

CITY BOARD
19 APRIL 2012

ITEM A10

COMMUNITY ROOM REVIEW

Report of the Director of Housing and Customer Services

1. SUMMARY

This report updates the City Board on the ongoing work to reduce costs in community rooms across the City. This includes reviews and proposals in respect of under-utilised community rooms, the Use and Hire of Community Rooms Policy and the purchase of television licences for community rooms.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The City Board is asked to agree:

1. the proposals to convert community rooms at Slindon Croft and Garsdale Court to accommodation suitable for elderly or disabled tenants, subject to the Council 's approval, and to note progress in encouraging greater use of the community rooms as detailed in paragraphs 3.21 - 3.27.
2. the withdrawal of television licences at selected community rooms.
3. the changes highlighted in the Use of Hire and Community Rooms policy.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Derby Homes manages 25 community rooms which are located within sheltered housing schemes. The schemes are primarily for older people and people with disabilities. The community rooms are used to varying degrees by local residents for community activities such as coffee mornings, lunch clubs and bingo. Services are also provided by other agencies like Social Care to our residents and the wider community.
- 3.2 The residents of housing schemes with a community room pay 68p a week as an element of the rent.
- 3.3 There has always been a disparity in the levels of use in the community rooms, both by the residents and external agencies which the Community Initiatives Team has attempted to address since April 2009.
- 3.4 Whilst we have seen almost a 40% increase overall in the numbers of residents attending social activities there are still a number of community rooms which are significantly under-utilised.

- 3.5 The Executive Team made recommendations to the City Board in June 2011 regarding the top ten most under-utilised rooms. It was proposed that some of the rooms be considered for conversion to accommodation. These proposals were subject to consultation with the Supported Housing Offering Unity and Trust Group (SHOUT) and local residents.
- 3.6 Derby Homes has carried out consultation events at the community rooms that were highlighted as having the potential to be converted into accommodation.
- 3.7 The SHOUT group created and sent out a questionnaire to all tenants that contribute towards the cost of the room and collated the results independently of Derby Homes (Appendix 1).
- 3.8 SHOUT and Derby Association of Community Partners (DACP) were represented at each consultation event. Items discussed included income and outgoings for each room (Appendix 2), current financial restraints on Derby Homes, current usage at each room, what has been done to increase activities and tenant s'views about the future of the rooms. The SHOUT representative also read out the results of the questionnaires.
- 3.9 At its meeting in October 2011, it was recommended that the City Board continued to support and monitor the growth of new activities at Oakleigh Avenue, Slindon Croft and Garsdale Court and to retain the current use of the community room at Humber Close.
- 3.10 At the end of the monitoring period, the following community rooms are proposed to be considered for conversion to accommodation.
- 3.11 **Garsdale Court** – The number of activities taking place remains at 2 covering a total of 2 hours per week. There has been no interest shown by residents to increase the number of activities. Both of the current activities could be accommodated at Humber Close Community Room.
- 3.12 The cost of running the room is £2,865 a year. This is covered by £1,110 income from tenants and £1,756 subsidy from Derby Homes. The cost of converting the room to accommodation has been estimated at between £7,000 and £9,000. The property could be converted in to a two bedroom property to suit a disabled person.
- 3.13 Closure of the room would create an immediate saving to tenants of 68p a week and to Derby Homes of £1,756 a year. If the conversion cost £9,000 and the rent charged was £80 a week (rent charge of similar two bedroom property in that area), the cost of the conversion would be recouped in just over 2 years.

Proposal – To convert the room to a desirable accommodation and to cease charging tenants from the agreed closure date.

- 3.14 **Slindon Croft, Alvaston** – Some residents at Slindon Croft have been very proactive in encouraging use of the community room. However, there has been

little interest shown in any activities delivered. It is counterproductive to encourage usage from outside agencies because they bring additional traffic to an area where there is already a shortage of parking facilities and residents complain that the close is too busy. There are currently 2 resident led activities and 2 activities run by the Live at Home Scheme. The resident led activities can be accommodated at Humber Close Community Room and the Live at Home Scheme can be accommodated at other community rooms within the City.

- 3.15 The cost of running the room is £2,725 a year. This is covered by £979 income from tenants and £1,746 subsidy from Derby Homes. The cost of converting the room to accommodation has been estimated at between £7,000 and £9,000. This property could be converted to a large one bedroom bungalow.
- 3.16 Closure of the room would create an immediate saving to tenants of 68p a week and to Derby Homes of £1,746 a year. If the conversion cost £9,000 and the rent charged was £71 a week (rent charge of similar one bedroom property in that area), the cost of the conversion would be recouped in 2.5 years.

Proposal – To convert the room to a desirable accommodation and to cease charging tenants from the agreed closure date.

- 3.17 **Oakleigh Avenue – Chaddesden** – Derby Homes has assisted the residents at Oakleigh Avenue by door knocking, producing/dropping leaflets and promoting the social activities that take place in the community room. They have recently set up an additional games activity on a Thursday afternoon. There is a community group currently based at Chester Green who is interested in hiring the room for a lunch club on a Monday afternoon, Derby Homes tenants will be invited to attend. In addition, Derby Homes has also spoken to external agency RETHINK who is interested in using the room once a week. Oakleigh Avenue now has 4 activities but this will increase to 6 if the other activities take off, which would be a substantial increase. A local ward Councillor has also been very supportive and has encouraged residents to become more involved in their activities.

Proposal – To continue to support residents at Oakleigh Avenue to increase and sustain activities.

- 3.18 The following is an update on the community rooms where it was highlighted that additional work was needed to increase usage.
- 3.19 **Colville Street, Ashbourne Road** – Residents consultation was carried out on 6 December 2011, 9 residents attended. It was agreed the group would restart their Bingo sessions in 2012. They also agreed they would like a coffee morning but would require a volunteer to organise this activity. RETHINK have started to use the community room once a week to deliver a wellbeing programme. Once the new Community Activities Coordinator is in post we can look at recruiting a volunteer. There are currently 2 activities a week running at the room, this is an increase of 1 on the previous report.

- 3.20 **Streatham Road, Mackworth** – There continues to be a healthy number of activities held at this room. Streatham Road now delivers 7 activities a week.
- 3.21 **Max Road – Chaddesden** – Residents consultation was carried out on 5 December 2011, 6 residents attended (4 of them attend the Friday lunch club.) It was suggested by the residents they would like to start a Bingo club but they felt they do not have enough residents to make this work. A couple of the residents were happy to join the Bingo group at Oakleigh Avenue community room. Also RETHINK is using the room once a week. Max Road now has 2 weekly activities, up by 1 on the last report.
- 3.22 We will give this a final push when the new Community Activities Coordinator is in post. However, unless significant improvements are made, we may need to revisit the viability of this room.
- 3.23 **Holly Court, Mickleover** – There continues to be a reasonable number of activities held at this room. Holly Court now delivers 4 activities a week.
- 3.24 **Slaney Close, Allenton** – There continues to be a healthy number of activities held at this room. Slaney Close now delivers 5 activities a week.
- 3.25 **Rebecca House** – Activities have substantially increased from 3 a week to 6 a week. There is now an additional lunch club, a breakfast club and a darts evening.

Use of Hire and Community Room Policy (Appendix 3)

- 3.26 The policy has recently been reviewed and the changes are highlighted in the report. The main changes are that the trial period for new groups has been reduced from 6 months to 3 months and an additional charge has been included relating to non charitable groups. These changes were discussed and agreed at the SHOUT committee in January. If the policy is agreed, all existing activities will be reviewed in line with the new policy.

Proposal – To agree the changes to the Use of Hire and Community Room Policy.

Television Licences at Community Rooms (Appendix 4)

- 3.27 During September when the digital switchover was completed we expected there to be concerns from residents who could no longer use the television sets in their community room. However, the reality of it was that very few people used the televisions so did not raise concerns. Where it was identified that residents used the television sets, digital boxes were provided. In addition to this, during the recent community room consultations a couple of residents questioned whether Derby Homes should be paying for televisions licences in community rooms, particularly if they aren't used very often. The cost of the licence is currently £145.50 per room per year.
- 3.28 The Community Initiatives Assistant contacted the most active residents at each community room and asked them to speak to other residents and decide whether they wanted to keep their televisions. The result of the consultation is that there is up to 13 rooms (those highlighted in bold) where the television licence is no longer needed. This would be a saving of £1,891.50 per year.
- 3.29 Proposal – To write to individual tenants at the identified rooms informing them that we plan to remove the television and cease payment of the licence, allowing time for a response. If no concerns are raised during consultation, cancelling the licences and removing televisions at the rooms where they are no longer required.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

The Housing Act 1985 requires that tenants are consulted on all matters that affect their tenancy. As a result of this we have consulted with affected tenants. Local Councillors, the DACP and the SHOUT residents' group were all invited to the consultation events. SHOUT also sent out a questionnaire to tenants independent of Derby Homes. It is one of the objectives of SHOUT residents group to monitor progress on the proposals contained within this report.

5. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 If proposals to close the two rooms are agreed, Derby Homes will make savings from no longer having to subsidise the running costs. The Council will also gain additional income from the rental charge for each accommodation.
- 5.2 If the proposal to cancel television licences goes ahead Derby Homes would save £145.50 per year for everyone that is cancelled.
- 5.3 The additional charge highlighted in the Use of Hire and Communities Policy relating to non charitable groups will create additional income for the organisation.

6. LEGAL AND CONFIDENTIALITY IMPLICATIONS

None

7. COUNCIL IMPLICATIONS

The closure of the community rooms is a matter which requires the approval of the Council.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

These will be considered in line with issues that arise as a result of planned conversions.

10. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 Garsdale Court – There are currently 2 activities taking place at this community room. Therefore, a large proportion of the tenants are paying for a service they are not accessing. Both of these activities would be moved to Humber Close which is in close proximity.
- 10.2 Slindon Croft – There are a small number of residents that use this room regularly. Therefore, a large proportion of the tenants are paying for a service they are not accessing. There are currently 2 activities taking place. Both of these activities would be moved to Humber Close which is in close proximity.
- 10.3 Television licences – these will only be removed at rooms where consultation has been completed and it is identified that the televisions are no longer required.

11. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

There may be issues that arise as a result of building alterations. These will be considered in line with future plans for conversion.

12. RISK IMPLICATIONS

Failure to close the rooms that are significantly underutilised could lead to unnecessary spend by the organisation due to ongoing utility, maintenance and staffing costs.

13. POLICY REVIEW IMPLICATIONS

This is a key policy of Derby Homes and will be included in the Key Policy Review Schedule. In accordance with minute 10/51 this policy will be reviewed no later than 3 years from the date of this meeting.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report:

Personnel

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or Phil Davies, Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org – Phone: 01332 888528

Author: Lorraine Testro / Customer Services Manager / 888675 / lorraine.testro@derbyhomes.org

Background Information: None.

Supporting Information: None.