

## **OPTIONS FOR TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PROVISION IN WYCOMBE DISTRICT**

**Cabinet Member:** Julia Langley

**Ward(s) Affected:** all

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### ***PROPOSED DECISION***

Subject to full Council approval of the relevant funding, to agree one of the two options set out in Appendix A for future provision of temporary accommodation.

If the new build option is chosen, to grant delegated authority to the Corporate Director, Head of Environment and Major Projects Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Housing and for Economic Development and Regeneration; to agree the terms on which to award a contract for the design of the accommodation through the SCAPE BECS framework as set out in Section 6 Appendix A.

If the new build or refurbishment options are chosen, to grant delegated authority to the Corporate Director, Head of Environment and Major Projects and Property Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Housing and for Economic Development and Regeneration to approve the terms of all other necessary contracts connected with the selected option in accordance with Contract Standing Orders;

If the new build option is chosen, to grant delegated authority to the Major Projects and Property Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Growth and Regeneration; to agree the final terms of a legal agreement and Lease with the British Red Cross and to approve the terms of the disposal of Saunderton Lodge;

### ***PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL***

***That the project funds as set out in Appendix A relevant to the option selected by Cabinet be approved.***

### ***Reason for Decision***

Saunderton Lodge provides temporary accommodation (TA) to homeless households to fulfil Wycombe District Council's (WDC) statutory duties. It is over 90 years old, has small bedsit units, drainage issues and increasing repair bills. Work has been carried out to consider future options for provision of temporary accommodation and designs and costs have been developed for two options – 1) a refurbishment of the Lodge and 2) a new build scheme based in High Wycombe town centre providing a total of 57 units (22 more than Saunderton Lodge).

## **Corporate Implications**

1. The Council has Statutory Duties to homeless households under sections 188 and 193 of the Housing Act 1996. The S188 duty concerns the provision of emergency accommodation for households who are believed to be: eligible for services, homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days and in priority need. Further to this the S193 duty requires suitable accommodation to be provided to households owed a duty under s184 of the same Act.
2. The new Homeless Reduction Act 2017, which is expected to be brought into force in April 2018, will add to the 1996 Act new duties for authorities to “take reasonable steps” to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible households. The new Act will be subject to statutory guidance which will establish the ‘reasonable steps’ required to prevent and relieve homelessness. This may mean that more households will require accommodation to be provided to non-priority need persons.
3. Depending on which option is selected, an Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure that equality issues are properly taken into account in providing the accommodation.
4. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Council to do anything including the acquisition or disposal of property which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of its functions; Section 123 provides that the Council shall not, without the consent of the Secretary of State, dispose of land for a consideration less than the best that can be reasonably obtained.

## **Executive Summary**

5. In addition to developing designs and costs for the refurbishment of Saunderton Lodge, consideration has been given to the option of 57 new build temporary accommodation (“TA”) units at Desborough Road car park in High Wycombe. This option would also include community units on the ground floor providing amenity space for the TA units plus some community and commercial units for rent. The Desborough Road option features modular ‘offsite manufacture’ build (OSM). This is a solution being pursued by increasing numbers of Local Authorities and other housing providers; it offers an alternative method of construction that can address housing pressures faster and at lower cost than ‘traditional’ build; the solution also reduces construction risk, and provides high quality end products. A timber volumetric OSM system for move-on and temporary accommodation has been pioneered at YMCA in Mitcham and Ladywell in Borough of Lewisham, and London Borough of Lewisham is now developing further temporary and permanent residential housing using the modular system. This development was visited by the Project team in the course of researching suitable options.

6. The offsite manufactured, modular option would remove the cost and disruption issues with regard to decant and temporary accommodation for Saunderton Lodge's tenants, and free up Saunderton Lodge land for disposal, with the resulting capital receipt becoming available to support the funding of a new build scheme.
7. Costs have been developed for both options, and can be found in Appendix A of this report.
8. The capital costs are not directly comparable. The options achieve different outcomes and have different revenue implications:
  - The new build would deliver a new, fit for purpose scheme of 73 units (57 residential and 16 ground floor community/office units), with low ongoing maintenance costs, substantial revenue savings from the increased provision and a much-improved location for access to facilities and services. It would also use a method of construction that is emerging as a significant alternative to current 'traditional' building methods, with high potential to contribute to easing the national housing shortage.
  - The Saunderton Lodge refurbishment option would deliver the refurbishment of 35 units at the 90+ year old Lodge (with no external/landscaping works included). This would still leave an ageing building, in an isolated location, with high ongoing maintenance costs and small, non-standard units that are all smaller than those in the new build scheme.
9. Revenue savings for the new build option with 22 additional TA units would be realised by reducing the need for B&B accommodation, as set out in Appendix A.

### **Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications**

10. The provision of temporary accommodation supports the Council's priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. It also contributes to the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy.

### **Background and Issues**

11. The Housing Service's preferred option is the new build town centre option for 57 TA units and 16 community/office units. Not only is this due to the ongoing revenue savings that could be achieved but it would also deliver significant operational and service benefits for the Housing Service. A review of the two options is given below:

## **a) Saunderton Lodge Refurbishment**

### *(i) Scope of Refurbishment*

The refurbishment costs allow for a general overhaul and redecoration of the Saunderton TA units, with new gas and electrical provision (including central boiler rooms/ hot water radiators, improved foul drainage, defenestration and essential repairs to the exterior facades). They also allow for a new door entry system, and replacement CCTV and WIFI. Changes to the fabric of the building would not be included apart from minor amends to units to remove lobby doors, and modification of the bungalow, nor would any external landscaping works or works to the staff bungalow be included.

### *(ii) Housing Service perspective: benefits, issues, risks & operational considerations*

The Lodge is situated in an attractive countryside location. However, the location is also a problem in terms of accessibility, with a long walk from the main road to the building, lack of public transport and no amenities close by at all. The nearest shop is in Princes Risborough, the nearest school is in Lacey Green and the nearest GP surgery and Police Station are in Princes Risborough.

The rooms in Saunderton are all bedsit in nature with the average room size approximately 19m<sup>2</sup>. The largest family rooms are approximately 21m<sup>2</sup>. Staff facilities are poor with little more than a cupboard for officers to work from at present. One officer has accommodation on site, for which WDC receives a reduced rent, and officers are also on 24/7 cover for emergencies.

The hostel was used at one point as a women's refuge, however the vast majority of its residents are now families that have either been evicted from their parental home, or have lost their private rented accommodation. In fact, women fleeing domestic violence from the Wycombe area would not normally be placed at Saunderton Lodge due to its location being known to the community and therefore being regarded as a safety risk to this client group. Refurbishment of the Lodge would address some of the most immediate issues of the old building but it will still remain an ageing building with increasing maintenance and repair costs, the rooms would remain very small and not fit for purpose, and all the location issues would also remain.

## **b) Modular new build option in High Wycombe town centre**

### *(i) Scope of proposed scheme*

The potential redevelopment site for the new build 57 TA scheme is the Council's Desborough Road car park, along with the adjoining British Red Cross ('BRC') site, fronting West End Street. A further 16 ground floor units would form part of the scheme and would include replacement BRC offices, a small office for commercial rent, as well as ground floor units to rent to community organisations; at affordable rents. Positive discussions have taken place with BRC (see Appendix A) and final terms are still to be agreed.

This scheme would allow the Service to manage directly most of its Temporary Accommodation demand and reduce/remove its use of third party B&B provision; thus achieving revenue savings from the amounts paid to others and extending standardised, good quality, fit for purpose accommodation to all its homeless clients within the District.

Utilisation of the car park has reduced since the closure of West End Street. WDC is currently considering possibilities for decking the nearby Richardson Street car park to deal with displacement from various town centre developments, so this could deal with any local parking shortage.

*(ii) Housing Service perspective – benefits, issues, risks & operational considerations of this option.*

New, purpose built Temporary Accommodation would be an asset to the WDC Housing Service and is the Service's preferred option; providing revenue savings and fit for purpose accommodation to meet statutory homeless needs within the district. Not only would it provide a more revenue efficient solution to meet need; the service provided to customers would be enhanced greatly both in terms of the size and suitability of units provided, and the location of the accommodation in terms of access to amenities and travel to the wider district.

The increase in capacity to 57 units would provide better, standardised quality of accommodation at reduced cost because there would be less need to use expensive third party providers.

Another benefit of the OSM modular build is in the high energy efficiency rating of the building, which would achieve further revenue savings in utility costs. Good quality design and standards for the units would also ensure they are durable and less expensive to maintain, and re-let.

Security measures such as gated entry would be provided to ensure only residents and their visitors can access the units, thus reducing the risk of external anti-social behaviour affecting vulnerable people or households. The proposed units will, in essence, be small, self-contained flats for use for temporary periods - no different from social or private rented housing in the district. The self-contained nature of each unit would provide families with more autonomy and privacy and remove the institutional feel of the Saunderton building.

The location of self-contained units in the town centre and reduced communal areas require for less intensive management (removing the need for permanent on site management) and be closer to the main WDC offices for easier access for both staff and residents to access.

Residents will also benefit from access to all town centre amenities and no longer be reliant upon the Service to provide assistance due to the lack of nearby facilities. A high proportion of the residents are on low incomes and do not have cars, so rely on public transport or walking to move around, often with infants in pushchairs and other small children. Local services will be easier to access, including access to medical and welfare services.

## Consultation

12. Housing Service officers have been involved in developing and considering the two options and the Service's preferred option is the new build scheme. A meeting took place with the Police Superintendent for the Wycombe area to discuss the new build proposals and provide information on the wider regeneration plans for the Desborough area. If the new build option were to be agreed by Cabinet and Council, fuller consultation would take place with stakeholders and statutory consultees as part of the Planning process, to ensure designs and plans are developed in accordance with best practice for security and other considerations.

## Options

13. As stated in this report there are two options for Cabinet and Council to consider and the Housing Service's preferred option is the new build scheme. The reasons are summarised below
14. **The service & operational benefits** of a new build town centre option over the refurbishment option are key drivers:

**a. Lodge will not be fully fit for purpose even after refurbishment.**

- i. It will still be an ageing building which will not be 'as new' even after a refurbishment. Ongoing R&R costs would be much higher than the new build option.
- ii. Saunderton units would remain small – even the largest unit in the Saunderton building is smaller than the standard size of 28sq m proposed for the new build units.
- iii. Isolated location is difficult for many tenants.
- iv. The building would continue to have an 'institutional' feel due to its internal corridor layout.

**b. New Build will offer fit for purpose temporary accommodation:**

- i. Self-contained units will be of a decent standard size, new and energy efficient, which are designed to meet tenants' needs.
- ii. Town centre location means families without cars have easy access to shops, town facilities, services and schools.
- iii. It involves no need to displace Housing tenants at Saunderton during the refurbishment period.
- iv. There would be less reliance on third party providers for expensive B&B for comparable additional units.
- v. OSM units are highly energy efficient, with low utility costs.

## **Conclusions**

15. Cabinet is asked to recommend to Council one of the two options for the future provision of temporary accommodation, and to recommend the appropriate delegations proposed in the first section of this paper. As stated in this report, the Housing Service's preferred option is the new build scheme for the benefits it delivers in terms of better standards of TA provision and revenue savings from reduction of use of third party B&B provision.

## **Next Steps**

16. Council be requested to endorse Cabinet's recommendations.

## **Background Papers**

Background papers used in preparing this report are held on the Council's G Drive.