

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 24th September, 2013

**Lead Member / Officer: Lead Members for Social Care and Children's Services and Lead Member for Housing and Community Development
Director of Modernisation and Wellbeing**

Report Author: Sally Ellis

Title: Supported Housing Protocol

1. What is the report about?

The report sets out a process to enable the Council to take fair and balanced decisions about the location of "supported housing".

2. What is the reason for making this report?

A decision is required on the adoption of the protocol attached at Appendix 1.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Cabinet adopts the protocol attached at Appendix 1.

4. Report details.

4.1 "Supported housing is housing "Where support is delivered alongside the provision of accommodation and the support continues to be delivered in that property even when one person moves out and another person moves in". It does not include residential homes which are regulated by CSSIW and require a special category of planning permission.

4.2 Supported housing can include schemes for a wide range of groups including

- Frail older people
- People with medical conditions
- Young people not yet ready for independent living
- People fleeing domestic violence
- Those leaving institutions (including ex-offenders) and
- Those with alcohol and drug related issues

4.3 Proposals for supported housing may be put forward by a range of bodies- including the Council's own Learning Disability Team and Homelessness Services, services commissioned by the Supporting People Team, as well as external bodies such as the Bail Accommodation and Support Service and

others like Probation or BCUHB. In all cases, the supported housing proposed is for local people.

4.4 While finding suitable locations for supported housing can be straightforward, it can also be highly contentious in local communities. This can be for a range of reasons- lack of knowledge and understanding of the group involved, a sense of vulnerability, anxiety about the impact on house prices, concern about the impact of a development on near neighbours or groups of individuals. It can cause conflict in communities, lead to distrust of the Council and to behaviours which are discriminatory, including against groups protected by the Equalities Act 2010. These proposals can put local elected members in an almost impossible position where they can see the need for a scheme, but it can be hard to maintain this against vocal local opposition.

4.5 Equally, local vulnerable individuals need suitable accommodation. Without it, people's needs become more acute, in health and welfare terms. They are unable to build stable community links and get engaged in normal life- including in education and employment- and, in the case of those previously involved in the criminal justice system, repeat offending behaviour becomes more likely.

4.6 Vulnerable people also need to know that they are living somewhere which will accept them. The evidence is that they are more likely to be victims of harassment themselves than to perpetrate it.

4.7 Currently, there is no formal system for the Council to consider all perspectives and take a reasoned decision about a proposed location. This can lead to repeated failure to find locations for schemes that are badly needed. Sometimes the planning system has been used as a way of seeking a resolution, but on its own this is unsatisfactory and does not lead to all issues being properly considered.

4.8 The protocol attached at Appendix 1 has been developed by officers from a range of departments (social services, Housing, Planning, Supporting People, with input from Legal) in conjunction with the two relevant Lead Members, representatives of each of the political groups and the Homelessness Champion. It has used material from a similar protocol developed in Wigan but is very much based on the experience of Denbighshire officers and members over a number of years and through both straightforward and highly contentious proposals.

4.9 The protocol sets out a carefully considered approach to making decisions about the proposed location of supported housing. Key features include

- defining what information will be shared with whom and at what stage
- a structured approach to collating information about a particular site proposed and its strengths and weaknesses
- a structured approach to identifying any planning issues at an early stage
- a clear approach to identifying the potential "sensitivity" of a potential scheme in the interests of ensuring fair and considered treatment for all involved
- recommended approaches for sharing information about schemes with those most affected

- the establishment of a “Supported Housing Panel”, reporting to Cabinet, which would make recommendations on a proposed location having considered all information and perspectives

4 How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Two of the council’s corporate priorities are to ensure that

Vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible

And

Ensuring access to good quality housing

5 What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

Dealing with proposals for supported housing already commits substantial officer time. This is particularly the case when proposals are contentious and attract community opposition. Though they are not numerous, they are very time intensive when they arise. Working together in an agreed process should help reduce demands on time as well as enable consensus. There will be an admin resource implication arising from servicing the Specialist Accommodation Panel. It is proposed that this resource would be provided by the Supporting People Team or the Housing Department.

6 What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

The main conclusions of the EqIA are that the protocol will mitigate some of the most serious incidences of discrimination which can arise when supported housing proposals are brought forward.

7 What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The protocol has not been considered by Scrutiny. However, consultation has taken place with providers of supported housing, through Town and Community Council cluster meetings, with representatives of service users and each of the Member Area Groups. Virtually all consultees supported the principle of the protocol and suggested amendments to strengthen/clarify processes have been incorporated. These related, for example, to the need to include a definition of supported housing, to including a more explicit reference to the Equalities Act 2010, and to including a definition of “consultation” and a clear timescale for reviewing the Protocol.

Service users (9 were interviewed) were generally supportive of the protocol and were keen to see a number of approaches to informing communities and elected members about the needs and achievements of people in supported housing eg through development of media resources. They were keen to see the involvement of existing projects in new developments, wanted local communities to receive

balanced information and were keen that elected members understood that the profile of people in supported housing was changing in part because of welfare reform.

Negative views from consultees included: the view that the protocol is idealistic and won't work, the potential for it to be a long-winded process, anxiety about transparency and that the public would not be involved until late in the process (Dee Valley cluster), a view that decisions on location should be taken locally, not by Cabinet (Rhyl MAG), specific concerns voiced about particular housing providers, and concerns that the development of the prison in Wrexham could lead to a demand for more supported housing in Denbighshire (Dee Valley and Rhyl MAGs).

8 Chief Finance Officer Statement

The administration resource identified to support the Accommodation Panel can be provided from within existing Supporting People administration budgets

9 What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

It is possible that the requirement to comply with a protocol might make it more difficult to establish schemes than has previously been the case, or it will take longer to gain agreement. Schemes have sometimes previously come into existence "under the radar" and have caused no problems. The sensitivity matrix attempts to deal with this through providing a light touch approach to schemes which are not contentious- but it remains a risk. It is possible that the Panel approach will not lead to better resolution of a difficult community issue. It is recommended that the working of the protocol is reviewed after one year so that a different approach can be taken if it does not prove helpful.

10 Power to make the Decision

S 111 of the LG Act 1972
Equalities Act 2010