

## 121 CHERTSEY ROAD – AUDIT OUTCOME

### Executive Summary

121 Chertsey is a block of 25 studio flats converted for use as move-on accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. The acquisition of 121 Chertsey Road in 2021 allowed Woking Borough Council to secure the property for long-term move-on accommodation and have full control over the running of the scheme. The flats are offered at an Affordable Rent with one flat used for an on-site support worker. Acquisition of the block was made possible through securing the capital grant from the Homes England Next Steps Accommodation Programme.

Woking Borough Council received £3,125,000 in capital grant funding from Homes England, contributing just under 47% of the total £6,692,664 purchase price. This grant was awarded in March 2021.

Homes England undertake an annual Compliance Audit programme to provide assurance that organisations receiving grant have met Homes England requirements and funding conditions and have properly exercised their responsibilities as set out in the Capital Funding Guide. Woking Borough Council, specifically 121 Chertsey Road, was selected for audit as part of the 2021-22 Compliance Audit Programme.

The Homes England Compliance Audit report awarded a green grading, meaning that the scheme meets all requirements and no breaches were identified.

### Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE that**

- (i) the Homes England Audit Report, as attached to the report, be accepted; and
- (ii) the Strategic Housing and Development Manager be authorised to officially sign off the report with Homes England.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

**Background Papers:** None.

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### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Woking Borough Council, specifically 121 Chertsey Road, was selected for audit as part of the Homes England 2021-22 Compliance Audit Programme.
- 1.2 The audit sought to ensure that Woking Borough Council had met the requirements and responsibilities for grant recipients, as laid out in the Homes England Capital Funding Guide.
- 1.3 Woking Borough Council received £3,125,000 in capital grant funding from the Homes England Next Steps Accommodation Programme in March 2021.
- 1.4 Woking Borough Council acquired 121 Chertsey Road in March 2021, at the time a newly converted block of 25 studio flats, for use as move-on accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.
- 1.5 Acquisition allowed the Council to secure the property for long-term move-on accommodation and have full control over the running of the scheme.
- 1.6 The flats have been offered at an Affordable Rent, with one flat used for on-site support workers.
- 1.7 The capital grant funding through the Homes England Next Steps Accommodation Programme enabled delivery of this scheme to happen.

### 2.0 Audit process

- 2.1 The audit was carried out from 18<sup>th</sup> August 2021, with final document submissions on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021.
- 2.2 Mazars LLP UK were appointed by Woking Borough Council to act as an independent auditor.
- 2.3 Woking Borough Council's Strategic Housing and Development Team worked closely with Mazars LLP UK, providing all documents and information as listed in the Homes England Capital Funding Guide.
- 2.4 Mazars LLP UK were required to submit their findings via the Homes England online audit portal 5 weeks from the audit start date.
- 2.5 Woking Borough Council had a 10-day window from the submission of the auditor's findings to review all independent auditor findings and comment if there was additional information to raise.
- 2.6 Woking Borough Council were informed of the audit report recommendation on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

### 3.0 Audit outcome

- 3.1 On review of the evidence provided, Homes England determined that Woking Borough Council has complied with all the programme requirements and guidance.
- 3.2 A green grade was assigned with no breaches being identified.
- 3.3 There were no recommendations contained within the audit report.

## 4.0 Corporate Strategy

- 4.1 Improving the health and wellbeing of all residents - housing plays an important role in the health, social, environmental and economic wellbeing of everyone who lives in the borough. Good quality, decent and affordable homes contribute significantly to health and wellbeing. Delivering 121 Chertsey Road focuses on delivering suitable housing for residents that is truly affordable and meets local needs.

Strategic Priority 3 of the Housing Strategy focusses on the provision of good quality housing support services that promote independence. This is key to the Council's preventative strategies to enable vulnerable people to live successfully and independently in the community. Woking Borough Council's focus is on supporting customers not just to resolve their housing issues, but also encouraging them to improve their health and wellbeing.

- 4.2 Reducing Social Inequality - acquiring 121 Chertsey Road has enabled to tackle homelessness and its root causes (also Strategic Priority 2 of the Housing Strategy).

Woking Borough Council to Woking has an acute need for more affordable housing of all types, sizes and tenures and the demand for affordable housing far exceeds supply, with local people finding it increasingly difficult to afford to stay in the Borough. Successful homelessness prevention has been the main aim of Woking's Housing Options approach for many years and it will need to remain so with the added duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The team use a range of other tools to prevent and address homelessness, including family mediation, home visits, negotiation with landlords, landlord incentives, prevention funding to help with rent arrears and floating support.

- 4.3 The Homes England 2021-22 Compliance Audit Programme for 121 Chertsey Road ensures that we are delivering in line with the grant agreements and, subsequently, all the above aspects of the Corporate Strategy.

## 5.0 Implications

### Finance and Risk

- 5.1 There are no specific implications outlined in the report.

### Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.2 There are no specific implications outlined in the report.

### Legal

- 5.3 Woking Borough Council is required to acknowledge acceptance of the report via the England online audit portal

## 6.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 There are no specific implications outlined in the report.

REPORT ENDS