

## Record of Urgent Executive Decision(s)

### 1. Subject of decision

Empty Homes Programme - Charlotte Street, Wallsend

### 2. Name and Title of Decision Maker

Norma Redfearn - Elected Mayor

### 3. Details of any Conflict of Interest and any Dispensation granted in respect of such Interest

None

### 4. Executive summary

Charlotte Street in Wallsend is an area which is suffering from the blight caused by long-term empty homes. The proliferation of the empty homes has led to an increase in crime and anti-social behaviour and has resulted in a negative impact on the street scene, community confidence and an increase in complaints to the Authority and other agencies.

In order to directly address these issues and halt further decline, the Authority has, with funds from the General Fund, purchased 11 of the worst properties in the street from a single private landlord. These are all 'Tyneside Flats' and some of which the Authority now owns both the upstairs and downstairs properties. Following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and stakeholders a preferred approach to achieving their sustainable reuse has been developed. This report seeks approval for the Housing Revenue Account to purchase the properties for redevelopment and to let the properties at an affordable rent.

The approach involves the conversion of eight of the properties (where the Authority owns both the upstairs and downstairs flat) into four family homes and the refurbishment of the three remaining flats. All properties will be refurbished to the Authority's decent homes standard and will be retained by the Authority and let to applicants from the Authority's housing register in line with the prevailing criteria.

### 5. Alternative Options considered

In the assessing alternative reuse options officers have consulted with local stakeholders, estate agents, other local authorities and independent property professionals to assess the current market conditions. This has also included assessment of demand and tenancy sustainability of Authority stock nearby.

The Authority's construction team have undertaken detailed cost estimates to refurbish the properties both utilising the current floor plans and considering the conversion of flats to family homes where possible.

In consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Strategic Property Group and Investment Programme Board the outlined approach to achieving the sustainable reuse of the properties has been developed. This approach it is envisaged will deliver an improved physical environment, clear community benefits and increased stability.

## 6. Decision(s)

The Elected Mayor

- 1) approves the transfer of the eleven properties in Charlotte Street, Wallsend purchased as part of the Authority's empty homes programme into the Housing Revenue Account following the appropriate reimbursement of the General Fund; and
- 2) authorises the Head of Environment, Housing and Leisure to take all necessary or appropriate steps to progress the conversion and refurbishment of the eleven properties as outlined at 1.5.3. in compliance with the Authority's Constitution, Financial Regulations, Contract Standing Orders and any other relevant requirements.

## 7. Reasons for the Decision(s)

In addition to the advantages outlined at 1.5.4. of the report by retaining the maximum amount of control over the construction and reoccupation process this approach provides the platform for proactive area management and targeted enforcement by police, environment and community safety teams in order to maximise the positive impact of the physical improvements proposed.

## 8. Date Decision Made

6 April 2020

## 9. Is this decision subject to call-in and if so expiry date of call-in period

No – see below\*

## 10. Date of Publication

7 April 2020

## 11. Implementation Date

6 April 2020

\*Note – this is an Urgent Decision, as agreed by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and not subject to call-in, as agreed by the Chair of Council.

The reason for urgency is as follows:

To ensure progress can be made in the redevelopment of this area at the earliest opportunity. Any delay will result in no progress being made in even the most preliminary activities and the properties will remain a blight on the community for longer than is necessary.