



**Protocol for the Development of
Specialist Accommodation**

Approved by Cabinet 10th July 2003

(Updated September 2009)

Background

We all need somewhere to live and most people in our community live independently, usually in a house or a flat. However, a few are unable to do so and supported accommodation enables people to live within the community with some degree of independence.

Examples include:

- frail older people,
- people with medical conditions,
- young people not yet ready for independent living,
- people fleeing violence,
- those leaving institutions (including ex-offenders), and
- those with alcohol and drug related issues.

Currently there are just over 2641 units of supported accommodation available in the Borough (including sheltered accommodation) and approximately 635 units of floating support. Some expansion of specialist housing is needed to ensure that sufficient suitable accommodation is available to all in our community.

Failure to meet these needs within a managed framework would create situations with potentially serious consequences, such as:

- agencies introducing schemes without adequate explanation to local communities resulting in a negative or hostile response;
- a lack of specialist support for those with support needs be it young homeless people establishing a stable lifestyle, helping people with alcohol or drugs related problems, caring for the frail elderly or trying to help ex-offenders build a life away from crime; and
- a rise in homelessness and rough sleepers in the Borough.

We know the nature and scale of the consequences of the "do nothing" option on some of the issues. For example, ex-offenders who do not have a satisfactory home are more likely to re-offend. Indeed two-thirds are likely to re-offend within 12 months whereas only one-quarter of offenders with satisfactory accommodation re-offend. A "do nothing" approach increases the likelihood of re-offending – a managed situation can reduce crime.

We also know that appropriately located and well managed facilities can co-exist with local communities without causing disruption. Examples include:

- the homeless person's hostels located near to Wigan and Leigh town centres, and
- core and cluster accommodation for ex-offenders.

Sometimes things do go wrong but over the last few years we have worked closely with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to ensure any nuisance and anti-social behaviour arising is minimised and addressed. A policy framework is required to support this which ensures:

- that communities within which specialist accommodation is located are adequately consulted;
- risks are identified and managed; and

- a balance is achieved between the needs of individuals and wants of a community.

The protocol covers all new or substantially changed specialist or supported accommodation schemes such as those listed earlier, but not premises which are registered as nursing homes or residential homes with the National Care Standards Commission. This new protocol also:

- incorporates the Housing Capital bidding regimes and Supporting People funding regime; and
- is intended for use by all Registered Social Landlords, public agencies (e.g. the PCT, NHS Trusts and Probation) and private sector developers.

The approach is driven by the evidence-based research into needs on which the Council's key strategies are based (e.g. Housing, Homelessness, Supporting People)

Outline of process:

Council and partners agree needs and priorities
Submissions invited from providers
Panel of officers to select a preferred submission (to be approved by Executive Director Environmental Services and Supporting People Commissioning Body where appropriate)
Consultation with Ward Councillors and the community
Planning Application

These outline schemes will be assessed by officers from Housing Strategy, Supporting People and Planning. Members will be consulted, particularly on any potentially high risk schemes where potential locations have been identified and which have the prospect of progressing. Preferred options will then be reported.

Information will also be presented to members and other partnerships as appropriate. Subject to members approving the outline schemes in principle, the preferred options would then be developed in detail. Using the initial assessment, the officers would focus on the most sensitive schemes such as accommodation for ex-offenders.

Mechanisms to address community concerns on highly sensitive schemes include:

- only bringing forward schemes where there is a clear strategic need, and that contribute to corporate strategy (e.g. Homelessness Strategy, Supporting People);
- a selection process to ensure the provider has the appropriate skills and competencies to manage the scheme;
- the submission of a detailed project plan and business plan;
- a robust risk assessment which is then used to produce measures to minimise potential problems such as nuisance and anti-social behaviour;
- the setting of performance targets including the speed of responding to and resolving complaints from neighbours;
- Council officers assessing the project plan and risk management plus considering issues such as the extent of specialist housing already in an area;
- making it clear that the Council will make full use of its regulatory powers to tackle any deficiencies that may arise when this facility opens (e.g. the Housing Acts to address management defects in houses in multiple occupation, the Environmental Protection Act to deal with noise nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders);
- identifying other issues in the locality which the Council and its partners might be able to address (i.e. an acknowledgement for the neighbourhood's support or acceptance of a scheme);
- consulting with residents (in accordance with the Council's consultation strategy).

The appropriate location of schemes is a key element and it is intended to move highly sensitive developments such as a homeless persons' hostel away from residential areas to locations where there are appropriate facilities. This will mean more use is made of town centres and arterial routes providing access to transport and amenities.

The protocol includes provision for partners to bring forward exceptional schemes at other times of the year. The onus will be on the person leading the scheme to consider whether there might be an actual or perceived detrimental impact on a neighbourhood. Schemes which were potentially detrimental would be referred to the Housing Strategy Team and again these schemes would follow the basic approach of:

- an initial outline scheme to enable a risk assessment and consultation within the Council, and
- then the submission of a detailed scheme for potentially high risk initiatives.

Officers from Housing Strategy, Adult Services (Supporting People team), Neighbourhood Services and Planning have jointly produced this protocol. These liaison arrangements will continue but within the protocol it is stressed that the entire process operates quite separately to the Planning Development Control process. Planners will be briefed on potential schemes and partners advised that cases will arise where planning permission may not be given.

Consulting with Councillors and Residents

The consultation with Councillors and other stakeholders, takes place at 2 levels:

Borough Level

e.g. relevant Partnership Board, Supporting People Forum, Commissioning Bodies, Cabinet

Members and stakeholders will consider the gaps in service provision and determine priorities. Briefings will be issued to potential providers inviting outline proposals, these will be assessed and the preferred options put to the Executive Director of Environmental Services and or Supporting People Commissioning Body where appropriate, identifying potentially sensitive schemes which will involve close liaison with councillors and residents.

This approach will minimise, but not altogether prevent, inappropriate schemes emerging. The approach also has to be flexible, particularly to enable funding opportunities to be exploited or to deal with urgent needs.

Local Level

e.g. Ward Councillors and Residents

Once a possible location has been identified for a potentially sensitive scheme a meeting will be arranged with Ward Councillors. The meeting will:

- brief members on the scheme,
- set out the potential benefits,
- explore the potential for detrimental impacts of the scheme and how these could be minimised,
- agree contingencies should the scheme proceed and cause difficulties,
- identify other local issues which the Council might be able to address as part of a package,
- agree the appropriate means of consulting with those most directly affected by any scheme.

Case Study: Ex-offenders Housing Scheme

A Registered Social Landlord proposed a 16-bed facility for ex-offenders, but the scheme was assessed and rejected. A key factor was the impact assessment notably the concerns of accommodating such a high number in one locality.

A revised scheme was submitted and incorporated various measures to minimise risks. Ward Councillors were briefed and advised officers on their preferred way of consulting with the community. This involved:

- a drop-in facility in the locality (an afternoon and evening session),
- invitations to those living in the immediate vicinity,
- addressing other local issues (e.g. an area of unkempt land).

Officers contacted various Council departments and Wigan and Leigh Housing who all offered to assist in addressing the issues identified by Members.

The 'drop in' involved a Council officer and Ward Councillors. It enabled the scheme to be explained to residents; concerns were addressed honestly and discussions were held about what would happen if things went wrong. Residents were initially concerned but were reassured by the consultation process. They did use the 'drop in' to raise the other issues identified by Councillors and the positive response that action had been agreed proved useful in assuring the community that the Council cared for them and their neighbourhood.

Risk Assessment Pro-forma to be used by developing agency:

Supported Housing Developments Assessment of Risks and Impact on Community

To be completed by RSL / service provider for all supported housing schemes developed in partnership with Wigan Council

1. Scheme Details
Scheme Name:
Scheme Address/Proposed site:
Target Client Group:
Scheme Type: (e.g. core and cluster, move-on)
Breakdown of type and number of units: (e.g. single flats, double flats, shared house etc.)
Maximum capacity of scheme:
Age range of client group:
Sex mix of client group:
Estimated length of stay e.g. home for life, temporary, short stay
Any further details of scheme (communal areas, disabled facilities, staffing areas):
2. Local Environment
Please provide an assessment of the location of the scheme (e.g. proximity to school, residential area etc) How will any issues be managed?
Indication of current circumstances in the locality (e.g. current level of social exclusion, crime, anti-social behaviour etc.)

Is the scheme likely to have an effect (positive or negative) on locality problems?
3. Community Involvement
How will concerns raised by the local community be addressed (including perceived fear)?
How will good community links be established and maintained?
4. Inter-agency links
Which other agencies will be involved with clients?
What will their involvement be?
5. Scheme Management
Please provide Service Charter or state clear Service Standards and explain how they are measured e.g. speed of investigating problems, mechanisms for ensuring areas for improvement are implemented etc.
Allocations and Lettings Policy – please provide a copy
Complaints Procedure – please provide

Security – please give details of security measures (e.g. CCTV)
Noise nuisance – Is this likely? Prevention measures to be taken?
Has best practice has been adopted from similar schemes elsewhere? Please give examples.
6. Staffing
Nature and extent of staff cover (e.g. 24 hour, waking night cover etc.)
Management of staff e.g. competencies required, induction, training programmes
7. Management of Client
Please outline key processes e.g. initial assessment, risk assessment of client, activities to minimise risk/promote independence?
How will clients be managed e.g. responsiveness to supervision or ability to self manage
What clauses will be included on the tenancy agreement/licence to prohibit anti-social behaviour and promote positive behaviour?

8. High Risk Clients

If high risk clients are likely to be accommodated within the scheme please describe how the client and related issues will be managed (e.g. high risk offenders, people with complex needs, drug and/or alcohol activity, crime etc.).

This form should be submitted to:

Housing Strategy Team:
Wigan Council
Gateway House 4
Standishgate
Wigan WN1 1AE

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