

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 19 January 2017

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director
Enterprise, Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Resources

SUBJECT: Use of Guardian Service in Vacant
buildings

WARDS All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To advise the Board of the success of the use of the Guardian Scheme following the initial 4 year contract and to present proposals for continuing this arrangement where appropriate.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) Members approve the continuing use of the Guardian Scheme and approve the retendering of the service;**
- 2) Members are made aware of the potential liability of Belvedere (Former Hostel) and approve the continued use of the scheme as an interim arrangement; and**
- 3) Officers explore the options for disposal and / or demolition of the property and report back to Executive Board with recommendations by June 2017.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Executive Board Sub-Committee on 29 March 2012 approved a pilot of the Guardian Scheme in two of its vacant properties (Egerton Street Library building in Runcorn and Transporter Bridge House in West Bank) as an alternative method of security and it was further agreed that the

outcome of the pilot be reported to a future meeting of the Executive Board.

- 3.2 Following the pilot scheme a progress report was presented at Executive Board on 11th January 2013 in which it was agreed to tender the service with procurement. Ad Hoc were successful in the tender and have been administering the service since 2013, this contract is due to expire in March 2017 and it is recommended that the Council retender the service
- 3.3 Generally by installing the Guardians it ensures that the fabric of the buildings are being maintained due to their continued occupation and incidences of water ingress or burst pipes are quickly noted before any serious damage can occur.
- 3.4 Both properties are inspected monthly by the management company and spot checks are also carried out to ensure that the Guardians are complying with their agreements. The management company provides the Council with a monthly report and also takes meter readings periodically to monitor usage.
- 3.5 To date the service is working well and proving to be cost effective in most cases as set out below:
- 3.6 Egerton Street former Library
- 3.7 The Guardians moved into the former library on 17 May 2012 with an initial set up of £2,640 to install a shower unit (this was more costly than would normally be expected due to complexities with the existing services in the building which had to be adapted). Since then the Council has incurred on average costs of £7,280 which is below previous expenditure.

| Costs | Average Amount (13/14 – 14/15 – 15/16) |
|---------------------|---|
| Gas | £2,520 |
| Electric | £2,230 |
| Water | £575 |
| Mechanical services | £90 |
| Electrical services | £320 |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| Repairs (General) | £1,545 |
| Repairs (Antisocial behaviour) | £0 |
| Total | £7,280 |

- 3.8 This is contrasted with the costs incurred by the Council during a period of 2 weeks when the building was vacant before the Guardians moved in. There were several break-ins and attempted break-ins resulting in almost £6,500 being spent on repair, boarding up and additional security, not including the cost of officer time in dealing with these incidences.
- 3.9 It is considered highly likely that if the Guardians had not been placed in the property the building would have been vandalised beyond repair and stripped of its unique listed features.
- 3.10 The scheme has also been used successfully during the contract period within Transporter Bridge House and the Former Caretaker's Bungalow at St John Fisher Primary School.
- 3.11 Transporter Bridge House had been vacant for several weeks before the Guardians moved in and whilst there had been no reported incidences of break-ins or vandalism during the interim period there was no guarantee that it would remain secure. The building had been substantially refurbished several years ago. The Property was sold at Auction in 2014 during the marketing period Ad Hoc and the Guardians in residence assisted with the process organising access for potential purchasers on a number of occasions.
- 3.12 Former Caretaker's Bungalow at St John Fisher became vacant in 2012 after it became unfit for purpose. Given its locality to the primary school Ad Hoc ensured that screening took place to find suitable Guardians for safeguarding purposes, a married couple of teachers took up occupation in August 2012. They have only recently moved out due to the decision to demolish the property.
- 3.13 Belevedere
- 3.14 This is a former hostel located on the outskirts of Runcorn Old Town adjacent to All Saints Primary School and

Churchill mansions (HHT). Its layout, condition and title restraints make it a difficult site to dispose. The property became surplus to operational purposes in 2012 and Guardians were accommodated within the property in 2014.

- 3.15 Due to its previous residential use, the initial set up cost was nominal when the Guardians moved in. However since then the Council have incurred on average costs of £18,675 per annum.

| Costs | Average Amount (14/15-15/16) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Gas | £13,100 |
| Electric | £2,600 |
| Water | £1,020 |
| Mechanical services | £160 |
| Electrical services | £750 |
| Repairs (General) | £1,045 |
| Repairs (Anti-Social Behaviour) | £0 |
| Total | £18,675 |

- 3.16 The above table does not take into account total spend within the current financial year as some will be ongoing until March. Within the current financial year costs total in excess of £18K already with five months left until the end of the financial year. In fact the costs for Belvedere appear to be increasing year on year.
- 3.17 It is difficult to determine how this would compare if the property were not occupied by the Guardians. However, if the example of the former ICI Recreation Club is reviewed this property was stripped of valuable elements and was beyond economic repair resulting in urgent and more costly demolition. The former Woodlands building is another example of an empty property which has been subject to numerous break-ins and vandalism resulting in a deteriorating asset. In the past few years the Council has spent over £4,000 keeping the building secure from further vandalism.
- 3.18 It is recommended that the scheme be continued as an interim arrangement within Belvedere. Officers will explore the options for disposal and / or demolition of the property

and report back to Members with recommendations by June 2017.

3.19 Whilst not every vacant building would be suitable for Guardians it is considered that it is a viable alternative method of protecting vacant buildings until they are sold, let, demolished or occupied by the Council.

3.21 Recently three bungalows at Grangeway Court, Runcorn became surplus to requirements and were proposed to be demolished. Immediately upon becoming empty the properties were subjected to a number of incidents of antisocial behaviour. As such the decision was taken that Guardians should be used to protect the buildings until the Council is in a position to demolish and dispose of the site.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There will be legal implications as contract documentation will need to be completed in respect of each property where Guardians are placed.

4.2 In line with Standing Orders a procurement process will be undertaken to appoint a Property Company to manage the Guardian Service.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 With continued budget savings required and work being currently undertaken to streamline services / buildings to achieve savings it is possible that current operational buildings may become surplus / vacant before the Council is in a position to dispose of the property. The Guardian service proves a cost effective way of securing the buildings to protect value.

5.2 Management between the expiration of the current contract and new contract will need to be handled carefully to ensure that the buildings remained secure and that any period of vacantness is minimised as much as possible.

5.3 There will be a financial cost to the Council in that services would need to be maintained in the building to an extent that

they provide basic amenities for the Guardians and are compliant with Health and Safety standards.

- 5.4 There will also be some initial set up costs, for example, minor adaptations, and clearing out of new buildings.
- 5.5 There will also be utility and refuse disposal costs incurred although Ad Hoc operate a low usage policy and monitor the Guardians activities.
- 5.6 There is no management fee to pay as Ad Hoc gain their income from the Licence fee paid by the Guardians.
- 5.7 As examples above have shown such costs are likely to be small proportion of the costs that could be incurred and the loss in capital or future rental value by leaving a building vacant.
- 5.8 There will be a resource savings as a reduction of time spent on monitoring the vacant buildings and attending to incidences that occur.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None

6.3 A Healthy Halton

By placing Guardians in vacant buildings it will prevent the building from deteriorating, thereby attracting vermin, being a target for fly tipping and generally having a detrimental effect on the surrounding environment.

6.4 A Safer Halton

By placing Guardians in the vacant buildings it deter acts of vandalism, theft and arson.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The use of Guardians will alleviate the need to board-up the buildings and reduce their deterioration which can quickly happen whilst unoccupied having a detrimental effect on the surrounding neighbourhood.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Belvedere, the nature of this building has meant that this scheme has not been as cost effective as other properties. Since the Guardians have been in occupation the Council has spent in total over £77 K over the last two years. It is recommended that Members approve further investigation into the property.

7.2 A full risk and fire assessment of any proposed building would be required to be carried out by the Guardian management company prior to occupation.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None.