

Report of: Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager

Title: Simon House Major Project Approval

Ward: Carfax

Report author: Nerys Parry
Contact Tel No: 01865 252825
E-mail address: nparry@oxford.gov.uk

Key Decision: Yes

Lead Member: Councillor Ed Turner

Scrutiny responsibility: Housing

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board agrees to:

1. Grant Major Project Approval under Section 2.11 of the Financial Regulations for the refurbishment of Simon House.
2. Approve the Capital Spend of £1.2million over 05/06 and 06/07 which was successfully awarded to Oxford City Council through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Hostel Improvement Programme.

1. Summary

Simon House, a 51-bed homeless hostel is about to undergo a full refurbishment with a grant of £1.2million allocated through the ODPM's Hostel Improvement Programme. This report seeks major project approval and outlines the refurbishment plans as well as the decant arrangements.

2. How does it fit in with the Council's Vision and strategic aims?

This will help deliver the Council's vision in terms of enhancing community safety, by providing better quality hostel accommodation which will provide people with an environment where they can address their issues and learn the basic skills needed to return to independent living.

It is also linked to the Council's vision of "Creating Local Prosperity and sustaining full employment"

3. Background and context

- 3.1 Simon House is a homeless hostel, providing accommodation and support to rough sleepers and single homeless people in Oxford City, in a “dry” and “clean” environment for those detoxing or abstaining from drink and drugs. The service provides 51 rooms with shared facilities. The facility is open to men and women over 18 years old and they are provided with a full meal service throughout the day and a resident key worker. Six registered care beds are contained within the 51-bed portfolio, providing high levels of support on a contractual basis.
- 3.2 The service has traditionally, like many homeless hostels in the UK, acted as a “warehouse” with very little expectations or hope instilled in the clients.
- 3.3 OCC owns the freehold of the site and leases the building to Cherwell Housing Trust for the purpose of housing single homeless people. The land that the building’s footprint rests on is covenanted for “under privileged persons” on a 99-year lease that commenced in 1981.
- 3.4 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) have made a commitment to radically improve the general standard of hostel provision across England.
- 3.5 This tranche of funding from the Homelessness Directorate, approved by EB on 10th January 2005 and full Council on 24th January, 2005, is to enable Oxford to continue its programme of improving the standards and services of its hostel provision.
- 3.6 With an injection of £1.2 million capital it is expected that Simon House will become a centre of excellence where people can stabilise, address their issues and be provided with a range of skills to enable them to move on to independent living and back into mainstream society.
- 3.7 The significantly improved service and building will include 51 en-suite bedrooms in cluster arrangements, more interview rooms, training facilities and a library, better staff facilities, improved kitchen, dining and garden area.
- 3.8 An additional bid for £115k has been submitted to the ODPM to build a trade workshop in Simon House where clients will follow courses in bricklaying, plumbing etc, enhancing their opportunities to return to work. This will be in partnership with the Oxford and Cherwell College of Further Education.
- 3.9 The entire programme is managed by a team of people from Oxford City Council, Simon House and Dominion Housing Group and lead and overseen by a senior consultant employed by Dominion Housing from Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP. It is expected that the work will commence

on-site towards the middle of October 2005 with a guaranteed finish date of the end of April 2006.

3.10 Decant Arrangement

Dominion Housing Group (DHG) need to temporarily decant residents from Simon House for the period of the refurbishment work. A number of options have been considered based on the following criteria:

- A City Centre location is not essential
- The temporary accommodation should be laid out to allow existing services to be delivered to residents as far as possible
- The accommodation must be available for Simon House to be decanted by early October.

The options which have been considered are:

- **Do nothing**

The hostel service could be shut down for the 6 months of the works but this would put huge pressure on the remaining City Centre hostel and increase substantially the number of rough sleepers.

- **Temporary accommodation on vacant land**

The Albion Place car park is vacant following its use as the temporary Nightshelter and could be used to site a temporary building. However, this would cost in the region of £150k to hire and planning consent would not be granted before the deadline for works to start in October.

- **Market acquisition**

DHG have enquired about properties with local agents which could be acquired on the open market but have been unable to find suitable ones in terms of size and layout. They have recently acquired three large properties from the University in Iffley Road but they are in poor condition, as well as needing conversion work to make them useable. These properties would not be available until well after the October deadline for works to start.

- **OCC Hostels**

A cluster arrangement is thought to be the best arrangement in terms of continuing to provide the appropriate support to residents and managing with the existing staffing structure, and this could be provided by using some of the Council's hostel properties which are surplus to requirements. Financial and Asset Management and Housing Services have agreed that it is feasible for Dominion Housing Group (DHG) to lease 5 of the properties.

The five hostels to be used are all of the Iffley Road properties and the Bullingdon Road property. There is a report elsewhere on the agenda regarding the use and lease of 5 OCC properties in the Iffley Road area for the decant of Simon House residents

Simon House expect to continue to provide a similar service during the decant period, and will continue to take referrals into the hostel. The Decant Sub-Group (part of the Project Management Group) are looking at arrangements for the period Simon House is decanted, with regards to scheduling the decanting of residents, provision of food to residents and staffing arrangements.

The accommodation and referral procedures will remain the same during the decant but there might be some changes to extra-curricular activities, given the layout of the buildings. It had been agreed that hostel staff will be located on-site, to the rear of one of the larger properties along with catering facilities including a kitchen and a small dining room for residents.

One expected change to the service is that the 6 registered beds will not be provided by DHG during the decanting period, as the rooms do not meet the required standards in terms of disabled access. These residents will be decanted to suitable alternative properties. It is expected that DHG will continue to provide 4 respite beds during the decant period.

The Decant Sub-group are considering site security in more detail, although CCTV has been included in the costs of the decanting. It is expected that the Manager of Simon House will write to the local community, liaise with neighbours, local Councillors and attend Residents' Associations to address any issues that may arise within the local community.

4. Response to Forward Plan consultation (if key decision)

Published in the Forward Plan in accordance with the general exception procedure. No response has been received to date.

5. Financial implications

The total project cost is £1.2 million, broken down into £630k for 05/06 and £570k for 06/07. The project is entirely funded through the ODPM's Hostel Improvement Grants Programme. In the event of slippage on completion, the funding is not at risk as the allocation is over two years.

The scheme received a PIR score of 57 from the PIR group on 13th May 2005.

There are no revenue implications to the project during the decant or when returning to the refurbished building. The revenue budget for Simon House will continue to be administered and monitored by Supporting People.

There is no financial risk to Oxford City Council as any overspend is the responsibility of Dominion Housing Group.

6. Legal implications

Major project approval is a requirement of the Council's Financial Procedure Rules. The Council will need to comply with any grant conditions and procure the works in accordance with the law.

7. Staffing Implications

There are no other staffing implications for the Council arising from this report.

8. Other possible means of achieving the objectives

The allocation from the ODPM's capital programme was for upgrading hostels that already exist. Therefore, this is a bespoke service that no other provider would be able to deliver.

9. The timetable for action following the decision

Simon House will be fully decanted to Iffley Road properties by the beginning of October 2005. Refurbishment work will start towards the middle of October with a guaranteed finish date of the end of April, to coincide with the sale of the Iffley Road properties by Oxford City Council to investor developers.

10. List of appendices

None

<p>THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY: Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ed Turner Business Unit Manager: Val Johnson Legal and Democratic Services: Jeremy Thomas Financial Management: Emma Burson</p>
--

There are no background papers