

Agenda Item No:

Report No:

Report Title: Extra Provision of Refuge Accommodation

Report To: Cabinet

Date: 21 November 2007

Lead Councillor: Councillor Steve Saunders

Ward(s) Affected: All

Report By: Director of Finance and Community Services

**Contact Officer(s): Roger Moore, Acting Housing Strategy Manager
Jo Jacks, Principal Housing Needs Officer**

Purpose of Report:

To advise members of the need to provide refuge accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic violence and to alert them to the fact that a suitable property has been identified.

Officers Recommendations:

That Cabinet agrees to the grant of £20,000 to the Home Group, subject to the condition set out in 3.4 below, in order to create a further refuge linked to the existing one.

Reasons for Recommendations:

The Council is required, under Best Value Performance Indicator 225, to provide one household space per 10000 of the population of the district for women and children fleeing domestic violence. Current provision is six units and the target is nine. The proposals contained in this report will increase provision to twelve. In addition the extra provision will produce far better value for money whilst providing much needed respite places of safety for families who would otherwise be temporarily homeless.

1. Background Information

1.1 Planning consent was given in 2002/03 to provide a Refuge the aim of which was to provide respite accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic violence. Following considerable refurbishment and conversion works the refuge was opened in November 2003.

- 1.2 The project was achieved through a partnership arrangement between the Council, South London Family Housing Association [now the Horizon Group] who purchased and own the property and Refuge [a national organisation] which manages the service. The refuge provides accommodation for up to six families.

2. Present Situation

- 2.1 Unfortunately there is still a high demand for this type of accommodation. In addition it is a requirement, under Best Value Performance Indicator 225 [BVPI 225] that each local authority should provide one refuge place per 10,000 of the population. In the case of Lewes with a population of approximately 90,000 this equates to 9 'spaces'.
- 2.2 A property has recently become available which could be used as an annexe to the existing refuge, being in close proximity to the existing property.
- 2.2 This house is owned and managed by the Home Group [another Registered Social Landlord] but it is in a rather poor condition. It currently provides bed sitter accommodation for up to six women [although only four are in occupation] and has shared facilities.
- 2.3 The Home Group was proposing to decant the tenants and upgrade the property by providing self contained accommodation. However, when they approached the Housing Strategy division with their proposal it soon became clear that this property would address the need for extra refuge spaces.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 It is proposed to convert the existing property into an additional refuge which will provide accommodation for a further six families.
- 3.2 This will have the effect of addressing current concerns:
 - Much needed accommodation will be provided for women and children fleeing domestic violence'
 - The target set under BVPI 225 will be exceeded, and
 - Unit costs will be reduced considerably, thereby affording better value for money.
- 3.3 If this project does proceed it will be necessary for the council to offer alternative accommodation to the four women who are currently in occupation.

3.4 Costings have been calculated and are as follows:

Capital Costs:-

• Works	£350,000
• VAT [@ 5%]	£ 17,500
• On-costs [% 21%]	<u>£ 73,000</u>
TOTAL	<u>£ 441,000</u>

Funding:-

• Existing Dowry [HGL]	£215,000
• Agency Loan	£ 30,000
• HC Grant	<u>£ 176,000</u>
TOTAL	<u>£421,000</u>

This leaves a shortfall of £20,000. However, a budget has been identified which could address this shortfall and it is proposed that the Council contributes £20,000 to this project on the basis that it proceeds to completion.

Revenue Funding: Revenue funding for the existing refuge is met from Supporting People, although in their opinion units costs are excessive. However, as the proposed property is very close to the existing refuge there would not be a need for major increases in staffing levels. Thus unit costs would be far less and provide better value for money. The Supporting People team have been involved in our discussions and are satisfied with the proposals.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 The costs to the Council would be £20,000 but this can be met from existing budgets which have been set aside for the provision of accommodation in order to address the needs of the homeless.

5. Environmental Implications

5.1 Should this proposal not proceed the Home Group will be left to revert to their original proposal to refurbish the property and create self-contained accommodation as the property, in its existing condition, fails to meet current standards.

6. Risk Management

6.1 There is no financial risk as the £20,000 referred to above would only be paid on completion of the scheme.

6.2 However, if the proposal does not proceed, then the Council will still have failed to meet the requirement under BVPI 225.

7. Background Papers

There are no background papers in relation to this report.