

<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Head of Housing and Waste Management</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Louise Tandy Julie Cope</b>
<b>Telephone No:</b>	<b>01543 464348 01543 464556</b>
<b>Portfolio Leader:</b>	<b>Housing</b>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Report Track:</b>	<b>HPDC 18/03/2014</b>

**HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**  
**18 MARCH 2014**  
**REVIEW OF FESTIVAL COURT HOMELESSNESS FLATS**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To review the use of the two “homelessness flats” at Festival Court, West Chadsmoor.
- 1.2 To consider whether additional units in the District are required for temporary accommodation, including within the Council’s property portfolio.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the current position regarding the use of the two homelessness flats at Festival Court is noted.
- 2.2 That no further units are brought into use for temporary accommodation at the present time.
- 2.3 That the use of the two homelessness flats and use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families is kept under continual review by the Housing Options team and a further report be presented to the Housing Policy Development Committee if necessary.

**3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Housing Policy Development Committee on 19 March 2013 considered the temporary accommodation options available for homeless families and requested that a further review of the two homelessness flats at Festival Court, West Chadsmoor was undertaken.
- 3.2 One 3 bedroom furnished flat at Festival Court has been used for temporary accommodation since 5 January 2009. A further flat was brought into use in

October 2012 but was unfurnished. This was found to be unsuitable for families who had few possessions and therefore bed and breakfast accommodation was continuing to be used more often than necessary.

- 3.3 As a result the Housing Policy Development Committee agreed that the flat was furnished at an estimated cost of £5,000 met from the 2013-14 Homelessness Prevention budget. The flat was furnished and was ready for use in August 2013.
- 3.4 Having two furnished flats suitable for families has helped to reduce the number of families that have been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Between April 2012 and February 2013 a total of 14 families were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation with 8 staying for longer than 6 weeks. This compares to 9 families staying in bed and breakfast accommodation during the period April 2013 to February 2014, with 4 staying longer than 6 weeks.
- 3.5 From April 2013 to February 2014 the 4 families accommodated for longer than 6 weeks had an average stay of 11.5 weeks, compared to 7.8 weeks for the previous year. However, the increased length of stay was caused by one family in particular who had been referred to Cannock Chase from outside the District by West Midlands Police following threats of violence.
- 3.6 Both flats have been well used between April 2013 and February 2014 and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation has decreased. It is not possible to predict when families may approach the Council as homeless and at the current time one of the flats at Festival Court is empty and the second flat is due to be vacated imminently. There are currently no families in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 3.7 There is increasing pressure on the supply of smaller 1 and 2 bedroom housing as a result of the Social Sector Size Criteria and it is therefore not considered necessary to identify a further temporary accommodation unit at the present time. However, as it is impossible to know when, or how many families may approach the Council as homeless at any given time it is suggested that both the use of the two homelessness flats and bed and breakfast accommodation is kept under review. A further report will be presented to Housing Policy Development Committee if necessary.

#### **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The provision of temporary accommodation for homeless families contributes to the service aim to “provide housing advice and homelessness services” which forms part of the agreed 2014-15 PLACE Priority Delivery Plan.

**5 Report Detail**

- 5.1 One of the ten local challenges for local authorities as identified in the Government’s document “Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness” is ‘to not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks’.
- 5.2 Section 188(1) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) imposes an interim duty on housing authorities to secure that accommodation is available for an applicant pending their decision as to what duty, if any, is owed to the applicant under Part 7 of the Act if there is reason to believe that the applicant may:
- i) be homeless
  - ii) be eligible for assistance
  - iii) have a priority need
- 5.3 If a decision is made to provide temporary accommodation to a family, the first option is always to utilise the Festival Court flats. Only if this accommodation is already in use or considered unsuitable for any other reason is Bed and Breakfast accommodation used. Families placed in Bed and Breakfast are transferred into the Festival Court flats when a vacancy becomes available and it is considered suitable.
- 5.4 Although bed and breakfast has continued to be used, the number of families accessing this accommodation has decreased. Between April 2012 and February 2013 a total of 14 families were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation with 8 of these staying for longer than 6 weeks. This compares to 9 families staying in bed and breakfast accommodation during April 2013 to February 2014, with 4 of these staying longer than 6 weeks.
- 5.5 The following table shows homelessness applications and decisions for the period 2009-10 to date.

	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b> Apr 13 to Dec 13
Applications	180	222	183	209	140
Homelessness Duty Acceptances	28	51	42	27	35
No Duty Owed	152	171	141	182	105

- 5.6 Although homelessness acceptances decreased between 2010-11 and 2012-13, acceptances for 2013-14 have increased. This is despite a decrease in the number of applications. A number of homelessness applications are complex in nature and whilst the investigations are undertaken, bed and

breakfast accommodation has been used if the Festival Court flats have been occupied.

- 5.7 One of the flats at Festival Court, West Chadsmoor is a 3 bedroom, furnished flat that has been used for temporary accommodation since the 5 January 2009. From April 2013 to February 2014 the flat has been used by three families, with a 2 week period between the first and second family moving in and a 7 week period between the second and third family. The third family remain in occupation but are due to leave imminently.
- 5.8 The second flat at Festival Court was furnished and converted to gas central heating under the planned maintenance programme and has been ready for occupation since August 2013. The flat has been in continuous use since then and during this time has accommodated two families, with the last family leaving in January 2014. At the present time the flat is empty but there are no families residing in bed and breakfast accommodation that could be moved into this flat.
- 5.9 It is proposed that no further units of accommodation are brought into use for temporary accommodation at the present time. There is pressure on the supply of smaller one and two bedroom dwellings due to the introduction of the Social Sector Size Criteria and it is therefore not considered necessary or appropriate to identify a further unit of accommodation for temporary accommodation at the present time. As it is impossible to predict how many families may approach the Council as homeless at any given time, the use of the Festival Court flats and bed and breakfast accommodation will be monitored. A further report would be made to Housing Policy Development Committee if the situation significantly changes.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

The cost of furnishing the unfurnished flat of £5,000 was met from the Homelessness Prevention Grant in 2013-14. The costs of using the two flats as temporary accommodation are met from within existing budgets.

### **6.2 Legal**

The legal implications are set out throughout the report.

### **6.3 Human Resources**

None

### **6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)**

Having two furnished properties has ensured that they are both fully utilised and therefore less likely to be empty which can attract crime and anti-social behaviour.

**6.5 Human Rights Act**

None.

**6.6 Data Protection**

None.

**6.7 Risk Management**

Having two furnished flats at Festival Court, West Chadsmoor has increased the number of homeless families who can use this accommodation which has helped to ensure that both properties have not remained vacant for lengthy periods of time.

**6.8 Equality & Diversity**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out as part of the evaluation into the potential need for further temporary accommodation units in the District.

Negative implications identified for the Festival Court flats are that they are situated on the first floor and therefore unsuitable for people with physical disabilities. If additional units of temporary accommodation are required in the future, priority would be given to sourcing ground floor accommodation.

**6.9 Best Value**

Two furnished flats for use as temporary accommodation instead of one has ensured that families in need of this type of accommodation can access it, regardless of whether they have any possessions. This has helped to ensure the flats are utilised to their maximum potential and lessened the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

**7 Appendices to the Report**

**Previous Consideration**

Housing Policy Development Committee	6 February 2013	“Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness”
Housing Policy Development Committee	19 March 2013	“Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Families”

**ITEM NO. 7.6**

**Background Papers**