

Soha Housing Tenant Scrutiny Group

Scrutiny Review 3: Soha's Older Person's Housing Strategy

Headline Findings

1. Scope of Older Person's Housing Strategy

The Group welcomes the proposed scope of the strategy to include people and services as well as reflecting the 'bricks and mortar' strategy. Members feel strongly that caring for existing tenants is as important as looking at new ways of providing homes and services and are pleased that Soha's outline includes both.

The Group encourages Soha to include partnership working within its strategy, including access to services and information (e.g. Good Neighbour Scheme and Age UK's directory of information)

2. Resident Involvement in Strategy

The Group welcomes Soha's active gathering of Tenants' views to inform its Older Person's Housing Strategy. This pre-scrutiny review has been carried out at a time of:

- New initiatives – the Thame Extra Care Scheme
- Continuing research – Older Persons Visiting Scheme, Sheltered Housing Survey, Tenant Inspection of Sheltered Housing.

The Group would therefore like to revisit this (6 – 12 months?) when the strategy is complete to review the outcome of this research and the impact of RI on the strategy.

3. Thame Extra Care Scheme

The Group finds the Thame Extra Care Scheme is a very positive development and a 'good news' story for Soha. Specifically:

- Early hand-over, on budget
- Good contracts and contract management.
- Good initial briefs, well informed and researched
- Quality of finish and snagging

4. Future Extra Care Scheme Planning

The Group understands that the scale of the Thame Scheme is based on current research which suggests that 40 units are required for economic efficiency.

- Will Soha continue to use this data for future developments?
- Will Soha assess and review if this is the case in practice, to inform planning?

The panel request that information on the cost of running the scheme be available for future scrutiny.

5. Care Providers at Thame Extra Care Scheme

The Group would like a better understanding of the relationship between Soha and care providers at Thame EC – if, and how, this is different to the provision by Community Voice in other sheltered schemes and how it appears to residents.

The Group is concerned about the potential for reputational risk to Soha if the quality and consistency of care is not maintained. Will Soha incorporate lessons learned from Thame Extra Care into its management and provision in other sheltered housing?

6. Existing Sheltered Housing

The panel's own visits and the information presented by the Tenant Inspectors, raise concerns about the consistency of service and support provided by Scheme Managers and Community Voice. The strategy should include mechanisms to address these concerns, particularly in relation to

- Fire safety and fire alarm testing
- Clear communication so that residents understand what they should expect from Soha and other agencies (including how to contact them)
- Sense of isolation among residents

7. Downsizing

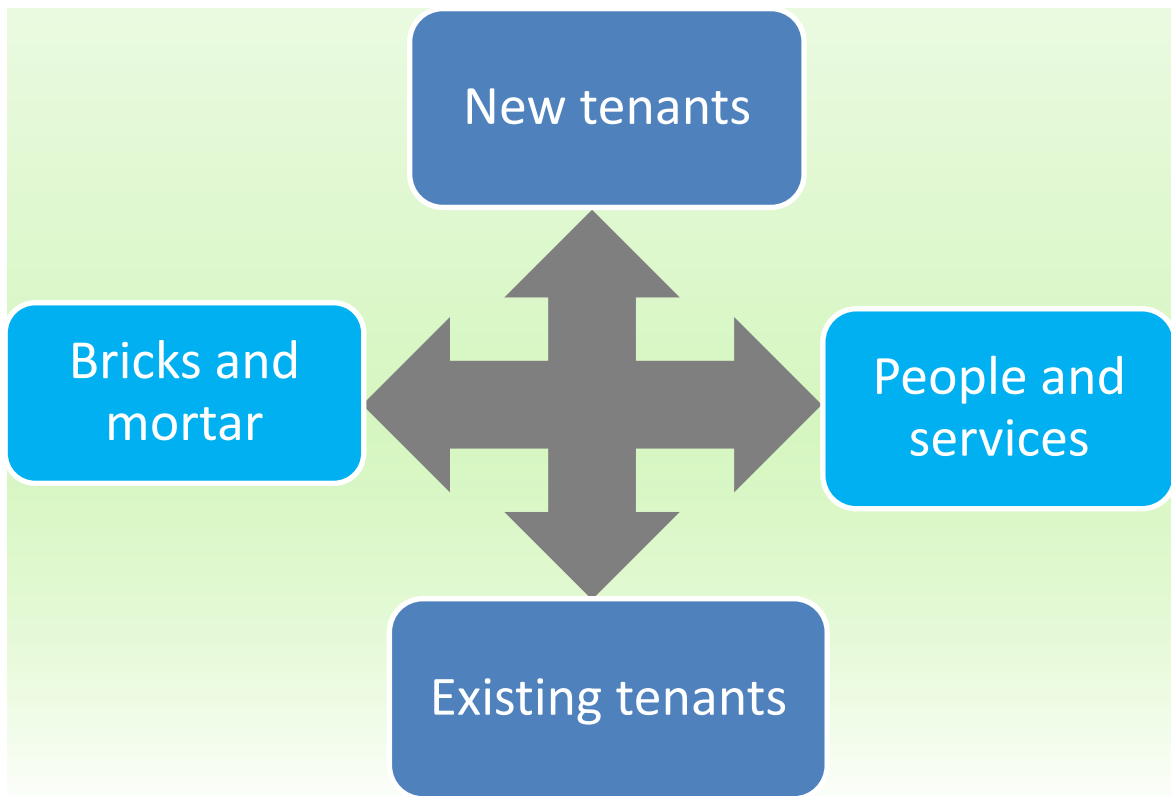
Barriers to down-sizing should be addressed, and the Group understand that the criteria are being reviewed to see if Soha's information can be more clear about the support that is available. Information in 'black and white' about incentives, costs, and help with moving would reassure older people

Background and Scope of Review

This review is pre-scrutiny, which means it looks at how Soha is putting its strategy together, the issues covered and makes recommendations to help inform the strategy. In particular, the Group was interested in:

- how Soha will reflect the priorities and concerns of older people in its strategy;
- the balance between 'bricks and mortar' and services; and
- how the strategy may impact on tenants and communities.

Overall, the scope is outlined in the diagram below.



Scope of Tenant Scrutiny Group Review of Older Persons Housing Strategy

The scope was put together following a Tenant Research project where young residents spoke to over 50 older tenants. The Group would like to thank both the researchers and those tenants who took the time to inform this review.

The scoping of this review was difficult as 'older people' span a wide age range and will have very different experiences, needs and aspirations. Recognising and responding to individual needs falls outside the scope of this review, but we feel it is important that Soha does so and is clear about how information relating to individuals is used. We welcome the Older Persons Visiting Scheme and are concerned that adequate resources exist to meet the needs identified by the visits.

Methodology

Tenant Scrutiny Group Review Members (the Group)

Margaret Buckell (lead)
Andy Dunsmore
Marcel Coulon
Michael Andrews
Wendy Selwood

Interviews and Briefings

James Berrington	Independent Consultant
Vickie Zielimski	Housing Choices Caseworker Age UK
Nigel Holmes	Service Manager, Extra Care Housing Programme, Oxfordshire County Council

Maureen Adams	Director of Customer Services & Operations
Kris Crowther	Development Manager
Steve Lynch	Director of Property and Development
Paul Rennard	Director of Finance and Resources
Jayne Sharp	Sheltered Housing Manager
Frances Salter	Thame Extra Care Scheme Manager

Val Kir	Chair of Soha's Seniors Group
Ian Allison,	Tenant Inspectors
Jenny Dewsbury,	
Gerald Prior	

Visits and Sources

Thame Extra Care Scheme
Mowforth House

Young Tenant Researcher project: Older residents in general needs housing

Older Persons Visiting Scheme: Preliminary Results

Information from Soha:

1. Soha's housing stock – summary
2. Soha's customer profile
3. Outline of key issues
4. SODC's Housing for Older People strategy and consultation notes
5. Local demographics (included in 4.)
6. Soha's annual report 2010-11

Additional Detail

Thame Extra Care

Although Extra Care Schemes form a very small proportion of Soha's housing they raise challenging issues and comparisons in relation to other forms of housing, care and support for older persons.

Will the strategy consider what proportion of housing stock might be extra care schemes in the future?

The Group were interested in the impact of the presence of a full-time scheme manager. Would this be maintained if costs rise.

Is there more responsibility to residents for the monitoring and maintaining of care services and standards as they came a 'part of the package'. There is concern that if good standards of care are not sustained and developed this could damage Soha's reputation, and vulnerable residents might be at risk.

The Group want to know to what extent care provision is guaranteed by contracts and service level agreements, and how these will be monitored.

Soha should ensure that its culture of openness and involvement is fostered in extra care schemes, so that residents can influence and monitor standards. Members of this panel would like to return to Thame to interview willing residents in the future.

Surveys

Are patterns emerging from visits to older residents in general needs properties that can inform the strategy? Follow-up to requests need to be properly managed and documented. Do adequate resources exist to meet the needs identified by the visiting scheme?

The Group notes that the Young Resident Researchers did an excellent job in conducting telephone interviews with sheltered housing residents. It is clear that their calls were welcomed by most of the residents contacted. In some cases these calls seemed to be the only recent human contact for some elderly residents.

Downsizing

Anxiety about costs and the complexity of moving are significant barriers for older people who might otherwise considering downsizing. Confirmation about costs that can be covered, and help available for completing forms for gas, electricity and phones etc. should help. Decorating vouchers are not the best option for older people – basic re-decorating in advance of moves might also be incorporated. If this is a priority for Soha is the budget adequate?

Appendices available:

A: Interview notes

B: Tenant Research project findings