

**Lead Officer: Executive director of adult services, health and housing**

**Wards: All**

**Agenda Item: 6**

**Subject: - A proposal to change the use of Gillett Road Retirement Housing Scheme to General Needs Temporary Accommodation**

---

## **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to note the proposal to change the use of Gillett Road to general needs temporary accommodation and the tenant consultation which has taken place.

## **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Panel of a proposal to change the use of Gillett Road retirement housing scheme (Gillett Road) to general needs to accommodation for homeless families with children.
- 2.2 The proposal was presented to the existing tenants at Gillett Road on Thursday 7 March and marks the start of the consultation with affected tenants. The consultation period lasted for 4 weeks and ended on 8 April.
- 2.3 This report also provides information about the background and reason for the proposal, the options that have been presented to tenants and a brief description of how the block was selected as well as the tenant consultation and decision making process

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Over the past two years, Croydon has seen a significant increase in homelessness. In 2009/10, Croydon accepted its legal duty to house 380 families with children. By 2011/12, this had almost doubled to 715 representing a greater increase than any London borough except Lambeth.
- 3.2 Unfortunately, the forecast for the next few months is bleak as it is expected that there will be further sharp increases in the number of homeless families.
- 3.3 While the number of homeless families has increased dramatically, the supply of private rented properties has all but dried up. In the year 2008/09 the

Council secured 373 private sector properties for homeless households but last year this had dropped to just 30 properties. Due to this fall in the supply of private rented properties, more and more homeless families are being housed in unsuitable accommodation such as bed and breakfast (B&B). Obviously, this kind of accommodation is not suitable for families with small children and it is also very expensive

- 3.4 As well as not being suitable, not all of the nightly fee payable is covered by housing benefit and the Council has to make up the shortfall. On average the cost of making up this shortfall is £15.20 per family, per day. Bearing in mind that there are around 500 living in B&B accommodation, this places pressure on the General Fund; a budget that is already under strain.
- 3.5 There is a very serious shortage of family housing, but there is a lot of retirement housing in Croydon. Also, some blocks are less popular than others and we often have difficulty finding people who want to move into some of these empty flats particularly those on the upper floors. We also know that over time, older peoples housing expectations have changed and they now prefer to stay in their own homes.

#### **4. The reason for the proposal to change the use of a retirement housing block**

- 4.1 Due to the serious shortage of family housing and demand from homeless families, we cannot afford to keep all retirement housing for older people, especially as it has become less popular.
- 4.2 Therefore, the Council needs to make sure that it is making the best use of the homes that it has to house as many people as possible.

#### **5. Selection of the retirement housing blocks**

- 5.1 The process of selecting the retirement blocks was carried out in three stages and these are described below.
- 5.2 Stage 1 involved drawing up a list of retirement housing schemes which considered being potentially suitable for general needs housing. The blocks which were selected were the 11 high rise retirement housing blocks. Which we aware are more difficult to let, particularly the uppers floors, so much so that in the past they have had to be advertised in the local press to encourage people to move into them.
- 5.3 At Stage 2, the popularity of the 11 blocks selected was reviewed as well as the number of other sheltered housing schemes near by and whether the flats in each block were self contained with a separate bedroom.
- 5.4 Stage 3 of the section process involved looking at whether the blocks met the decent homes standard, at the number of adapted bathrooms and shower.

Other factors also taken into consideration was the age of the existing tenants and how much they used the services provide by Careline and Invicta.

## **6. The reasons leading to Gillett Road being the preferred block**

6.1 The reasons leading to the selection of Gillett Road as the preferred block are:

- Historically, the high rise sheltered housing blocks have been the more difficult to let
- it is one of three 'twin tower' high rise blocks;
- there are a large number of alternative sheltered housing blocks near by;
- Gillett Road is one of the largest retirement housing blocks comprising 66 1 bed roomed self contained flats and on its own would provided a higher number of flats than some of the other blocks
- Gillett Road has fewer adapted showers/bathrooms than Garnet Road.

## **7. Consultation with the tenants at Gillett Road**

7.1 Consultation with the existing tenants at Gillett Road began with two meetings held on the 7 March. Tenants have also been given a detailed information sheet, a shortened version of the information sheet and a questionnaire which they have been asked to complete.

7.2 The purpose of the these documents is to give the tenants at Gillett Road a clear understanding of the reasons and facts behind the proposal to change the use of Gillett Road. We are seeking the views of the tenants about the proposal and the following options:

**Option 1:** Keep Gillett Road as retirement accommodation and other retirement housing block as retirement housing (in other words, do nothing)

**Option 2 (preferred option):** Change the use of Gillett Road retirement housing scheme to general needs housing classification.

**Option 3:** Change the use of another retirement housing block to general needs housing classification.

7.3 The consultation period lasted for four weeks and the closing date for receipt of completed questionnaires and comments was 8 April.

## **8. Tenant support during the consultation**

8.1 Officers from the Council's resident involvement team visited Gillett Road on three separate occasions to offer help and assistance to the tenants and to encourage tenants to express their views.

**9. Potential impact for existing tenants**

- 9.1 If the decision was made to change the use of Gillett Road to general needs housing, existing tenants will be able to remain in the block if they wish you want to. However, the Council is aware that some tenants may not want to stay at the scheme if it was used to house families with children. Some people may, for example, want to move to another retirement scheme so that their neighbours are all older people. If people chose to move, the Council would offer to help and support people to find somewhere suitable to move to.

**10. Decision making and what happens next**

- 10.1 It is important to emphasise that a decision has not been made about changing the use of Gillett Road. When the consultation period has ended, the findings will be pulled together in a report as well as carrying out an equalities impact assessment.
- 10.2 It is expected that the report will be presented at the cabinet meeting scheduled to take place in June and would expect to be able to inform the tenants at Gillett Road of the outcome in July.

Report Author, Joy Gardner, special projects officer, 020 8726 6100 ext. 62119