

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**1ST AUGUST 2007**

**HAMILTON HOUSE SUPPORTED HOUSING SCHEME, SIDEMOOR –  
FUTURE USE OF PREMISES**

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor P. Whittaker
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Planning and Environment

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Hamilton House is a supported housing scheme that is managed by Bromford Housing Group to provide temporary housing and support for single homeless people aged between 16 and 25 years of age.
- 1.2 The scheme was enabled by this authority back in 1997 when a 10 year lease of a block of four one bedroom council flats was allocated to Bromford Housing Association on a peppercorn rent, to run as supported housing to provide a service to young homeless people.
- 1.3 As the lease has now expired, this report provides members with an opportunity to review the future use of the premises which remain in the ownership of the Council.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **That the Council owned premises known as 15, 15a, 17 and 17a York Road no longer be leased to Bromford Housing Group for the purposes of providing a supported housing scheme for younger people and that reasonable notice be given to enable the closure of the scheme and appropriate re-location of residents currently housed at Hamilton House.**
- 2.2 **That members approve the principle of the accommodation being returned to four self contained one bedroomed flats for management by a partner RSL and allocation to general needs or homeless clients subject to a condition that no more than two units at any time may be allocated as temporary accommodation.**
- 2.3 **The Council's partner RSLs be invited to submit innovative proposals to purchase or lease the premises for management and allocation on the basis set out in 2.2 above, at a cost that would enable them to cross subsidise a scheme of bringing back into use empty flats over shops in the district for letting as**

**dispersed temporary accommodation for younger homeless people .**

- 2.4 That subject to a suitable scheme being proposed by an RSL, the Head of Planning & Environment and the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing be granted delegated authority to sell or transfer the dwellings at a peppercorn rent or capital receipt that represents market, below market or zero value.**

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Hamilton House is a supported housing scheme that is managed by Bromford Housing Group to provide temporary housing and support for single homeless people aged between 16 and 25 years of age.
- 3.2 The scheme was enabled by this authority back in 1997 when a 10 year lease of a block of four one bedroom council flats was allocated on a peppercorn rent to Bromford Housing Association, to run as supported housing to provide a service to young homeless people to whom the Council did not have a legal duty to assist under housing legislation. Over the years, the scheme has increasingly been use to house young single clients to whom the Council does have a duty.
- 3.3 The project opened in 1997 providing accommodation for up to 8 young people. Each flat was converted into two bed sitting rooms with a bathroom and kitchen being shared between two residents. Occupants are granted 6 month Assured Shorthold Tenancies and receive support from a visiting support worker.
- 3.4 The role of the support work has been to support tenants to gain the life skills and confidence that they need to live independently. Tenants are expected to participate as a condition of tenancy through regular meetings with a keyworker and referral to appropriate agencies.
- 3.5 The support work is funded through Supporting People under Bromford Housing Group's Worcestershire Floating Support Service For Younger People. This service provides support to an average of 24 young people at any one time based upon provision of 5 hours contact per client per week. Whilst Supporting People funding has in the past been ring fenced to the Hamilton House Scheme, more recently the more flexible approach under the countywide floating support scheme has allowed levels of support to be adapted to clients' individual needs with more hours per week being available when clients first enter supported housing. Support is now available to clients irrespective of where they are housed whether they are in Hamilton House or a dispersed tenancy elsewhere.

#### **4. NEIGHBOURHOOD ISSUES**

- 4.1 Complaints have been made by residents of Sidemoor relating to anti social behaviour that is seen to emanate from Hamilton House. Whilst issues have been raised over the 10 year life of the scheme, the most recent incidents have culminated in a petition signed by 68 residents being submitted asking for the scheme to be closed down.
- 4.2 The complaints made cover a broad range of issues including:
- A general concern that higher levels of supervision and management are required to provide 24 hour cover at the scheme.
  - Anti social behaviour in and around the premises, especially during the evenings and at weekends including, loud music, screaming and fighting and bottles being smashed against fences.
  - Acts of vandalism, stones and rubbish being thrown into neighbouring gardens and poor management of domestic refuse at the premises
  - Unreasonable levels of people entering and leaving the premises and vehicles parking in the vicinity.
  - Inconsiderate use of the garden areas and bad language.
  - Late night parties and consumption of alcohol outside of the scheme.
- 4.3 It appears that matters may have recently been exacerbated by a large proportion of the tenants in the scheme falling in the 16 – 18yr age group. Bromford Housing Group have responded to complaints by appointing a Team Support Worker who is addressing the issues through more intensive working with tenants, the issue of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and the issue of written warnings to offending residents at the scheme. Referral procedures are being reviewed and support has been given by the Police and the Council's Community Support Officers in carrying out late night drive bys.

#### **5. PROPOSED FUTURE USE OF THE PREMISES**

- 5.1 The future of Hamilton House and alternative use of the premises has been discussed with both Bromford's Supported Housing Manager and the Supporting People Manager for Worcestershire.
- 5.2 It is jointly recognised that whilst the Hamilton House Scheme has provided a vital service for younger people over its 10 year life, it is reasonable to say that provision of supported housing in this form has possibly run its course.
- 5.3 There continues to be a high level of need for supported housing for homeless young people and accordingly the closure of Hamilton House would be a major loss to the housing options available in the District.

However, grouping together members of this client group to the density allowed at Hamilton House is now viewed as not being the best method of delivering support services to young homeless people unless higher levels of support are available. Therefore dispersal into self contained accommodation in the wider community is considered to be a more favoured option. This view has already been taken by the Council in agreeing its own strategy for re-modelling homeless hostel provision in the District. The longer term strategy for young people is being developed in conjunction with Supporting People and neighbouring authorities to provide appropriate supported housing options for younger homeless people in north Worcestershire.

- 5.4 The more flexible method by which support services are now provided to clients who live at Hamilton House would enable support to continue to be provided to the client group irrespective of where they live. Accordingly, in the event of Hamilton House ceasing to operate, support services would continue to be available wherever the tenants may be re located.
- 5.5 Members are therefore asked to consider the future use of the four Council owned dwellings that are currently operated as the Hamilton House Supported Housing Scheme. The lease to Bromford Housing Group has expired and both Bromford Housing Group and Supporting People agree the importance of reviewing the provision.
- 5.6 Members must however bear in mind the pressing need to provide both temporary and permanent accommodation for homeless clients to whom the Council has a statutory duty. The loss of 8 units of accommodation for this client group would be a loss of such provision and closure will inevitably present a higher risk to the Council of having to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 5.7 Members are asked to consider the recommendations set out at Sect 2 of this report that attempts to address the concern of local residents that Hamilton House should cease to operate whilst offering an option for the Council to offer the asset to an RSL as the possible catalyst to develop a number of dispersed dwellings for homeless people in buildings that are currently empty and in private ownership.
- 5.8 The Council is encouraged and measured against its performance in bringing empty property back into use for affordable housing. Members will be aware that usable accommodation above shops remains empty and unused. Much of this accommodation may have potential for conversion into affordable housing and suitable for occupation by single or homeless couples in preference to hostel or B&B type temporary accommodation.
- 5.9 In the past, housing associations have failed to successfully bring such accommodation back into use due to the cost of refurbishment and the lack of willingness on behalf of shop owners to grant leases of

sufficient length to warrant the refurbishment investment necessary by the RSL. The recent proposals for a Council managed Private Leasing Scheme also proved to be expensive and accordingly was not approved by the Executive Cabinet for adoption.

5.10 The recommendations set out at Sect 2 of this report propose:

- That the four flats at York Road are not re allocated for the purposes of providing a supported housing scheme.
- That the dwellings be either sold or leased to an RSL for allocation as four self contained one bedroom flats to general needs or homeless applicants from the waiting list.

It is envisaged that this action will provide a more stable community and a higher level of respect for the dwellings by the occupying tenants and accordingly provide a higher level of confidence to local residents.

However, recognising the need to replace the loss of provision for homeless and younger people at Hamilton House it is necessary to try and provide suitable accommodation elsewhere. As all opportunities for new build affordable housing are currently being pursued and the Council is already funding BDHT to buy back private flats for such use, the Council needs to further explore the use of private sector empty accommodation. Recognising that such action can be expensive, the recommendations go on to propose:

- That the Council's RSL Preferred Partners be invited to submit innovative bids to either purchase or lease the accommodation from the Council (for allocation as general needs housing) but at a discounted cost to the RSL sufficient enough to enable them to operate the four dwellings at a surplus that could be ring fenced to cross subsidise the development of a small group of privately owned empty dwellings that could be brought back into use as temporary accommodation for occupation by homeless clients.
- That the officers be granted delegated authority to lease or sell the premises to an RSL at a discounted value deemed to be appropriate to enable a scheme to be developed.

It has to be recognised that the proposals outlined above are aimed at promoting re-use of empty privately owned accommodation to supplement the lack of affordable accommodation available for rent in the District. Such a scheme is likely to be costly to provide and this proposed pilot scheme is an opportunity to investigate whether the potential exists for using an existing asset as an incentive. Members must be aware that there is no certainty that such a scheme will be viable and that in the event of failure by an RSL to submit a viable project, it may be necessary to sell or lease the four dwellings as a stand alone affordable housing scheme.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The four dwellings have an open market value that will be affected by the current condition, layout and limited garden land. Had the dwellings been transferred to BDHT in 2004 as part of the LSVT their Tenanted Market Value would have been in the region of £7,000 per dwelling.

The Council has leased the premises to Bromford Housing Group since 1997 for a peppercorn rent under which the RSL was responsible for internal and external repairs.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Provision of temporary accommodation to qualifying homeless applicants is a statutory duty of the Council under the Homeless provisions of the Housing Act 1996. The requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002 prevents local authorities from placing homeless families or expectant mothers in B&B type accommodation.

## **8. CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

### **8.1 Objective 1 – Regeneration (Town Centre, Longbridge and Housing)**

Improved standard of housing for homeless people and possible opportunities to bring back into use empty accommodation over shops.

### **8.2 Objective 2 – Improvement (Customer Service, Reputation and Performance)**

Improved service to customers by the ability to provide better options for homeless clients.

### **8.3 Objective 3 – Sense of Community and Wellbeing (Community Influence and Community Events)**

Improved forms of temporary accommodation may influence health and wellbeing.

### **8.4 Priority 4 – Environment – Clean District and Planning**

Dispersal of homelessness younger people into the community may support better neighbourhood integration and therefore reduce negative impact upon the environment.

## **9. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 9.1 There a risk that younger people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness or who are in housing need will have more limited alternative options. There is the risk that they may have to make a homeless approach and this could consequently lead to the following risks:

- Inability by the Council to meet the statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation in the District thus necessitating placement in B&B accommodation outside of the District.
- Increased B&B costs.
- Weakened performance against BV 183a (number of families placed in B&B) which is currently zero.
- Inability to reach DCLG target of reducing temporary accommodation by 50% by the year 2010

## 10. **CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Closure of the scheme may affect the Council's customer, by offering homeless young people less options to address their homelessness situation. However if a private empty homes scheme develops it may encourage younger people to be more independent and take responsibility for their housing situation.

## 11. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Procurement Issues Proposal to invite Partner RSLs to submit bids to develop a scheme as set out in the report.
Personnel Implications  None
Governance/Performance Management  Ability to improve performance against BVPI's on use of B&B and Hostel accommodation.
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998  Aims to address the community issues put forward by local residents by returning the dwellings back to self contained flats for single occupancy, thus reducing the risk of anti social behaviour in the neighbourhood.
Policy  None
Environmental  None
Equalities and Diversity  None

## 12. **OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Please include the following table and indicate 'Yes' or 'No' as appropriate. Delete the words in italics.

Portfolio Holder	Yes.
Acting Chief Executive	Yes
Corporate Director (Services)	Yes
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	Yes
Head of Legal & Democratic Services	Yes
Head of Organisational Development & HR	No
Corporate Procurement Team	Yes

## 13. **OTHER SUB HEADINGS**

13.1 None

## 14.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

14.1 None

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

Name           A.M. Coel  
E Mail         [a.coel@bromsgrove.gov.uk](mailto:a.coel@bromsgrove.gov.uk)  
Tel             01527 881270