

CommitteeName: Overview and Scrutiny Committee**MeetingDate: 19 December 2023****IssueTitle:** To consider and pass comments to Cabinet on engaging a specialist, technical project resource to facilitate scoping the remodelling of Heathland's Court, the Council's Temporary Accommodation provision.**Report of:** Executive Director - Community**Cabinet Portfolio:** Community**Key Decision:** Yes**Reasons for Urgency:** None**Confidentiality:** Non Exempt**Summary**

1. That Overview and Scrutiny Committee discuss, consider and comment on the following recommendation prior to submission to Cabinet for approval.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet agrees that £80k be released to fund technical, specialist resources to support scoping options to remodel Heathlands Court.

Main Issues

2. In 2020, an Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group was formed to review and analyse ongoing projects to identify opportunities to create affordable housing options using the Council's housing capital funding. One of the priority projects identified by the Group was the revamping of Heathlands Court, which currently serves as temporary accommodation for the entire district.
3. Heathlands Court is a Council-owned asset VIVID manages on a long-term lease. The Council, therefore, has a longstanding interest to ensure that it is fit for purpose and is of a decent standard for people to live in. It is in Yateley but is used to house households across the district. It helps the Council to assist people who are at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping and reduces the Council's reliance on using Bed and Breakfast as temporary accommodation.
4. The accommodation comprises 23 units that offer bedsit, 1-bed, and 2-bed options. However, some units are quite small and have a unique layout where one of the bedrooms is not separate from the main living area. Instead, it is set in an alcove in the lounge area. This can be inconvenient for families sharing the accommodation and limits the households that can be accommodated. Additionally, there are no wheelchair-accessible rooms available, which means that homeless families with such requirements cannot be accommodated there.
5. There is an urgent need for the accommodation to be upgraded to meet the needs of today's customers and future-proofed accordingly.

6. The remodelling project aims to completely transform the type of accommodation provided, with a focus on offering support to residents in managing their homes, learning essential life skills, and successfully transitioning into the private rented sector while maintaining their tenancy.
7. The building has several communal rooms that can be reconfigured during the remodelling process. This presents an excellent opportunity for external services, such as health, social services, and voluntary sector organisations, to utilize the rooms to offer support and advice services to residents and others. Additionally, some of the communal areas can be incorporated into the footprints of the flats themselves to create extra internal space.
8. The building's current EPC rating is C, with some flats rated EPC D. In line with the Council's climate change agenda and its goal to reduce carbon emissions, it is worth considering leveraging this opportunity to upgrade the building's EPC rating. This would not only benefit the environment but also help in reducing gas and electricity costs for the residents.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Comments/Recommendations

9. Subject to any additional comments or recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee this proposal will be taken to Cabinet to recommend the release of £80k of housing capital reserves to fund technical and specialist resources to support scoping options to remodel Heathlands Court.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

10. The option of leaving the property as it is and not implementing the proposal is available. However, the Task and Finish Group Members have already expressed their priority is to remodel Heathlands Court to provide suitable and modern accommodation. Therefore, the Council needs to develop the proposal further, and hiring a technical specialist will help to create fully costed options for the remodelling.

Corporate Governance Considerations

Relevance to the Corporate Plan

11. The proposal follows all three focus areas of the Corporate Plan, 2023-2027. Planet – tackling climate change and becoming a carbon neutral district by 2040. People – a people-centred approach and working with key local partners such as the voluntary sector, police, NHS and education providers. Place – deliver warmer, better homes that people can afford. Safe, secure and affordable housing to help support people's wellbeing and create sustainable communities.

Service Plan

- Is the proposal identified in the Service Plan? No
- Is the proposal being funded from current budgets? Yes
- Have staffing resources already been identified and set aside for this proposal? Yes - There will be some input required from existing staff time and resources and due to the specialist nature of this proposal a qualified, technical specialist is required to manage this project going forward. Existing staffing resources do not have the specialist skills or the capacity to support this project.

Legal and Constitutional Issues

12. Advice and expertise will be sought on any legal and constitutional issues that are identified through the scoping process.

Financial and Resource Implications

13. This report seeks approval to provide the necessary funding to bring forward an options appraisal for the project. The outcome is an understanding of the overall costs and exact requirements for the entire project. Once more specific costings have been established, a further paper will be brought back to Cabinet to review the details and approve the overall budget. It is estimated that the re-modelling will cost in the region of £4 million which will be funded from the Housing Capital reserve.

Risk Management

14. There is no risk at this stage as funding is simply being sought to carry out a detailed options appraisal. The outcome of the appraisal will be the subject of a further report back to Cabinet.

Equalities

15. Heathlands Court provides emergency temporary accommodation for homeless households. It is the Council's only Temporary Accommodation. The Council is responsible for ensuring that the accommodation is accessible to all homeless households the Council works with.

Climate Change Implications

16. The building currently has an average EPC rating of C with some flats rated D. The remodelling project provides the opportunity to make the building more energy-efficient and sustainable.
17. The Corporate Plan also states that it seeks to "improve the energy efficiency of homes including supporting low-carbon heating and insulation technologies for those residents who are on low incomes which in turn will help to reduce heating costs".

Action

18. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee's comments will be reported to Cabinet. Officers will bring back a more detailed report in 2024 to set out clear options and costs.

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Appendices None

Background Papers: None