

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE - 5 FEBRUARY 2013

Title:

DECENT HOMES – BATHROOM SPECIFICATION

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Keith Webster]
[Wards Affected: All]**

Summary and purpose:

On 2 October 2012, the Executive received a report on the HRA Capital Programme and was concerned that the bathroom installations under the Decent Homes programme were behind schedule because the current specification might not meet tenants' needs. The Executive asked Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee to review the specification for bathrooms and associated equipment.

This report recommends that for a trial period of 6 months, tenants due to receive a new bathroom under the Decent Homes programme are offered an over-bath shower. At the end of the trial period there will be a review to consider feedback from tenants and whether any permanent change in the bathroom specification is appropriate.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

The report relates to three of the Council's corporate priorities:

- Value for Money – ensuring our actions are customer focused and provide tenants with value for money.
- Affordable Housing – investing in our stock and achieving the Decent Homes standard.
- Understanding Residents Needs – ensuring our services are designed to meet people's needs.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

Waverley Borough Council ensures that tenants are given the choice of a shower over the bath in their homes.

Environment and Climate Change Implications:

The investment in a shower would generally reduce the amount of water used by a household, which benefits the tenant and the environment.

Financial Implications:

The funding of showers for those tenants who request one can be funded from the savings arising from tenants who do not require a new bathroom fitted.

Legal Implications:

The Council has statutory and contractual responsibilities to maintain and repair its property assets to defined standards. In contractual terms this includes responsibilities on the frequency of maintenance work and it is essential that the recommended planned maintenance programmes are implemented.

Background

1. On 2 October 2012, the Executive received a report on the HRA Capital Programme and was concerned that the bathroom installations under the Decent Homes programme were behind schedule because some tenants had refused the offer of a new bathroom. Anecdotal evidence suggested that one of the main reasons why tenants turned down a new bathroom was because the standard specification for new bathrooms did not include a shower.
2. To ensure that the bathroom specification met tenants' needs, the Executive asked Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee to review the specification for bathrooms and associated equipment. Officers were asked to explore with tenants different ways in which a shower might be included in the specification for new bathrooms, to encourage take-up of the offer and so bring more Council homes up to Decent Homes standard.

Bathroom specification

3. In order to get a proper understanding of the issues, officers carried out a telephone survey of tenants who had turned down a new bathroom suite offered under the Decent Homes programme. Contrary to expectations, only one tenant from the sixty-nine contacted had declined a new bathroom because an over-bath shower was not included in the specification. Most of the refusals were because the tenants had already installed a new bathroom at their own expense.
4. Whilst the fact that a shower has not been part of the standard offer is less of an issue for tenants than previously thought, there was very positive feedback from tenants to the suggestion that in future a shower might be included in new bathrooms.
5. The proposed change to the bathroom specification would be to include the installation of a thermostatic shower together with curtain rail. The existing bathroom specification already allows for full height tiling to the walls around the bath, which would be necessary if a shower was installed.
6. The proposal is to use the Mira Sport 9.0kw Thermostatic shower unit, which is robust and less likely to develop faults than other models, and therefore provides good value for money. Thermostatic controls provide safety for our tenants and meets Waverley's duty of care as landlord. Officers have negotiated to upgrade the warranty from a 2-year insurance-backed guarantee to a 5-year guarantee.

7. In the event of a breakdown during the extended warranty period a Mira Service Engineer would attend site and carry out the necessary repair. Mira can also work closely with Mears to provide additional training for their operatives in order to improve fault diagnosis and provide 'hospital packs' so that faults can be fixed on first visit. Ongoing maintenance after 5 years is hard to estimate and would need to be monitored.
8. The additional cost for provision of this shower is approximately £400 per bathroom (including extended warranty, shower rail and curtain). To achieve Decent Homes, Waverley needs to renew an additional 750 bathroom suites, and if all the 750 tenants required showers, the budget would increase by £298,800. In practice, this cost can be met from the savings in the budget arising as a result of new bathrooms being refused by tenants who have already fitted a new bathroom.
9. Where thermostatic mixer showers are not appropriate, the alternative of an electric shower would be provided. The cost of the thermostatic mixer shower taps with rail and curtain would be approximately £470 per bathroom.
10. The options around showers have been discussed with the Tenants Panel and there was no strong preference expressed between the mixer shower and electric shower.
11. A grab rail of 70 cms length (approximately £50) can be offered to tenants with some mobility limitations, to help them get in and out of their bath safely. Tenants with more serious mobility problems are referred to occupational health for a full assessment of their needs.

Financial Implications

12. Currently the average price of a bathroom is £1,985. To date 23% or 70 out of 300 tenants have refused a bathroom.
13. The budget for bathrooms in 2013-14 is £1.56 million, if the current rate of refusals continues that would release £298,800 of allocated budget to spend on the showers.
14. The showers would have an estimated life of 10 years when they would need to be replaced. This would need to be included in the business plan if the specification is permanently changed.

Conclusion

15. The current bathroom specification has not been a significant reason for tenants refusing the offer of a new bathroom, however, the possibility of including an over-bath shower in the specification has been positively received by tenants.
16. With regard to those properties in which the tenants have independently fitted a new bathroom, Waverley's records will be updated to show that they now meet the Decent Homes standard for the bathroom.

Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Observations

17. The Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Housing Improvement Sub-Committee met on 7 January 2013 and discussed the outcome of the tenant survey and the proposed

offer of either an electric over-bath shower or thermostatic mixer shower taps as part of the bathroom specification.

18. The Sub-Committee was pleased with the choices being proposed, which had been welcomed by the Tenants' Panel and which would help promote responsible use of water. The Sub-Committee agreed that any tenant opting for a thermostatic mixer shower tap should be asked to sign a disclaimer to accept that there may be variations in the water pressure which might affect the power of a shower.
19. Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee meets on 29 January, and will be asked to endorse the observations of the Sub-Committee, and the recommendation set out below.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Executive agrees that

1. tenants due to receive a new bathroom under the Decent Homes programme are offered (for a trial period of 6 months), a shower with thermostatic mixer taps (subject to survey), and where thermostatic mixer taps are not appropriate, an electric shower; and
2. at the end of the trial period a review of feedback from tenants be undertaken along with a decision as to whether any permanent change in the bathroom specification is appropriate.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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