

FUTURE OF BROCKHILL

Executive Summary

At its meeting of 14 December 2023, the Executive agreed to commence consultation with residents, their families and other stakeholders on the proposed closure of Brockhill extra care housing scheme. Brockhill requires significant capital expenditure on fire safety remedial works and a full heating system replacement. The anticipated total capital expenditure required on Brockhill over the next 10 years is forecast to be circa £5.8 million. In addition, whilst Brockhill is a much valued and loved facility by residents, the design and layout of the building does not meet the current expectations for extra care housing as set out in Surrey County Council's Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy and national best practice. This level of capital investment is considered unviable for a building of this age and size.

This report provides an update on the results of the consultation and seeks approval to progress with the proposed closure.

The Council understands that this will be a difficult and upsetting time for people living and working at Brockhill, as well as their families. The Council is fully committed to supporting residents with identifying and moving to alternative accommodation based on their individual assessed needs and their preferences. This will continue to be done in close partnership with colleagues in Surrey County Council (SCC) Adult Social Care. The Council has already commissioned additional advocacy support (Citizens Advice Woking) and mental health support (Catalyst) to assist residents through this difficult period of change.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That

- (i) the closure of Brockhill Extra Care Housing be agreed;**
- (ii) the residents of Brockhill be offered suitable alternative accommodation which best meets their needs and preferences and be paid Statutory Home Loss and Disturbance payments, where eligible; and**
- (iii) authority be delegated to the Strategic Director - Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to make any further decisions required in respect of the closure.**

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To set out the future plans for Brockhill Extra Care Housing scheme and the support that will be available to impacted residents.

The item(s) above will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.

Background Papers: None.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Brockhill Extra Care Housing is a purpose-built two-storey scheme, constructed during the late 1980s. The scheme provides 48 extra care apartments over 2 floors, along with a communal lounge, dining room, kitchen and reception/staff/office areas. The Council provides a dedicated support team at Brockhill, whilst Surrey County Council commissions a care provider to provide individual care packages to residents who need it. The scheme is very popular with older residents in the Borough for its homely setting and operates with a waiting list.
- 1.2 Brockhill requires significant capital expenditure over the next 10 years which is forecast to be circa £5.8 million. This level of capital investment is considered unviable for a building of this age and size.
- 1.3 At its meeting of 14 December 2023, the Executive agreed to commence consultation with residents, their families and other stakeholders on the proposed closure of Brockhill.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on the results of the consultation and seeks approval to progress with the proposed closure.

2.0 Building Issues

- 2.1 Over the years, the structure of the building at Brockhill appears to have had limited investment with only some minor internal works undertaken. As a result of its age and lack of ongoing investment, the building needs major capital works over the next 2 years and beyond.
- 2.2 The communal boiler serving the scheme failed last December causing considerable inconvenience and discomfort to residents and staff. The communal boiler was found to be beyond repair. Furthermore, the heating infrastructure throughout the building is aged and in poor condition and the whole heating system requires upgrading and renewing. The scheme is currently being served by a temporary boiler, which is not a long-term solution.
- 2.3 In February 2023, the Council received an updated Fire Risk Assessment for the building that identified that significant improvements were needed, including replacing fire doors and frames and compartmentation works. The combination of the building defects and the vulnerability of the residents means there are high risks around the fire safety of the scheme. In order to mitigate these risks, the Council has implemented a number of interim measures, including introducing a Waking Watch, switching from a Stay Put to an Evacuation Policy, freezing new lettings and upgrading the fire detection system. Where possible, the Council has sought to relocate residents from the first floor to the ground floor to aid evacuation. Since December 2023, a team of evacuation officers has also been introduced to assist less mobile residents in the event of a fire occurring.
- 2.4 The combined cost of upgrading the heating system and fire safety remedial works is circa £2.75 million over the next year. The building is expected to require other planned works over the next 5 years, forecast at a further cost of circa £600,000.
- 2.5 Many other building elements are original and are deteriorating in accordance with their anticipated lifecycle expectancy. Over the next 5 -10 years, building components, such as, rainwater fittings, roofing, external joinery, paths/hardstanding, common electrical elements, and floor coverings, are expected to need investment. The anticipated total capital expenditure required on Brockhill over the next 10 years is forecast to be circa £5.8 million, including design and professional fees, inflation, preliminaries and contingency.
- 2.6 In July 2019, Surrey County Council (SCC) approved an Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy and committed to a major programme within the strategy to deliver 725 units of affordable Extra Care Housing for older people by 2030. Any decision around Brockhill will have implications for the delivery of this strategy, along with potentially placing additional cost

pressures on adult social care budgets. Accordingly, the Council initiated discussions with officers at SCC during the summer of 2023 regarding the future of Brockhill, which included a site inspection.

- 2.7 The engagement with SCC officers has been productive and positive, including validating the extent of the capital works required at Brockhill. In addition, whilst Brockhill is a much valued and loved facility by residents, the discussions concluded that the design and layout of the building does not meet the current expectations for extra care housing as set out in SCC's strategy and national best practice.
- 2.8 Sadly, all discussions and investigations point to the conclusion that the building is becoming obsolete with the level of capital investment required over the next 10 years being unviable (in the context of the age and size of the scheme).

3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 Under Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 the Council has a legal obligation to consult its secure tenants on 'matters of housing management' such as changes to the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of houses let by them, or changes in the provision of amenities.
- 3.2 A consultation with residents ran from 20 December 2023 to 22 January 2024. Residents were assisted by Brockhill staff to complete the consultation survey, along with advocacy support commissioned from Citizens Advice Woking (CAW). The survey sought views on the proposed closure and its impact on residents, along with seeking input on the type of accommodation and support residents would need with moving to a new home.
- 3.3 The Council received a total of 19 responses to the survey, representing 76% of the remaining residents living at Brockhill.
- 3.4 Respondents were asked to provide comments on the proposed closure of Brockhill. Generally, residents expressed their shock and upset at the news of the proposed closure. Some expressed their frustration that the building had not been maintained better over the years. However, some residents felt the proposed closure had opened up alternatives for them, such as, moving closer to relatives.
- 3.5 74% of respondents felt the proposed closure would impact them negatively. All respondents identified some downsides with a potential move, particularly the disruption, not wanting to move away from Goldsworth Park and being separated from friends at Brockhill.
- 3.6 However, 42% of respondents identified potential benefits to the proposed closure, particularly moving closer to family and wanting more modern facilities. Two residents felt they needed more care than Brockhill could offer them.
- 3.7 The majority of respondents would like to move to other extra care housing schemes in the Borough (i.e. Hale End Court). However, respondents were aware of the lack of available spaces. There was also interest in moving to residential care homes, extra care housing schemes in other areas and sheltered housing from some respondents.
- 3.8 All respondents indicated that they would need support to move, with packing and unpacking; removals and post redirection being the mostly frequently selected support needs.

4.0 Future of Brockhill

- 4.1 Determining a way forward for Brockhill is a sensitive issue. The Council has sought to be open and transparent and acknowledge that this a complex issue, which doesn't necessarily have an ideal solution. However, given the ongoing fire safety concerns, the future of Brockhill does need to be resolved swiftly and the residents provided with a clear direction.
- 4.2 Whilst the Council acknowledges that the majority of residents feel the closure of Brockhill will negatively impact them, regrettably the level of capital investment required remains unviable for a building of this age and size. As such, this report recommends that the proposed closure of Brockhill goes ahead.
- 4.3 The Council understands that this will be a difficult and upsetting time for people living and working in Brockhill, as well as their families. The Council is fully committed to supporting residents with identifying and moving to alternative accommodation based on their individual assessed needs and their preferences. This will continue to be done in close dialogue with colleagues in Surrey County Council (SCC) Adult Social Care. The Council has already commissioned additional advocacy support (Citizens Advice Woking) and mental health support (Catalyst) to assist residents through this difficult period of change.
- 4.4 A number of residents have already been assisted to move with only 50% of flats at Brockhill still being occupied (compared to 67% in December 2023). Given the low occupancy and speed by which residents are moving out, it is considered in the best interests of the remaining residents that the Council aims to progress the rehousing process swiftly. Experience elsewhere highlights how quickly sheltered housing schemes can become lonely and isolating places for the last remaining residents as occupancy reduces.
- 4.5 As a Council Tenant, residents moving from Brockhill will be entitled to a Statutory Home Loss Payment, which is currently set by the Government at £8,100. In addition, the Council will reimburse reasonable disturbance costs incurred in moving. Given the age and vulnerabilities of residents, the Council will seek to arrange (on behalf of tenants) items, such as, packing and unpacking and removals to avoid cost and inconvenience.
- 4.6 The Council intends to continue to work collaboratively with residents, their families and advocates to agree a suitable move and to support them with settling into their new home. However, where this is not possible, the Council reserves the right to seek possession through the legal process as a last resort.
- 4.7 Officers have been focused on supporting the residents through this difficult period and no decision is being sought on the long-term future of the Brockhill site. Should Council agree to progress the closure, work will need to commence on a decommissioning strategy to ensure the building is secured upon vacant possession. A decision on the future of Brockhill will be brought back to a future meeting when options have been explored.

5.0 Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 The Council's Housing Strategy 2021 – 2026 includes the following priorities "to provide well-designed, high quality homes that are affordable and meet local needs", "to help people to achieve independence and wellbeing" and "to deliver an improved housing service to our tenants and leaseholders".
- 5.2 Whilst Brockhill is a much valued and loved facility by residents, its design and layout does not meet the current expectations for extra care housing and does not meet latest fire safety standards. The Council invested in a new build Extra Care Housing Scheme at Hale End Court, which opened in 2021, which better meets the Council's strategic objectives for housing.

6.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 6.1 The proposal in this report to close Brockhill will have financial implications through the home loss and disturbance payments which will need to be made. This is estimated at around £350,000.
- 6.2 If fully occupied, Brockhill would have been projected to have brought in approximately £540,000 of rent and service charges during 2023/24, inclusive of all energy costs. The operating costs for running Brockhill are high due to the on-site support team (approximately £179,000), high energy consumption (approximately £207,000) and significant areas of communal spaces that have to be maintained. In addition, all Brockhill residents receive wider housing services offered to Council tenants and covered by rents (for example, repairs service, rent collection, etc.). Although attempts have been made in recent years to increase charges and reduce costs, the income from Brockhill generates little (if any) surplus upon which to contribute to capital investment.
- 6.3 The proposed closure removes the necessity for the Council to undertake a significant amount of capital work over the next 2 years to improve fire safety and upgrade the heating system, along with longer-term works that will be required. The anticipated total capital expenditure required on Brockhill over the next 10 years if it were to stay open is forecast to be circa £5.8 million, including design and professional fees, inflation, preliminaries and contingency.
- 6.4 The building will remain part of the Council's housing assets and further consideration will be given to the future of the site in due course.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 6.5 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the proposed closure of Brockhill.
- 6.6 Based on the resident profile, the proposed closure will most significantly impact women (83%), older people (75% are aged 70 or more) and those with disabilities. The impact of these proposals will be managed and mitigated through comprehensive support and assistance with those affected by the change. This includes working in close partnership with occupational therapists, Adult Social Care, Catalyst and Citizens Advice Woking. The specific needs of each individual will be considered and addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- 6.7 The proposed closure may potentially impact up to 3 members of staff working at Brockhill. The Council will attempt to identify alternative employment opportunities for affected staff following the full closure in line with the Council's Organisational Change policy.

Legal

- 6.8 The Council has complied with the consultation requirements in s105 of the Housing Act 1985 as already set out in section 3 of this report.
- 6.9 The residents of Brockhill benefit from secure tenancies. In order to rehouse them, the Council has to provide suitable alternative accommodation as provided for at Ground 10, Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985 (1985 Act). For accommodation to be suitable alternative accommodation for the purposes of s.84(2) of the 1985 Act, it must be "reasonably suitable to the needs of the tenant and his family".

7.0 Engagement and Consultation

7.1 A resident consultation on the proposed closure of Brockhill ran from 20 December 2023 to 22 January 2024. The Council received a total of 19 responses to the survey, representing 76% of the remaining residents living at Brockhill. The results are summarised in Section 3 of the report.

7.2 In response to the consultation feedback, this report sets out proposals to:

- Continue to work with residents, their families and carers, to plan moves to new homes that meet residents needs and wishes.
- Ensure that affected residents receive the best care and support with moving to suitable alternative accommodation.

REPORT ENDS