

Report of Richard Marshall

Report to Environment and Housing Decision Panel

Date: 8 August 2016

Subject: Transfer and refurbishment of a former caretaker bungalow into Council housing stock as part of the Empty Homes scheme.

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	Burmantofts and Richmond Hill	
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:		

Summary of main issues

The Council House Growth programme includes an allocation of £9m for phase two of the Empty Homes Buy Back project that will run until April 2018. The budget is made up of £1.836 m from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and £7.164m from Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital resources.

Phase two will deliver a programme to bring 100 properties back into use across the city.

A Council owned former caretaker bungalow, 83 Rigton Drive has been declared surplus to use by Children's Services and has stood empty since January 2016. It was not transferred to the Academy running the primary school on the basis that the Council would use it for a family with high medical needs on the Leeds Homes Register (LHR).

Housing Leeds officers support the proposal to transfer the property to Council housing stock and feels it would help meet housing need. The HCA have confirmed that properties can be included in the empty homes scheme as long as they are not currently social housing and have been empty for longer than six months.

Recommendations

The Director of Environment and Housing is recommended to approve:

- As part of the empty homes scheme, the transfer of the former caretakers bungalow at 83 Rigton Drive to the Councils housing stock. This will include the refurbishment of the property to the letting standard and additional adaptations for use by a family with a high level of medical need.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To inform the Director of Environment and Housing of a former caretakers property in the Burmantofts and Richmond Hill ward of the city, which is Council owned and has been empty since January 2016.
- 1.2 To seek approval from the Director of Environment and Housing to accept the transfer of a former caretakers property into the housing stock as part of the empty homes scheme. Also, to outline the costs involved in the transfer and subsequent refurbishment to the Councils letting standard prior to allocation.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The HCA 'Bringing Empty Homes Back into Use as Affordable Housing' funding has been made available as part of the government's priority to bring empty homes back into use. The programme supports the City Priority Plan to reduce the number of long term empty properties in the city. A requirement of the HCA funding is that properties have been empty for more than 6 months, that properties are refurbished to the HCA's Rehabilitation Standard and must be let as affordable housing. Existing social housing is not eligible for the funding.
- 2.2 For the project an average of £90,000 is available to purchase 100 properties by April 2018. This will cover the costs of purchasing and refurbishing privately owned homes that have been empty for longer than six months. The budget for the scheme is made up of £7.164m from HRA capital funds and £1.836m from the HCA.
- 2.3 One of the categories of property identified as a priority for purchase during the scheme was those that are causing blight to a neighbourhood, alongside those
 - located in areas where there is a significant presence of housing still within Council ownership; and
 - in the areas of high demand.
- 2.4 The Empty Homes Project Group has been established to co-ordinate the delivery of the programme. All decisions to proceed with a valuation and purchase are made collectively by the Empty Homes Project Group based on clear evidence.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The former caretaker property at 83 Rigton Drive has been empty since January 2016. The property was not included in the transfer of land under the standard

125 year academy lease and has been declared surplus to requirements by Children’s Services, see appendix 1. This was on the basis that the Council would be using it for allocation to a family on the LHR with high medical needs for a low rise adapted property.

- 3.2 The property type is rare in Leeds with the Council having just over 50 in the whole of its housing stock. There are around 70 families on the Leeds Homes Register that require a property with three bedrooms and have group A priority for high medical needs. Only one three bedroom bungalow has been let by the Council since April 2014.
- 3.3 The property is on Rigton Drive and sits on the edge of the land leased to the Ebor Gardens Primary Academy School. This will require a sensitive approach to the allocation of the property.
- 3.4 The property will need an estimated £45,000 to install adaptations, widen doors for wheelchair use, install dropped ceilings with insulation and create a wet floor washing room alongside bringing it to the Council’s general letting standard.
- 3.5 Details of the property and how it meets the agreed priorities are outlined below.

Address	Type	Ward	Empty since	CBL bids for similar properties
83 Rigton Drive	3 bed bungalow	Burmantofts and Richmond Hill	January 2016	None in the area

- 3.6 The property will be refurbished to the Council’s letting standard with additional adaptations for use by a family with a high level of medical need. The property will be let as either a Secure or Introductory Tenancy on either an affordable or social rent pending discussion with the HCA. Based on estimates of rents for the area the weekly difference between affordable and social rents would be between £25 and £35.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Housing Services support the move into Social Housing. The City Development Asset Management Board has agreed to the transfer for use as part of the Council’s social housing stock without a capital receipt.
- 4.1.2 Ward members have been consulted and note the move of the property into residential use as social housing for an applicant with high medical need.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration.

- 4.2.1 An equality, diversity cohesion and integration screening exercise has been carried out. This has confirmed that equality, diversity, cohesion and integration

considerations have been effectively considered in relation to this proposal and that a full impact assessment was not required.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 Retaining for housing use, to let as affordable housing supports the City Priority 'Best City to Live' to reduce the number of long term empty properties in the city.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The cost of refurbishment are estimated at £45,000 which will bring it to the Council's letting standard and install adaptations for use by a family with high medical need. The cost of the refurbishments fits within the budget of the project and the investment represents value for money.

4.4.2 Properties bought in the scheme will be charged at a social rent where they are within areas of existing Council Housing. This will avoid a situation where tenants living in adjoining properties are being charged significantly different rents. The HCA are supportive of this approach.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

There are no legal implications associated with the transfer of the property into the Council's housing stock.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 While the property has been surveyed to assess its condition prior to inclusion in the scheme, there is a risk that unforeseen works are required to it which weren't identified during the survey. A 10% contingency of the refurbishment works has been included within the budget in order to cover any unforeseen works required to the property prior to letting.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The repurchase and refurbishment of this long term empty dwelling represent value for money and would be an enhancement to the Housing Leeds portfolio.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The Director of Environment and Housing is recommended to approve the following;

- As part of the empty homes scheme, the transfer of the former caretakers bungalow at 83 Rigton Drive to the Council's housing stock. This will include the refurbishment of the property to the letting standard and additional adaptations for use by a family with a high level of medical need.

Background documents¹

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include

None