

Report to Cabinet

1 September 2021

Subject:	Consultation on the Future of Walker Grange Extra Care Housing Scheme
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Living & Ageing Well Cllr Suzanne Hartwell
Director:	Director of Adult Social Care Rashpal Bishop
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Divisional Manager, Colin Marsh Colin_Marsh@Sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to commence consultation with the tenants of Walker Grange and their relatives, on the future of Walker Grange.
- 1.2 That in connection with 1.1 above, approval be given to commence consultation with affected Council staff members.
- 1.3 That a further report be presented to Cabinet, to agree the future plans for Walker Grange following completion of the consultation.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Walker Grange, having been designed and built in the 1980s, is now becoming dated, and proving unsuitable to meet the changing care and support needs of some individuals. Rooms are not big enough to accommodate non-standard wheelchairs, and limit the equipment needed to meet peoples care and support needs, such as mobile or fixed hoists.



The layout of the building and the mechanism of the entrances and exits do not provide suitable infrastructure to best support tenants with dementia, and do not offer best practice in dementia specialisms.

- 2.2 In addition, bathroom and toilet facilities within the accommodation units are not able to accommodate people with or who develop very complex needs, and there are increasing needs for wet rooms over more traditional bathrooms.
- 2.3 The Council has tried to maintain the quality of the accommodation, with recent investment in the internal décor, but significant investment will be required if Walker Grange is going to continue to offer Extra Care provision in the future. Any modernisation of the fabric and infrastructure of the buildings will require temporary closure of the scheme, people would have to be moved to alternative accommodation, which would reduce capacity elsewhere in the system, and create additional financial pressure for the Authority. This is also a concern for the future of staff employed as, during any period of closure, the staff team would need to be redeployed to other services where suitable alternatives are available.
- 2.4 Consideration of the lifespan of Manifoldia Grange, Holly Grange and Walker Grange, as well as the development of Willow Gardens and Knowle, has highlighted a need to integrate the accommodation strategy for Extra Care Housing around new and existing developments.
- 2.5 A previous valuation of the Walker Grange site indicated that the market value of the freehold interest of the site based upon the indicative layout is in the region of £500,000. The Officer undertaking this valuation provided the following information at the time of the valuation in 2019:
- 2.6 In terms of redevelopment, it is considered that residential use would be appropriate in this predominantly residential area.
- 2.7 An option for redevelopment has been prepared to illustrate the development potential of the site. This option has a development capacity of twenty units comprising five two-bedroomed dwellings, eight three bedroomed dwellings, six four-bedroom dwellings and one 2 bed bungalow dwellings.



2.8 The Covid 19 Pandemic has impacted the ASC market considerably and the recommendations within this report could provide an opportunity to explore how we could shape future service provision. This could ensure that Sandwell citizens have the best possible housing options available to meet their needs whilst also looking at securing budget savings to ensure the long-term viability of key services.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People live well and age well - Willow Gardens or other modern ECH Schemes would provide high quality housing with on-site support allowing our 'older' citizens the opportunity to remain within a community setting as opposed to residential care.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities - ECH offers housing that accommodates a community of mixed needs but also provides strong links to the wider community.</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods The Willow Gardens development provides quality housing for Older People with care and/or support needs.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

Current Situation to be part of the consultation:

4.1 Whilst Walker Grange has capacity for 39 properties, there are currently only 22 tenants in situ. This is as a result of decreased demand in recent years, exacerbated by the closure to admissions because of the Covid 19 Pandemic. Similarly, the onsite day service has capacity for 20 attendees per day, 7 days per week. Prior to the pandemic 8 to 15 people attended daily with 26 people registered. The day service has not operated throughout the Covid 19 pandemic. When day service clients have been contacted there has only been a small number who have wanted to consider day care options in the future once these services are back and operational. As part of the consultation process, we would look to support anyone wishing to continue with some form of day care to explore all available options at the appropriate time.



- 4.2 Of the 17 properties unoccupied only 2 of these have undergone voids work and are in a ready to let position. 15 properties are awaiting housing voids work, however, this has currently been paused. Rent loss over the last 12 months is in the region of £74,000.
- 4.3 In addition, Walker Grange provides accommodation to Healthwatch Sandwell as part of the contract for that service. The accommodation is offered via peppercorn rent and is due for renewal/extension in March 2022 with an option of a rollover to 2024. As part of the consultation process we would wish to engage Healthwatch on future accommodation options for their service.

Alternative Provision:

- 4.4 There are a number of other Extra Care Schemes in Sandwell and three in Tipton in close proximity to Walker Grange, which could accommodate existing tenants if required:

Scheme	Capacity	Current Voids
Exon Court (Tipton)	38	10
Goldfield Court (West Bromwich)	63	0
Millennium Forge (Tipton)	17	5
Willow Gardens (Rowley Regis)	90	Opens late 2021
Oakley Gardens (West Bromwich)	81	0
Penmakers Court (Smethwick)	51	5
Queensridge Court (Oldbury)	88	0
Swallow Fields (Tipton)	62	10
Walker Grange (Tipton)	39	17



Consultation:

- 4.5 The proposed consultation will involve existing tenants and day care service users, staff and wider stakeholders, and would be carried out in line with existing Council policies.
- 4.6 Staff and tenants will be supported throughout the consultation process, in line with the approaches and learning from similar consultation exercises conducted previously, and will include face to face discussions, Independent Advocacy, drop in sessions and an online questionnaire.
- 4.7 This report proposes an overall 12-week consultation period for tenants and a 30-day consultation period for the affected staff group. This will be developed to encourage and facilitate participation by all affected parties.

Staff Consultation:

- a) Trade Union colleagues will be presented with the proposal at a Special JCC in August 2021.
 - b) Staff will be presented with the proposal in August 2021.
 - c) Adult Social Care will arrange for further appropriate consultation to take place during this period in line with Council Policy, if Cabinet approve the recommendations in this report.
 - d) It is proposed that should a decision be taken following consultation to cease Extra Care provision from Walker Grange, the affected staff will be transferred to alternative Council services.
 - e) As part of the proposal there are no proposed redundancies. Consideration will be given to approaching staff in related care activities about possible interest in a job swap scheme, as an alternative to transfer for the affected staff group.
- 4.10 Following completion of the consultation with tenants, stakeholders and affected staff, a further report will be presented to Cabinet where a decision will be sought to agree the future of Walker Grange.



5 Alternative Options

Options Appraisal:

Option 1 – Do nothing – continue to provide Extra Care Housing at Walker Grange.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
There will be no immediate impact for tenants.	Missed opportunity to alleviate expected issues that would arise from natural closure of Walker Grange in the future.
There will be no immediate impact for staff.	Out of 44 potential ECH vacancies in the Tipton area, there is only current demand (i.e. someone is in the process of becoming a Tenant in 1 of these Schemes) for 21.
There will be no risk of adverse publicity.	Staff would need to be placed At Risk and alternative job opportunities would need to be sought. However, should this not be viable it could lead to the need for staff redundancies in the future if the Scheme has to close and there are no alternative job opportunities.
There would be continued ECH provision in Tipton to support people with Dementia.	There may not be sufficient capacity across the ECH market in the future, especially LA owned/managed ECH services. Therefore, this would impact on the ability to move people in their support/friendship groups.
Potentially continue Day Service provision in the Tipton area for people with Dementia (This is however, linked to the on-going COVID situation).	As the Scheme continues to deteriorate we would expect further decreased demand as there are better alternatives on the market.
	If a decision isn't taken in the near future, then a full refurbishment would be required which could be costly.



	Ongoing void costs due to decreased demand
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Option 2 – Look at the closure of Walker Grange & the transfer of Tenants to Willow Gardens or other suitable ECH provision.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Opportunity to re-provide accommodation for people living at Walker Grange, as this building is coming to the end of its natural life span.	Tenants who have a secured Council tenancy would be expected to move due to the closure of the Scheme.
If people wish to remain in the Tipton area, there is a high number of available voids. Out of 44 potential ECH vacancies in the Tipton area, there is only current demand (i.e. someone is in the process of becoming a Tenant in 1 of these Schemes) for 21.	Even though the ECH stock is being increased with the opening of Willow Gardens, if Walker Grange was to close there would be a total loss of 19 units of ECH accommodation with the combined closures of Walker, Manifoldia and Holly Granges.
Opportunity for existing Tenants to relocate to brand new accommodation and maintain existing friendship groups.	There could be adverse publicity or unhappy/disgruntled tenants and staff.
Opportunity to sell land and realise capital receipts or look at re-purpose in line with Corporate objectives either of these opportunities would provide potential benefits to both ASC & Housing.	
The staffing complement released would support the staffing structure required for other services.	

Option 3 – Look at Upgrading Walker Grange to ensure it is fit for purpose for the future.



ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
No loss of service in the short-term.	For a full refurbishment to take place then it would be likely that the tenants would have to move out whilst this work was undertaken. This would mean both tenants and staff would be displaced.
No adverse publicity or unhappy/disgruntled tenants or staff.	Sufficient budget would have to be found to finance this requirement.
Upgrading Walker Grange may generate interest in lettings.	Whilst awaiting any upgrade the Scheme is currently carrying 17 voids which is generating significant void loss.

3 Options were explored, and the advantages and disadvantages can be seen in the above tables. Based on the above summary, Option 2 is recommended as the most viable option.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>A previous valuation of the site indicated that the market value of the freehold interest of the site based upon the indicative layout is in the region of £500,000.</p> <p>The annual budget for the existing service is £1.152 million; after funding alternative provision for existing users of the extra care and day care services there will be a significant balance available to support the directorate's priorities and delivery of the medium term financial strategy.</p> <p>As with previous Scheme closures we would look to provide each tenant with a relocation grant to cover the cost of decoration and moving. Based on a grant of £1,500 per person, and current occupancy numbers, this would cost £33,000 and could be met from the expected under spend against the 2021/22 Adult Social Care budget.</p>
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Legal and Governance:

We will consult on the proposals for the future of Walker Grange and the responses to the consultation will be considered in the decision-making process. Failure to do so would expose the Council to heightened risk of the decision being challenged, and subject to and overturned by a Judicial Review process.

In order to comply with the Gunning Principles, which set a legal framework to situations of this nature, the Council's consultation will:

1. Be carried out at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage.
2. Offer sufficient reasons for the proposals to permit intelligent consideration.
3. Allow adequate time for consideration and response.

In presenting this report to Cabinet, the authors are of the understanding that the 3 points above have been, or will be, fully met.

The employer must undertake informed and meaningful consultation with trade unions, and the affected staffing group.

Under Section 188 of the Trade Union Labour relations Act 1992, for the purposes of consultation, the employer must satisfy and disclose in writing the following:

- a) The reason for the proposal.
- b) The total number of employees of any such description employed by the employer at the establishment in question.
- c) The number of agency workers temporarily for, and under, the supervision of the employer.
- d) Those employees on fixed term contracts will be treated no less favourably than permanent employees, pursuant to the Fixed Term Employees Prevention on Less Favourable Treatment Regulations 2002.

In presenting this report to Cabinet, the authors are of the understanding that the points above have been, or will be, fully met.



	The principles of the Equality Act 2010 will be adhered to, in respect of applying Council policies.
Risk:	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) will continue to be complied with throughout, in identifying and assessing risks associated with this strategic proposal. A risk register has been produced covering the main strategic risks for this particular part of the consultation.</p> <p>There are arrangements in place to manage and mitigate these effectively. The Risk Register will be kept up to date at all times for the duration of the project.</p>
Equality:	<p>When making a decision as to changes in service provision, the local authority must comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and, in particular, section 149 (the Public-Sector Equality Duty).</p> <p>The protected characteristics to which the duty applies includes age, as well as disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief and sex.</p> <p>In order to ensure that the PSED is complied with an Equality Impact Assessment will be maintained and updated during the consultation period and will form part of the report to Cabinet with the proposal on the future of Walker Grange, following the proposed consultation process.</p>

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

None

