

This report is public	
Temporary Accommodation Provision	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	2 December 2024
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Housing – Councillor Nick Cotter
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	6 November 2024
Report of	Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing – Nicola Riley

Purpose of report

To propose the utilisation of 15 rooms at Whately Hall, Banbury for use as temporary accommodation, continuing the current provision

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To approve the extension of the continuous booking of 15 rooms at the Whately Hall for use as temporary accommodation until the end of the financial year.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 As part of meeting our statutory duties in relation to homelessness and temporary accommodation, and in response to rising demand, the Council made a block booking at the Whately Hall, Banbury, to help manage the increased demand. This initially commenced in August 2024 for an intended period of 3 months pending the availability of Town Centre House, Banbury. A decision is required to extend this arrangement due to the cost exceeding Officer delegation
- 2.2 In the long term, the Council owned block at Town Centre House Banbury will be used, in part, for housing 24 households in temporary accommodation. The Whately Hall provision has been used to assist the Council provide for its temporary accommodation commitments pending Town Centre House becoming available.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	To extend the block booking further, approval is required to draw on reserves to fund the extension.

	Also, if the contract is to be extended further it is recommended that a more robust procurement exercise take place. Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 14 October 2024			
Legal	It is necessary that a procurement strategy is developed for this type of provision, where the Council is procuring accommodation as a services model. This has substantial cost exposure for the Council and should be carried out within the procurement framework to obtain best value as well as compliance with the applicable regulations. It is noted that the Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation and is at risk of challenge. Procurement exercise needs to be commenced as soon as possible to ensure Council is complying with both its constitution and procurement regulations. Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director - Law and Governance, 24 October 2024			
Risk Management	There are no risk implications arising directly from this report. The proposal mitigates the risk of failing on the delivery of our statutory duties in relation to homelessness and temporary accommodation. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 10 October 2024			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact		x		Not applicable
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		Neutral
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		Neutral
Climate & Environmental Impact	x			Moving residents regularly to a variety of different placements in different areas would increase our environmental impact due to taxi or other car journeys increasing.
ICT & Digital Impact		x		Not applicable
Data Impact		x		Not applicable
Procurement & subsidy		x		Not applicable

Council Priorities	Housing that meets your needs
Human Resources	Not applicable
Property	Not applicable
Consultation & Engagement	None

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council has a mixed temporary accommodation offering, comprising an agreement for lease of the accommodation next to the Musketeer Pub and an agreement with Sanctuary Housing to provide a number of units through stock it owns and manages. In the last year, temporary accommodation usage has more than doubled and thus exceeded these provisions. This is part of a national trend of rising homelessness and rough sleeping that is linked to many wider factors that are affecting Cherwell.
- 3.2 As a result, the Council has been working to secure more units of temporary accommodation that do not require hotel usage, which is costly, unsuitable for families and can be unpopular with applicants. The Council has done this through utilising some of its own housing stock for temporary accommodation, repurposing 12 units thus far. The Council also intends to use 24 units at Town Centre House when they become available at the beginning of 2025. Additionally, it has entered into new partnerships with South Oxfordshire Housing Association and Sanctuary Housing to bring forward more temporary self-contained housing. Despite these steps, hotel usage has increased as units that the Council has and is sourcing through these arrangements are not all immediately available.
- 3.3 The Council has used commercial hotels to meet the rise in demand. The number of bookings and households has meant that clients earlier this year were experiencing interruptions and changes in bookings due to local commercial demand. This meant applicants being moved multiple times and often moved out of the Cherwell area due to no placements being available. This can increase the stress of homelessness for the residents we are working with. The Council also does not receive competitive rates from commercial providers and prices have tended to increase for nightly charged accommodation when a booking is required at short notice, particularly on weekends. The amount the Council can claim back through Housing Benefit following a placement remains static, therefore the financial demand of a more expensive placements is met by Council budgets.
- 3.4 The Council explored with commercial providers of accommodation in Banbury and surrounds the ability or willingness to enter into a block booking to assist in managing the growing temporary accommodation client base until Town Centre House and other solutions became available, and whilst demand through the year could be further assessed. A solution was identified through the Whately Hall,

Banbury. A commercial hotel that was under-utilised through the commercial market. The Council was able to make a block booking at a fixed price. This offered improved value and service enhancements to the Council and clients. Firstly, many bookings made for homelessness clients requiring temporary accommodation can be at short notice, and a booking at the Whately Hall is around half the price when compared to a chain of commercial hotels operating locally, when booked for the same day. Rates are comparable on longer stays, but as outlined above, other providers approached were not willing to consider a block booking. The Whately Hall is close to facilities and services within Banbury and is therefore within the district area. This meant that applicants would not be moved multiple times at short notice and also reduces some associated costs, such as taxis.

- 3.5 Additionally, The Whately Hall offers benefits to residents beyond what may other providers of similar accommodation do. They provide residents with kitchen facilities to prepare basic meals and provide some basic kitchen supplies. They will also provide laundry services should they be required and provide access to an outside space within the grounds, which can be particularly beneficial to families.
- 3.6 The Council made the initial booking for a period of 3 months. It was expected that Town Centre House would become available at the conclusion of this period and residents placed could be transitioned into this accommodation, or moved to alternative accommodation within the temporary accommodation portfolio. The initial 3-month period would also enable the Council to assess the success of the arrangement should the Council's demand have continued to increase as it had done earlier this year.
- 3.7 Whilst the Council's demand for temporary accommodation has increased and continues to be high by its historic levels, however, the levels of increase that were seen in the early part of this year (quarter 4 23/24 and quarter 1 this year) have not continued at the same pace through the second and third quarter. Since April 2024, the Council has had an average of 68 households in temporary accommodation. The Councils Temporary Accommodation provisions are summarised in the table below.

Scheme	Number of units	Availability
Registered Provider managed accommodation	24	In use
Council managed units	12	In use
Musketeer	10	In use (Lease until September 2025)
Town Centre House	24	Early 2025
Other Registered Provider managed units	14	End of 2025
Other Council managed units	3	End of 2024
Total	87	

4. Details

- 4.1 The cost of the block booking of 15 rooms is around £33,000 a month. As outlined in the above section, the Council is able to make a Housing Benefit claim for applicants place that can reduce the cost by up to £7,700.
- 4.2 Extending would give the Council time to further assess its future needs and also assess its pipeline of properties that are intended to be used for temporary accommodation. This includes the future operation of 24 of the units at Town Centre House, Banbury, which will come back into operation in the coming months.
- 4.3 The Council has a homelessness prevention grant reserve, which is funding it has received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, will be used to meet the costs of the increased demand in year. The table below shows the financial implications of the report in more detail.

Total Council core budget for Temporary Accommodation 2024-25	£206,000 (£76,000 + £130,000 Musketeer Lease)
Total spent on Temporary Accommodation Year to Date (October 24)	£303,075
Homelessness Prevention Grant Received 2024-25	-£763,348
Homelessness Prevention Grant assigned for Temporary Accommodation 2024-25	£171,161
Income received from charges (October 24)	-£146,579
Total remaining in homelessness grant reserve (October 24)	£446,004

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To end the arrangement with the Whately Hall and end block bookings

This is an option. It would however not lead to an overall reduction in hotel placements. It would also mean that the households currently placed in the 15 rooms would require immediate rehousing in establishments that are not identified and would have to be sourced within the commercial hotel market. It would also not allow time for other options to become available. This is rejected.

Option 2: To end the arrangement with the Whately Hall and explore alternative options for a block booking.

The Council has explored making a block booking with commercial hotels within the last 3 months. The offer at the Whately Hall is considered favourably for the reasons outlined in the report. A wider procurement exercise could take place to ensure that the Council is certain it is receiving best value. Due to the fact that residents are placed at the hotel currently and due to the other factors outlined in the report, this is rejected at this point, but will be reviewed again within the next 3 months following a review of demand and supply or temporary accommodation.

It is anticipated that Town Centre House will be available from February 2025, based on current demand levels being maintained, it is not anticipated that the provision at Whately Hall will be required when Town Centre House is available.

Option 3: End the arrangement with the Whately Hall and do nothing.

If the Council did nothing, 15 households would require immediate rehoming in alternative temporary accommodation. This is highly likely to be another hotel. Many of these households would be housed in other hotels within Cherwell, but depending on availability, some may have to be housed out of the area. The issues with this approach for the Council and the households within temporary accommodation are outlined within the background of the report

6. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 Extending the agreement with the Whately Hall would assist the Council in meeting the temporary accommodation responsibilities it has to homeless households until other options outlined within the report become available. Households are currently placed in the accommodation, so extending would give some certainty to those households in the short term regarding the location of their placement.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	Banbury Cross and Neithrop

Document Information

Appendices	None
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
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Corporate Director Approval (unless Corporate Director or Statutory Officer report)	Ian Boll, Corporate Director – Communities, 8 th November 2024