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Meeting	Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	20 March 2013
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Barbara Langstone House</b>
Report of	Director for Place
Summary	This report provides information on the closure of Barbara Langstone House as accommodation used by the council for homeless people, and arrangements for providing alternative housing and ongoing support for residents of the scheme.

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Officer Contributors	Pam Wharfe – Director for Place Laura Davison - Project Manager, Barnet Homes Paul Shipway – Head of Strategy and Performance
Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards Affected	All
Key Decision	No
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in	Not Applicable
Enclosures	None.
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## **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 That the committee note and make appropriate comments on the the report which sets out the closure of Barbara Langstone House and the decanting of residents to alternative temporary accommodation.**

## **2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS**

- 2.1 Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 12 December 2012, (Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme) – the Committee requested to receive a report on Barbara Langstone House (BLH) to outline the closure of the hostel and details of pathways for residents.

## **3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate priority to provide better services with less money will be met, as better outcomes will be delivered for housing applicants in dispersed accommodation with support provided through an additional floating support resource funding through savings resulting from the closure of Barbara Langstone House.

## **4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

- 4.1 Risks have been identified and managed as the project has progressed. All risks are reviewed and updated on a fortnightly basis. There is currently a risk that those placed in dispersed temporary accommodation after leaving Barbara Langstone House, particularly young and vulnerable residents, will not receive appropriate long term support. The Youth Mediation Coordinator and Outreach Barnet will provide support in the short term. Longer term support needs will be addressed through the proposed appointment of two floating support posts that will support young people and vulnerable adults in dispersed temporary accommodation.

## **5. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 5.1 There is a high level of vulnerability amongst the residents of Barbara Langstone House due to the age and disability profile of the clients. A significant number of both young people and people with disabilities, particularly those with mental health issues, reside there. Careful and close consideration of these vulnerabilities has been central to the decanting of residents, in order to minimise adverse impacts such as anxiety and stress for residents and ensure that suitable move on options have been provided.
- 5.2 In finding suitable alternative accommodation the Council complied with its equality duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010 at section 7 below.

## **6. USE OF RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (Finance, Procurement, Performance & Value for Money, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

- 6.1 The closure of BLH will generate £400,000 General Fund per annum savings from April 2013. It is likely that at least £50,000 of these savings will be used to offset some of the decommissioning costs.
- 6.2 It is proposed that £90,000 of the savings is used to fund two Support Worker posts to provide floating support to young people and vulnerable adults in dispersed temporary accommodation. These roles will provide young people and vulnerable adults with ongoing support and work with clients to develop pathways out of temporary accommodation. Tenancy sustainability will also be covered within the support to help prepare the clients for the time when they are able to move into more settled accommodation. Clear outcomes are anticipated and will be measured, from the funding of such posts. These include a reduction in the average time spent on temporary accommodation by younger people and vulnerable adults, lower rent arrears and better signposting to appropriate pathways.

## **7. LEGAL ISSUES**

- 7.1 Full vacant possession must be achieved by no later than the day of the contractual lease expiry (26<sup>th</sup> March 2013).
- 7.2 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 lays down a public sector duty, pursuant to which the council must have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation prohibited under the Act;
  - Advance equality of opportunity between those with protected characteristics and those without;
  - Foster good relations between those with protected characteristics and those without.

The protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; religion or belief; and sex and sexual orientation.

Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others, but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under the Act.

## **8. CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS (Relevant section from the Constitution, Key/Non-Key Decision)**

- 8.1 The scope of Overview and Scrutiny Committees is contained within Part 2, Article 6 of the Constitution
- 8.2 The terms of Reference of the Scrutiny Committees are in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Part 4 of the Constitution). The Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee has within its terms of reference the following responsibilities:

- To scrutinise the Council and its partners in the discharge of statutory duties in relation to safeguarding.
- To scrutinise the provision of education (children and adults), special educational needs provision, and the protection and welfare of children.

## **9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **9.1 Project background and objectives**

Barbara Langstone House (BLH) in Ballards Lane has provided Housing Options with 81 units used as temporary accommodation since 2003, predominantly for young people but also some families. The hostel has on site staff (a manager and two caretakers) and 24/7 close protection security. In addition over the past two years there has been some additional on site support for the client group from Outreach Barnet, Youth Support Services and the Housing Options Service.

9.2 The lease for BLH expires at the end of March 2013 and is not going to be renewed by the landlord, who has indicated that they intend to use the property for residential purposes. A project commenced in November 2012 to decant the building. As well as returning BLH with vacant possession, resolving all outstanding repair issues, exiting associated contracts and consulting with BLH based staff at risk of redundancy before the lease expires on March 26<sup>th</sup>, the other key project objectives are to:

- Move all residents from BLH to alternative accommodation that meets their housing and support needs;
- Keep residents well informed during this period to allay any fears they may have about moving on;
- Identify the provision of floating support for young people and other vulnerable residents in dispersed temporary accommodation.

9.3 The vulnerable nature of the client group at BLH has presented significant challenges but close working between Social Services, Mental Health Services and Barnet Homes has enabled good progress with positive outcomes for the residents. The learning from the project particularly around how to work more effectively with the client groups has been captured.

### **9.4 Decant progress**

The decant of residents to suitable alternative accommodation is progressing as planned. The first decant target date of February 4<sup>th</sup> 2013 to clear the top two floors was met. Residents with particularly complex needs have been prioritised so that sufficient time is dedicated to identifying suitable move on options for them. As of March 4<sup>th</sup> 68 units of the building are empty with 13 residents still waiting to be moved.

9.5 Communication with residents of BLH has been ongoing. As well as written information, well publicised weekly surgeries were held on site at Barbara Langstone House in the lead up to Christmas to answer any queries, offer any reassurance required and to discuss move on options. Since the beginning of

January 2013 Barnet Homes Housing Options Service has had an even stronger onsite presence to assist residents with their moving, which has also helped to alleviate concerns.

9.6 **Moving residents to accommodation that meets their needs**

At the very start of the project comprehensive information was collated about each resident's up to date housing requirements and support needs. This was achieved through a variety of means including gathering information from the residents themselves, BLH based staff and those providing support to the residents; working with Mental Health and Adult Social Services to see what further information they held on those that had engaged with them; and new assessments by the Medical Team from Housing Options.

9.7 Move on options have varied depending on the needs of the residents, their priority banding and whether tenancy sustainment issues have been identified. Rent arrears have been closely reviewed and members of the Rental Income Team are fully engaged with the project. Weekly surgeries, close working with Support Workers and the provision of advice and assistance such as helping secure Housing Benefit back payments has seen the Rental Income Team collect more than £10,000 of arrears from BLH since December.

9.8 To ensure that the right housing options are identified, a single dedicated team within Barnet Homes is coordinating all resident moves from BLH – be that through successfully nominating residents to longer term accommodation or working with the Property Management Team to identify suitable alternative temporary accommodation. This has enabled a consistent approach to be taken with all moves, making sure that the requirements of the Allocations Scheme are met and support needs are identified and addressed.

9.9 Residents have moved to a mix of longer term, temporary and supported accommodation. Two young residents with extremely complex needs have opted to move in with relatives. Due to the vulnerable nature of the client group, many of whom are engaged in local support and health services, a high proportion of residents have been provided with alternative accommodation within the Borough of Barnet. This will enable their support from local services and organisations to continue. The breakdown of types of accommodation that residents have moved to so far is provided below:

<b>Accommodation Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
2 Year Flexi	5
5 Year Flexi	3
Secure tenancy	2
Supported housing	6
Respite care	1
Friends/ family	4
Non-secure long-term TA	12
Short term TA	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>

- 9.10 The majority of moves to short term temporary accommodation have involved tenants with rent arrears which need to be addressed before they can be moved to a more secure home. In most cases, this will mean that the tenant must agree a plan to pay off the arrears and demonstrate that they can keep to this. Support provided by Outreach Barnet and the Youth Mediation Coordinator will help ensure that arrears agreements are maintained and appropriate move on options identified. Assessments have been carried out of these residents and the short term accommodation meets their needs and support has been provided as necessary.
- 9.11 Younger residents have been supported with their move from BLH through a variety of means to date:
- Advice and assistance from the Youth Mediation Coordinator in considering options, especially that of supported housing;
  - Assistance from Youth Support Services, including a Targeted Youth Support Worker;
  - Three referrals to the Safestart Foyer;
  - Two referrals to Adamson Court;
  - A sign up to the pilot 'Get Real Project' flat.
- 9.12 Only one of the BLH residents was a care leaver who has been provided with temporary accommodation within walking distance of their college whilst more settled accommodation in the area can be found.
- 9.13 There are a considerable number of vulnerable adults residing at BLH, many of whom have complex mental health issues. This provided a significant challenge for the project team in terms of engagement and move on options. Many of the residents with more complex needs had received little or no further contact from the Housing Needs Team since their move to BLH. Joined up working has been essential to enabling these residents to move on from BLH. Support has included:
- The involvement of the Right to Control team;
  - Arrangement of private and assisted viewings of properties to minimise stress to residents;
  - Working closely and jointly with the relevant Social Worker, Support Worker and/or Care Coordinators and Outreach Barnet, as well as family and friends of the resident;
  - Assisting residents with their move by providing taxis and furniture and accompanying them to their sign-up.
- 9.14 This approach has yielded some very positive results for these residents. One resident with complex mental health issues had lived at BLH for almost a year. He was no longer formally engaged with Mental Health Services and seemingly would not engage with any other means of support. He was very fearful of leaving BLH and in addition had a small amount of rent arrears that potentially prevented him from being nominated for more settled accommodation. This resident was flagged as a priority complex case and the Right to Control Officer was appointed to lead on his case. Within just a few weeks of the Right to Control Officer and additionally the Rental Income team becoming involved with the resident, his arrears had been cleared and he had

been housed in a housing association home near his mother. The day after his move the mother fed back her gratitude to the people that had helped with the customer's move. She reported that he had seemed very happy that day.

9.15 **Support for residents who have moved on**

BLH residents previously received support from on site staff. Discontinuing support once residents are moved on from BLH and placed in dispersed accommodation will put them at risk of limiting their future housing options and struggling to move on from temporary accommodation, as well as increasing the risk of safeguarding issues. The Adult Social Care commissioning team has asserted that the BLH decant is a key priority for the team and thus has committed that Outreach Barnet will provide short term floating support for fifty of the former residents. Younger clients will be supported by Barnet Homes' temporary Youth Homelessness Officer. A planned approach to initial assessments is taking place although more urgent referrals can and have also been made if they are needed. A more sustainable support role for this client group is clearly required. Proposals are currently being prepared for two Support Worker posts, as described in paragraph 6.3, which will help to address this need.

**10. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 None

<b>Cleared by Finance (Officer's initials)</b>	<b>JH/MC</b>
<b>Cleared by Legal (Officer's initials)</b>	<b>LC/JK</b>