Dear Member

MULTI STOREY FLATS TASK GROUP – 3 NOVEMBER 2010

The next meeting of the Multi Storey Flats Task Group will be held at 5.30pm on 3 November 2010 in Committee Room 1 at the Town Hall, Rugby.

Andrew Gabbitas
Executive Director

A G E N D A

PART 1 – PUBLIC BUSINESS

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2010.
2. Apologies – to receive apologies for absence from the meeting.
3. Declarations of Interest.
   To receive declarations of –
   (a) personal interests as defined by the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors;
   (b) prejudicial interests as defined by the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors; and
   (c) notice under Section 106 Local Government Finance Act 1992 – non-payment of Community Charge or Council Tax.
4. Progress review – to identify key findings and conclusions to date, and areas to explore further. To include presentation from Head of Housing.
5. One page strategy and programme of work – to agree the focus of future work of the review group. Revised one page strategy attached.
6. Next meeting – please bring your diaries to set a date.
Membership of the Task Group:

Councillors: Butlin, Mrs Hotten, Ms Robbins, Roodhouse and Srivastava.

Co-opted Member: Dr Alan Thompson

If you have any general queries with regard to this agenda please contact Elizabeth Routledge, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (01788 533522 or e-mail Elizabeth.routledge@rugby.gov.uk). Any specific queries concerning reports should be directed to the Scrutiny Unit (01788 533591 or e-mail Scrutiny@rugby.gov.uk)

If you wish to attend the meeting and have any special requirements for access please contact the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer named above.
Key findings and conclusions to date

This paper provides a summary of some of the key findings and conclusions of the review to date and areas that members have indicated they may like to explore further, as a starting point for discussion.

1. What have we learnt so far?

- A structural survey was commissioned in 2010 for all 5 high rise blocks belonging to the Council. The buildings are all structurally sound and concrete used is of very high quality.

- Security arrangements for the flats are robust, with secure entry provided through the concierge service and approximately 280 CCTV cameras in place and monitored by the control centre. In a high rise survey in October 2009, 83% of residents expressed satisfaction with the concierge service. 91% feel safe in their flats.

- Flats are heated by storage heaters – gas is not permitted in high rise buildings. Residents pay for electricity through individual card meters.

- Windows are not currently cleaned on the outside but residents are being consulted as to whether they would like this service.

- There is no communal room or space in the high rise blocks. The potted plant displays provided by residents in Royal Court greatly enhance the appearance of this block.

- The ongoing relevance of the High Rise Charter is under review following the introduction of the UChoose choice-based lettings system from 31 March 2010. There is anecdotal evidence that take-up has reduced.

- High rise flats are more difficult to let – under UChoose, high rise properties have taken on average 33 days to let, which is higher than other council accommodation. One property had been rejected six times. Average length of a high rise tenancy is 8 years.

- Almost 50% of RBC’s one-bed flats are in the high rise flats. Single-person applicants make up 41% of the total number of applicants registered on UChoose (at September 2010). The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2008) predicted that the number of one-person households would increase.

- Single people under 50 have access to only around 8% of our total stock. 12% of the general needs stock (296 dwellings) and 78% of the sheltered
A notional scheme to redevelop the Biart Place site indicated a net loss of 71 homes, and would provide just six 1-bedroom apartments. Such a move would have considerable cost and practical implications (detailed to members), particularly in relation to decanting tenants.

Tenant profile – approximately 63% of high rise tenants are in receipt of housing benefit; average tenant age is 47 years (oldest is 94 years, youngest is 17).

Estate Officers play an important role as a reassuring presence and in dealing with problems of ASB and nuisance. 90% of residents expressed satisfaction with estate officers in October 2009.

Since January 2010 Housing Officers have dealt with 6 noise complaints and in the past 12 months have taken successful possession proceedings against 3 tenancies in respect of drugs nuisance.

Rent and service charges:
Biart Place – one-bedroom flat £76.45; two-bedroom flat £85.50
Rounds Gardens – one-bedroom flat £77.94; two-bedroom flat £86.31.

Further income is generated from the lease of 3 floors of Ashwood Court to Mayday (£63,741 per year) and mobile mast site rental (£16,645 per year).

2. **What conclusions have we drawn?**

Demolition and redevelopment of the sites does not make economic sense, particularly as the buildings have been found to be structurally sound.

The high rise flats make an important contribution to meeting housing needs in the borough, providing a significant proportion of single-person accommodation. The needs of this group of applicants (41% of the UChoose household profile) are not able to be met from the Council’s existing stock.

Costs of cladding or otherwise improving the outside appearance of Biart Place are prohibitive.

3. **What would we like to explore further?**

Potential areas for further investigation by the task group include:
Heating and insulation
- How affordable and effective are the storage heaters in heating the flats?
- How affordable is the card meter electricity payment method?
- What is the SAP rating for the flats (compared with other types of property)?
- Is there potential to generate alternative energy within the fabric of the buildings to reducing energy consumption and potentially alleviate costs?

Service charges
- Are they affordable?
- How could they be reduced? What would be the service implications?
- Could reduced service charges incentivise tenants to find work?
- What are the views of tenants?

Security arrangements
- Do they represent value for money?
- What would be the impact of reduced security arrangements on service charges, and on actual and perceived safety of tenants?

Allocations and meeting housing needs
- What is the turnover of tenancies compared with other council accommodation?
- Why do people reject the flats?
- Could the flats be better marketed to reduce length of voids?
- Should redesignation of high rise accommodation be considered to better reflect the UChoose household profile? Or, does the current tenant profile offer the best mix (and therefore redesignation of other stock should be considered instead?)

Environmental improvements and communal space
- Are there simple improvements that could be made at a minimal cost to improve the accommodation?
- What are the views of tenants regarding window cleaning?
MULTI STOREY FLATS

ONE-PAGE STRATEGY

What is the broad topic area?
To consider the future role of the council’s multi-storey flats at Rounds Garden and Biatt Place (five blocks in total).

How does the accommodation contribute to meeting housing needs in the borough, delivering a sustainable Rugby and providing value for money?

Could the land on which the flats are sited be used more effectively to meet the housing needs profile of the borough?

What is the specific topic area?
Is the maintenance of the multi-storey flats a viable economic concern in light of the current HRA subsidy and rent restructuring formula regime or any future potential move to self-financing HRA from April 2011?
What are our current policies concerning allocations to multi-storey flats and how effective are they?
Do the flats contribute effectively to corporate priority 2: meet the housing needs of our residents, now and in the future

What is the ‘unreasonable’ ambition of the review?
That, regardless of the homes on the sites, the sites provide desirable and secure for homes for people where they choose to stay, and where they can stay as their circumstances change at a cost that they can afford to meet.

How well do we perform at the moment?
What information is provided from the structural surveys?
What are the flats’ contributions to reducing energy consumption?
What is the feedback from the tenants of the flats?
Are they easy to let; and do people stay once they take up the tenancy?
Why do people refuse tenancies that they have bid for under the UChoose scheme?
Are the flats affordable for the tenant and for the council as a landlord, including heating, maintenance and service changes?

Who shall we consult about the current service and about how we can improve it?

Tenants? (to be considered later in review process)
Rugby and District Tenants’ Association
Other social landlords
Maintenance contractors
Mayday (who lease the top-three floors of Ashwood Court)
What other help do we need?

Dr Alan Thompson, Chairman of Rugby District Tenants Association co-opted member of the group
Other organisations or local authorities who manage high rise accommodation
Some training and facilitation support for meetings
Consultation with potential funders and regeneration and funding advisors such as the Homes and Communities Agency
Research
Internal support from officers from the Housing service, from finance officers in Resources, from systems support in CIS. Potentially from planners in Planning and Culture.

How long should it take?

6 – 9 months

What will be the outcome?

A report to Cabinet to make recommendations on the medium to long-term future of our multi-storey flats.