

Housing and City Development Scrutiny Committee

18 November 2024

Independent Living Review and Future Model

1. Purpose

1.1 This report provides the Committee with an update on the review of Independent Living provision, which represents designated housing for older people. It details the extent of current provision and the challenges faced, summarises the findings of the Housing Quality Network (HQN) review and provides an overview of proposals that will be taken through the Council's decision-making process to ensure the best use of its housing stock moving forward with a model for older persons' housing that is fit for the future.

2. Background

2.1 The Council currently has 1,986 Independent Living homes spread across 59 individual schemes. These represent a mixture of corridor schemes, courtyard schemes consisting of ground and 1st floor maisonettes, and bungalow schemes. Some corridor and courtyard schemes have neighbouring bungalows attached to them. The majority of homes are one-bedroom and all but three bungalow schemes have communal facilities. Over the past eight years, there has been considerable investment in upgrading the communal facilities of Independent Living stock to enhance kerb appeal and improve let-ability. Despite this, comparatively low demand for this form of provision indicates that the current model for Independent Living needs re-evaluation.

2.2 Whilst the older population of the city is growing, the rate of growth is less than originally projected. As of 2021, there were just under 38,000 citizens aged 65+ resident in the city. However, this population is not evenly spread, with older person households ranging from 5.8% in Radford to 28.7% in Clifton West. There are Independent Living schemes in each ward of the city other than Berridge and Castle, and there is one Independent Living scheme outside the city boundary in Ruddington. There is, however, a clustering of schemes in wards of the city where there are high concentrations of Council homes and tenants, including Bestwood, Bulwell and St Anns. There is an Independent Living home (Council or Registered Provider operated) for every four households with someone aged 65+ in the Basford, Bestwood, Bilborough, Meadows, Radford and St Anns Wards.

2.3 The current Independent Living model has remained largely unchanged since 2010 when Scheme Wardens were withdrawn, and the service moved to support delivery by peripatetic Independent Living Co-ordinators. All tenants receive an annual needs assessment and this determines the frequency and nature of support contact that they receive. Days that the Independent Living Co-ordinator will be regularly on site are also publicised so that staff are accessible for ad-hoc support needs. There are quarterly resident meetings at all schemes with

communal areas, which provides tenants with the opportunity to have their say as to how the service is being delivered. There are currently 24.1 full-time equivalent (FTE) Independent Living Co-ordinators and 2.5 FTE Activity Co-ordinators supporting around 2,150 Independent Living tenants. Other than Winwood Heights, no Independent Living scheme has an Independent Living Co-ordinator permanently based on site. All Independent Living tenants also have access to 'Nottingham on Call' 24 hours a day for any emergency needs that they may have.

3. Issues

- 3.1 Whilst there is notionally strong general demand for Independent Living provision, with approximately 1,600 applicants in Band D, the majority of these applicants have very specific criteria: specifically for bungalow and two-bedroom accommodation often within certain geographical areas. Whilst the number of voids becoming available at any given time will impact on the average relet times, generally, bungalow and new-build schemes have much stronger demand and subsequently quicker re-let times, with upstairs maisonette properties and corridor schemes having significantly less demand.
- 3.2 The proportion of new Independent Living tenants who are under state retirement age is increasing year on year and is currently 55% of all new tenants. This is having an impact on the balance of schemes as, in general, these 'younger' older people are not as interested in the communal life of the scheme and often require no support from the service. Many of these residents do not want to be in older persons' housing, but this was the only offer available to them. Tenants who are of working age will often be on Universal Credit (UC). Of the 261 Independent Living tenants claiming UC, 37% are in arrears compared with 14% of tenants not claiming UC. For those who are in arrears, the average for UC tenants is £471, as opposed to £314 for non-UC tenants. The reason for this differential is likely that not all service charges that are Housing Benefit eligible are eligible for UC.
- 3.3 There has been a noticeable increase in anti-social behaviour in Independent Living schemes in recent years, often associated with needs around drug and alcohol abuse, untreated mental health and the cuckooing of vulnerable tenants. Anti-social behaviour is often associated with this 'younger' cohort of tenants and has a highly detrimental impact on other residents of the scheme, particularly in corridor schemes where, due to the nature of the building layout, the anti-social behaviour impacts on larger numbers of tenants.
- 3.4 Data analysis indicates that there is an oversupply of older persons' accommodation in the city and lower demand for this form of provision than for 'general needs' accommodation. As of 31 March 2024, Independent Living homes account for 8% of the Council's housing stock, but 23% of voids. Average relet times for Independent Living homes currently stands at 115 days whereas, for general needs homes, it is 26 days. Over the past five years, the level of Independent Living terminations has outstripped lettings with an average of 213 terminations per year and 197 lettings. There were nine more lettings than

terminations in 2023/24, but this was more due to the number of terminations being 35 fewer than the then average than an increase in actual lettings.

- 3.5 Whilst demand for Independent Living properties has decreased, there is increasing demand for general needs accommodation and for temporary accommodation for people who are homeless. There are currently approximately 11,000 applicants on the Housing Register, with general needs lettings running at 842 per year. With regard to homelessness, there are around 760 households currently being accommodated due to being placed by the Council under Homelessness Reduction Act duties. This includes 664 homeless families, of whom 103 are currently housed in hotels.
- 3.6 Engagement with Independent Living tenants and staff has indicated that many older tenants struggle with the current Homelink application process, both in terms of the digital application process itself and gathering the information required. Adult Social Care services also struggle to navigate the Homelink system and make referrals into Independent Living, including the Winwood Extra Care scheme. This maybe a contributory factor to higher residential care placements for older persons, although anecdotal evidence indicates that many of these placements are for citizens whose complex needs are incompatible with being housed in an Independent Living scheme.
- 3.7 Census data indicates that 43% of households resident in the city report that one member of the household has a disability. This will be increasingly prevalent for older persons. Within the Independent Living stock, there are approximately 830 homes in courtyard schemes consisting of maisonettes with 50% of these properties being accessible only via a staircase. Stairlifts can be fitted to these properties following a referral to the Adaptations Agency, but there are currently considerable waits for assessment. Walk-in showers are also not a standard feature on Independent Living homes, although many properties now have this facility fitted through adaptations.
- 3.8 For the past 10 years, there has been an ongoing programme of modernisation of the communal areas of Independent Living schemes to provide attractive environments for tenants to socialise. This improvement is not, however, reflected in the flats themselves which, whilst they conform to Decent Homes standard, are sometimes let in a poor standard of decoration (though decorating vouchers are provided). A full stock condition survey of all Council homes and communal facilities of homes has been commissioned. This will provide accurate information on projected future spend on all stock, which will be helpful in informing decisions on the most appropriate future use of Independent Living sites.

4. Proposals for the Future Independent Living Model

- 4.1 Earlier this year, HQN was commissioned to support the review of Independent Living building on data analysis and other work undertaken during 2022. HQN reviewed data analysis, undertook site visits and carried out some engagement with both staff and tenants. The work undertaken by HQN concluded that there was a probable oversupply of Independent Living provision and that there was a

sound rationale for changing the eligibility criteria for the service, but that more could be done to enhance both the lettings process and the lettable standard of properties, and that a full options appraisal taking account of stock condition factors should be undertaken to determine the best future use of current schemes.

4.2 As a result of data analysis undertaken, the outcome of the HQN review and high levels of demand for Council housing, a number of proposals will be made with regard to both the model and extent of Independent Living, moving forward. In addition to the remodelling of the Sutton House scheme (commenced) and a further Independent Living scheme (proposed) for temporary accommodation for homeless families, the proposals are:

- The selection of an additional small number of Independent Living schemes to be redesignated during 2025/26 in order to rebalance housing supply. Options appraisals will be undertaken to determine the best use of those sites selected for de-designation.
- Changing the branding of older persons' housing, with the working assumption being that it will become Retirement Living.
- Changing the age-related eligibility criteria to 67 (or 60 and in receipt of a disability-related benefit) and not with complex care needs.
- Developing a lettable standard for Independent Living homes moving forward both with regard to the standard of decoration and with 'Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation' principles being used for bathroom and kitchen fittings.
- Enhancing the lettings process, making it simpler for older people to apply and providing more support with the process for both applicants and social care professionals.
- There will also be more active marketing of provision linking in with other workstreams to encourage 'right-sizing' in order to free up under-occupied family homes.

4.3 Changes to eligibility criteria will only apply to new tenants moving into Independent Living schemes. This will also be the case with the Independent Living lettable standard, which will be applied to future properties as they become void. It is anticipated that the proposals detailed will make the older persons' housing offer more attractive to prospective tenants and help to create more cohesive communities for current residents. Once the above proposals have been implanted and the impact on supply and demand for older persons' provision has been assessed, options appraisals for re-designating further older persons' housing will be undertaken should data analysis indicate that this would be appropriate.

5. Next Steps

5.1 Benchmarking with other similar Local Authorities is being undertaken to understand how Nottingham compares with regard to the amount of dedicated older persons' housing provided for the population aged 65+. A report on proposals for the future model of older persons' housing will be tabled at the newly-formed Housing Assurance Board for consideration and comment. A report requesting permission to consult on proposed changes to older persons' housing,

including any additional schemes to be re-designated will be taken to the Council's Corporate Leadership Team. Consultation will then be undertaken with Independent Living tenants, which will inform a final decision on proposals through the appropriate process.