

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 13 March 2014

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Communities

**PORTFOLIO:** Physical Environment

**SUBJECT:** Decommissioning of Belvedere Supported Housing Scheme

**WARD(S)** Mersey

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The report seeks approval to decommission and close Belvedere supported housing scheme.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board**

- 1) **agrees the decommissioning and closure of Belvedere supported housing scheme; and**
- 2) **upon closure, agrees to the building been made safe and secure and disposed of in accordance with the Council's approach to vacant properties.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 On the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2012 the Board received a report setting out proposals to reconfigure a number of homeless accommodation services following a Scrutiny Review undertaken by members of the Health Policy and Performance Board. This report concerns one of those proposals, the decommissioning of Belvedere supported housing scheme.

3.2 The intention was to decommission Belvedere following the opening of a new hostel in Albert Rd, Widnes in early 2015. However circumstances have changed in that occupancy levels at Belvedere have significantly declined over recent months. The scheme has the capacity to accommodate 23 residents but at 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014 there were only six in occupation.

3.3 The Council has a block purchase contract with Community Integrated Care (CIC) for the provision of housing related support at Belvedere which means the Council is committed to paying a fixed monthly sum of £28,647 irrespective of occupancy levels. In light of current occupancy levels and the resultant loss of Housing Benefit income to CIC, is considered that the service is no longer viable. There is therefore an opportunity to bring forward the closure plan and secure

savings against the 2014/15 budget.

- 3.4 Halton YMCA has capacity to accommodate any displaced residents who continue to require supported housing, and priority for permanent rehousing will be given to those who are ready to move on to independent living. A member of the Housing Solutions Team will coordinate all arrangements as was the case with the successful closure of the Halton Goals scheme last year.
- 3.5 These proposals have been discussed with CIC who are agreeable to this proposal and have agreed to work with the Council to achieve the satisfactory relocation of any remaining residents.
- 3.6 Belvedere is Council owned and occupies a prominent site overlooking the Mersey. The Council has already engaged partners to develop regeneration proposals for Runcorn Old Town and it would therefore be sensible for the building to be included in the development of those plans. It is therefore proposed that the Council be charged with developing a disposal strategy for the building which supports the regeneration proposals.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The proposal outlined in this report aligns with the approach to reconfigure services agreed by the Board in July 2012 albeit sooner than anticipated. The closure reinforces the approach to supporting people in their own homes and further work to consider the YMCA provision will be undertaken this year and reported to the Board.

#### **5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Assuming that Belvedere is decommissioned by the end of April, a financial saving of around £250,000 would be achieved against the planned 2014/15 budget, less the cost of securing and maintaining the building whilst vacant.
- 5.2 Disposal of the building at some future point will produce a capital receipt, which could be used to support regeneration proposals for Runcorn Old Town.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### **6.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

Whilst the closure reduces service capacity to accommodate homeless young people in the short term, alternative provision is planned for next year and remaining services will ensure the Council continues to support these vulnerable individuals.

## 6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None

## 6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

None.

## 6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None.

## 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

Closure of the service offers the opportunity for what is a prominent site to be included in the development of regeneration proposals for Runcorn Old Town.

## 7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The closure of Belvedere will reduce the number of hostel places available for homeless young people at a time when there continues to be some uncertainty about the potential impact of welfare reforms. However it is now nearly a year since some of the major reforms were implemented and homelessness has not significantly increased.

7.2 This reduced capacity will be offset by the development of the new hostel in Widnes and the ongoing success of the Housing Solutions Team in delivering targeted support and mediation to prevent homelessness.

## 8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Not applicable.

## 9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Exec Board Report 12/7/13 – Homelessness Services	Runcorn Town Hall	Commissioning Manager
Homeless Services Scrutiny Report	Runcorn Town Hall	Housing Solutions Manager