

**Report of Richard Marshall**

**Report to Resources and Housing Decision Panel**

**Date: 20 June 2017**

**Subject: Conversion of the former wardens office at Churchville House LS24 4AW 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):	Kippax and Methley	
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 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.

The project will deliver a programme to bring 100 empty properties back into use across the city.

Since the programme began Housing Leeds and the Private Sector Housing team have worked closely to identify suitable properties to buy or refurbish. Vacant Council owned office space or community centres can be included in the scheme. This gives the Council an opportunity to bring empty none residential units into use as Social Housing.

The former warden flat in Churchville House Micklefield had been an office space since 2008 and has been empty for over six months. Housing Leeds officers state that for long term viability the property should be converted into two flats for use as part of the sheltered scheme.

**Recommendations**

The Director of Resources and Housing is recommended to approve the following:

- the conversion of the former sheltered warden home / office at Churchville House LS24 4AW into two flats as part of the Empty Homes Scheme.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The report provides a history of Churchfield House up to its becoming empty and demonstrates how the conversion of the property will help to meet the overall aims of the scheme.
- 1.2 The report seeks approval to proceed with the conversion of Churchville House to two flats as part of the Empty Homes programme to let as council housing.

## **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 also supports the City Priority Plan to increase the number of long term empty properties brought back into use. 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 this project an average of £90,000 per property is available to purchase or convert 100 properties by April 2018. This will cover the costs of purchasing and refurbishing privately owned homes or Council none social housing properties 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 Throughout the scheme officers have considered properties that are owned by the Council and have been empty for longer than six months. If a conversion fits within the scheme budget and Housing Leeds is supportive of the proposal then they have been included as one of the 100 properties.
- 2.4 Churchville House contains a three bedroom property that was used by the resident warden of the sheltered scheme, the last warden occupied the flat from 1980 to 2008 when they left employment. From November 2008 until October 2016 it was used by local Sheltered Staff as an office base. It has been empty since October 2016 when the team was relocated to the area office at Halliday Court Garforth.
- 2.5 Conversion back to a three bedroom flat has been considered unviable. The reasons are that access is through an internal staircase from the scheme communal room and because occupancy by a family requiring a three bedroom property would not be compatible with the sheltered accommodation around it. Housing Leeds officers state that the best long term option for the property is conversion into two flats which could become part of the sheltered scheme.
- 2.6 The HCA have confirmed that there are be no barriers preventing the conversion from being included in the empty homes scheme.

### **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 The Empty Homes project is due to complete in March 2018, which means that the timescales are tight for completing this conversion. The project team has sought and received assurance that the work can be completed and grant claimed before that date.
- 3.2 A planning application will be required before work can commence and, whilst no problems are anticipated, it could delay the progress of the scheme.
- 3.3 An estimate for the refurbishment work has been priced at £136,000 by Housing Leeds' Strategy and Investment team. This will be subject to a contractor agreeing the price for the schedule of work.
- 3.4 Details of the property and how it meets the agreed priorities are outlined below.

<b>Address</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Empty since</b>	<b>CBL bids for similar properties</b>
<b>Churchville House, Churchville Drive, LS24 4AW.</b>	<b>1 bed flat 2 bed flat</b>	<b>Kippax and Methley</b>	<b>October 2016</b>	<b>10 21</b>

- 3.5 The property will be refurbished to two flats that meet Council's letting standard. They will be let as either Secure or Introductory Tenancies on a social rent.

### **4 Corporate Considerations**

#### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 Tenants of the sheltered scheme were consulted in October 2016 when Churchville House stopped being used as office space.
- 4.1.2 Housing Leeds housing management officers have been consulted and support the conversion.
- 4.1.3 Ward members have been consulted about the purchase and have raised no objections to the principle of the conversion. Concerns were made about how occupation of the properties would impact on the use of the communal room directly under them. Assurance was given that the refurbishment will include a level of sound insulation that will help to reduce this impact to manageable levels.

#### **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 The conversion of the properties to let as affordable housing supports the City Priority 'Best City to Live.' It will help reduce the number of long term empty properties in across the city and increase the supply of low cost well maintained homes.

### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

- 4.4.1 The cost of refurbishment is estimated at £136,000 by a Housing Leeds Asset Management Property Surveyor. The estimate fits within the budget of the project.
- 4.4.2 Properties included 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**

- 4.5.1 There are no legal implications for the conversion of the property.

### **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 The property has been surveyed to assess the level of work required for the conversion but this is subject to contractor confirmation of the costs. A 10% contingency of the refurbishment has been included within the budget in order to cover any unforeseen work required to the property prior to letting.
- 4.6.2 The conversion will be subject to planning permission and building regulation inspection as it progresses. All work will be compliant within current regulations and carried out by appropriately qualified operatives.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 The former warden flat at Churchville House was used as an office space between 2008 and October 2016 when it became vacant. It has remained empty since this date.
- 5.2 Housing Leeds officers state that there is no long term future for the property as either continued office space or a three bedroom flat and have confirmed a desire to see it converted to two flats.
- 5.3 The estimate for work to install an external staircase, remove internal access to the communal room and convert two flats fits within the budget of the Empty Homes Scheme. The HCA have confirmed that there is no problem including the work in the scheme.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 The Director of Resources and Housing is recommended to approve the following:

- The conversion of the former sheltered warden house / office space at Churchville House into two flats as part of the Empty Homes Scheme.

**Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

None.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 published works.