

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

1 FEBRUARY 2012

PROPOSALS FOR USE OF WHITE WINGS HOUSE BEDSITS

REPORT OF HEAD OF LANDLORD SERVICES

Contact Officer: Steve Tong Tel No: 01962 848298 stong@winchester.gov.uk

RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report seeks authority from Committee to designate the vacant wing of White Wings House as supported accommodation for people with learning disabilities. The project offers the opportunity for partnership working with Hampshire County Council Adult Services team to meet the housing needs of vulnerable adults. It will also enable the accommodation to be brought back into use, bringing full occupancy back to the scheme and generate a significant amount of rental income for the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the vacant wing of bedsit flats at White Wings House be designated for letting to adults with learning disabilities.
- 2 That approval is given for the Head of Strategic Housing to include an appropriate referral arrangement into Hampshire Homechoice to enable allocations to be dealt with in accordance with the sub-regional choice-based lettings scheme.
- 3 That the Head of Landlord Services be authorised to develop detailed proposals in conjunction with Hampshire County Council officers, undertake further consultation with existing tenants, take account of the outcome of an Equality Impact Assessment and implement the project.
- 4 In view of the value of the refurbishment project a financial appraisal will be presented to the Committee at a future meeting.

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

1 FEBRUARY 2012

PROPOSALS FOR USE OF WHITE WINGS HOUSE BEDSITS

REPORT OF HEAD OF LANDLORD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. White Wings House in Denmead is a sheltered housing scheme comprising 18 one-bedroomed flats and 18 self-contained bedsit flats. The bedsit flats had proved difficult to let over a number of years and despite a number of initiatives to remodel the accommodation, none of the proposals proved viable. The wing of bedsit flats was taken out of commission in 2009, so although no rent has been received for the accommodation, neither has there been any subsidy payable.
- 1.2. The one-bedroomed flats in the other wing of the building have remained popular with older people and following a successful open day, the group of five vacant flats which have occurred recently are in the process of being allocated through Hampshire Homechoice.
- 1.3. In recent months, officers have been in discussions with Commissioning Managers at Adult Services (Hampshire County Council) and proposals to make this accommodation available to clients with learning disabilities are well advanced.
- 1.4. This report outlines the proposals and seeks authority for the accommodation to be re-designated to enable the proposed supported housing project to be established.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSALS

- 2.1. Hampshire County Council Adult Services has responsibility for providing services for vulnerable adults with learning disabilities. They have a number of clients who are in need of a safe and supported environment where they can live independently. In some cases, clients remain living at home with ageing parents who are worried about what will happen to their son or daughter when they themselves can no longer provide for their needs. Other clients are currently in residential accommodation due to lack of alternative provision, but would like the opportunity to live in a more independent setting.
- 2.2. The proposal would enable fourteen of the vacant bedsit flats to be brought back into use as rented accommodation with the remaining four units being adapted to provide the other facilities needed to make the project viable. The proposed use of the accommodation for this project will make effective utilisation of the stock and will help to secure

the vibrancy and sustainability of White Wings as a supported housing environment for older people and adults with learning disabilities. In addition it will offer an excellent opportunity for the Council to work in partnership with Hampshire County Council in delivering an effective service to meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

3. PROPOSED PROJECT

- 3.1. The project would encompass the entire vacant wing of the building (currently including 18 x bedsit flats; laundry room; and guest room). The 12 flats on the top two floors would be let as individual studio flats, whilst the ground floor would comprise 2 flats for letting (making 14 flats in total); two flats to be knocked into one to be used as a communal space for social and therapeutic activities; one flat for staff sleepover and one flat for emergencies / respite. The 'knocking through' of two ground floor units would be subject to the necessary approvals from Building Control although no planning consent would be required
- 3.2. It is anticipated that whilst the Learning Disability project would be fairly self-contained, there will be opportunities for interaction between both groups of service users, including continued access to the laundry room for the sheltered tenants, and joint use of the guest room facilities.
- 3.3. Each flat will require replacement of the boiler, a new kitchen and full redecoration. Most flats have a bath as opposed to a shower, and it is proposed therefore that a level access shower should be installed in each of the two flats on the ground floor. These flats would be fitted out to a higher mobility standard. However, it is anticipated that most clients will not have significant physical disabilities, and mobility will form part of the assessment process undertaken with clients being considered for referral to the scheme.
- 3.4. Studio Four Architects have been involved in preliminary design work for the project and it is proposed that they continue to work with officers to develop firm proposals. The firm are Members of Constructionline and given the value of the contract, their selection falls within Rule 9.2 B of the Contracts Procedure Rules.

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1. Since the majority of the physical work required will be focussed on refurbishing the flats themselves, it should be possible to implement the proposed project fairly quickly, with the target date for commencement of occupation being July 2012.
- 4.2. The Council will retain full ownership of the scheme and will act as landlord, letting each flat direct to the occupier on their own separate

tenancy. Adult Services would commission the necessary support services, which will include staff sleep-in cover at nights.

- 4.3. It is anticipated that all clients referred to the scheme will be eligible as applicants of Hampshire Homechoice. Consideration will need to be given to how the referral arrangements are managed to ensure the suitability of those accommodated in the project. Although no detailed consideration has yet been given to this issue, it is anticipated that a similar arrangement to the one in use for the Extra Care service, using a multi-disciplinary panel, might be the most effective means of dealing with this issue.
- 4.4. The Equality Impact Assessment of the bidding arrangements for choice-based lettings recognised that vulnerable clients may need practical assistance to ensure they are able to successfully register their interest in a vacant dwelling. Accordingly, officers will offer the appropriate additional help and support required by applicants to this project. In view of the introduction of a different client group into an existing sheltered housing scheme, an Impact Assessment will be carried out to ascertain whether the current tenants might be disadvantaged.
- 4.5. As outlined above, the project is intended for clients who are assessed as having capacity for independent living, and referrals to the scheme will need to reflect this criterion.
- 4.6. An informal discussion has taken place with the existing tenants at White Wings House over these proposals and they were very positive about the suggested use. More detailed consultation will be undertaken as the project develops. If any material unresolved objections are received, they will be reported to this Committee for further consideration.

5. FUNDING

- 5.1. Since the units of accommodation have been out of commission for some time, there will be a significant cost involved in reinstatement of the dwellings. The overall project cost is estimated at around £170,000. Hampshire County Council Members have yet to consider the proposals in detail, but it is intended that they will be asked to approve capital funding to cover the costs of the works which are over and above the City Council's normal voids standard. These are likely to include assistive technology, and the conversion works to create the new communal space.
- 5.2. A provisional sum of £200,000 to fund the improvement of sheltered housing schemes generally has been included in the Housing Repairs and Renewals Programme within the HRA Business Plan. Details of this are given in another item on the meeting agenda. It is proposed

that the City Council's share of the project costs, estimated at £120,000 should be funded from this provision.

- 5.3. Preliminary work on the rent and service charge figures suggests that the Council should be able to expect an income of approximately £28,000 per annum from the letting of 14 of the flats. The initial outlay incurred in making the properties suitable for letting would therefore be recovered within five years.

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- 6.1. The site on which White Wings House is situated has potential for redevelopment and Members may wish to take this into consideration. However, it is likely that any new-build opportunities on the site would take some time to realise. Additionally, previous work undertaken by Studio Four at the site outlined some limited opportunities to construct additional accommodation units without demolishing the existing dwellings. The proposed use of the scheme as outlined in this report is likely to offer a much quicker solution as well as meeting a strategic need to provide affordable supported housing for vulnerable adults.
- 6.2. Since White Wings House will continue to offer sheltered housing for the elderly or for people with disabilities, there should not be any impact upon the current exemption of dwellings in the scheme from RTB status in any part of the building.

7. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 7.1. The proposed use of the accommodation at White Wings House would promote the objectives of Inclusive Society and help promote Health and Wellbeing for the new tenants who would benefit greatly from the opportunity to live independently.
- 7.2. The project would also contribute significantly to the strategic objectives of Hampshire County Council Adult Services.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1. The funding situation is set out in section 5 above, and the project is considered to be financially sustainable. In addition, by bringing this vacant housing stock back into use, the Council will be making effective use of an existing housing resource in meeting the needs of adults with learning disabilities.
- 8.2. For Hampshire County Council, the provision of independent housing for clients who are currently accommodated in a residential care setting will be much more cost-effective and release finance for other clients in need. The provision of funding for this project will be considered by County Council's Cabinet in mid-February, so the outcome will be

known before any financial commitments are entered into to reinstate the property.

9. TACT COMMENT

- 9.1. TACT has been directly represented on the Supported Housing Informal Member/Officer Group which has reviewed a number of options for the use of the vacant units in White Wings House. TACT has raised concerns about the vacant units over many years and fully supports the proposals in this paper.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None