



Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 13 August 2024 when there were present:-

Chair: Cllr D Blackwell

Cllr W Gibson
Cllr B Palmer
Cllr M Fuller

Cllr T Gibson
Cllr R Lillis
Cllr S Mountford

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllrs S Ainsley, B Campagna, M Cortes, M Dearson, A Harbinson, G Howlett, J Knott, K Knott, D Macpherson, L McCarthy-Calvert, N Pachy, D Silk, D Thomas and G Watson.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R Savage

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Hutchings	- Chief Executive
C Adlem	- Director, Corporate & Customer
M Harwood-White	- Director, Commercial & Assets
D Ghela	- Assistant Director, Housing, Health & Partnerships
A Law	- Assistant Director, Legal & Democratic Services
D McLoughlin	- Assistant Director, Estates
L Wosko	- Assistant Director, Finance & Procurement
V Jackson	- Housing Options & Allocations Manager
D Randerson	- Housing Development & Finance Manager
S Worthington	- Democratic Services Manager

112 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr D Blackwell declared a non registerable interest in item 5 of the agenda relating to the re-negotiation of existing lease and management agreement for Canvey Lake by virtue of membership of Canvey Island Town Council.

113 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

114 PURCHASE OF FORMER PRIVATE SHELTERED SCHEME FOR USE AS TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Cabinet considered the report of the Director, Commercial & Assets presenting an outline business case for the purchase and development of the former privately owned Abbeyfield sheltered housing scheme in Chapel Lane, Hadleigh for use as temporary accommodation.

In presenting the report to Cabinet, The Portfolio Holder for Special Projects and Assets advised the following:

“The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval on an outline business case for the purchase and development of the currently privately owned Abbeyfield House in Chapel Lane, which can be seen in the Exempt Appendix 1 to this report. The Council’s offer to purchase the property has been accepted by the vendor. This report seeks Cabinet’s approval to the purchase subject to the due diligence set out in paragraph 3.2 of the outline business case. The report also seeks Cabinet approval of the delegation of authority to complete the purchase and undertake renovation works to convert the property into temporary accommodation.

I’d like to offer some background as to why this proposal has come to Cabinet this evening.

The Council has a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation to households presenting as homeless regardless of current demand or affordability. In the last two years, the cost of providing temporary accommodation has increased significantly for the Council primarily as a result of increased demand and increased cost. To be to the point, we do not currently have sufficient temporary accommodation stock to house Castle Point residents presenting as homeless in the borough. This has an extremely detrimental impact on the wellbeing of households, largely families, housed by the borough as they risk loss of their immediate support networks including links to friends and family as well as access to crucial educational and medical resources.

The Council’s homelessness duty is typically delivered in the first instance via the use of nightly let properties such as bed and breakfast accommodation or homes offered on a nightly let basis by specialist providers. The Council then has a statutory duty to move all households with children placed in these properties into interim accommodation within 6 weeks. This nightly let accommodation is both expensive and in short supply with typical costs in the

region of £370 per week per unit. Due to the nature of the local market, this type of accommodation is provided predominantly out of borough in neighbouring Local Authority areas. This results in households being taken away from their support networks and increases the likelihood of disruption to their children's education and healthcare. This use of bed and breakfast accommodation cost the Council general fund £532,000 in the financial year 2023/24, an increase from £310,000 in the previous financial year.

The Council currently has 17 units of temporary accommodation which it owns and operates. This is nowhere near enough to satisfy the current demand with 50 nightly let places routinely filled by households in private sector temporary accommodation.

This private sector provision simply cannot meet the urgent needs of homeless people within the borough. Out of borough placements, principally in Basildon, Rochford, and Southend, but as far as Ipswich and Thurrock, account for 92% of current emergency placements. There is a clear demand, and I would go as far to say an urgent need, for affordable temporary accommodation to be provided locally.

Abbeyfield House currently consists of 14 bedsits and 2 one-bedroom flats and recently came onto the open market for sale. This property is ideal for use as temporary accommodation as it is conveniently located to nearby facilities to meet the requirements of homeless households. The outline business case confirms that this proposed purchase will result in greater capacity to house homeless residents within the Borough at a cost which is far less expensive than the current provision, thereby not only allowing for a far less distressing experience for the users of this provision, but also saving a substantial amount of taxpayers' money.

I'd like now to turn to the outline business case and next steps should Cabinet approve this proposal tonight.

The outline business case was considered by the Council's Asset Review Board and was endorsed as being worthy of recommendation to the Cabinet for decision. On this basis, an offer of £1.1m was made to the vendor. This offer was based upon an independent market appraisal commissioned by the Director for Commercial & Assets and was £100,000 below the asking price. This offer was subsequently accepted by the vendor. It is important to note, however, that completion of the sale remains subject to full due diligence and to Cabinet approval as proposed in the recommendations of this report.

The OBC proposes the refurbishment and redevelopment of the internal layout which will cost an estimated £500,000. A contingency of £200,000 has been included in order to allow for any additional unforeseen costs and to demonstrate the viability of the project, even at this potential increased cost.

The proposal is to redevelop the internal layout of the property by removing the current communal facilities to allow the total number of units to increase from 16 to 19, all with individual kitchen and ensuite facilities to make them

self-contained units. Plans showing the location and borders as well as the floor plans of the property are shown in Appendix 2.

Following the refurbishment and redevelopment works, the property will be operated by the Housing Team on the same basis as the Council's existing two temporary accommodation facilities in Benfleet and Canvey Island.

Conversion of the property is not considered to constitute a change of use requiring planning consent but this is something that will have to be kept under review, for example, planning requirements relating to the addition of new rooms. The works will be compliant with all current building regulations. Upon acquisition, the Council will appoint an architect to scope the site and deliver a draft specification. This specification will be used as a basis to invite tenders in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules with a view to awarding the contract by December 2024.

Although it is the proposal of this report that this purchase is made, it is important to present all available options and assess their viability.

The first option available to Cabinet tonight is to vote against the purchase and, in effect, do nothing. This would mean that the Council's current position regarding its homelessness duty would remain unchanged. Although it is always possible that demand for temporary accommodation could fall, all the evidence that we have available to us, the upward trajectory and the national picture does not suggest that this is likely to happen any time soon. In addition to this, properties such as this are highly sought after by social housing landlords looking beyond their typical area. Failure to secure and use the property for the benefit of Castle Point's own local residents increases the risk that the property is acquired by either another local authority looking to house their own homeless in the facility, or by central government in order to house asylum seekers to advance their desire to discontinue use of hotels for this purpose. It should be noted here that the Home Office is actively looking to purchase these kinds of property in order to house asylum seekers. Should Castle Point Council purchase the property, this would prevent this from being the case except where the existing criteria for eligibility for access to Castle Point homelessness provision has been met.

Option two is, of course, to proceed with the purchase. This is the recommended option and is set out in detail in the outline business case. There are several substantial benefits to the option, including but not limited to the following:

I would ask members present to bear in mind that this report deals solely with the acquisition of the property as per the recommendations in the report with the intention of converting it into temporary accommodation for Castle Point's homeless. However, I am aware that there is significant public interest in the plans going forward, particularly from residents of Chapel Lane and the surrounding roads, in how we envisage this project being managed and how the facility being run should Cabinet approve this proposal tonight. I would like to assure residents to whom this applies both in the public gallery and

watching online that I have personally read through every single one of your emails received either directly by myself, or forwarded on by your St James' ward councillors, with special thanks to Cllr Kate Knott who has been absolutely tireless in her liaison with residents on this matter. If, by the end of tonight's meeting, anybody feels that they still have any queries please continue to filter them through your ward councillors and Cllr Lillis and I will look to provide answers to them.

I understand that this proposal has been met with some reservations from local residents, but I believe this is largely due to misinformation or perhaps a lack of clarity over what the Council actually plans to do with Abbeyfield House.

I have seen many references made to plans for a 'homeless shelter' on the Abbeyfield House site. The usual perception of a 'homeless shelter' is a large open space filled with temporary beds, occupied on a nightly basis, which closes during the day. This is not what these plans will mean for Abbeyfield House. All units will be self-contained and have their own dedicated kitchen and bathroom facilities.

In terms of the demographic of residents likely to make use of the facility, allow me to refer to the Council's two existing temporary accommodation facilities. Over the past 8 years, we have accommodated 332 people in our schemes of which 113 were men, 133 were women, and 86 were children. The average age of the adults currently in our schemes is 32. This is representative of the demographic for which we are looking to make provision at Abbeyfield House. As you can see, this will not be a facility used solely to house large numbers of young, single men as many residents have been concerned about and that, in fact, the Council houses more women in similar such schemes than men. Again, it is important to stress that this proposal is for local people.

Let me be clear. This facility, subject to cabinet approval tonight, will be solely for the use of Castle Point residents who present to the Council as homeless and find themselves in need of our assistance. This facility will **NOT** be used to house asylum seekers to whom we don't already have a statutory responsibility, nor will it be used to house homeless people who have presented to any other local authority. We will only allocate here homeless residents to which we have an existing statutory duty. Hadleigh, along with the rest of Castle Point, has an exceptionally strong community togetherness about it. The people who are housed here will all have an existing buy-in to that community spirit as existing Castle Point residents. If we do not proceed with the purchase of this property, we cannot guarantee that this would be the case. In fact, it would be unlikely that it would. Owning the property is the only way in which the Council and, by extension its residents, can have any say over who occupies it. There are also existing measures available to the Council to monitor, correct, and remove any antisocial behaviour from all of our temporary accommodation properties. These measures would be utilised to further prevent the emergence of any antisocial behaviour in Chapel Lane.

This, hopefully, should alleviate some concerns around potential antisocial behaviour as a result of the proposed facility. I have asked officers for information around the effect of our other two similar facilities on local crime rate and I can confidently say that the introduction of these facilities had no notable increase in crime or antisocial behaviour in their respective areas compared to before they were opened.

This links into concerns around neighbouring property value, another concern expressed by local residents which officers have investigated and there is, again, no noticeable negative impact to properties neighbouring our other temporary accommodation provisions. For example, based on publicly available data, 5 properties that were sold both prior to and after the scheme was commenced within the street had sale price increases either in line or beyond the borough average. Therefore, it can be seen that there is no evidence to say that there will be a detrimental effect on property prices on Chapel Lane or surrounding roads as a result of this proposal.

There have also been concerns raised over matters of local resident convenience such as car parking. However, residents at existing schemes within the borough do not tend to own vehicles and parking provision made generally goes unused. This will, however, be part of the considerations undertaken as part of the process. This would, therefore, limit any impact on pre-existing parking issues on and around Chapel Lane. We will be communicating with surrounding residents about the proposals and taking into account any concerns raised as part of our commitment to the residents of the Borough. It is also our experience within sheltered housing that many residents have multiple visits each day from care providers. This would not be the case with the new residents, thus a reduction in traffic is likely to occur.

In summary, this development will benefit the whole community. It will see the creation of a facility which will primarily house families who have found themselves in need of council assistance and already buy into the Castle Point

Hopefully this has covered the main queries and concerns, although I know that ward councillors have passed on some more questions from residents that Cllr Lillis and myself would be happy to answer. We would also encourage residents to submit any further queries via their ward councillors which we will endeavour to answer.

Leader, with your agreement, I'd like to suggest that we take any such questions now before the recommendations are moved. Although I have delivered the report as it only deals with the acquisition of the property rather than the running of it, Cllr Lillis as portfolio holder for Housing has expressed that he would be happy to answer any questions on the management which we are currently in a position to do so. This being the case, may I suggest that any questions regarding the acquisition or commercial side of this proposal be directed to myself and any to do with the future management of the facility or broader related housing issues be directed to Cllr Lillis. Once these have been

answered, I think we will be in a position to move the recommendations as set out in the report. Thank you.”

In response to the question as to why the current building use was being changed, the Portfolio Holder for Special Projects and Assets advised that when the building came to the attention of the Asset Review Board a range of potential uses for the property were discussed including use as sheltered accommodation and temporary accommodation. Currently the Council does not have any need for additional sheltered accommodation for elderly people, which is what the building currently lends itself to. The Council does, however, have a real need for temporary accommodation; this would benefit the Council and council tax payers financially, but would ensure the Council could do more to house local families closer to their support networks and avoid scattering them in disparate placements as far away as Thurrock and Ipswich.

Responding to the question why residents had not been consulted so far, the Portfolio Holder for Special Projects and Assets advised that consultation is not a requirement for this type of acquisition development although the Council does seek to engage with residents as best it can. The report before Cabinet only dealt with the acquisition of the property and not the running of it. It was not standard practice for the Council to consult with the public when undertaking an acquisition, as per the Council's acquisition and disposals policy. However, he confirmed that he had read every email that had been received on this subject and sought to answer them this evening. If anyone needed further clarification on any matters raised, he encouraged them to continue to raise any further enquiries via their Ward Councillors and he and the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing would seek to answer them.

In response to the question as to what criteria was used to select this site for the proposed temporary accommodation provision, the Portfolio Holder for Special Projects and Assets confirmed that there were no set criteria; however, the current layout of individual bedsits does lend itself to temporary accommodation with some adaptation. The blueprint is there for what the Council intends to use Abbeyfield for and thus allows substantial cost savings compared to building a new facility to add to the Council's temporary housing stock.

Responding to a question around whether alternative locations were considered, the Portfolio Holder for Special Projects and Assets advised that other locations weren't actively considered but the Council's Asset Review Board will assess potential acquisitions for all purposes as and when they come onto the market if it's believed that any potential asset could help the Council meet any of its objectives, including temporary accommodation or any homeless provision.

In response to a question as to who this facility is intended to help, the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing advised that many ordinary people and families within the borough are being displaced from the private

rental sector due to rising rents or sale by their landlords. When this happens the Council has a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation. When that cannot be offered within the borough important social connections through schools, doctors and friend networks are lost, which increases the distress and isolation which homelessness engenders. Abbeyfield House will offer some of these Castle Point residents temporary local accommodation. The proposed accommodation will be a mix of flats suitable for families.

Responding to a question around whether the Council already offers similar facilities within the borough and, if so, how many are in operation and how these are operated, the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing stated that the Council already owns two other schemes managed by the Council's Housing team with support provided to residents by the Housing Options team to resolve their homelessness situation, move them into interim or long term accommodation. These schemes have proven the importance of having the capacity to provide temporary accommodation for homeless residents within our borough.

In response to a question as to how successful the Council has been in moving residents of these sites into permanent accommodation and how long this takes on average, the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing confirmed that the average time spent in this type of temporary accommodation is 16.5 weeks. Households move onto interim accommodation provided by the Council in private sector leased properties comprising of flats, bungalows and houses reflecting the needs of the household. Alternatively, they are supported to move into the private rented sector by the Housing Options team who actively work with landlords to find suitable and affordable properties. Due to the lack of Council-owned properties, households may remain in interim accommodation for an extended period until a suitable property becomes available.

Responding to the question as to whether there will be security at the facility, the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing advised that Abbeyfield House would be managed by the Council's Housing team. Experience has shown that this does not require a permanent management presence.

The Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing confirmed, in response to a question as to whether it would be used to house asylum seekers, that the intention is to use Abbeyfield House to accommodate our own local families on a temporary basis.

In response to a question as to how residents would be managed, the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing advised that the properties would be self-contained flats managed by the Council's Housing team with support provided to residents by the Housing Options team to resolve their homelessness situation and move them onto interim or long term accommodation. The Council already owns two other schemes and these have not indicated the need for 24-hour security; more intensive supervision is provided than for our general housing stock. In instances where poor

behaviour is reported, the Council has robust powers employed at short notice to either correct, limit or remove the behaviour.

Responding to the question as to whether the property would be identifiable as temporary homeless accommodation, the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing confirmed that it was envisaged that there would be no significant external changes to the building and it would be visually the same as any other flatted complex. Any external changes would be those needed to bring the property up to current standards of repair and energy efficiency.

The Deputy Leader made the following statement in response to a number of planning-related questions that had been received:

“It’s important to note that we don’t need planning permission to buy the property so it doesn’t affect the purchase of the property. The Housing department are fully on board that whatever planning processes need to be followed they will be followed. As the plan is to increase the number of rooms, this may constitute a material change of use by way of increasing the intensity of use of the building. If this route is followed, as proposed, then a planning application will be submitted, a public consultation will be undertaken, and the application will come before the Development Management Committee for consideration, as this would be the Council’s own application on Council-owned land.”

A Motion moved by Cllr D Blackwell and seconded by Cllr M Fuller that the recommendations set out at paragraph 3.1 be approved was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

Resolved

- (1) To approve the outline business case set out in Exempt Appendix 1.
- (2) To agree to purchase the former private Abbeyfield Sheltered Housing Scheme (the “Property”) for £1.1m and to delegate authority to the Director of Commercial and Assets and the S151 Officer (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing, the Portfolio Holder for Special Projects and Assets, the Leader and the Deputy Leader) to complete the purchase, subject to satisfactory completion of due diligence as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the outline business case.
- (3) To agree payment of purchase and due diligence related fees and to commission the refurbishment and redevelopment works as are necessary to convert the property into temporary accommodation for use by the Council with a combined value of up to £800,000 and to delegate authority to the Director of Commercial and Assets and the S151 Officer (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing, the Portfolio Holder for Special Projects and Assets, the Leader and the Deputy Leader) to scope, procure and award contract(s) for

such works.

- (4) To create a new capital scheme within the General Fund for the purchase and refurbishment, with scheme approval of £1.9m, 2024/25 payments approval of £1.2m and 2025/26 payments approval of £700,000.
- (5) To agree to a Supplementary Estimate for £20,000 to fund interest costs in 2024/25, to be funded from the General Reserve.

115 MATTERS REFERRED FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: RE-NEGOTIATION OF EXISTING LEASE AND MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT FOR CANVEY LAKE

Cabinet considered the report of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee seeking Cabinet's endorsement of a Deed of Variation to the lease between the Council and Canvey Island Town Council in respect of Canvey Lake.

In presenting the report, the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee stated:

"This Council granted a 99-year lease to Canvey Island Town Council on 1 March 2010 for Canvey Lake and surrounding landscaped areas on a peppercorn rent of £1. As well as being an important local amenity the lake is a surface water attenuation unit and is part of the flood prevention measures in place on Canvey Island and, contrary to rumours, will not be filled in. The day to day management of the lake and overall operation lies with the Town Council. However, the Borough Council has a stakeholder role to help the Town Council in the way in which the lease is operated in terms of future sustainability. The Town Council is putting in place plans for a number of solutions that will look at the long term biodiversity and financial sustainability of the lake going forward.

The legal arrangements that were put in place back in 2010 are no longer fit for purpose to enable the Town Council to take its plans forward. The Council's Monitoring Officer has put together a deed of variation, which is a legal instrument that will amend the terms of the lease that relate to the Town Council's Common Liaison Committee and potentially replace it with a Stakeholder Forum.

The Deed of Variation has been considered by the Town Council who are happy with it and it is now with the Borough Council for agreement. At the meeting of Overview & Scrutiny on 30 July we heard that key stakeholders had been approached and were happy with the proposal. Under the proposed new arrangements they would be involved more proactively to help design the strategic future of the lake.

Chair, I commend the recommendations set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report to Cabinet."

A Motion moved by Cllr M Fuller and seconded by Cllr B Palmer, that the

recommendations set out at paragraph 2.1 of the report be approved, was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

Resolved

- (1) To approve the draft Deed of Variation, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Assistant Director, Legal & Democratic Services to execute the Deed of Variation and complete the transaction.

116 THE PADDOCKS UPDATE

Cabinet considered the report of the Assistant Director, Estates updating Cabinet on the progress of the refurbishment project at the Paddocks Community Centre.

A Motion moved by Cllr D Blackwell and seconded by Cllr M Fuller that the recommendations set out at paragraph 3.1 of the report be approved was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

Resolved

- (1) To approve option 2A, as set out in paragraph 6 of the report.
- (2) To approve an increase of £826,000 in the capital scheme and 2024/25 payments approval, consisting of £687,000 for the Paddocks refurbishment and £139,000 for associated professional fees, to be funded by an appropriation from the Priority Initiatives Earmarked Reserve.

The meeting closed at 7.48 pm.

Chair

Date

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