



Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 20 February 2024

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Lee Brazier, Housing

Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing

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<b>Report Summary</b>	
<b>Type of Report</b>	Open Report, Key Decision
<b>Report Title</b>	Proposed Operating Model for Alexander Lodge, Newark
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To provide Cabinet with an overview of the Alexander Lodge temporary accommodation project and to set out the proposed service model and associated costs.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>It is recommended that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) note the progress of the scheme and the allocated budgets for 2024-25;</li> <li>b) approve the transfer of £17,033 from the Homelessness Reserve to revenue for the one-off items listed in the table at 4.3 (summarised at 5.2.3) of the report;</li> <li>c) approve budgetary provision a caretaker post, funded through service charges;</li> <li>d) note that costs of the caretaker role of £28,195 will be funded from the existing budget set for 2024/25; and</li> <li>e) approve additional budget of £30,000 for the purchase of a vehicle (subject to caretaker role approval) and inclusion into vehicle replacement programme.</li> </ul>
<b>Alternative Options Considered</b>	Alternative lesser service models could be an option, but this would have an impact on the service and its deliverables, management of the site and could lead to damage to the structure and wasted community space.
<b>Reason for Recommendations</b>	<p>To provide a strong homelessness support service that complements the investment in temporary accommodation in the District; improving the standard of housing available and extending the services available within and from Alexander Lodge.</p> <p>Aligning to 24/27 Community Plan objectives:</p>

- Increase the supply, choice, and standard of housing.
  - Raise peoples' skills levels and create employment opportunities for the to fulfil their potential.
- To be a top performing, modern and accessible Council.

## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 The 2024/27 Community Plan includes an objective to “Complete development of Alexander Lodge, a new temporary accommodation facility.
- 1.2 The build element of the project commenced in November 2021 and has faced challenges including the loss of the main contractor in September 2022. Following this, a new contractor was appointed to progress the works through to completion of phase one (making the super structures watertight).
- 1.3 Subsequently, in April 2023 a further tender exercise was carried out for the phase two fit out and completion of the internal works and the project was due to complete by January 2024, the target date for completion has been achieved and it comes within the budget of £4.1million, with occupation expected as early as March 2024.



## **2.0 Proposal/Details of Options Considered**

### **Alexander Lodge – Management Arrangements and Flexibility of Space**

- 2.1 The Council wants to create a service model that matches the modern method of construction for the building, ensuring it is flexible to the current and future needs of the user. This project is a major investment for the council and therefore it is imperative that asset management and maintenance programmes are well planned and managed – this will be achieved by mirroring those used for managing the Council’s Housing Revenue Account portfolio of homes.
- 2.2 Temporary accommodation, by its very nature, has high occupancy and turnover that reduces the life expectancy of its internal components and decoration. A repairs and renewal programme for Alexander Lodge will be created and administered through APEX, the asset management software system used in Housing.
- 2.3 The APEX system can set different lifecycles for replacement and renewal of components and will ensure that maintenance and compliance programmes and annual servicing requirements are maintained in line with statutory regulations and scheduled in advance. The programme will also include a 18 to 24-month full redecoration programme to ensure accommodation units remain in good order. This repair and renewal programme will be funded through the rent and service charge.
- 2.4 The intelligent design of Alexander Lodge is such that the units have capability of flexing from a one-bedroom, up to a four-bedroom, self-contained unit via its interlocking doors and access to storage/bedroom arrangements. The interlocking and adjoining rooms are such that they can remain locked if they are not required, they can be made available as sleeping spaces or given as storage space if not required as a bedroom. For this reason, there is a variable weekly rent charge that will be applied reflecting the size of the household occupying it and the room space they have. This is a keyless system using access cards such as would be found in a hotel.
- 2.5 The smart design of this site also extends to the energy provision too. It has Photo Voltaic Solar Panels installed on the roof meaning that an estimated 80,000kw of electricity will be created per annum. Projections show that the whole site is likely to consume 60,000kw, therefore circa 20,000kw can be sold back to the National Grid once moved from the starter tariff. This green energy along with the significant levels of insulation means that the accommodation will be warm, efficient to heat and the site will be energy efficient, helping to keep service charges to a minimum for utilities and communal facilities usage.
- 2.6 Having operated temporary accommodation for many years much has been learnt about what occupants need when accessing temporary accommodation and this has provided strong learning for the management of this scheme and making best use of the accommodation to meet the Council’s statutory duties.
- 2.7 With that in mind, solutions have been considered that would enable quicker turnover of accommodation whilst ensuring standards are maintained. It is proposed that a caretaker role is introduced to achieve a speedy and cost-effective turnaround when units become empty, which will encompass most of the work required to bring properties up to the Lettings Standard.

- 2.8 This role will undertake a multitude of tasks including:
- Clearance and cleaning of the unit,
  - PAT testing of electrical items,
  - Visual electrical inspections (training to be provided),
  - Painting and decorating the units,
  - Maintenance of the grounds and surrounding area,
  - Inspection of play equipment (training to be provided) and
  - anything else required in order to create a timely and efficient turnaround of available accommodation.

An assumption of this post has been factored into 2024/25 budget for Alexander Lodge.

- 2.9 It is anticipated that undertaking empty property turnarounds in this way will make the units available sooner, reducing the inconvenience for the customer and the use and expense of B&B placements for the council. Again, to ensure standards are maintained, once the post holder is satisfied that the standard for the accommodation has been met and it is ready for letting it will post inspected by the tenancy support team prior to its next allocation.
- 2.10 Longer term there is the intention to extend the reach of this role across all temporary accommodation sites, to bring consistency with service and standards offered and in doing so freeing up HRA resources that currently provide this service. There will always be a need for the input of technically specialised roles to maintain compliance and these will be used when required.

### **3.0 Alexander Lodge Service Offer**

- 3.1 Alexander Lodge is the council's Newark offer of temporary accommodation for those who are owed statutory duties and provision of accommodation pending assessment as per the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 3.2 The current service offer for those owed these duties is self-contained, clean, part furnished accommodation with tenancy support provided both on arrival, and support with housing and broader areas such as education, health and employment and to prepare them for moving on. This element of service will transfer to Alexander Lodge: upon arrival, the tenancy support team begin building trust and rapport with the residents to ensure they settle in, access services and provisions needed for them and their families.
- 3.3 With Alexander Lodge, in addition to the immediate input the team have on arrival, support workers will work with residents to understand longer term aspirations, helping to identify tenancy and life skills that may be needed for longer term tenancy success.
- 3.4 This offer needs to be accessible to the person for as long as needed without extending their stay in temporary accommodation. Three local colleges – Lincoln and Newark College, Academy Transformation Trust Further Education (ATTFE) and Inspire have all agreed to work together with the Council to deliver a complimentary package which meets the key skills set out below.

- 3.5 A working group identified the key skills below needed for tenancy sustainment and educational growth:
- Confidence and Communication
  - Budgeting
  - Health and Wellbeing
  - Income and Employment
  - Tenancy Responsibilities
  - Home Safety & DIY
  - Practical Skills
- 3.6 These skills will be delivered in a module format with blended learning both face to face and online, based on the findings from an assessment questionnaire that will identify the skills and classes that will be of benefit to the residents, as well as best delivery model.
- 3.7 Embracing this shift in service delivery has led to the installation of four touch-based computer systems in the community centre, to support the growth and development of the residents using this service as well as access to job and recruitment opportunities, cv writing, applying for benefits and updating benefit records among others. The method of delivery for these skills also allows residents to move on from the temporary accommodation and continue in their growth and educational journey.
- 3.8 In addition, the Council is also looking to expand existing partnerships with Citizens Advice, the Credit Union and health partners to deliver targeted sessions on an individual basis and some group sessions. The broader offer will be live from the Autumn 2024 and hopefully can be expanded to include applicants on the housing register and existing tenants.

#### Community Space

- 3.9 The community space is attached to the office and laundrette and has an accessible wet room with showering facilities. The centres will house the touch down computers, a screen, projector and sharing capabilities for training, staff meetings, events, and sessions with a secondary interview/private space available for staff and agencies like social care, health, CLG, Early Learning that are working with the residents.

#### Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

- 3.10 The building also gives the Council a variety of options for accommodating rough sleepers when the SWEP is activated – this is the Council’s crisis response when extreme events such as high or low temperatures require additional support for rough sleepers and those experiencing homelessness.
- 3.11 Currently, when SWEP is activated the housing options team secure accommodation through existing temporary accommodation if there is any space, or a place B&B placement. Alexander Lodge will enable the council to use the community space to provide shelter (from hot and cold weather) during the daytime for those who are rough sleeping. If there are units of accommodation with vacant storage/spare bedroom area, these can be opened to provide a sleeping space for the rough sleeper, with access to bathroom and toilet facilities inside the community building.

## Support with Being Tenancy Ready inc. Care Leavers

3.12 For many years the housing options service has worked closely with NCC social care and Care Leavers to create and support care leavers. This will continue and facilities will be made available to support better housing outcomes e.g. life skills and practical skills experience to support independent living.

### **4.0 The Finances**

4.1 **Appendix A** shows the indicative rent setting calculations approved by Full Council in February 2023.

4.2 As the specifics of the service come to fruition and exact costings are identified, the rent and service charges will continue to be reviewed and amended to ensure they are reflective of the service costs, keeping a focus on achieving affordability.

4.3 The table below identifies works undertaken and where possible, where specific costs have been apportioned.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Est Cost (if known)</b>
CCTV	To cover all the external site, entrance space, community space and laundry areas. Awaiting approval from Information Governance	£5,971 quote
Internet for office/site use	Virgin Media Business Line including internet access for the touch-down computers in the community centre.	£4,544 pa – installed
Community Centre Desk Top Kiosks	Installation of 4 touch-down systems	£3,061.12
Accommodation Units Fixtures and Fittings	White goods & household equipment for all 20 units.	£39,958.28
Window Coverings	Blinds for 20 units, community centre, meeting room & office space.	£11,620
Laundry	Leasing of four machines inc repairs and maintenance contract.	£418 pm
Educational Offer	Educational Fees covered by college grants.	Via service charge.
Soft/Extra Furnishings	For office space – furniture recycled from other offices where able.	£8,000
Solar Panel Dongle	To transfer readings and data from the battery.	£75 pa
APEX Annual Licences	3 licences	£100 x 3 = £300 p/a via service charge
Vehicle Provision	Provision of a vehicle for caretaker role in rental fees during wait period. This vehicle would also need adding to vehicle replacement programme.	£32,560

Staff Upskilling – see follow up note on caretaker role	Training and qualifications in required compliance, health and safety and health and hygiene.	£1,000
Clean and Clear Cover	When the caretaker is on leave/absence provision has been secured via Corporate Property Cleaning contract	tbc

4.4 The Alexander Lodge project is set to be delivered within budget and timescales.

Category	Total Budget	Spend to Date	Committed Spend	Total Spend	Available
Construction	3,899,958	3,817,818	73,806	3,891,624	8,335
Professional Fees	237,000	225,235	11,290	236,525	475
Fit Out	12,896	23	12,148	12,171	724
Corporate Property Fees	10,000	1,748	6,000	7,748	2,252
Legal Fees	146	146	0	146	0
	<b>4,160,000</b>	<b>4,044,970</b>	<b>103,244</b>	<b>4,148,214</b>	<b>11,786</b>

## 5.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

### Financial Implications (FIN23/24/6959)

- 5.1 The Capital budget of £4.160m is sufficient to complete the building and fit it out, as per the table at 4.4, albeit the table includes some estimates as final invoices are still to be received.
- 5.2 Financing of the scheme is due to be £3.310m borrowing and £0.850m contribution from the homelessness reserve.
- 5.3 A summary of the table at 4.3 between capital and revenue is shown below:

Item	Capital	Revenue	Comments
Accommodation Units Fixtures and Fittings	39,959		Included in Capital Budget
Window Coverings	11,620		Additional item can be contained in existing Capital budget
Vehicle Provision	30,000		Additional item Capital (also see below revenue)
<b>Sub Total to added to the Capital Budget</b>	<b>81,879</b>		
CCTV		5,971	One off cost to be funded from Homelessness Reserve
Community Centre Desk Top Kiosks		3,062	One off cost to be funded from Homelessness Reserve

Soft/Extra Furnishings		8,000	One off cost to be funded from Homelessness Reserve
<b>Sub Total to be funded from Homelessness Reserve</b>		<b>17,033</b>	
Internet for office/site use		4,544	Additional cost
Laundry		5,016	Included in budget from 2024/25
Educational Offer	-	-	No costs associated with this
Solar Panel Dongle		75	Additional cost
APEX Annual Licences		300	Additional item
Vehicle Provision		17,560	Additional item prior to capital purchase – hire costs due to lead in time from order.
Staff Upskilling – see follow up note on caretaker role		1,000	Additional item
Caretaker		28,195	£60,000 included in the 24/25 budget
<b>Sub Total Revenue</b>		<b>28,195</b>	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>81,879</b>	<b>45,228</b>	

5.4 As per the table above, a further transfer from the Homelessness Reserve is required of £17,033 to revenue for the one-off items. Any replacement of these items will be included in a Repairs and Renewals Programme.

5.5 During the budget process for 2024/25 onwards, following review of the community plan, a budget of £60,000 was included for the caretaker and the running costs of a vehicle. Following the job description being written, it is now expected that the costs associated with the caretaker will not be as high as originally estimated. As a result of this, the revenue costs totalling £28,195 in the table above can be contained within the budget requested for 2024/25 due to be presented to Cabinet in February.

5.6 The new vehicle is an additional item that needs to be added into the vehicle replacement programme. This can be done via the Capital Budget report due to go to Cabinet for approval in February 2024.

### **Digital and Cyber Security and Data Protection Implications**

5.7 Include in this report in sections 3.7, 3.12 and 4.3 are details pertaining to the digital offer at Alexander Lodge. The office will be kitted out with touch down/docking equipment so that all staff can use this when needed. The community centre will be fitted with suitable customer-based equipment and there is an ongoing piece of work with ICT to make either hot spots or mobile data available to residents who need internet access, which could include access to free data as part of ICT Digital Inclusion programme.



### **Equalities Implications**

- 5.8 Protected Characteristics have been taken account of when constructing Alexander Lodge and its wider service provision. It should be noted that Alexander Lodge does provide an accessible entrance, community space, level access to all ground floor units and has two DDA compliant units, including appropriate turning circles and wet rooms. As mentioned in 3.12 above the community centre also has a shower/wet room with accessible toilet which will be utilised by identified rough sleepers and is an option for staff to consider for tenants who are experiencing difficulties in their homes and need access to suitable facilities such as but not limited to hospital discharge cases who need level access facilities whilst they wait for social care/DFG alternations and adaptations.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.