

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:-	Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods
2.	Date:-	7th June, 2010
3.	Title:-	Petition- St Joseph's Court Sheltered Housing Scheme
4.	Directorate:-	Neighbourhood and Adult Services

5. Summary

A petition was received on the 23rd February 2010 from residents living within the St Joseph's Court Sheltered Housing Scheme. Residents were concerned that the charge for the use of the laundry facilities at St Joseph's Court are due to rise to £1.00 in April 2010 and they have asked for an interim rise in April 2010 with the full cost being implemented in 2011.

6. Recommendations

Cabinet Members are asked to note the report and support the decision taken at the Cabinet meeting on 2nd March 2009 from the recommendations agreed in the Sheltered Housing Neighbourhood Centres Review minute number 157 2nd March 2009

7 Proposals and Details

7.1 On the 29th September 2008 the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods received a report with proposals to review the usage and charging arrangements for the communal facilities attached to the sheltered schemes. There are 58 Neighbourhood Centres across the borough which are attached to some sheltered schemes. The centres consist of a communal lounge area, kitchen, and toilet facilities of which 50 of the centres have a laundry area with washing and drying facilities.

7.2 The larger review of the centres was prompted by challenges from the surrounding community who wished to utilise the facilities and from a Local Government Ombudsman challenge, other implications which triggered the review were around the historical charges of the laundry, changes in health and safety legislation, rises in utility costs, and the cost of maintaining these centres have risen substantially; this has put pressure on the income from the communal facility charge.

7.3 It was agreed that consultation with tenants and residents would take place, initially in relation to the charging policy. The majority of neighbourhood centres provide a laundry service and the cost of this service had not been reviewed for more than 30 years. The charge for the laundry did not reflect the large rises in utility costs and was being heavily subsidised by the communal facility charge for many years which is the main income stream for the neighbourhood centres.

7.2 On the 2nd March 2009 a further report on Neighbourhood Centre Review was submitted to Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods. The report outlined a variety of proposals for the Neighbourhood Centres. One of the recommendations that was agreed was around an increase to the laundry charges which at the time stood at 10p per wash and 10p per dry. It was agreed that laundry charges would increase from the 6th April 2009 from this rate to 50p per wash and 50p per dry and from April 2010, this would further increase to £1 per wash and £1 per dry.

7.3 A petition was received on the 23rd of February 2010 from St Joseph's Court Scheme which has been signed by fifteen tenants from the Scheme. The petition states that the washing facilities went up last year from 10p per wash and 10p per dry to 50p per wash and 50p per dry which was an increase of 500%. A further increase to a £1 is another 100% rise and is too much. The tenants are petitioning for an interim rise to 75p in 2010 increasing to £1 per wash and £1 per dry in the year 2011.

7.4 To ensure that Neighbourhood Centres are sustainable in the future we need to generate income and ensure that any charges for the laundry reflect the costs of providing that service as agreed by Cabinet on the 2nd March 2009.

8 Finance

- 8.1 Laundry facilities throughout the schemes have generated an income of approximately £20,500 in the current financial year. The further increase in laundry charges to £1 a wash and £1 a dry would have brought in an expected income of approximately £32,000, allowing for reduced use of the facilities. If the petition is upheld it will reduce the expected income from the laundry facilities by approximately £6,000.

9 Risks and Uncertainties

- 9.1 Ensuring that we meet all health and safety legislations, and changing service provision has put a huge strain on the limited income from the Communal Facility Charge. Any loss of income from the laundry facility will increase the pressures on that budget.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

- 10.1 Neighbourhood Centres have the potential to be a thriving community resource to assist and support older people and vulnerable people to live independently whilst offering opportunities to act as a base for more integrated local service delivery. However since they were developed, the use of the centres, the social profile of the tenants and the role of the warden has changed significantly and many now require refurbishment to a modern, contemporary standard. Policy developments around self directed support and enabling older people to retain their independence does not necessarily mean that older people will want to use an on site facility, preferring instead to access community and commercial facilities available to the wider community.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- Sheltered Housing Community Building Review – 2nd April 2007
- Neighbourhood Centres Review update – 29 September 2008
- Sheltered Housing Review of Charges- 2nd March 2009
- Neighbourhood Centres Update – 29th June 2009

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