

**Item 6**

**REPORT TO THE CARLISLE SHADOW BOARD**  
**MEETING TO BE HELD ON 25/2/02**

**Carlisle Housing Association**  
**Proposed Specialist Services Policy Statement**

**For Decision**

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To inform the Board of the specialist services responsibilities of Carlisle Housing Association and to agree the specialist services policy statement set out in Appendix 1.

**2. Report Content**

- 2.1 The main policy is contained within Appendix 1. This sets out Carlisle City Council's current obligations within the broad area defined as specialist services and details Carlisle Housing Association's approach to these specialist services on transfer of the housing stock. The policy statement covers the following service areas:

- Careline
- Sheltered Housing Service
- Housing Visitors Service
- Garden Maintenance Service for frail and elderly

- 2.2 The policy statement reviews the key priorities leading from the Best Value Review of Elderly Services which took place in January 2001. All service areas outlined above, except the Garden Maintenance Service, were included as part of the Best Value Review. From this review, the policy statement sets out Carlisle Housing Association's key principles and approach to these services, as summarised in Section 3 of the policy statement.

- 2.3 Early work for the Association following transfer will involve reviewing specialist services operations and procedures, systems and processes governing eligibility and setting clearer service standards and performance indicators.

**3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Shadow Board is asked to approve the attached policy set out in Appendix 1.

**Paul Anson**  
**Assistant Director**

**Jane Morris**  
**Housing and Regeneration Manager**

# APPENDIX 1

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### SPECIALIST SERVICES POLICY STATEMENT

Carlisle Housing Association

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Jane Morris  
Housing and Regeneration Manager

Paul Anson  
Assistant Director

## Carlisle Housing Association

### Specialist Services Policy Statement

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy statement outlines the core specialist services responsibilities of Carlisle Housing Association and the Performance Standards within which the Association operates.
- 1.2 The statement sets out the broad approach in the context of current structures and practices of Carlisle City Council.
- 1.3 This statement will provide sufficient policy detail to inform the tenant offer document.
- 1.4 This initial statement will be reviewed and refined and form the basis of a final policy approach of the Association prior to transfer.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 The Supported Housing Services Section of Carlisle City Council currently delivers a range of specialist services. As part of transfer proposals, the following services will be continued by Carlisle Housing Association:
  - Careline – 24 hour monitoring and emergency response service, providing support and reassurance to a range of client groups both inside and outside the district (currently service is provided to over 5800 dwellings). Current council tenants who have Careline installed will be subject to a charge of £2.75 per week (monitoring and response service) from April 2002. Disabled and vulnerable tenants may also benefit from Careline.
  - Sheltered Housing Service – currently seven sheltered housing schemes with a total of 160 bedspaces. One scheme (Freshfield Court) is classified as Very Sheltered (Category 2.5) with a rehabilitation wing. Support charges (per week) of £6.73 for sheltered and £14.44 for the very sheltered unit have been agreed from April 2002.
  - Housing Visitor Service – befriending and advocacy service for older tenants living in (currently Council) accommodation. Currently 14 part-time housing visitors. Each has a caseload of approximately 85 people. Each client is visited at least once every fortnight.
  - Individual Garden Maintenance – to older tenants living in (currently Council) properties. Currently no charge levied but from April 2003 a support charge will be introduced.

- 2.2 These services are funded through the Housing Revenue Account via rents and service charges and in addition, Careline is supported by external income through contracts with other housing authorities and Registered Social Landlords.
- 2.3 For the sheltered units (not the very sheltered unit), an eligible person must be of state registered age and still be able to care for themselves. For the Housing Visitor Service, tenants must be of state registered age, have little or no family support, suffer chronic illness or disability, are frail, lonely or isolated and in need of support. Careline exists to provide an emergency service to elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents in Carlisle and the surrounding area. The garden maintenance service is provided on referral from Housing Management to frail and elderly tenants (over 60) living in a council family home where no one in the household is able to maintain the garden. The service also extends to vulnerable and disabled tenants on referrals from housing management.
- 2.4 The provision of a benefits advice centre, hostel accommodation for homeless families and vulnerable single people, and the provision of direct access hostel accommodation and resettlement services for single males will be not at this time form part of the transfer.
- 2.5 A Best Value Review of Elderly Services was carried out in January 2001. This concluded that the services of Careline, Sheltered Housing and Housing Visitor are performing well. There is however scope for improvement. The services, in terms of average weekly cost, compare favourably to national benchmarking although it was not possible to compare the Housing Visitor service as there is no similar service replicated elsewhere. User satisfaction of all these services is very high.
- 2.6 The Best Value Review highlighted that both the Careline and Sheltered Housing services required capital investment to modernise operations through IT development and investment to improve the accommodation. This was necessary to maintain and improve service standards.
- 2.7 In particular the review highlighted the following priorities:
  - Investment to upgrade sheltered housing accommodation to provide self-contained accommodation.
  - Options appraisal of Westhill House sheltered scheme.
  - Clearer policy approach to these specialist services, setting of standards and monitoring.
  - Careline, Sheltered Housing and Housing Visitor Services should be managed as an integrated package as part of a whole systems approach to supporting older people. A strategic approach to developing these services with other commissioners of services and service providers, such as the PCTs, Health Authority and Social Services should take place.

- To focus the Housing Visitor Service to older people in greatest need; expansion of the Botcherby generic domiciliary care worker pilot initiative.
- Further develop the role of the warden in sheltered housing schemes.
- Review Careline's pricing and charging policy.
- Recognise the importance of Careline continuing to provide value for money and the potential risk of its income base from external organisations.

2.8 Progress on these priorities has taken place:

**2.9 Careline**

The Careline Control Room has been improved with the latest technology. Further improvements and service developments to Careline are being worked on such as tele-medicine, passive alarms to monitor heat, cold, movement, fire etc, fall detection, lone worker monitoring, intermediate care projects monitoring vulnerable groups on discharge from hospital.

**2.10 Housing Visitor Service**

The Housing Visitor service has been restructured to link the housing visitor workers more closely with the sheltered units (wardens) and to Careline to provide a more focused service to those in greatest need. A service charge for the Visitor Service was introduced in April 2001 at £0.74 per week. This will increase to £1.10 per week in the 2002/3. The pilot domiciliary care worker initiative is being expanded.

**2.11 Sheltered Housing**

A 3-year pilot rehabilitation project at Freshfield Court sheltered scheme aiding transition from hospital to home living has been launched. The procedures and working arrangements for wardens is currently being reviewed. Wardens are now linked to other Council services and departments via computer links to all schemes.

**3. Key Elements of Carlisle Housing Association's Policy Approach**

3.1 Carlisle Housing Association will ensure the continuation of the high quality specialist services from Carlisle City Council. The Association seeks to maximise independent living, enabling older and vulnerable groups to remain in the community, benefiting from appropriate care support, monitoring and response services as appropriate to their needs.

3.2 Carlisle Housing Association is committed to listening to the users of the specialist services in order to continually improve and seek to modernise existing services.



3.3 Carlisle Housing Association will work with statutory bodies and other organisations to provide joint responses to the needs of older people, and other vulnerable groups in greatest need.

3.4 Carlisle Housing Association will:

- Review criteria for eligibility for specialist services to ensure priority is given to those in greatest need and that limited resources are deployed efficiently and targeted effectively.
- Continue to develop Careline as a local, financially robust service, embracing technological advances to improve and expand the service for the benefit of all users. Carlisle Housing Association will review the business plan annually and submit regular reports (to be agreed by the Board) on service performance, financial performance, development and long term strategy.
- Ensure that the Housing Visitor Service is integrated with Careline, Sheltered Housing Services and other care packages provided by others. Carlisle Housing Association will review current operations, identify performance measures so as to maximise its role and effectiveness in targeting those in greatest need.
- Improve the quality of sheltered accommodation currently provided and introduce procedures of good practice to govern operational issues, service standards and introduce monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure continuous improvement.
- Adopt a clear charging policy for support services in line with the Supporting People regime.
- Work in partnership with Carlisle City Council, Health Authority, Primary Care Trusts, Probation, Social Services, other housing providers, specialist providers and the voluntary sector to develop a range of services and accommodation needs to support older people and other vulnerable client groups (e.g. learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health needs, asylum seekers, drug/alcohol problems, leaving care, harassment and domestic violence).
- Work in partnership with others to ensure the continuation of the Carlisle Floating Support Scheme, maximising Transitional Housing Benefit and Supporting People Grant (from April 2003).
- Continue to provide a garden maintenance service to older tenants living in transferred rented accommodation. Carlisle Housing Association will review the current service to identify any improvements - both operationally and in targeting, and will look at funding to extend this scheme to leaseholders and owner occupiers in areas where it has stock.

- Ensure that vulnerable tenants receive the necessary level of support and advice to ensure where appropriate that the tenant is maximising their income through applying for all benefits they are entitled to.
- Subject to budgetary constraints, Carlisle Housing Association will carry out specific adaptations to properties for those with physical disabilities. We will also work with other agencies to obtain additional funding for adaptations where possible.
- Appropriate design features will be included in any rehabilitation or improvement work carried out by Carlisle Housing Association where these are needed to meet the particular requirements of an individual. In addition, the design of new properties will be flexible and meet where possible, the standards specified for Lifetime Homes.

#### **4. Legislative and Regulatory Framework**

- 4.1 Carlisle HA will fulfil all statutory duties under Landlord and Tenant law, and comply with other relevant legislation such as the Residential Homes Act 1984, food hygiene and health and safety regulations.
- 4.2 RSLs are also expected to ensure housing management services take account of residents vulnerability: specifically in the areas of physical adaptations and floating support.
- 4.3 RSLs are expected to establish and maintain links with outside agencies that provide care and support services.
- 4.4 The Government's Supporting People policy and funding framework is specifically related to the financing of support services to meet the needs of vulnerable people and assist them to sustain independence and promote well-being. This funding regime will commence in April 2003. Support costs will be removed from housing benefit and replaced with a specific grant. This grant will also absorb a number of other funding streams (such as SHMG, Probation Accommodation Grant) into the one grant. Prior to this, funding for support costs is via the Housing Benefit Transitional Scheme. Housing services costs have to be proportioned between 'management' and 'support' costs. Those qualifying for housing benefit will be entitled to claim the cost of the provision of support services via the Supporting People grant. Those ineligible for 'Standard' housing benefit will have to pay for such services from their own resources. A clear charging policy therefore needs to be devised to show clearly the management charge (rent) and the support charge (based on % staffing costs involved in the provision of support services). There are six key principles of Supporting People:

- Prevention
- Promoting Independence
- Alleviating Crisis
- Resettlement
- Inclusion
- Focusing on People

4.5 Changes to service charges will be agreed by the Board of Carlisle Housing Association in the context of rent restructuring and requirements under Supporting People. For further information on service charge setting please refer to the rent and service charge and rent arrears policy.

## **5 Performance Standards**

5.1 Housing Corporation Performance Standards state that RSLs should provide responsive housing services for vulnerable residents, support to keep them in their tenancies, and that RSLs should be able to identify areas where social conditions put residents at risk or affect the lettable or value of the property. RSLs should liaise with other agencies about care and support needs for vulnerable residents.

5.2 Carlisle Housing Association will identify clearer performance indicators for the services covered under this policy and report on a quarterly and annual basis to the Board of Carlisle Housing Association in relation to:

- Careline Service Performance service developments.
- Sheltered Housing Schemes
- Housing Visitor Service
- Garden Maintenance Service
- Multi-agency work on floating support and other new developments within the remit of specialist services.

## **6 Information Technology and Customer Service Centre**

6.1 To remain competitive, the Careline Service must innovate through the use of enhanced information technology as new products and services are developed to assist elderly and vulnerable tenants to remain in their home for as long as possible. Careline has already improved its control room and is looking at new services, for example, in the areas of tele-medicine, passive alarms and remote monitoring systems. Currently there are no plans to integrate Careline with Riverside's Customer Service Centre, although it is important that the benefits of working within a large organisation are maximised through joint working, IT integration and the sharing of good practice.



## **7 Risk Assessment**

- 7.1 The major risk to the Association is supporting of costs of the specialist services. Although many of those receiving the service will be on Housing Benefit and therefore the costs can be recovered through Transitional Housing Benefit and then Supporting People, the introduction of service charges may dissuade existing and new users from taking up the services. The major risks to Careline are the loss of contracts through lower priced and higher quality local competitors, increased costs or damage to reputation.