

Report to Stronger Place Committee

Date of meeting: 30th March 2021

**Portfolio: Housing and Community Services
Councillor H Whitbread**



Subject: Furniture Leasing Scheme (Older Persons Sheltered Housing Schemes)

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Appendix 1 - Examples of newly furnished older persons housing schemes

Appendix 2 – Work programme

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1) To note the progress with regards to the Older Persons Housing work programme.
- 2) To recommend that the proposed furniture leasing scheme with Buckingham Interiors for approval.

Report:

1. Background

Epping Forest District Council invited ARK to undertake a review of its sheltered housing. The principal focus of this assignment was to review the performance and sustainability of the Councils sheltered housing schemes. This resulted in a work programme which is presented to this committee. This report provides an update on the key points in the work plan and any proposals which would require an approval by Cabinet

Leasing Scheme

2. Although not expressly covered in the report, our sheltered housing schemes are extremely dated and do not currently present as an attractive option for older people. As such, officers have researched the options to refurbish the communal areas of our sheltered housing stock to include the upgrade of fixtures, fittings, and redecoration. Officers have started work with an organisation called Buckingham Interiors, who are a bespoke company who provide leased furniture specifically for older people. The organisation is owned by FRC Group, which is a collection of leading social businesses, all commercially successful, all not-for-profit, which gives people in poverty and unemployment an opportunity to change their lives. They have won several awards and are continually looking for new ways to create practical solutions to get furniture to those in need and create sustainable livelihoods and futures for people. If approved, Buckingham Interiors, would provide an interior design service which would consist of mood boards. The mood boards contain samples of fabric, curtaining, carpet etc. and this would be used to form the basis of extensive consultation with residents. EFDC will be funding the decoration of each scheme based on the specification of colours provided by the design team. EFDC would lease the furniture from Buckingham Interiors over a period of 5 years. After which we can take ownership of the furniture or opt to refurbish the scheme again. Examples of the work

undertaken by Buckingham interiors and the look we will achieve for our sheltered schemes can be found in **appendix 1**.

3. This leasing scheme has been undertaken by other local councils and housing providers and it will allow EFDC to provide an interior design within its sheltered housing schemes, which is to a high standard without a capital outlay.
4. The financial arrangements consist of payments for the lease of the furniture made over a five-year period. This will be raised from a new component added to the service charge to cover the leasing charge, administration and 10% for replacement furniture (damage or breakages). There will be no financial detriment to current tenants as a result of the scheme. This is because the leasing of furniture is subject to housing benefit subsidy therefore, those tenants on full housing benefit would have the cost covered by their benefit entitlement. Those tenants who are on partial benefit or are full rent payers will have the charge debited and then credited to their rent account. The cost of the leasing scheme for tenants not on benefit, will be covered by the surplus gained from the replacement fund. This has worked extremely well in other organisations.

Warden Call System

5. Due to the national infrastructure changing from analogue to digital, all the warden call systems will need to be upgraded. Officers have recently soft tested the market and have invited three providers to give a demonstration of their equipment. Two different systems are available to provide the service required. Following the demonstrations officers will decide which type of service is required and a tender process will begin. A report will then be presented to this Committee.

Impact of reducing age to 55+

6. Officers have reviewed the impact of reducing the minimum age to 55+. The impact of the work programme and the upgrades to the schemes need to be embedded prior to any decision on the age criteria.

Redevelopment of communal lounges

7. A scope of works has been produced for the redevelopment of smaller second lounges at Buckhurst Court, Jessop Court and Leonard Davis, into accessible accommodation. In order to progress this work officers will need to review the access arrangements at the schemes. At present automatic doors are not fitted at the main entrances, as such the accessible units would not be able to be used for the intended purpose. The review of the entry doors will be added to the work plan.

Reason for decision:

Members are asked to recommend that the leasing scheme is progressed to Cabinet for approval. This would enable the Council's sheltered housing schemes to be given a much-needed upgrade. Furthermore, at a nil capital cost for the fixtures and fittings to EFDC and no cost to current tenants.

In addition, committee are asked to note the progress to the work plan.

Options considered and rejected:

Officers considered whether to put in a business case for purchasing the furniture, this was rejected due to the huge capital outlay and the opportunity that leasing would bring in terms of a relatively quick refurbishment of schemes.

Consultation undertaken:

Buckingham Interiors will support officers in the consultation with the residents on colours and styles. Residents may be able to try out the chairs and furniture being considered for their scheme may, subject to covid restrictions.

Resource implications:

It is proposed that 2 sheltered housing schemes are renovated each year. The cost to the Council would be the internal decorations of the sheltered schemes for which there is existing budget provision.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Buckingham Interiors are on a number of frameworks and officers will consult with the procurement team to ensure the policy requirements are met.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

The furniture provided by Buckingham Interiors is manufactured in the UK. In addition, support would be given to re-use our old furniture, either through the local re-use scheme of the FRC Groups recycling scheme.

Background Papers:

NA

Impact Assessments:

Attached

Risk Management:

Should the project not go ahead there is a risk that the schemes will become more difficult to let resulting in rent loss.

Appendix 1: Examples of schemes refurbished by Buckingham interiors – Appendix 1

Overview

In the initial meeting between Buckingham Interiors and Plus Dane, 4 mood boards were selected alongside a Plus Dane Furniture range that was chosen by the Buckingham Interiors and Plus Dane's senior staff. These were later presented to residents at each scheme by our in house experts.

Our resident consultations involved taking samples of the furniture and the mood boards to each scheme. We then ran through the various options with the residents. This allowed the residents to be fully involved in the whole process of refurbishing their schemes. There was a complete buy in from the residents throughout the three schemes, who interestingly voted unanimously in favour of one mood board at each scheme. For example, all residents at Vienna Court chose the New England mood board to base the interior design off.





Brief

B3 Living have nine dedicated schemes for older people in Hertfordshire. The schemes are not difficult to let but B3 Living wanted to refurbish the properties to provide better homes for their residents. B3 Living had a full budget available to modernise and upgrade the structure of the properties and they were looking for innovative ways to fund new fixtures and fittings, and to provide better homes. The client needed a full interior design service and new fixtures and fittings with new furniture for the communal living and dining areas, and the reception.



Overview

We delivered a full resident and staff consultation with a detailed interior design service. We designed a complete scheme, including wall and floor coverings, and suggested structural changes to divide communal rooms to meet the residents' needs. We liaised with contractors and gave them the paint and flooring schedules. We provided furniture for the communal lounge, dining area, games area and bistro / computer area and all corridors. This included tub chairs, bistro and dining tables, easy chairs and sofas, plus sideboards and artwork.



Feedback

Deborah Fenton, B3's Head of Support and Rehousing said:
"We were delighted to find out that Buckingham Interiors design service was not only cost effective, but also created a beautiful scheme. By leasing the furniture, we are now looking at the option of developing further schemes with Buckingham."

Maureen Preedy Independent Living Team Leader at B3 said:
"Buckingham Interiors completed the brief on time and on budget, and we're really pleased with it."