

REPORT TO: Cabinet

DATE: 25th November 2010

SUBJECT: Proposed Closure of Homelessness Unit – Windsor House, Southport

WARDS AFFECTED: All

REPORT OF: Alan Lunt - Neighbourhoods and Investment Programmes Director

CONTACT OFFICER: Neil Woodhouse – Housing Options Manager
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EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL: No

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

To set out the business case for the proposed closure of the homelessness unit at Windsor House, Manchester Road Southport

REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:

The Neighbourhoods and Investment Programmes Director does not have delegated authority to make decisions relating to such matters.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Cabinet;

1. Approves the closure of Windsor House Homelessness Unit;
2. Instructs the Neighbourhoods and Investment Programmes Director to implement an appropriate personnel process in respect of staffing requirements in light of the proposed closure

KEY DECISION: N/A

FORWARD PLAN: N/A

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Upon the expiry of the call in period for the minutes of the meeting

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

The alternative option is to maintain Windsor House as a homeless unit. However, based upon current occupancy levels, this is not a cost effective solution and alternative accommodation exists in which to place homeless families on a temporary basis while more permanent housing is identified.

IMPLICATIONS:**Budget/Policy Framework:**

Financial: The closure of Windsor house would secure a net revenue saving of £36,500 per annum including potential savings in staffing costs.

<u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u>	2010/ 2011 £	2011/ 2012 £	2012/ 2013 £	2013/ 2014 £
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources (HMRI –HCA)				
<u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u>				
Gross Reduction in Revenue Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources		11,500		
Funded from External Resources		25,000		
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/ N	When? 31/3/2011			
How will the service be funded post expiry?	N/a			

Legal:

The Council has a statutory duty to house vulnerable families who are homeless. However, adequate provision exists within the borough to provide such accommodation following closure of Windsor House

Risk Assessment:

The relative risks of closure have been considered in arriving at the recommendations

Asset Management:

Windsor House is a Council owned asset that could be put to an alternative use or sold to generate a capital receipt

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS

FD 551 - The Interim Head of Corporate Finance & Information Services has been consulted and his comments have been incorporated into this report
Acting Head of Legal Services
Strategic Director for Children Schools and Families

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		x	
2	Creating Safe Communities		x	
3	Jobs and Prosperity		x	
4	Improving Health and Well-Being		x	
5	Environmental Sustainability		x	
6	Creating Inclusive Communities		x	
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy	x		
8	Children and Young People		x	

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

None

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Local Authorities have a statutory duty to offer suitable accommodation to people who are homeless and in priority need.
- 1.2 In discharging it's duty, Sefton has two Homeless units for vulnerable families; a unit in Litherland offering 10 self contained flats and managed by a residential accommodation support manager and Windsor House, offering 5 flats and also managed by an accommodation support manager.
- 1.3 In recent years, the Government has shifted emphasis away from the provision of accommodation for homeless people and towards activity to prevent homelessness. As the council increasingly becomes successful at preventing those at risk of homelessness from becoming so, demand for accommodation at it's homeless units has reduced.
- 1.4 During the calendar year to August 31st 2010, occupation at Windsor House was 27%. The unit is currently empty as a result of a lack of demand. During the past year, vacancies did exist at the council's other unit, based in Lonsdale Road, Litherland, within which emergency re-housing could have been arranged for the tenants of Windsor House, thus consolidating homeless families adequately within Litherland while awaiting identification of more permanent accommodation. It is the opinion of the Housing Options Team Manager that it is not feasible to retain both units and closure of Windsor House – leaving 10 units of accommodation in Litherland – would meet identified emergency need adequately.
- 1.5 It is important to note that the units provide emergency accommodation to be utilised in cases of urgency for a short period of time while longer-term accommodation is found. If there was a case where the remaining unit was at capacity and additional accommodation was required, the short term need would be met by providing a rental bond to an appropriate private sector landlord.

2.0 Accommodation Details

- 2.1 Windsor House is located at 124-126 Manchester Road, Southport. It is a large double fronted Victorian property that was originally two separate semi-detached homes. It was converted to comprise;
 - 6 self contained flats
 - 1 office unit with combined mini-kitchen and attached w.c.
 - 1 large basement
 - Large rear garden
 - Limited parking spaces
- 2.2 Due to it's existing use, the property also has the following:
 - Fire escape
 - Fire and security alarm system

- 1 communal laundry area formed from part of the basement
- Full CCTV system
- Emergency lighting system

- 2.3 The building has been used for the last 6 years as a dedicated accommodation resource for applicants who are homeless and “vulnerable”. Prior to this period it had been used as accommodation as part of the Kosovar refugees program (1999 to 2004).
- 2.4 Of the six self contained flats, one is dedicated to a residential Accommodation Support Manager but due to recruitment difficulties in 2004 the accommodation has been managed without a resident manager, and as such this flat has remained empty. The other five flats have been used for homeless families.
- 2.5 If the decision to close the Windsor House unit is confirmed, then consideration would be given to potential future uses of the accommodation as well as to the potential disposal of the site.

3.0 Management of Homelessness Units

- 3.1 In order to ensure effective management of the two homeless units, three accommodation support managers are employed to manage the units on a rota basis; One manager is a specific resource for Windsor House, one specifically for Lonsdale Road Litherland and a ‘peripatetic ‘ Manager who rotates between both units, covering leave, sickness etc. The duty rota is in effect two weeks on day shift plus one week on call.
- 3.2 If the decision to close the Windsor House unit is confirmed, then only two managers would be required in future.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 The closure of the Windsor House Homeless Unit would generate a revenue saving, a potential capital receipt OR would provide accommodation to meet other statutory requirements, without undermining the Council’s statutory duty to accommodate vulnerable households that are homeless.