

Committee: Cabinet

Meeting Date: 4 January 2024

Title: Remodelling of Heathland's Court, Cricket Hill, Yateley.

Report of: Executive Director - Community

Cabinet Portfolio: Community

Key Decision: Yes

Reasons for Urgency: None

Confidentiality: Non-Exempt

Summary

1. To approve the release of £80k for technical resources to support Heathlands Court's remodelling options.

Recommendation

2. That Cabinet agrees to release £80k to fund the procurement of technical, specialist resources to support work on scoping of options for Heathlands Court's remodelling.

Background

3. Heathlands Court is a Council-owned asset VIVID manages on a long-term lease. The Council, therefore, has a longstanding interest in ensuring 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 assist people at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping and reduces the Council's reliance on Bed and Breakfast as temporary accommodation.

Main Issues

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, focusing 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 remodelling. This presents an excellent opportunity for external services, such as health, social services, and voluntary sector organisations, to utilise 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 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 its EPC rating. This would benefit the environment and help reduce gas and electricity costs for the residents.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

9. The option of leaving the property as it is and not implementing the proposal is available. However, the 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

10. 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

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

Financial and Resource Implications

12. This report seeks approval to provide the necessary funding to bring forward an options appraisal for the project. The outcome is understanding the overall costs and exact requirements for the entire project. Once more specific costings have been established, a further paper will be returned 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

13. There is no risk at this stage, as funding is being sought only for a detailed options appraisal. The outcome of the appraisal will be the subject of a further report back to Cabinet.

Equalities

14. 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

15. The building currently has an average EPC rating of C with some flats rated D. The remodelling project allows the building to be more energy-efficient and sustainable.
16. The Corporate Plan also 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

17. That Cabinet approves up to £80k funding for an additional resource to provide specialist, technical knowledge, and project management.
18. Officers will bring back a more detailed report in 2024 to set out clear options and costs. At this point, the Committee will be asked to decide whether to agree to proceed with the project to remodel Heathlands Court.

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Appendices None

Background Papers: None