



COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 17 January 2008

Title: Homeless Families Hostel Replacement

Report of: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Report reference: DS.10/08

Summary:

This report presents Members of the Community Overview and Scrutiny committee with the report that went to Executive on 17/12/07 to update them on progress on proposals to replace the homeless families hostel with a new build alternative.

Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:

Input from this committee surrounds the progress made to date in taking the project forward.

Recommendations:

That the attached report that went to the Executive on the 17/12/07 be considered and comments forwarded to the Executive.

Contact Officer: Simon Taylor

Ext: 7327

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None



PORTFOLIO AREA: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Date of Meeting: 17 December 2007

Public Yes

Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan: Yes

Inside Policy Framework Yes

Title: FAMILY HOSTEL REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Report of: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Report reference: DS. 119/07

Summary:

This report updates members on the background to, justification and proposals for, the replacement of the London Road Homeless Families Hostel. It seeks approval for the allocation of capital funds from the Housing Strategy programme for 2008/9 and beyond and sets out proposals for the funding of the project using capital funds, capital receipts and Hostel Capital Improvement Grant from the Government. It sets out a vision for how we will develop service for people who have housing problems including homelessness.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that

1. The update on the hostel replacement project as detailed below be noted including the in principle allocation of £400,000 Regional Housing Board Grant from 2007/08
2. A bid is made to the Department for Communities and Local Government for Hostels Capital Improvement Grant to part fund the new hostel.
3. The further development of hostel services and an integrated approach to housing advice, homelessness and rehousing be located at John Street as a new centre of excellence.
4. A detailed report identifying final scheme costs, funding arrangements and development timescales is brought back to the Executive in February 2008 for consideration.
5. If the bid to Communities and Local Government is successful and the detailed report to the Executive in February is supportive of the development the existing hostel at London Road is declared surplus to requirements and sold, the capital receipt being ring fenced, subject to approval by full Council, to help fund the replacement hostel.

Catherine Elliot

Director of Development Services

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1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1.1 The London Road Homeless Families Hostel accommodates 10 families/single women. It is a 3-storey building converted from two adjoining terraced houses and has communal facilities including a kitchen, laundry, bathrooms and sitting rooms. There is an office and sleep over facilities for staff. It has a large enclosed concrete yard at the rear.
- 1.2 It is not suitable for its purpose as it has no accessible accommodation for people with disabilities, is inadequate in terms of how support and help can be provided to homeless clients and it is physically unacceptable and unsuitable due to poor design, small rooms, inadequate communal space, and the control of access to and from the building.
- 1.3 A new building is needed to improve the quality of service, address equality and accessibility issues and comply with government policy of hostels being Places of Change.
- 1.4 New build provision is the only option which will provide high quality, appropriate, temporary accommodation for homeless families and vulnerable women to enable the City Council to discharge its homelessness obligations effectively. It is the option which is most likely to gain government support and funding.
- 1.5 The government's approach to homelessness services for the future is for Councils to provide early intervention to prevent people losing their homes. We will be expected to provide advice and practical help to help them resolve their problems, and work in partnership with other agencies to deliver joined up services, support and accommodation to make a real difference to people's lives.
- 1.6 On the 2nd July 2007 a report regarding the Housing Capital Programme was brought to Executive (DS 55/07) and paragraph 2.7 of that report stated;

'Through the annual Housing Investment Programme for the financial year 2007/08 the authority received a grant of £1.5 million for preferred expenditure on priorities set by the Regional Housing Strategy. This allocation was the same as last year but more than the anticipated £1.1 million. Feedback from the Government Office for the North West (GONW) has indicated that future grants will be within the region of £1.1 million. The Carlisle Housing Strategy priorities are aligned with the Regional Housing Strategy.'

The recommendation by Executive (EX155/07) states at 1(d);

'The extra £400,000 income from the Regional Housing board grant for 2007/08 (paragraph 2.7 of report DS 55/07) to be allocated in principle for the families hostel replacement subject to a full business case being developed and a further report to the Executive'.

- 1.7 Report DS 55/07 taken to Executive on 2/7/07 identified the 3 long term projects under theme one – Supporting Vulnerable People of the Updated Housing Strategy Action Plan. These were;
- Extra Care Scheme
 - Foyer for young people
 - Homelessness and Hostels Provision

The proposed funding for the replacement families hostel is from four sources. These are;

- Regional Housing Board Grant – as stated in 1.6
- Ringfenced Capital Receipt – from the sale of London Road Hostel and potentially the 4 'Homeshare' properties
- Housing Strategy Capital Programme – reallocation of capital funding for 08/09
- Bid to the Government for funding from the Hostel Improvement Grant pot – This is a funding programme of £70 million nationally to help implement the 'Places for Change' programme described in section 3. Bids are to be submitted by mid January 2008 and successful bids approved by early March 2008.

The Housing Service control 3 out of 4 of these funding mechanisms. The submission of a bid for funding will play an important part in taking forward the project and any grant award will determine how much allocation is required from the Housing Capital Programme.

2.0 Benefits of the New Hostel Project

- 2.1 The provision of a new hostel would have the following benefits for the City Council and its citizens:
- High quality self contained accommodation with no sharing for families and higher quality shared flats for single women. In each case, space standards, privacy and quality of life would be improved significantly.
 - Flexible accommodation provision to meet a wide range of family needs including large families
 - Improved play facilities for children inside and outside
 - Protected, secure garden facilities
 - Better access arrangements which are less staff intensive and more efficient
 - A more energy efficient, more cost effective, "greener" building to meet higher environmental standards
 - A building which is cheaper to run and more affordable for the Council and homeless customers
 - New facilities such as improved reception area, better communal spaces, workspace and training rooms with better office accommodation and private interview facilities.
 - On site storage provision for homeless people's furniture and belongings
 - Accommodation accessible for people with disabilities including wheelchair users

- Provision of limited facilities for pets including dogs
- A more relaxed atmosphere more conducive to effective working with clients and more supportive for them
- Improved outcomes through better productivity from staff
- Accommodation which can be adapted for different uses – as permanent housing for instance - in the future if the need for temporary housing diminishes.
- The ability to provide an integrated service with homelessness staff being located at the hostel site.

3.0 Government Policy Context

3.1 The Government policy agenda for temporary homeless accommodation requires hostels to be developed as **Places of Change**. By this they mean that hostels should no longer be seen as temporary housing alone, but should help people address the issues that led to homelessness and access services to develop the skills to live independently in the community. Effective resettlement is the key to achieving this.

3.2 There are three key elements to this approach set out by the government:

- (i) Welcoming buildings.
- (ii) Motivated staff, and
- (iii) Engaging services

3.3 Their intention is that is that hostels should be centres of excellence and choice which positively change lives - Places of Change.

3.4 A key part of this policy approach is the Hostel Capital Improvement Programme.

(i) Welcoming buildings

3.5 This funding programme amounted to £90 million across the country when first allocated in 2005. The 3 year programme funded 150 hostel and day centre improvement projects by March 2008 in the first phase. The government has just announced there will be a second phase of the programme from 2008 onwards with funding nationally of £70 million. The City Council will be invited, along with other authorities, to bid for capital funding to contribute to new hostel and day facilities and services.

3.6 The national programme to date has been a success and new hostels and day centres have been provided by local authorities across the country which look, feel and work differently to traditional hostels. Some really imaginative and effective hostel buildings and services have been developed over the past three years and welcoming hostels created.

(ii) Motivated staff

3.7 The outcomes anticipated from the funding and new policy approach were:

- An Increase in the amount of engagement of residents in meaningful activity in the community
- Involvement of residents in developing services
- Development of well trained and motivated staff
- Provision of a quality physical environment.

3.8 The first three outcomes have been difficult in recent circumstances, in terms of resources, staff training, capacity and skills.

3.9 However we now have in place new systems and training to help staff develop best practice in support work focused on outcomes. We have also, funded by an increased grant for our Supporting People contract for London Road, increased the staff team and are introducing a new approach to holistic service delivery, with our new Its Your Move Co-ordinator, dedicated to training and equipping homeless people with the skills to resettle successfully in the community.

(iii) Engaging services

3.10 We are also leading on developing CHIP – the Carlisle Homeless Improvement Partnership, which is a multi-agency partnership to develop a wider range of services across Carlisle for homeless and vulnerable people. The partnership will be seeking funding to set up a co-ordinated programme of activities and training to enable homeless people to acquire social and employment skills and training to address their wider social needs and aspirations. This programme may be based at or delivered from John Street.

4.0 Proposals for a New Families Hostel

4.1 Refurbishment of the existing building is not feasible and therefore we need to look at a new hostel on a new site.

4.2 We recommend that this is provided by developing a new hostel on land adjacent to the John Street Hostel, presently occupied by the Shaddongate Car Park. The advantages of this proposal are:

- (i) It is adjacent to our men's hostel and will enable us to work more effectively and efficiently in the future, with potential for cost savings through better utilisation of hostel staff and other resources. We will do this by creating new, welcoming reception facilities for people who are homeless and/or need assistance or advice on a housing problem. We propose to transfer the current homelessness staff from the Civic Centre to the new premises at John Street to provide a one stop shop for housing advice and homelessness, including reception, assessment and onward resettlement.
- (ii) The site is in our ownership
- (iii) It is relatively near the town centre and accessible.

4.3 The key issues with the site are that:

- it is currently used for car parking. The future of the site as a public car park is being considered within the draft car parking strategy currently being drawn up by Capita Symonds on behalf of both the City and County Councils.
- some car parking could be retained within the site design by the creation of accommodation above ground floor level with parking underneath
- it is located in an area prone to potential flooding – a flood risk assessment is being carried out in relation to the site.
- The site lies within the Western Gateway area, as identified within the City Centre Development Framework & Movement Strategy Policy Statement agreed by the City Council in May 2007.. In line with that Policy statement the Council are currently working with consultants to prepare a Planning Brief for this Western Gateway area that will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in mid 2008. This Western Gateway area will also be included within the Urban Design Guide and Public Realm Framework currently being worked up and similarly to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents, hence any proposed developments will be expected to adhere to the design quality thresholds set within that guide.

4.4 Each of these issues will be considered as part of any eventual planning application made.

5.0 Progress So Far

5.1 We have, following consultation with staff and residents drawn up a design brief. Working with our project manager we have engaged local architects to draw up an initial design and identify outline costings, to enable the Executive to make a fully informed decision at its meeting in February 2008. At this time we should also be clear about any Hostels Capital Improvement Grant to be awarded to the Council. The cost of this initial work has been funded from revenue and need to be offset against the capital budget in due course.

6.0 What will the new hostel be like?

6.1 The outline development brief for the new hostel is set out below.

- To provide a new build replacement for the London Road Homeless Families Hostel
- To improve the facilities at the existing hostel at John Street
- Site location – rear of John Street on existing car park
- To be linked to existing John Street hostel with shared reception area
- Type of accommodation – self contained family units and shared flats for single people
- Total provision – 8-10 units
- Communal facilities – offices, lounge, laundry, work space, meeting room and kitchen
- Units accessible for disabled people including full mobility access flats
- Adjacent units being linked up/connectable to ensure larger/smaller accommodation units to be provided in a flexible way

- Fully equipped, floor coverings and furnished
- Storage facilities for customers belongings
- Covered physical link to John Street
- Car parking provision on ground floor - minimal
- Enclosed visible play area external and internal if possible
- Secure access system with digital CCTV linked to John Street
- Green building – with aim of carbon neutrality
- Office accommodation for homeless staff
- Private interview rooms
- Dog kennels
- Bike storage facilities

- 6.2 **Site location and development approach** – the site is adjacent to John Street hostel on the existing public pay car park. The building should be located over 2 or 3 floors and living accommodation provided on the first floor and above with ramp and lift access to the first floor and lift access to the second floor. The ground floor would accommodate parking, garaging/storage, services, kennels and workshops/communal spaces along with play facilities. There should be a covered physical link to the existing men's hostel at John Street through a shared reception, interview facilities and office accommodation for homelessness staff.
- 6.3 **Type of accommodation** - the accommodation provided should consist of self contained flats for families and shared flats for single women. There should be 2 and 3 bedroomed flats for families and shared flats should consist of ensuite bedrooms and shared kitchens and living rooms. In order to maximise the use of the space flexibly the preference is for adjacent accommodation units to be linkable so smaller or larger units can be provided if needed, by joining or separating units. The total accommodation units provided should be between 8 and 10.
- 6.4 **Reception area** – a new welcoming reception area to be created, linked to and accessible from both John Street and the new hostel building and incorporating staff/office accommodation.
- 6.5 **Communal facilities** – though each flat will have its own living room it is important there is provision for communal living space. There should be two such multi-purpose rooms to be utilised for living space, for meetings or training. There should be one office and an adjacent small interview room. There should be communal laundry provision with drying facilities internal and external. In addition workshop type facilities should be provided accessible from outside the building secure zone. The ground floor garden/play areas should be secured and accessible only to authorised users.
- 6.6 **Accessibility** -it is important that at least 50% of the accommodation units should be fully accessible for people with disabilities and mobility problems. This access would need to be achieved for both single persons and family accommodation, so as not to exclude wheelchair users.

- 6.7 **Storage and additional facilities** – there should be provision for dry secure storage of the belongings of residents. There should be lockable storage for bicycles and similar equipment and a storage facility for project staffs use such as cleaning materials and equipment. There should also be limited secure car parking provision.
- 6.8 **Security** - all communal areas internal and external should be secure and monitored by a digital CCTV system, linked to John Street hostel. The external communal areas and access to the flats and communal facilities should be secured and access controllable.
- 6.9 **Building carbon footprint** - the design of the building should have a minimal carbon footprint and maximise the use of renewable/sustainable energy. The aim is to produce a sustainable building and minimise running costs to the Council and people staying in the accommodation.
- 6.10 **Dog kennels** – a small number of homeless people have dogs or other pets. The new building should provide limited accommodation - kennels - linked to individual flats - for dogs. It would also include provision of kennels as part of the existing John Street hostel attached to existing ground floor accommodation.
- 6.11 **Direct access accommodation** – incorporate 2 - 4 bedspaces for emergency, short stay – beds and shared shower/bathing and kitchen facilities – for non resident rough sleepers.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 It is recommended that:
1. The update on the hostel replacement project as detailed below be noted including the in principle allocation of £400,000 Regional Housing Board Grant from 2007/08
 2. A bid is made to the Department for Communities and Local Government for Hostels Capital Improvement Grant to part fund the new hostel.
 3. The further development of hostel services and an integrated approach to housing advice, homelessness and rehousing be located at John Street as a new centre of excellence.
 4. A detailed report identifying final scheme costs, funding arrangements and development timescales is brought back to the Executive in February 2008 for consideration.
 5. If the bid to Communities and Local Government is successful and the detailed report to the Executive in February is supportive of the development the existing hostel at London Road is declared surplus to requirements and sold, the capital receipt being ring fenced, subject to approval by full Council, to help fund the replacement hostel.

8.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 To enable the development of a new, better quality, families and women's hostel, fit for purpose and meeting government aims to make hostels places of change and to integrate and improve homelessness and hostels services for people with housing problems.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – There are implications for the delivery of services and development of projects in line with decisions on expenditure. We anticipate that this project will produce staffing efficiencies and enable us to reduce costs.
- Financial – At its meeting on 2 July 2007, the Executive considered report DS 55/07 on the Housing Strategy – Projected Capital Programme. It was agreed that the extra £400,000 income from the RHB Grant for 2007/08 be allocated in principle for the Families Hostel replacement, subject to a full business case being developed and a further detailed report to the Executive.
- This report sets out a number of reasons why the London Road Homeless Facilities Hostel is unsuitable for its present role and need to be replaced. There is, however, no indication at this stage of the likely capital cost of the scheme and of any consequent revenue costs or savings that will result. Sources of capital funding have been identified (para 1.7) but until the scheme itself can be quantified, it is impossible to gauge whether or not these sources will be adequate.
- Until that has been established and a full business case constructed for the scheme, the Executive will be unable to release the RHB grant that has been reserved for the scheme on an 'in principle' basis. Similarly, the ongoing revenue implications of the scheme will also need to be quantified as an integral part of this process.
- Legal – The Council has available to it appropriate legal powers to enable it to develop a new hostel and dispose of the former hostel on London Road if it so determines. Section 9 of the Housing Act 1985 gives the authority power to provide housing accommodation by erecting buildings on land, whilst Section 2 of the Local Authorities (Land) Act 1963 allows the Council to erect buildings and construct or carry out works on land for the benefit or improvement of the area. Similarly, Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 allows the Council to do anything necessary for the benefit or improvement of the social, environmental or economic wellbeing of its area provided that it has regard to its community strategy prior to exercising this power. Sections 120 and 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows the Council both to purchase and dispose of land, subject to the provisions of the legislation.
- Corporate – The Housing Strategy is a key corporate document as is the delivery of the Updated Action Plan.
- Risk Management – The project will be subject to management under the PRINCE 2 methodology for project management. It will be a specific project feeding into the Housing Capital Board and construction work will also be overseen through the Community Services Capital Board.

- Equality Issues – The current hostel arrangements are inadequate in terms of the council's equality and diversity policies and particularly fail to address the needs of people with disabilities adequately.
- Environmental – This new build project and any improvements to the existing building will be developed so as to maximise environmental gains and sustainability.
- Crime and Disorder – Provision of specialised supported accommodation and services for homeless people is likely to have a beneficial effect on people's behaviour and a positive impact on crime and disorder reduction.
- Impact on Customers – The impact on customers of delivery of a new homeless families hostel and integrated homelessness service will be positive and significant.

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