

# **Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 12 July 2022**

**Portfolio: Housing & Community Services  
Councillor Holly Whitbread**

**Subject: Sheltered Housing Refurbishment Programme**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- 1. The successful refurbishment of Frank Bretton House, Sheltered Housing Scheme be noted.**
- 2. It is recommended that approval be given to the continuation of the sheltered housing refurbishment program undertaking refurbishments at one to two sheltered schemes a year until complete.**
- 3. It be noted that sheltered housing refurbishments are eligible for Housing Benefit, the Council fund the scheme upfront with money from the HRA. A new component is added to the service charge which has been accounted for in the HRA business plan.**

## **Report:**

1. Following the successful refurbishment of Frank Bretton House, sheltered housing scheme, member approval is being sought to continue the refurbishment program at other sheltered schemes undertaking one or two refurbishments a year in order to define interior design standards for the communal areas that meet the aspirations and expectations of our growing older population, making best use of the Council's housing stock, making them feel modern, welcoming and improve desirability.

2. Epping Forest District Council invited ARK to undertake a review of its sheltered housing. The principal focus of this assignment was to review the performance and sustainability of the Council's sheltered housing schemes. As a result of the review ARK made several recommendations one of which was to modernise the communal areas of the Council's sheltered housing schemes to create modern and sustainable housing stock.

3. At the Cabinet meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021, Members approved a pilot refurbishment scheme at Frank Bretton House working with Buckingham Interiors who are part of FRC Group a registered social enterprise and charity. Residents were consulted on three different mood boards which contained samples of fabric, curtaining, carpet etc. They were also able to try various seating and give their views on their preferred choice of colour scheme. Work began around August with EFDC undertaking the decoration of the scheme based on the specification of colours provided by Buckingham Interiors design team. The colour scheme on the ground floor varies to the first floor making the building dementia friendly. Residents were kept up to date throughout the work. The pilot took 6 months to complete, this was slightly longer than expected due to delays in obtaining materials and furniture which was a result of the covid pandemic. When the work was complete a post work survey was undertaken. Of the

33 properties at the scheme, 20 returned the post work survey. Of those 20, 15 flats were happy with the refurbishment which equates to 75%. Three of the five properties were unhappy due to having to contribute to the cost of the work. Six properties felt that given the cost of the carpet, the quality was poor. The full results of the post work survey can be found at **appendix 1**. This being a pilot we learned a lot from resident's feedback including the order in which the work should be undertaken, consulting residents on the artwork for their scheme and their views on flooring. These comments will help improve the customer experience if approval is given to continue the refurbishment program. This refurbishment has transformed the scheme and overall residents are happy with the modern and warm feel of the building. Before and after pictures can be found in **appendix 2**.

#### **4. Funding the refurbishment**

The project was funded from the HRA and repayment from a new component added to residents rent accounts. This process will be applied to any future refurbishments with the money being paid back over a ten-year period. These refurbishments qualify for housing benefit subsidy, therefore, those tenants on housing benefit have the cost covered by their benefit entitlement. Those residents not in receipt of housing benefit do have to pay the new charge which will vary from scheme to scheme.

#### **5. Costings**

The cost of future refurbishments will be determined by the footprint of the scheme for flooring, the number of windows to be dressed and both the number of rooms to be furnished and the level of furnishings / artwork etc. to be provided. The cost for Frank Bretton House was £115,810.14 broken down to:

Furniture, Artwork, signs and accessories	£38,314.75
Carpet	£66,126.67
Window Coverings	£11,368.72

In terms of the service charge costs, it is likely to be in the region of £5 - £10 per week depending of the size of the scheme. The service charge for Frank Bretton was £7.77 per week.

The scope of works includes interior design, which includes paint colours, flooring finishes, window coverings, furniture, artwork etc. This is suited to communal spaces for older people's housing, is fresh and modern, is compliant with fire regulations and compliant with the specification of fit for purpose products e.g. non slip flooring surfaces, safety glazed artwork, furniture styles which aid mobility, antimicrobial fabrics, medium risk settings fire compliant fabrics and upholstery foams (i.e. higher level of fire retardancy than required in domestic settings), and aids safe use of spaces by people who may be experiencing visual impairment and early stages of dementia.

As with Frank Bretton House, the continuation of these refurbishments will be led by a Business Development Manager from Buckingham interior who will coordinate all elements of the work and be on hand to work with the EFDC team throughout the planning, implementation and review processes. Installation work is all carried out by specialist installers, coordinated by a dedicated Project Manager. There is also a full aftercare service which includes advice on care, cleaning, maintenance and registration of warranties.

#### **Reason for decision:**

Members are being asked to approve the refurbishment of our sheltered housing schemes because this was one of the recommendations from ARK's sheltered housing review which was undertaken during 2019-20 and their more recent review in March 2022. The report highlighted the need to define interior design standards for communal areas of our sheltered

schemes in order to make them sustainable and desirable to an ageing population.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Officers considered whether to carry out a smaller scale upgrade, however this was rejected due to the long-term implications and properties in sheltered schemes being difficult to let.

**Consultation undertaken:**

Buckingham interiors will be supporting our officers to consult with the residents from the onset of each refurbishment on colours and styles. Residents will also be able to try out the chairs and furniture being considered for their scheme and a post work survey is undertaken after each refurbishment to monitor customer satisfaction.

**Resource implications:**

It is proposed that 1 or 2 sheltered housing schemes are renovated each year. The cost to the Council would be the internal decorations of the sheltered schemes for which there is existing budget provision.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

Buckingham Interiors are on a number of frameworks and officers have consulted with the procurement team to ensure the policy requirements are met.

**Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:**

The furniture provided by Buckingham Interiors is manufactured in the UK. In addition, support would be given to help us put to good use, our old furniture, either by donating it to local good causes such as the re-use scheme or recycling it through FRC Groups recycling scheme.

**Background Papers:**

C-001-2021-22 - Report to Cabinet 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021

**Risk Management**

Should the project not go ahead there is a risk that properties within our sheltered schemes will become more difficult to let resulting in rent loss.

**Equalities:**

No impact identified