

COMMITTEE

Housing and Environment

DATE 16th February 2009

CORPORATE DIRECTOR Pete Leonard

TITLE OF REPORT Housing Access Centre - Homelessness Accommodation
Feasibility Study

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to highlight the conclusions and findings of the Homelessness Accommodation feasibility study and recommend both a temporary option and a permanent option for the homelessness service to operate. The four properties below were chosen for appraisal because they are within Council ownership enabling early action.

1. Croft House, Old Croft Terrace, Aberdeen, AB16 5UD
2. Victoria House, 80 – 84 West North Street, Aberdeen, AB24 5AR
3. Aberdon House, Coningham Road, Aberdeen, AB24 2TW
4. 74 – 84 Spring Garden, Aberdeen, AB25 1GN

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended the Committee;

1) Approve the recommendations in the Feasibility Study by Robinson Low Francis (RLF) which would develop the preferred short term and long term options outlined in the executive summary: -

- Short term option - Provide a temporary accommodation unit at Aberdon House pending redevelopment of the property for new build housing.
- Long term option - Provide a purpose built Housing Access Centre on the site of the existing property at Victoria House

2) Make provision in the Housing Capital Programme for 2010/11 for the acquisition of Aberdon House and execute the minor repairs to meet the Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licence requirements as highlighted by Robinson Low Francis (RLF).

3) Make provision in the Housing Capital Programme for 2011/12 for the acquisition and development of the Victoria House option. Bring forward detailed costs, conceptual plans, and funding mechanisms to the Housing and Environment Committee on 25th May 2010.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding was provided through the Homelessness Strategy to carry out the option appraisal by Robinson Low Francis (RLF). The costs are on a time charge basis and are capped at £10,000.

At the present time no provision has been made within the Housing Capital Expenditure Budget under the heading; 9.3 Hostel Works – Accommodation Unit for the financial years 2010/11 or 2011/12.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

Aberdeen's City Vision, to be "a city which is vibrant, dynamic, forward looking - an even better place to live and work, where people can expect high-quality services that meet their needs", and the City Council's Vision that "we will be recognised within the city and more widely, as being a leading Council in Northern Europe by 2010". The content of this report links with the following priorities identified within Vibrant, Dynamic and Forward Looking 2007 to 2011.

- Housing
 1. Increase the number of temporary homes for homeless people across the City
 2. Retain the 24 hour contact point for homeless people.
- Environment
 1. Minimise the impact of Council activities on the environment, including a target of being carbon neutral overall by 2020 and a commitment that all new Council developments will be carbon neutral.

The content of this report links with the Housing Service Plan 2009 – 2012

Reduce homelessness by improving provision and prevention activities.

	Strategic Outcome	Operational Objectives
1.	Reduce homelessness by improving provision and prevention activities	We shall make available an adequate supply and choice of high quality temporary accommodation and reduce the overall time spent in temporary accommodation. Increase the number of temporary homes for homeless people. Working in partnership with other service providers, we will make available an adequate provision of appropriate supported temporary accommodation.

The content of this report links with Community Plan Update 2008

- Homes
- 1. Affordable housing - increasing the levels of affordable housing in new housing developments

The contents of the report contribute to the achievement of National Outcome 10 as outlined in the Single Outcome Agreement 2008 to 2011;

1. We live in well designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 introduced statutory duties on housing authorities to assist those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, including the provision of temporary accommodation. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 now requires local authorities to provide temporary accommodation to all homeless applicants, regardless of priority need status, whilst either permanent accommodation for those in priority need is found or non priority need applicants are given advice and assistance to secure alternative accommodation.

To ensure that homeless households with children and women who are pregnant are not placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation unless exceptional circumstances apply The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 was introduced. Unsuitable accommodation is defined in the order as “accommodation which does not meet standards relating to the physical properties of the accommodation (the physical standard), its proximity to health and education services (the physical standard) and its suitability for use by children (the safety standard). Bed & Breakfast (B & B) accommodation for households with children is deemed unsuitable.

A Community Briefing was produced and made available through Tillydrone community representatives. Two public meetings have been (1st February and 3rd February 2010) arranged via Tillydrone Community Council/Network, and via Riverbank School Parent Council to allow accurate information to be introduced into the community.

The Housing Service has long term plans to redevelop and regenerate the area in and around Aberdon Court. Aberdon House is held on the Social Care and Well Being service account and is open to other Council Service's for consideration and development.

The long term plans for the Housing Service would be to develop a mixed tenure new build programme to commence on site approximately 2012/13. With these time scales in mind the proposal to transfer Aberdon House in the interim period to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would seem prudent given that the whole area will be developed for affordable housing in the near future.

Consideration has been given to the current thinking with regard to best practice in the design and refurbishment of these sites into a potential "Housing Access Centre".

The properties at Victoria House, Aberdon House and Croft House have all been declared surplus to requirements and are currently held on the general fund.

6. REPORT

The Council requires to increase the provision of temporary accommodation to meet the 2012 deadline for the abolition of priority need, and to reduce its reliance on unsuitable Bed & Breakfast accommodation. To this end, Officers have embarked on a review of the asset management of temporary accommodation provision.

The Housing and Environment Committee on 11th January 2010, considered the proposal to use Aberdon House as a temporary accommodation unit for persons who have experienced the loss of accommodation, for an initial period of two years, subject to a more detailed report on the financial implications, the necessary statutory permissions being secured (Houses in Multiple Occupation – HMO licence) and community consultation being undertaken; In terms of Standing Order 36 (3). The report was referred to Full Council for its consideration.

The Full Council on the 10th February 2010 approved the use of Aberdon House as a temporary accommodation unit for persons who have experienced the loss of accommodation subject to the necessary statutory permissions being secured (Houses in Multiple Occupation - HMO Licence). Relets to homeless households will also be increased to 75% for a three month period.

A property consultant, Robinson Low Francis (RFL) was commissioned by Aberdeen City Council to undertake a feasibility study on four different properties under Council ownership to determine which property(s) best meet(s) the Council's needs to provide temporary accommodation to persons presenting themselves as homeless.

The feasibility report produced by the consultants (see appendix 1) recommends the use of Aberdon House as a short term solution and the redevelopment of Victoria House as a long term solution to meet the statutory requirements of the Homelessness service by increasing the supply of temporary accommodation for people who find themselves homeless in the city.

7. AUTHORISED SIGNATURE

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8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Housing Service Plan 2009 – 2012

Chartered Institute for Housing - Action Plan December 2007
A standard for temporary accommodation for homeless households

Temporary Accommodation Strategy - 2009 – 2012 (August 2009)

Homelessness and Resettlement Strategy – 2009 – 2013 (June 2009)

Firm Foundations - The Future of Housing in Scotland (October 2007)

Scottish Government – Operation of the homelessness legislation 2008 – 2009
(September 2009)