

THE EXECUTIVE

21 FEBRUARY 2006

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND HEALTH

USE OF 598 RAINHAM ROAD SOUTH AS A TENANTS' AND RESIDENTS' RESOURCE CENTRE	FOR DECISION
<p>This report concerns the possible use of a Council dwelling as a resource centre for Tenants and Residents and is a matter for the Executive to determine.</p> <p>Executive Summary: Members are asked to agree to the use of 598 Rainham Road, a currently vacant Council Dwelling long ago converted to a Doctor's surgery, as a resource centre for the Tenants' and Residents' organisations in the Borough.</p> <p>Wards Affected: All and Village Ward (Location of 598 Rainham Road)</p>	
<p>Implications:</p> <p>Financial:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) This proposal saves money on the current arrangement of some £3,500 per annum less fuel costs estimated at £800.00.ii) The use of this dwelling would lead to a one unit reduction in available accommodation but it has been out of normal use for some years and would require extensive work to return it to the housing stock estimated at £25,872.89 (Details available if required.) <p>Legal: There are no legal implications from this report.</p> <p>Risk Management: There are no specific implications insofar as this report is concerned</p>	
<p>Social Inclusion and Diversity: As this report does not concern a new or revised policy there are no specific adverse impacts insofar as this report is concerned.</p> <p>Crime and Disorder: There are no specific implications insofar as this report is concerned</p> <p>Recommendation(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">1. The Executive is asked to agree whether, subject to planning permission, 598 Rainham Road is made available to the Tenants and Residents as a replacement for their existing resource centre at a reduced cost to the Housing Revenue Account of some £3,500 per annum.	
<p>Reason</p> <p>For some years now the Council has, in line with most Local Authorities, provided the Tenant and Resident movement with a resource centre. The current arrangement of a room in Roycraft House is no longer available due to the expansion of the Customer 1st</p>	

Team but in any event the facility being based in a main Council building is far from ideal and in most Boroughs is located at a central and convenient site independent of the Council's facilities. This proposal seeks to use a unit of accommodation long ago converted as a Doctors' surgery that is ideally placed and could be used with virtually no expenditure on alterations or repairs.

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1. Background

- 1.1 For some years the Council has provided the Tenants and Residents movement with a resource centre to support them in their work. The centre provides computer access to the internet, print and design facilities and storage for information and materials as well as a place to meet and organise. Most Local Authorities provide a similar facility and they are a significant part of the Government's approach to Community empowerment.
- 1.2 Until recently the centre was based in Roycraft House on the 2nd floor. This has been far from ideal as good practice requires that facilities of this kind are not located in Council offices or buildings to ensure that users feel that they are independent of the Council's influence.
- 1.3 In April the expansion of the Customer 1st team in Roycraft House meant that the centre had to move out and is currently located in a small and inadequate room on the ground floor. This room is a short term measure due to changes in use and an alternative has to be found as soon as possible.

2. Report

- 2.1 Officers have been actively seeking a new location for the centre that is accessible, affordable and provides suitable accommodation. 598 Rainham Road was a two bedroomed flat in a low rise block that was converted some years ago to be used as a Doctors surgery and now has four rooms including messing facilities. The Doctor paid the full charges for the use of the property at approximately £6,500 per annum.
- 2.2 The property already has toilet facilities with adaptations for people with a disability and there is a suitable entrance to the flat that would require minor cosmetic work if the use is agreed. The accommodation is on major bus and rail links and close to Dagenham East tube station and is far more accessible than the current location in Barking.
- 2.3 The rent required for the unit is £6,500 per annum which is some £3,500 less than the Roycraft House facility minus estimated annual fuels costs at £800.00. In most respects the building is ideal and Tenants and residents' representatives have seen the building and are satisfied that it meets their need. There are some discussions around security and responsibility for locking up but it is proposed that a member of the Tenant Participation Team will call in and work with users to resolve any difficulties.

- 2.4 The Tenant and Resident's Movement and Federation is wholly funded by the Council including their current use of the facilities in Roycraft. Although a licence agreement needs to be drawn up to formalise their occupation it is not intended to levy a rental charge as this would simply equate to a charge that the Housing Revenue account would have to meet from within its own resources by grant application.
- 2.5 The property would be used mainly for an office and occasional meetings. No meetings would take place after 8pm in the evenings. If any late meetings are required these would be held at the Civic Centre, Barking Town Hall or other venues.
- 2.6 598 appears to be ideal for the resource centre. Although it uses a residential unit it was converted to a surgery many years ago and there would be estimated costs of £25,872.89 in returning it to housing stock.
- 2.7 Members need to consider whether they wish to agree to the accommodation being used as a resource centre for tenants and residents at no additional conversion cost, or to return the property to Council housing use at a cost of £25,872.89
- 2.8 Extensive consultation has been undertaken locally with all the neighbouring dwellings in the block with 598 having been door knocked and given the opportunity to attend a meeting with all three ward members and the full committee of the Tenants' and Residents Federation. The door knocking exercise raised no objections with this the most frequent comment being that neighbours would be glad to see the unit back in use. No one attended the evening meeting having made their views known on the doorstep.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Council need to urgently find alternative accommodation for the Resource Centre and although there will always be issues with any location or style of accommodation 598 Rainham Road South does appear to provide a very good alternative to the present arrangements and at a lower cost.
- 3.2 The Tenants Federations use of the building will be monitored within the first two years and should the building prove to be unsuitable or under used then members would be asked to review its future use. The loss of any unit of accommodation should be carefully considered but given the need for a suitable alternative and the key fact that this unit is not in residential use and would cost a significant sum of money to re-instate it appears to offer the best possible alternative at this stage.

4. Consultees

- 4.1 Tenants and Residents Representatives.
EMPA
Paul Feild
Jackie Adams
Naomi Goldberg
Local Ward Councillors.

Background Papers
None