residents may have built up rent arrears and be faced with eviction before seeking advice or even being aware of the advice services on offer. The Council obviously has less control over private sector landlords than its arms length management organisation Hillingdon Homes. However, it is clearly in both the landlords' and tenants' interests that rent arrears do not build up and any problems are tackled at an early stage.

Recommendation 2:

That the Council takes a similarly proactive approach in relation to the Finders Fee scheme to help prevent vulnerable private sector tenants building up rent arrears. In particular, officers should reinforce to private sector landlords the importance of notifying the Housing Service as soon as a tenant is building up rent arrears. This will enable Housing Services to refer these tenants to the housing support service now available so that appropriate advice and support can be provided to the tenant before eviction is threatened. It is recognised however that this is a direct relationship between the private landlord and the tenant, that the Finders Fee scheme does not guarantee rents to landlords and that the council does not have a liability for the rent.

21. People facing housing problems can access free advice and support from many sources. The Council's Housing Options Team, referred to earlier, is highly popular.

However, it is only able to support as many people as its resources allow. Also, some people will not want to seek advice from 'the Council'. Our recommendations above seek to ensure people are aware of the advice and support available at an early stage. We urge Housing Services to ensure intervention promotes the wide range of options for accessing support. This should include contact details for local MPs and Councillors. Councillors are members of the local community elected to represent and help local people with problems they may be having. Councillors can be an invaluable source in addressing problems with Council services and may appeal to those people who do not wish to approach Council officers for advice.

Winter night shelter for the homeless

22. The witnesses from both Frays Housing Association and West London YMCA strongly expressed their view that a winter night shelter for homeless people in Hillingdon is urgently required.
23. Official statistics indicate Hillingdon has less than ten people sleeping rough, and as such Central Government does not classify this as an issue for the Borough. A count of rough sleepers in December 2004 found seven. However, the geographical size of the Borough – the second largest in London – makes it difficult to accurately count the actual number of rough sleepers. It is thought that the real number, including those sleeping rough at Heathrow Airport, is closer to 20. The drop-in centre reported 93 callers who were sleeping rough in a single year.¹ Again therefore, it would appear that the Borough is adversely affected by hosting the world's busiest international airport.² In addition, the YMCA and Harrow Council have closed their night shelter for refurbishment, which may well further increase the number of people sleeping rough in Hillingdon.
24. However, night shelters can be unpopular and the proposal to establish such a facility may be controversial. Indeed, we note that Government policy is against the establishment of such facilities. Local residents may be opposed to a night shelter fearing an influx of homeless people to their area and an increase in anti-social behaviour. However, we believe that these concerns require further consideration. Successful night shelters require much planning and effective management. Security and health and safety considerations are vital to the effective operation of night shelters. West London YMCA and Frays Housing told us that they are very enthusiastic about becoming involved in a night shelter and would contribute highly valuable expertise, knowledge and enthusiasm. A well run shelter could also help reduce anti-social behaviour by providing a safe and secure refuge for the night. We

¹ Hillingdon Supporting People Strategy 2005-10, March 2005, page 45

² Heathrow is the world's busiest international airport and serves over 180 destinations in over 90 countries (www.heathrowairport.com). For further information on the Airport's impact on local public service providers see the Health & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee Report into 'The Impact of Heathrow on the Hillingdon Health & Social Care Economy' (http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/central/democracy/scrutiny/heathrow_impact.pdf).

heard that there are common instances of homeless people undertaking anti-social behaviour and low-level crime to obtain alcohol to help them sleep in the cold weather. The witnesses advised us that this anti-social behaviour might be reduced if a night shelter was available.

25. We note that it is not the Council's responsibility alone to establish and operate a winter night shelter. However, on the basis of the evidence received from our witnesses we believe that the case for establishing a winter night shelter in Hillingdon should be considered as a high priority. We have already written to the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Health & Housing and are grateful for his reply. Just as our report was being finalised we heard that a night shelter was planned to open in St Andrew's Hall, Uxbridge, on 22nd January 2007. The shelter was due to run for six weeks and would primarily be organised by the Council, SOLO Housing Project, and the YMCA. We welcome this and hope that it will lay the foundations for such a facility to operate for the whole of the 2007/8 winter.

Recommendation 3:

That following the temporary night shelter opened in January 2007, Cabinet ensures the Council continues to support the voluntary sector in establishing a winter night shelter for 2007/8; in particular the money allocated for this purpose in the current homelessness budget be rolled forward to 2007/8 if the need for such a facility is shown to continue to exist.

Support to single people in the private sector

26. Our review sought to examine housing support for vulnerable people. However, 'vulnerable' can be a subjective definition and there are many people who are not officially classified as vulnerable but require some level of housing support. We heard about the vital role the voluntary sector can play in supporting these people, and prevent the Council having to provide support to meet more serious needs at a later stage.
27. Frays Housing outlined their work to help single people find rented accommodation in the private sector. Although most of their clients receive benefits and some have severe depression most are not officially classified as 'vulnerable'. The SOLO scheme operated by Frays introduces tenants to landlords and helps these vulnerable Hillingdon people with their deposit. We heard that this is a highly successful scheme which provides accommodation for between 25 to 30 clients per month in resident landlord lodgings or shared housing.
28. However, we heard that the scheme is struggling as a result of its success. The more people Frays place in housing, the more people they have to offer ongoing support to. The project has now housed, and therefore supports, over 400 people with only one support worker and the part time Supporting People funded worker. Frays can

therefore find it difficult to manage what they believe to be sometimes unreasonable demands of the client and landlord. For example, landlords may have high expectations of Frays. As an introductory agent Frays told us that they cannot be held responsible for tenants' bad behaviour or criminal damage. Frays will carefully try to select tenants, but a small number may ultimately undertake dishonest and/or criminal behaviour. Frays struggle to find enough private landlords willing to participate in the scheme. Many do not wish to accept housing benefit and may have past experience of late payment with such tenants.

29. Hillingdon is an attractive and popular place to live and this fuels high property prices. As such, there can be a significant difference between the market rental prices and the level of income support or job seekers allowance, in particular for those under 25 years old who receive lower financial support levels. Frays advised us that Brent Council offers a discretionary top-up to housing benefit of between £8-10 to help these young people meet the high rental prices in north west London.
30. It was not possible to explore this issue in greater detail at our meeting. However housing officers suggested that a discretionary payment on these lines might present several complications. Our review seeks to review the strategic issues facing housing support services and it is clear from the evidence heard that the high rental prices in the Borough present a serious problem for young people in Hillingdon. This problem is both well known and complex. A solution will not be simple and is beyond the scope of this review, however we hope that the Council will continue to work with partners to examine solutions to this issue.
31. In the meantime, it is clear that voluntary groups such as Frays are undertaking vital work in helping people with moderate support needs find accommodation. While these people are often not officially classified as 'vulnerable', we believe that the support offered by these voluntary sector often prevents individuals' needs worsening and the Council having to offer support once the problems escalate. We are also aware that voluntary sector groups are operating in difficult circumstances with grants coming under threat as statutory organisations face budget pressures.

Recommendation 4:

That Cabinet endorses our acknowledgement of the excellent work undertaken by the voluntary sector in Hillingdon and asks officers to examine how the Council can further aid groups such as Frays who provide housing support services to Hillingdon residents.

Sheltered Housing

Background

32. One of the council's key objectives is to maximise the independence of older people. The council aims to reduce the numbers of people living in more institutional settings such as residential care and nursing homes, and enable older people, where possible, to live in their own home with appropriate support and care.
33. Sheltered housing provides older people with a secure environment within a community of other residents and the ability to continue living independently. Each sheltered housing scheme has a Scheme Manager whose role it is to provide housing support to residents, promote the welfare of residents and encourage independence.
34. Hillingdon Homes manage all the council-owned sheltered housing schemes in Hillingdon. Management and maintenance of the schemes is funded from the Housing Revenue Account, while housing support activities (part of the Scheme Manager's duties) are funded from the council's Supporting People grant.
35. We heard that sheltered housing is the current home for a minority of older people and is unlikely to be the preferred choice for most older people. Hillingdon's own Housing Need Survey undertaken in 2005 showed that most older people wish to remain in their own homes even when their health or mobility deteriorates. The vast majority of frail older people who said that their housing was unsuitable for their needs still had no intention of moving.
36. The majority of people currently living in Hillingdon Homes' sheltered housing have low or no support needs. Currently, council sheltered housing applicants must be:
- Over 60
 - Able to live independently with some support
 - Able to use the facilities of the sheltered scheme
 - Able and prepared to live within a close community sharing communal facilities
 - Council sheltered housing applicants must not be in requirement of 24 hour care and a secure environment to ensure their personal safety

Sheltered Housing for people with higher support needs

37. There is an increasing demand for sheltered housing to be used for a greater range of vulnerable clients who require extra care, such as those with dementia. We heard that using sheltered housing for people with higher support needs would provide a

greater range of housing options for people who could benefit from an independent environment but who would otherwise be living in residential care.

38. Social Services and Hillingdon Homes are working closely together to broaden the use of sheltered housing to cater for people with extra care needs. Scheme Managers (sometimes referred to as 'wardens' by residents) are able to provide day-to-day housing support and can refer a resident for extra care with a minimum delay. The extra care service can be used for a temporary period for people returning from hospital to ease recovery. Alternatively, a typical situation for a sheltered housing resident in receipt of the service would be to receive three visits per day from the extra care service offering personal care, assistance with meals and bathing. Hillingdon plans to have delivered extra care to 160 residents living in council sheltered housing by the end of March 2007. Although this has been a success, we heard that officers do not believe this current model is sustainable in the long-term.
39. During the consultation on the introduction of the extra care service with existing sheltered residents it was agreed to have a ceiling of 20% of residents in any one scheme receiving extra care. This was to ensure that schemes would maintain a mix of support needs and preserve the existing nature of the schemes where the majority of people have low or no support needs.
40. The ceiling of 20% extra care provision within an individual scheme ensures that the service is spread over 21 schemes. This provides residents with greater choice and flexibility as extra care is available throughout the borough. However, it also ensures that care provision is more expensive for the Council to provide. Officers advised us that large cost reductions are possible if extra care provision was to be concentrated in a smaller number of schemes.
41. This is a difficult issue and requires a careful balance to be struck between the two conflicting considerations of offering the greatest possible choice and maximising the use of the Council's resources. The current practice offers certain benefits to some Hillingdon residents. It enables the Council to offer a wide choice of sheltered housing facilities across the Borough. Importantly, we heard that it enables the Council to offer a 'home for life'; i.e. elderly people do not need to move to an alternative sheltered housing scheme if their condition deteriorates and their support needs increase. Residents much appreciate this.
42. However, we also heard that this current model of extra care service provision across 21 sites might not be financially sustainable in the long-term. Care staff currently spend time travelling between sheltered housing sites; reducing the number of sites providing extra care support would mean that staff could spend some of this travelling time helping vulnerable Hillingdon residents. The current model provides a quality service to a select group of people who are able to remain in the sheltered housing scheme of their choice. However, concentrating the number of sheltered housing sites offering extra care support is likely to maximise the use of the Council's resources and enable a greater number of people to benefit from this service.

Recommendation 5:

That Cabinet asks officers to develop proposals that ensure a financially sustainable strategy for delivering extra care housing support at a range of sheltered housing locations across the Borough.

Communication with existing residents

43. It is vital that any changes to increase the role sheltered housing plays in supporting people with higher needs does not significantly alter the experience of existing residents. Existing residents are worried that a large increase in the number of residents with dementia may alter the balance and nature of sheltered housing. Residents feel that it is important younger residents continue to move in to ensure the social scene is maintained.

44. Brian Steeples told us that residents do not oppose people with extra care needs moving in to sheltered housing. However, he said it is vital that someone explains to existing residents about the needs of the new residents, *before* these residents move in. Communal areas such as lounges are seen as part of people's homes, and residents are worried about how the arrival of new residents with extra needs (e.g. dementia) will affect *'their'* home. We believe that this communication is vital and must take place at an early stage in a sensitive manner to ensure that misconceptions and rumours about new arrivals do not emerge.

Recommendation 6:

That officers ensure that existing residents of sheltered schemes are provided with general information on living alongside tenants with higher care needs. Information will assist a general understanding of residents' needs within a scheme. Although not required to, there are also a number of residents who wish to assist neighbours with higher support needs. This information should be designed to support their efforts.

Enabling more people to benefit from Hillingdon Homes' sheltered housing

45. Demand for sheltered housing outstrips supply, and Hillingdon Homes must prioritise the need of residents; those with equity of over £30,000 are unlikely to be offered a place in Hillingdon Homes' sheltered housing. Although home-owners may have the equity to enable other options to be considered e.g. private sector housing schemes, the Council's eligibility criteria can force home-owners who may benefit from extra care sheltered housing into higher cost residential care.

46. We strongly feel that action must be undertaken to explore how a greater number of people could benefit from extra care sheltered housing – particularly those who are

currently unlikely to be eligible for Hillingdon Homes' excellent facilities for they own their homes. Building new facilities is expensive and we therefore briefly sought information on whether alternative methods may be available for delivering such objectives.

47. We were pleased to listen to Siobhan Moore from Housing 21 about the organisation's extra care sheltered housing schemes. Housing 21 is a charitable society that operates over 700 extra care units across England and this will soon increase to over 1000. We heard that extra care sheltered housing is an 'enabling environment' and residents' care needs typically decline by between forty and fifty percent in this type of accommodation. The schemes seek to develop links with health services e.g. to establish a falls clinic, and the organisation aims to develop extra care schemes as community hubs with resources such as catering facilities and shops. Housing 21 often receives land to build sheltered housing schemes on from local authorities and Primary Care Trusts. The organisation does not have a fixed model for provision and seeks to meet the local demand; schemes range from multi-storey flats in Liverpool to two-storey houses in rural Yorkshire. Significantly, Housing 21 also operates mixed tenure schemes that accommodate people on a range of tenures including owner-occupiers, part-owned and rented.

48. We are not suggesting that the Council necessarily enters into discussions with Housing 21 but we do believe that all options for meeting the needs of Hillingdon residents should be explored. The evidence we heard from Housing 21 suggests that organisations such as these may be able to play a significant role in maximising the Council's resources.

Recommendation 7:

That Cabinet asks officers to investigate proposals to enable home-owners to benefit from extra care sheltered housing, particularly whether not-for-profit organisations could play a role in delivering extra care sheltered housing.

Maximising the use of the Hillingdon Homes' sheltered housing facilities

49. We heard that Hillingdon Homes provides a service that is well regarded by its residents. The accommodation is of a high quality and work is underway to make improvements where necessary. However, our witnesses also told us that the communal facilities in many of Hillingdon Homes' sheltered housing schemes are often under-utilised including the lounges. In addition, many schemes have assisted bathing facilities that would greatly benefit those who struggle to bathe in their own home.

50. This issue must be explored in a sensitive manner, for as we stated earlier, sheltered housing residents rightly view the communal facilities as part of 'their' home. However, we understand that communal lounges are already being used on a trial

basis to host services for non-residents; dementia services have been extended to include a Saturday service to support carers and two pilot drop-in cafes are based at selected sheltered housing schemes. We believe that if the opportunity exists for a greater number of people to benefit from under-utilised resources then this must be explored further in a sensitive manner.

Recommendation 8:

That Cabinet asks officers to explore proposals to ensure high-quality communal facilities in sheltered housing are utilised to their full potential e.g. by enabling non-residents to use the assisted bathing facilities under the supervision of care staff and extending the use of drop-in centres and social events for non-residents in the communal lounges.

CLOSING WORD

51. Our review sought to examine two areas of the Council's provision of housing support to vulnerable people and identify whether any changes are required. We did not find any major gaps in these services but found that more people could potentially be supported if greater resources were available or existing resources were used slightly differently. We hope that these recommendations will help further improve these high performing services and commend them to Cabinet.