



Scott House and Edward Wilson House

Local Lettings Plan 2012

“Creating a desirable place where people choose to live”

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Executive Summary

This proposal for a Local Lettings Plan describes Cheltenham Borough Homes' (CBH's) plan for selective lettings of all properties at Scott House and Edward Wilson House in order to reduce anti-social behaviour and help build a more sustainable community. It will also form a part of the overall regeneration of these blocks of flats.

It outlines the history of the area and the problems it has faced. It also describes the work undertaken so far by CBH to address these problems and how the future success of this work will in part rely on a change to some of the residents living there and how future tenants can be managed. It then sets out the plans for the future to enable CBH to achieve ongoing positive change for this community and create a desirable place where people choose to live.

Introduction

Scott House and Edward Wilson House are two large blocks of four-storey one-bedroom flats located in the west side of Hester's Way, Cheltenham. A total of 205 properties house around 220 people. They make up approximately 40% of the CBH one bedroom stock in the borough and 4.5% of the total stock in the borough. The blocks have communal stairwells and access routes.

Originally built for GCHQ workers in the 1950s, the properties later came under the ownership of Cheltenham Borough Council and have been used primarily to house single people. Historically these flats have been challenged by high levels of anti social behaviour (ASB), with a poor reputation of the flats due to the actual and perceived high levels of ASB. The properties experienced a high turnover of residents and low tenant satisfaction, along with a higher than average rate of unemployment, arrests and imprisonment. Until recently, the flats also lacked defensible space which made it difficult for the residents to look after the grounds.

The flats are within a deprived neighbourhood in Gloucestershire. Hester's Way is in the top 10% of England's most deprived areas (comprised of employment deprivation (top 5%), crime (top 5%), income deprivation (top 10%), living environment (top 15%) and education, skills and training (top 15%)) (source: Indices of Deprivation, 2010).

In 2006, Cheltenham Borough Homes began to take action to resolve these problems. An intensive housing management approach started to resolve the significant levels of ASB and tenancy turnover.

Early in 2010 CBH recognised a range of needs:

- A need to encourage more community engagement
- A need to address the deterioration of the communal spaces
- A need for residents to have effective ways to address the problems that affect them
- A need for a bespoke support service to assist residents to access training or employment

A plan was established to regenerate Scott House and Edward Wilson House. This plan included improvement works to the grounds and communal areas, activities to set in motion community regeneration, and the holistic approach that was to be taken:

- Physical regeneration - the physical appearance of the flats and the grounds in which they are situated was unique, and had an institutional look. The lack of defensible space did not encourage residents to take ownership of their neighbourhood. Anti-social behaviour was encouraged by the layout. The creation of attractive and defensible space and space for leisure was identified as being important.
- Community regeneration - the long-term aim is to successfully regenerate the flats and develop a sustainable community. This has been started through development activities, employment support and social initiatives, which have complemented the physical improvements. By continuing to address social exclusion we will ensure that residents are able to positively participate in the social and economic life of Cheltenham.

During 2010 and 2011, a multi-disciplinary team from CBH has worked together to deliver this plan. Achievements during this time include:

- Completion of Neighbourhood Works at Scott House
- Completion of Neighbourhood Works at Edward Wilson House
- Repairs to the communal and private concrete balconies
- New perimeter fencing around both blocks
- Arboricultural work
- Intensive neighbourhood management
- Establishment of a Community Hub
- Delivery of a range of community activities
- Delivery of the Employment Initiatives service

The Regeneration Strategy 2012 outlines the key actions that will be taken during this year to further improve the quality of life for residents, and reduce the problems faced by residents and partner organisations. The actions CBH will take include activities to engage disadvantaged residents and the provision of support mechanisms to enable residents to improve their lives.

Regeneration is defined as “a set of activities which reverse economic, social and physical decline in areas, where market forces will not do this without support”. Regeneration in this area is essential, both now and in the future, and must always be assessed with a long-term view. The regeneration work undertaken now will impact on future generations and has the potential to create a sustainable community. A sustainable community is defined as a “place where people want to live and work, now and in the future”. It should meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, be sensitive to the environment and contribute to a high quality of life. It is safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offers equality of opportunity and good services for all. CBH brings 6 years experience of regeneration activity from across the town, to ensure a successful regeneration project.

A key part of the regeneration of this area is the reduction of ASB and, with the intensive management of the blocks, numerous actions have been undertaken to deal with this in both a proactive and reactive way. As a result, numerous injunctions have been obtained to try to reduce ASB, both against persons residing in the blocks and against others who had become frequent visitors, and in some cases, evictions for ASB have taken place to remove perpetrators.

As a result of evictions, or simply when tenants move on to alternative accommodation, void properties arise and it has been found that, on occasions, the new tenants moving in cause ASB, despite the use of 'selective lettings' at this block (and as is available to all blocks across the Borough). Selective Lettings is a procedure under which Neighbourhood Housing Officers can request that incoming tenants do not have a history of ASB. This may be because of issues that were caused by the outgoing tenant, or because of neighbouring properties to the void having a number of persons who fit one of these categories.

This impacts greatly on the existing residents as it appears to them that, just as one problem tenant moves out, another moves in. The residents at the blocks are, by and large, keen to make the area a better environment in which to live, but find these persons with known issues continuing to be re-housed there working against this aim.

Achievements 2006-2011

From the Community Regeneration Strategy, there are the following relevant outcomes desired for Scott House and Edward Wilson House, with the evidence of what has been achieved to date.

Outcome: “More opportunities for meaningful involvement of residents so that they feel empowered to make decisions about their community”

Evidence:

- Previous involvement opportunities were only the Neighbourhood Works Working Group and Neighbourhood Meetings
 - In early 2011, we asked residents “Would you be interested in using a Community Hub?” and 72% of them said ‘yes’, with many giving positive comments. Following this, a new Community Hub was established at 5 Edward Wilson House in January 2011. Our approach to community regeneration has been to provide dedicated staff resources and a physical location for residents to access services. This replicates the successful model of the St Paul’s Community House and the regeneration team based there.
 - The Hub has been open every Wednesday throughout the year as a drop-in venue (and other days for specific events). Residents attending the Hub give their opinions about the purpose and function of the Hub. We respond to their suggestions and develop a programme of activities to support residents in their desire for a better quality of life.
 - The Hub has been a place for residents to meet with CBH staff. Their consistent presence has meant that trust has been built between CBH and residents
 - At the Hub, residents have taken part in a variety of training courses. There have also been social events and many have received employment support from the Employment Initiatives Co-ordinator.
 - The Hub has also helped create community spirit through residents getting to know each other.
 - Partnership working has been important to deliver a wider range of services. It has also meant we were able to reduce the potential costs of the regeneration work. To date we have worked with the following partners: Adult Education, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, County Community Projects, Independence Trust, BTCV, Gloucestershire Police
 - Resident involvement has been an essential component of this regeneration project from the start. It has led to a greater sense of ownership and pride in the final outcome. The plans for Neighbourhood
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Works were developed in consultation with residents, using a professional landscape architect. Early on, a group of residents were part of the design team, and residents were consulted throughout the process on all aspects including new communal gardens, plant choices, paint colour choices, installation of new security doors and balcony repairs

- A monthly newsletter is sent out to all residents to communicate what's happening in their community

Outcome: "An improved urban living environment"

Evidence:

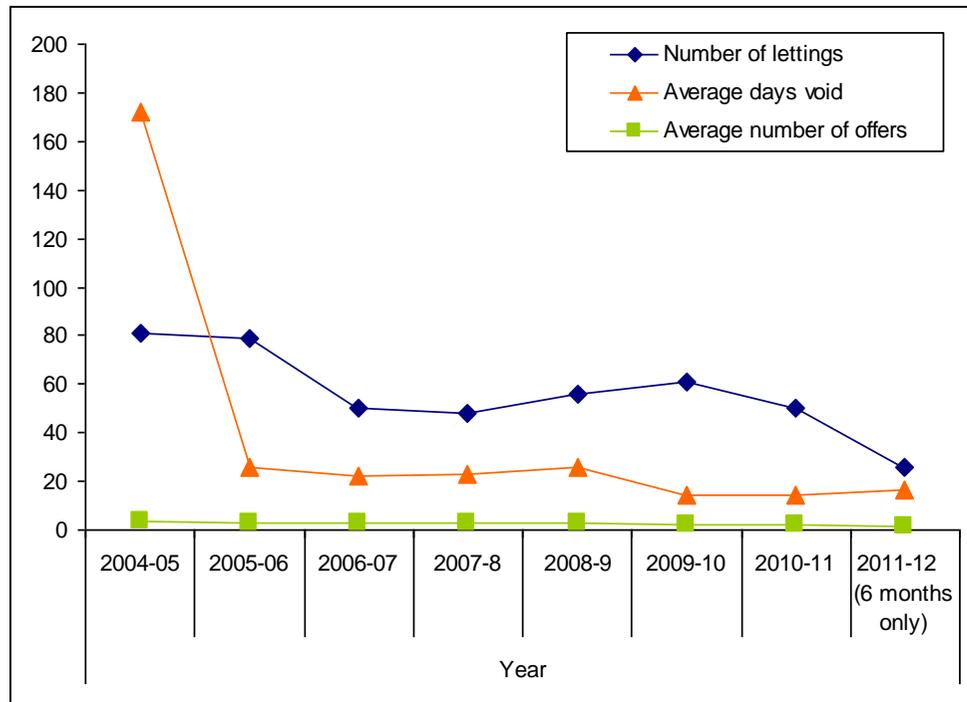
- Completion of landscape improvements - Neighbourhood Works began on site in January 2011, and was completed in August 2011. This included – secure communal gardens, arboricultural work, perimeter fencing, bin stores, cycle stores, parking areas, allotments, and garage improvements
- In addition, major repairs to the communal and private balconies and the drainage pipes have been undertaken to address water leakage, dampness and damage to the concrete
- A programme of re-painting the stairwells, railings and flat doors was completed in October 2011
- There has been a reduction in littering and general untidiness inside and outside the blocks
- Feedback from residents includes:
 - *"It makes the whole area a better place to use"*
 - *"It is nice to be able to sit outside in a pleasant area"*
 - *"We all benefit from the safer garden area"*
 - *"I live on the top floor, the view looking down is much better"*
 - *"Much improved garden and parking areas"*

Outcome: "Reduction in evictions, rent arrears, anti-social behaviour and turnover"

Evidence:

Turnover

- There has been an overall increase in tenancy sustainability, as the number of lettings per year has decreased since 2004. Although there was a slight increase from 2008-2010, lettings have decreased during the period of the regeneration project.
- Figures show that the average number of days a property is void, and the average number of offers per property, have also decreased since 2004.



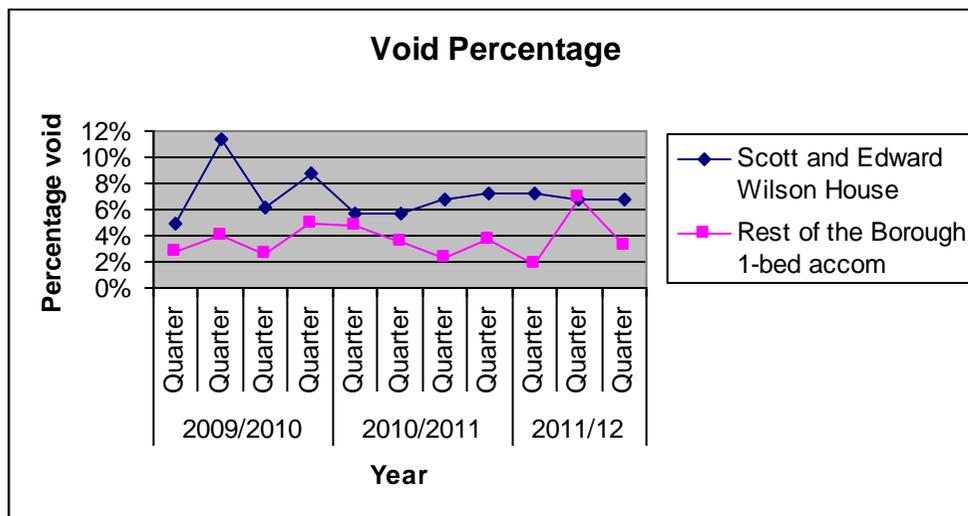
Voids

- In comparing the number of voids at Scott & Edward Wilson House with voids that have arisen at other one bed properties under our management across the rest of the Borough over the past three years, the tables below show there is a consistently higher number of voids at these blocks. The voids are also disproportionately high in comparison with all voids, but in general, this would in part be expected as the accommodation is for single persons who tend to be less settled than families and older residents, however still significantly higher than would be expected. Scott & Edward Wilson House make up just 4.35% of the total number of properties under management, but make up 7.04% of the total voids.

Numbers of voids	Average percentages
Scott and Edward Wilson House	7.04%
Rest of the Borough 1-bed accom	3.70%

- This is broken down as follows:

2009/2010				2010/2011				2011/12		
Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
5%	11.40%	6.20%	8.80%	5.70%	5.70%	6.70%	7.20%	7.30%	6.70%	6.70%
2.80%	4%	2.60%	4.90%	4.70%	3.60%	2.30%	3.70%	1.90%	6.90%	3.30%



- When looking at relet times, the difference between Scott & Edward Wilson House and other one bed accommodation under management is not so notable, the main reason being the difficult to let properties elsewhere such as sheltered bedsit accommodation.

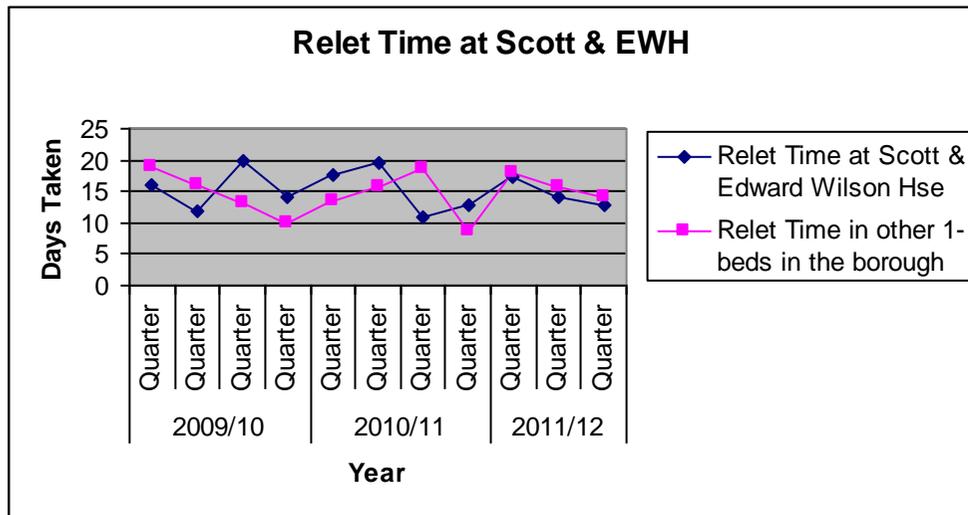
Relet Times at Scott & Edward Wilson House

Average relet times

Relet Time at Scott & Edward Wilson Hse	15.21 days
Relet Time in other 1-beds in the borough	14.71 days

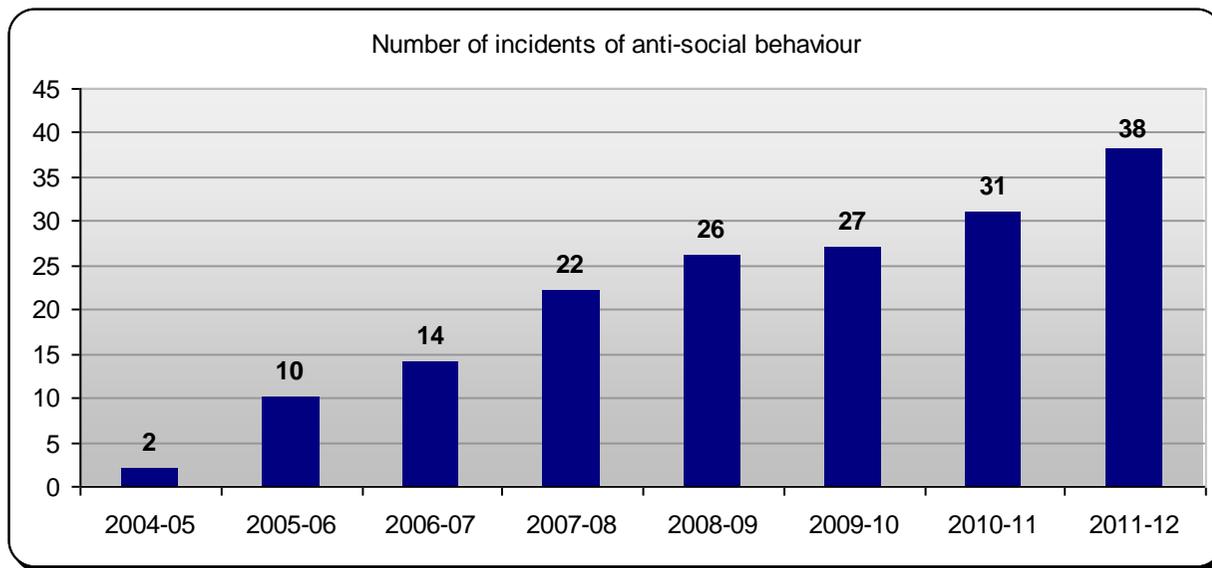
- This is broken down as follows:

2009/10				2010/11				2011/12		
Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
16	12	20	14	17.7	19.45	10.92	12.86	17.21	14.23	12.92
19	16	13	10	13.31	15.64	18.44	8.54	17.92	15.83	14.09



Anti-social behaviour

- The number of recorded incidences of ASB at both properties has increased steadily since first measured in 2004. However, it is known that ASB was a significant problem before this time, and since 2004 to date. The numbers of recorded incidences do not reflect an increase in occurrence, but an increase in the willingness of residents to report ASB. This has arisen from the proactive and effective work of the Housing Officer, which has resulted in an average of 3 evictions per year due to ASB since 2006.



- By looking at

- the number of reported incidents in the past year and comparing these to a similar development of one bed, general needs accommodation, in the same location, the following table gives details of how incidents of ASB at Scott & Edward Wilson House stands up against these other blocks.

Address	Total no. of tenanted flats	Total number of incidents of ASB in 2011/12	No. of incidents of ASB as a percentage of the total number of flats
Scott & Edward Wilson House	205	38	18.54%
Monkscroft / Cowper Road / Pitman Road	158	13	8.22%

The Action Plan attached to the Community Regeneration Strategy 2012 sets out the activities that CBH and its partners will undertake in the continued regeneration of Scott House and Edward Wilson House during 2012 and onwards. The overall aim of the project is to ***improve the quality of life for residents living in Scott House and Edward Wilson House.***

Outcome no. 5 of this plan reads as follows:

Outcome	Activity in 2012
5. Reduction in evictions, rent arrears, anti-social behaviour and turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of tenancy issues Stronger focus on dealing with anti-social behaviour as a result of changes to the Safer Estates and Neighbourhood Services teams Work with Housing Revenues team to address issue of rent arrears and impact of benefit changes

Local Lettings Plan in context

The Local Context

- Scott House and Edward Wilson House have the largest concentration of one bedroom / single person, general needs accommodation with any Social Housing Provider in the Borough.
- The turnover of properties at these two blocks is higher than any other blocks in the Borough.
- Nearly all new tenants are bidding from emergency or gold bands under Choice based lettings with Gloucestershire Homeseeker.
- A high percentage of single persons in these bands come from known backgrounds such as homelessness, leaving care, prison leavers, medical and support needs, and substance and alcohol abuse.
- Given the limited amount of single person accommodation in Cheltenham, a high number of these applicants are offered accommodation at Scott House and Edward Wilson.
- On occasions, some applicants that have caused ASB at Scott House and Edward Wilson in the past come back through the system to successfully bid for vacancies at the blocks.
- Importantly, the Policy Document of Gloucestershire Homeseeker allows for the provision of Local Letting Plans. Clause 35 of this document reads as follows:
 ‘The Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership is committed to creating balanced communities. In areas where there are known problems, such as anti-social behaviour or abandoned properties, a local lettings plan may be applied. The plan will take into account the needs of the current and new residents and the make up of the block, street or cluster of streets, to ensure a responsible letting is made. The local authority will review each letting plan periodically with landlords.’

The CBH Context

- CBH deals robustly with ASB at Scott House and Edward Wilson House (and at all properties) in our management.
- Numerous interventions are used to deal with ASB, including ASB Injunctions (which can exclude persons from an area or from carrying out anti-social acts).
- Injunctions are used either as an initial method of dealing with ASB (with the aim of stopping the ASB) or as a way of stopping the ASB until the longer process of action for possession can be applied for and implemented.
- Action for Possession of the accommodation is taken when there is serious ASB or when there continuous ASB over a period of time.
- Possession is used as a last resort and only when sufficient evidence is obtained, the ASB is sufficient to warrant such action, other actions and warnings have failed to stop the ASB, and support obtained for the tenant has not been successful in stopping the ASB.
- The impact of ASB on the neighbouring properties is considered and helps to determine the action taken in each case.

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- The disruption to other residents can be very high and works directly against improving the social regeneration and community building at Scott House and Edward Wilson House.
 - Interventions used to deal with ASB cause a large amount of work and are expensive.
 - A Local Lettings Plan for Scott House and Edward Wilson House would help counter this and give residents an opportunity to build on the regeneration work already commenced at these blocks.

The Local Lettings Plan

The reasons why a Local Lettings Plan is being considered for Scott House and Edward Wilson House are:

- due to the high levels of ASB,
- to improve the regeneration of the area,
- to improve the sense of community at the flats,
- to improve sustainability of tenancies, and
- to stop a 'revolving door' of tenants evicted coming back to the blocks.

It is therefore proposed that CBH introduces a Local Lettings Plan to cover all new lettings, initially for a period of 6 months, after which there will be a full review of the outcomes. It is envisaged that, for the impact of the Plan to be fully measurable, a minimum period of 12 months will be required so as to allow for existing ASB cases to be dealt with and for the community to settle down without (or with much reduced) impact of new tenants moving in and causing ASB.

It is accepted that some new residents maybe 'unknown quantities' – i.e. persons with no known previous criminality or ASB, but who may still cause issues after they move in. This would be outside the control of the Local Lettings Plan however, given that these residents will be on Introduction Tenancies, decisive, firm and swift action will be required should any issues arise.

Therefore, the Local Lettings Plan is proposed to be as follows:

- All properties that become vacant will be advertised under Gloucestershire Homeseeker, but marked as subject to a Local Lettings Plan.
- The Plan will clearly indicate which characteristics CBH wishes to have discretion over exclusion from offering accommodation at Scott House and Edward Wilson House.

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- These persons will include:
 - persons with a criminal record showing offences within the past 5 years (if the offences are of a minor nature, these can be disregarded, however, any offences related to violent crime, drug use or dealing, or the misuse of alcohol would exclude the applicant from consideration for rehousing at Scott & Edward Wilson House)
 - persons with a history of ASB in the past 3 years at any previous tenancies
 - persons known to have been involved in crime or ASB in the past 2 years
 - persons for whom a Possession Order had been obtained, or who had previously been evicted for ASB or who had been the subject of an injunction for ASB in the past 3 years
 - persons with high support needs who have failed to accept support or do not have adequate support in place and who may impact on neighbouring properties

 - Persons not considered for re-housing at Scott House and Edward Wilson House, would remain eligible for re-housing into other one bedroom properties in the Borough where no Local Lettings Plan exists.
 - The top three successful bidders for any void properties at Scott House and Edward Wilson House will be checked for the above by using information given, known, obtained or received and, if no record of crime or ASB in the time periods listed above, will then be visited by the Senior Neighbourhood Housing Officer for Scott House and Edward Wilson House to discuss their bids, the work we have done (and are doing) in the area and the importance of our regeneration of the flats.
 - Initially the first selected applicant on the shortlist will be visited, and others will only be visited (in turn) if the first selected applicant fails to meet the criteria required under the Local Lettings Plan. The decision regarding all applicants in the top positions who are being considered for refusal of accommodation will be made in partnership with the Empty Homes Team Leader and the Housing Options Team of Cheltenham Borough Council. A draft assessment / home visit form is attached – see Appendix 1.
 - If an applicant is subsequently found to have given false or incorrect information in respect of offences or ASB after being offered and signing up for a new tenancy, immediate action will be taken to end the tenancy.
 - A published Local Lettings Plan for Scott House and Edward Wilson House will be available on request, on the advertisements for void properties on Gloucestershire Homeseeker, on our Website, and to Cheltenham Borough Council.
 - Before implementation of a Local Lettings Plan for Scott House and Edward Wilson House, all residents will be consulted and their views, opinions and comments taken into account in finalising the Plan. There will also be direct consultation with the Tenants and Residents Association.
 - This plan will also be subject to the scrutiny and approval of the CBH Tenants Scrutiny Inspection Panel (TSIP), and the approval and agreement of Cheltenham Borough Council, and will be subject to periodic review.

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- The outcomes of the Local Lettings Plan will need to be closely monitored, with indicators for reductions in turnover of properties and in ASB cases at the blocks. The current turnover is approx. 20% of properties per annum and this much lower than average sustainability has a severe impact on the community there and on the neighbourhood as a whole. Whilst being all one bedroom flats, there would be an expectation of higher than average turnover of tenancies, this significantly higher figure undermines work being done under the Regeneration Strategy for Scott & Edward Wilson House.
 - An exit strategy for the Local Lettings plan needs to be developed and will need to be subject to some flexibility depending on its success. The residents need to be included in any decision to reduce or remove the Plan and will also be dependent on the outcomes regarding sustainability and ASB reduction as above.

Conclusion

Some work, in particular, consultation and approvals, is required before a Local Lettings Plan for Scott House and Edward Wilson House can be adopted, but once in place, it is strongly felt that this will:

- be a positive change for the existing community by reducing ASB,
- increase sustainability and therefore make a more settled community,
- be an important addition to the regeneration project for the area,
- help to create a desirable place where people choose to live.

Timeline of actions



Scott & Edward Wilson House

Local Lettings Plan

Action	Responsibility	MONTH 1	MONTH 2	MONTH 3	MONTH 4	MONTH 5	MONTH 6	MONTH 7	MONTH 8	MONTH 9	MONTH 10	MONTH 11	MONTH 12	MONTH 13	MONTH 14	MONTH 15	MONTH 16	MONTH 17
Residents consultation	SNHO / NM Team	Orange	Orange															
TARA consultation	SNHO / CIT		Orange															
TSIP Scrutiny & Approval	NMTL		Orange	Orange														
Presentation to CBC	NMTL			Purple														
Introduction of LLP	EHT				Green													
Inclusion on CBL advertisements	EHT				Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green						
Home Visits	NM Team				Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green						
Monitoring of sustainability	NMTL				Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink						
Monitoring of ASB cases	SET				Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink	Pink						
Review of LLP outcomes	NMTL										Blue							
Further consultation with residents	HM Team																Orange	

Development of exit strategy	NMTL		
Full or partial removal of LLP	NMTL		