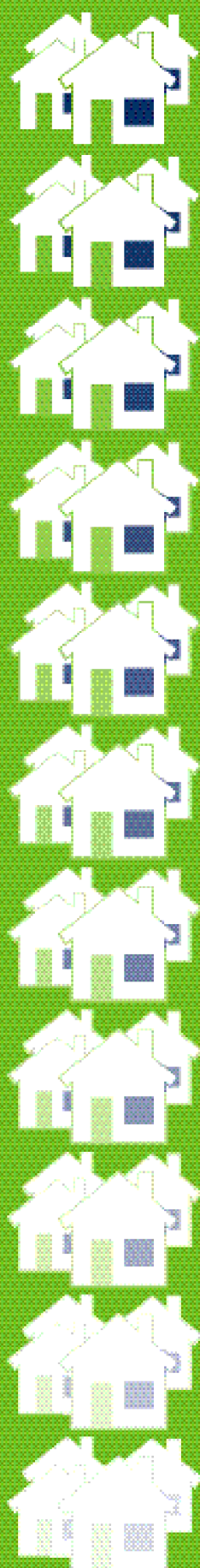




**ERoSH**

Speaking up for Sheltered Housing

Registered Charity No 1098050



## An ERoSH good practice guide to Decommissioning



## Introduction

This guide has been put together to offer outline considerations for organisations considering the decommissioning of a sheltered / retirement housing scheme. A number of members have asked EROSH to produce advice on managing the decommissioning of a scheme including guidance on options appraisal and the actions that need to be taken during the decommissioning process

The decision to decommission a scheme may follow strategic review by the local authority or may be initiated by the provider because the scheme is no longer economically viable because there is insufficient demand for the scheme and/or because the costs of repair and improvement are not sustainable. Decommissioning should be regarded as a last resort option.

Decommissioning is often a long process which may take up to two years before the scheme is decanted and closed. Undertaking an options appraisal may take three months.

Before a final decision is made to decommission a scheme is made an options appraisal should be carried out to provide an objective appraisal of the possible options for the scheme which may include:

- Re-modelling
- Change of use
- Disposal for social housing purposes
- Subletting for other purposes
- Replacement
- Subletting for social housing purposes
- Land banking
- Disposal for other purposes

The appraisal needs to take account of

- local authority plans and priorities, physical conditions of the scheme, restrictive covenants, mortgage
- the costs of decommissioning
- income from sub-lettings or disposal
- the costs of re-commissioning
- the costs of any building
- the costs of decommissioning conditions, grant repayments

Once the decision to decommission is made the following steps need to be taken

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## Process

- a decommissioning process needs to be developed with all stakeholders that is open, honest and transparent. Stakeholders may have already have developed their own protocols.
- the process must recognise that the closure of a scheme will have a major impact on staff, tenants, and their relatives. Those involved in the process must acknowledge the breath of anxieties and concerns that individuals can face when confronted with major change. A network of support for all concerned should be provided.

## Support for tenants

- local providers, social services departments, housing benefits and supporting people teams will need to work together to assist in re-housing issues. Options for re-housing should be discussed with tenants as soon as possible and the support and assistance to be given to tenants both financial and non financial should be explained.

- tenants who have no obvious support from friends or relatives may need assistance with advocacy services.
- the needs of tenants from different cultures or with language difficulties need to be addressed.
- the needs of people with disabilities should be addressed.
- a checklist should be produced for tenants who move covering advice on the re-direction of mail, who to inform of the change of address, cancelling bankers orders and direct debits, and the disconnection of services.

## Stakeholder involvement

- the ongoing consultation and communication process needs to involve all stakeholders (including, tenants, relatives, staff, media, local providers, local authority, supporting people teams, social services, local agencies, local councillors and MPs) at the earliest stage. High quality information and advice should be provided that meets the stakeholders respective needs.
- following meetings with all tenants, a letter should be sent to each tenant recording the main points raised, outlining the timescales and offering a opportunity to follow up with individual interviews
- scheme based staff are an essential part of the consultation and communication process and have pivotal role. They will be focus of liaison and information between tenants, the provider and other agencies . The options for staff, particularly residential staff that will lose their jobs should be discussed with staff affected as soon as possible. Staff need to be supported through the process.
- the re-letting of accommodation needs to be reviewed depending on the timescale for closure.

## The building

- the level of maintenance to be carried out needs to be reviewed depending on the timescale. Normally planned maintenance will be reduced whilst reactive and cyclical work may continue.
- decisions need to be made about what to do with the scheme equipment and furniture. Some may be sold with the building, some transferred to other schemes, some sold either to tenants or privately.
- scheme security needs to be reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- if the scheme remains empty following closure, the responsibility of the building needs to be established.







## Financial arrangements

- a decommissioning budget needs to be set up covering home loss and disturbance payments, other costs relating to re-housing, income from disposal of furniture, legal fees, valuation costs, redundancy payments, staff costs, security costs, and council tax on void properties, capital surpluses or deficits.
- the scheme budget needs to be reviewed. Income will fall as a result of tenants moving out, and maintenance expenditure will fall but the costs of management are likely to remain at the same level
- agreements and contracts for services provided to the scheme will need to be determined.

## Public relations

Whenever a local facility for older people is in danger or is closing there is always the potential for adverse media coverage. Any media item relating to vulnerable older people will attract local and possibly national media attention. In order to lessen the possible impact it is advised to carry out the following actions:

- Draft a press statement outlining the reason for the closure but also stressing that the residents with their relatives and staff have been and will be kept fully informed of future actions. Also state how they will be helped to be re-housed. If your working relationship with your SP contact is good you could possibly draft a joint press statement with them. Use this statement if contacted by press but do not alert them to closure.
- Write a briefing for local Councillors and local MP who will often be contacted by residents or their relatives.
- If contacted by press do not be tempted to answer their questions on the phone – take them down and then give yourself more time to prepare the answer you would want to give and not just your knee-jerk reaction
- Give updates on decommissioning progress to the contacts above.

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### References

Decanting Tenants – A good practice guide – Tony Bird and Russell Campbell can be obtained from the Chartered Institute of Housing <http://www.cih.org/publications/pub315.htm>  
Copies of the following can be obtained from - [info@shelteredhousing.org](mailto:info@shelteredhousing.org)  
AIMS - Moving On  
Age Concern - Closure of a sheltered housing

scheme - Good Practice in re-locating residents  
Anchor Trust - Standards for De-commissioning Procedures  
Epic - Protocol for reacting to notice of contract closure  
Waltham Forest - Decommissioning at Schemes - Protocol and Procedures  
Guinness Care and Support - Options Appraisal

ERoSH is a national charity promoting sheltered and retirement housing. We work with and on behalf of sheltered and retirement housing. ERoSH is committed to creating and maintaining ways to allow the sharing of best practice and knowledge amongst housing professionals working with and on behalf of older people. In addition to the range of good practice checklists and guides, ERoSH works alongside a number of organisations, government bodies and companies to promote its charitable aims. If you have a question about any aspect of ERoSH's work, or an enquiry relating to sheltered and retirement housing, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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