

To: Housing Panel

Date: 9th March 2016

Report of: Head of Housing and Property services

Title of Report: Tower Project update

Summary

Purpose of report: To update the Panel on progress with the City Tower Block Refurbishment Project

Key decision: No

Executive lead member: Councillor Mike Rowley

Report author: Jack Bradley, Tower Project Lead

Policy Framework: Meeting Housing Need

Appendices to report – none

Background

1. The Panel has requested a report to update them on progress with the City tower block refurbishment project.
2. In July 2015, Members approved a budget of £20.108m, funded from within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital programme to repair and enhance the five high rise residential towers in Oxford.
3. The works generally include structural repairs, external wall insulation, new external windows and doors, new external cladding, new flat ventilation, new flat sprinkler systems, communal fire detection systems, communal lighting, lift refurbishment, external entrance improvements (including enhanced waste and recycling facilities, cycle racks and improved security) and new heating systems to all tenanted flats (Lessees have an optional buy-in).

4. The key targets of the project are
 - To extend the life of the Towers by at least 30 years.
 - To provide thermal performance of the flats 10% above current building regulation requirements
 - To provide ventilation to meet current building regulation requirements
 - To provide an 11, 17 and 30 point SAP (energy performance rating) improvement for ground, mid and top floor flats respectively.
 - To provide all key construction elements at a minimum level of BRE Green Guide A rating.
 - To provide the Oxford Living Wage to all contractor staff
 - To provide local apprentices
 - To provide local jobs
 - To spend 70% of the contract on local subcontractors and/or labour.

5. The Council continues to engage Arcadis (recently re-branded from EC Harris) as Project Managers along with their appointed sub-consultants for design (BM3), Civil and Mechanical Engineering (Rolton Group). Appointment is retained until the end of the defect liability period (December 2018) to support the Council in ensuring the contractor delivers the requirements of the performance specification.

Contractor Appointment and Design

6. In July 2015, David Edwards, Executive Director of Regeneration and Housing, approved the appointment of Willmott Dixon Energy Services Limited (WDES) to undertake the works

7. In November 2015, WDES were formally engaged to deliver the works on a design and build contract.

8. Following approval of WDES as the principal contractor, the contractors design and delivery team have developed their designs, engaged sub-contractors to enable their supply chain and undertaken on-site assessment and investigations to better inform the design.

9. WDES have coordinated closely with various Council groups and departments including (but not limited to) Tenancy Management, Tenant Involvement, Building Design & Construction, Direct Services, Communications, Planning, Building Control, Parks, Waste and Recycling etc.

10. Externally, WDES have continued the Council's engagement with the County Fire Authority, Police Authority, Head Lessee's (New River at Hockmore Tower) and Oxford Colleges.

11. WDES as part of their Social commitment have entered in to partnership with the City of Oxford College and are engaging with

Community Services to ensure their commitments to Social Value are delivered.

12. The Council's project team has been re-structured to better reflect WDES's delivery of the scheme; coordination concerning design, communication, finance and delivery has and continues to progress to ensure the Council's targets are achieved.
13. The delivery programme has been refined to reflect contractor resources and manage disruption to residents.

Delivery

14. Works are due to commence on the first Tower, Evenlode in Blackbird Leys, on the 8th March 2016. Works to the other tower will commence in:
 - May 2016 for Windrush Tower
 - July 2016 for Hockmore Tower
 - August 2016 for Foresters Tower
 - December 2016 for Plowman Tower
15. Works at each tower will take approximately 52 weeks.
16. The Council's contact centre is receiving regular updates on forthcoming weeks work; the same information is available of the Tower Project web page (Council web site) and will be printed on posters in the Tower Blocks.
17. WDES have dedicated community support officers (CSO's) at each tower who will be the contact for all residents of that tower and manage all access arrangements, resident queries and coordination.

Leaseholders

18. Of the 346 flats across the five high rise blocks, 49 are owned by Leaseholders.
19. In addition to resident consultation and engagement with all Tower residents and the local community since 2014, Leaseholder have been formally engaged and consulted under the requirements of the Landlord and Tenant Act.
20. Following statutory consultation through 2015, in January 2016, Leaseholders were advised of the Council's intention to undertake works and recover £48-53,500 from each Leaseholder.
21. The Council is voluntarily applying to the First Tier Tribunal to independently verify that recoverable charges and works are reasonable and in line with the terms of the lease agreements. Leaseholders will be invited to make their own statement at Tribunal.

22. A number of Leaseholders have recently formed an association to collectively comment and coordinate responses.
23. The Council has recently received negative press concerning proposed demands however the Authority is obliged to re-claim monies in line with the lease agreement and is being open and transparent in its calculation and comments

Finance

24. WDES and external consultants have provided expenditure profiles for the duration of the project and Financial Services have confirmed that the profile spend is affordable in the forthcoming annual expenditure.
25. Expenditure will be tracked monthly. As the project is based on a fixed prices sum, costs should not vary.

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List of background papers: *none*

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