

**Report of Richard Marshall**

**~~Report to Resources and Housing Decision Panel~~**

**Date: 23 August 2017**

**Subject: Conversion of vacant community centre at 9 – 15 Cardinal Crescent LS11 8HQ to one six bedroom house 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):	Beeston and Holbeck	
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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:	10.4(3)	
<p>Appendix number: Appendix 1 to this report has been marked as exempt under Access to Information Procedure Rules 10.4 (3) on the basis that it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) which, if disclosed to the public, would, or would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of that person or of the Council. The information is exempt if and for so long as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. In this case the report author considers that it is in the public interest to maintain the exemption.</p>		

**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 £1.836m 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, which includes vacant Council owned office space or community centres. This gives the Council an opportunity to bring empty none residential units into use as Social Housing.

9 – 15 Cardinal Crescent was a block of four flats that was converted into a housing office in the early 1980s. The housing office closed in 2002 and it was then used by the Cardinal Community Enterprises as a base for informal youth activities. The property has been empty since this use ended in 2014. The Council is working with a Kinship Care family with nine children that needs accommodation and it is proposed to convert this empty property into a single unit for them.

## **Recommendations**

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

- The conversion of the former Dewsbury Road housing office / CCE community centre at 9 -15 Cardinal Crescent into one nine bedroom house as part of the Empty Homes scheme.

### **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The report provides a history of 9 – 15 Cardinal Crescent until it became empty and demonstrates how the conversion of the property will help to meet the overall aims of the Empty homes scheme.
- 1.2 The report seeks approval to proceed with the conversion of 9 - 15 Cardinal Crescent to one unit to accommodate a Kinship Care family with nine children as part of the Empty Homes programme.

### **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 funding also supports the City Priority Plan to reduce the number of long term empty properties in the city. The HCA funding is allocated on the basis that if properties have been empty for more than six months, they 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 per property is available to purchase or convert 100 properties by April 2018. This is to cover the costs of purchasing and refurbishing privately owned homes or Council non-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 During 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 local councillors and Housing Leeds officers are supportive of the proposal they have been included as one of the 100 properties.
- 2.4 9 – 15 Cardinal Crescent was a block of four cottage style flats built in the 1940s. In the early 1980s it was converted into a housing office, which remained in use until 2002. The property was then converted into a community centre and used by Cardinal Community Enterprises (CCE) until 2014. The Council covered costs for the use as a community centre because no lease was ever signed by CCE. The Council closed the centre due to the poor state of repair and non-compliance with health and safety legislation (including inoperable fire alarms and security lighting).
- 2.5 As the property has been empty for six months it can be included in the Empty Homes scheme. Housing Leeds management officers have expressed a desire to see it being converted into a nine bedroom house.

### **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 A local Councillor and a member of the CCE want to see the property put back into use as a community centre. Keeping the property as a community centre would require further conversion/upgrade works costing an estimated £63,000 and an ongoing commitment for full rent over a sustainable period of time, which is not felt likely. Alongside this other purpose built premises in the area are available for this type of use.
- 3.2 Consultation with Housing Leeds officers and senior management has concluded that the preferred option for the property is to bring into use as a large home for a family working with the Kinship Care Team. This outcome would contribute to several of the Best Council Plan priorities and breakthrough projects, including housing growth and high standards in all sectors; keeping people safe from harm; providing enough homes of a high standard in all sectors; supporting children to have the best start in life.
- 3.3 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 from Housing Leeds' Strategy and Investment team that the work can be completed and grant claimed before that date.
- 3.4 A planning application will be required before work can commence and, whilst no problems are anticipated, it could delay the progress of the scheme.
- 3.5 An estimate for the conversion has been priced at £125,000 by Housing Leeds' Strategy and Investment team. This will be subject to Leeds Building Services (LBS) agreeing the schedule of work and costs.
- 3.6 It is proposed to convert the property to a nine bedroom house to be used for a family working with the Kinship Care Team. Repairs will meet Council's letting standard.

### **4 Corporate Considerations**

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

- 4.1.1 Housing Leeds housing management officers have been consulted and support the conversion.
- 4.1.2 Ward members and local interested parties have been consulted about the conversion. Strong preferences raised about alternative options – specifically retaining use as a community centre - have been responded to.

#### **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 property to homes 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.
- 4.3.2 Other Best Council Plan priorities contributed to are: keeping people safe from harm; providing enough homes of a high standard in all sectors; supporting children to have the best start in life.

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

- 4.4.1 The cost of refurbishment is estimated at £125,000 by Housing Leeds Asset Management team.
- 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 confirmation. A 10% contingency of the refurbishment has been included within the budget in order to cover any unforeseen work that may be required.
- 4.6.2 The conversion will be subject to planning permission and building regulation inspection as it progresses. All work will be compliant with current building regulations and carried out by appropriately qualified operatives

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 The former housing office and community centre on Cardinal Crescent has been empty since it was vacated by CCE in 2014. Housing Leeds officers' preference for the property is conversion into a nine bedroom house for a family engaging with the Kinship Care Team.
- 5.2 A local Councillor and a member of the CCE have expressed a strong preference for keeping the property for a community centre. Ongoing discussions have suggested that this use could be provided at an alternative venue and that a return to housing use fits better with the Councils priorities.

## **6 Recommendations**

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

- The conversion of the former Dewsbury Road housing office / CCE community centre at 9 -15 Cardinal Crescent into one nine bedroom house 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.