

		AGENDA ITEM NO.							
Report Cover Sheet									
Name of Meeting:		Executive							
Date of Meeting:		23 July 2007							
Report Title:		Proposed conversion of shed area at Sussex Court, Lyttleton Road.							
Summary of report:		The report details a proposal to create a community office facility by conversion of the under-utilised shed area within Sussex Court, Lyttleton Road, Warwick. The work would be jointly funded by Housing Services and Warwickshire County Council. The facility would be used by the Community Workers currently working on the Packmores estate, for other community activities including surgeries or drop-ins and by Housing staff.							
For Further Information Please Contact (report author):		Bill Hunt Head of Housing Services 01926 456403 bill.hunt@warwickdc.gov.uk							
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Policy Framework:		No							
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budgetary framework:		No							
Wards of the District directly affected by this decision:		Warwick West							
Key Decision?		Yes							
Included within the Forward Plan?		Yes Ref No 23							
Is the report Private & Confidential		No							
Background Papers:		WCC report to Warwick Area Committee 10 July 2007 :Well-being fund 2007/08 – Funding proposal – Community Office, Packmores/The Cape, Warwick Questionnaires from consultation exercise.							
Consultation Undertaken									
Below is a table of the Council's regular consultees. However not all have to be consulted on every matter and if there was no obligation to consult with a specific consultee they will be marked as n/a.									
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Consultees</th> <th>Yes/ No</th> <th>Who</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Other Committees</td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Consultees	Yes/ No	Who	Other Committees	No	
Consultees	Yes/ No	Who							
Other Committees	No								

Ward Councillors	Yes	Councillor Kinson
Portfolio Holders	Yes	Councillor Doody
Other Councillors	Yes	Councillor Grainger
Warwick District Council recognised Trades Unions	No	
Other Warwick District Council Service Areas	Yes	Property Services
Project partners	Yes	Warwickshire County Council
Parish/Town Council	No	
Highways Authority	No	
Residents	Yes	Residents of Sussex Court
Citizens Panel	No	
Other consultees	No	

Officer Approval

With regard to officer approval all reports must be approved by the report authors relevant director, Finance Services and Legal Services.

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Relevant Director(s)	26/06/07	Mary Hawkins
Chief Executive	28/06/07	Chris Elliott
CMT	28/06/07	
Section 151 Officer	28/06/07	Mary Hawkins
Legal	26/06/07	Simon Best
Finance	26/06/07	Philip Morgan

Final Decision?

Yes

Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)

--

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 1.1 That Executive approves the proposed conversion of the existing shed area at Sussex Court into self contained office accommodation, subject to any necessary planning or building consents and the confirmation of a commitment of £15,000 from Warwickshire County Council towards the cost of the work.

2. REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The Community Support Team, a jointly funded District and County Council initiative, has focused a significant amount of its time over the last year working in the Packmores area of Warwick, which currently lacks any form of community facility. The work of the team has been hampered by the lack a base from which to operate and where they can meet the community. Various options have been explored but none has proved viable or satisfactory.
- 2.2 This proposal provides for the creation of a community office on the ground floor of the Sussex Court flats on Lyttleton Road. The shed area is under utilised and a consultation exercise undertaken with the tenants of the block has demonstrated that whilst only 1 tenant currently uses the area that their needs can be accommodated elsewhere. Those tenants who responded to the consultation exercise are all supportive of the initiative. The results of the consultation are detailed at Appendix One.
- 2.3 The office facility would be used as a base for the 2 community support staff currently working on the estate and would also be utilised by housing staff working in the area. However, it would have many other potential uses including:
- A contact point for Police Community Support Officers
 - An informal drop-in facility for community and service provider information
 - A venue for councillor surgeries
 - A venue for activities such as benefits advice work, credit union activity
 - A facility for basic training / community education for small groups and individuals.
- 2.4 The conversion costs would be jointly met by Housing Services and the County Council. A funding proposal has been made by the latter to the Warwick Area Committee meeting on 10 July 2007.
- 2.5 The facility would remain under the control of Housing Services but its day-to-day management would initially become the responsibility of the joint WDC/WCC Community Support Team until such time as they cease to work in the locality.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED

- 3.1 The alternative option is not to undertake the work. However, there are currently no other viable options for providing a working base for the Community Support Team and the HRA asset would remain under-utilised.

4. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 The capital cost of the conversion works is estimated to be £35,000.

- 4.2 The County Council funding proposal is to commit £15,000 towards these costs. A verbal update on the outcome of this proposal will be available to Executive.
- 4.3 An estimated £5,000 of the total cost of the works relates to the provision of an innovative and sustainable heating system utilising a heat pump to minimise future revenue costs of heating the facility. The cost of this element of the work can be met within the existing central heating budget within the overall Housing Investment Programme (HIP).
- 4.4 The remaining £15,000 can be met from within the existing security works budget within the overall HIP.
- 4.5 On-going revenue costs, estimated at £1,000 at current prices, can be met within existing budget although a significant contribution will be received from the community support team budget. Potential exists for consideration of a future charging regime for external organisations wishing to use the facility although it is not felt that it is necessary or beneficial to implement charges at present.

5. POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 The provision of a focal point for community activity in the Packmores area of Warwick is identified as a priority in the current Warwick District Community Plan. The area has in recent years scored consistently highly in terms of indices of deprivation and recent work on identifying health issues across the district highlighted the area as a priority for action.
- 5.2 The facility would complement the priorities contained within the current Corporate Strategy of making the best use of resources and targeting areas of greatest need.
- 5.3 The environmental impact of the new strategy would be mitigated by the use of a heat pump to promote efficient and sustainable energy use and minimise future carbon emissions. Usage of this form of heating at this facility would enable evaluation of the potential for application elsewhere within the housing stock to assist the Council to meet its objectives within the Local Area Agreement.

Outcomes of tenant consultation: Sussex Court

Sussex Court is a block of 14 properties on three floors. A shed for each property is provided on the ground floor of the block accessed from the internal communal area.

During June 2007 a series of visits were made to all flats within the block by Housing Services and Community Support Team staff to explain the proposal and to capture tenants views through the use of a standard questionnaire form.

If no face to face contact was made with a tenant following a morning and afternoon visit on separate days a copy of the questionnaire was left for completion with a covering letter and pre-paid return envelope. A minimum of 3 visits were made to each flat to attempt to make face to face contact and attempts were made to also contact non-respondents by phone.

Face to face contact was made with 5 tenants and a total of 7 completed questionnaires were received.

The responses to the questions posed were as follows:

Q1 Have you used the sheds for storage recently?

6 tenants responded that they did not currently use the shed area.

1 tenant responded that they did.

Visual inspection of the area reveals that it is unlikely that any of the non-respondents are using the area regularly.

Q2 Do you have any objection to the sheds not being available for resident's storage?

6 tenants responded that they had no objection.

1 tenant responded to say that they would need secure and convenient storage. The types of items being stored are not in everyday use and discussions are being held as to whether the provision of a shed in one of the adjacent blocks will meet the tenant's need. If not the size of the communal area in Sussex Court will accommodate the construction of additional storage space without compromising the plans for the new office facility.

Q3 Would you be happy for the shed area to be used in the way proposed?

All 7 respondents said yes

Q4 Would you use a community office on the Packmores and if so what for?

5 respondents said they would use the facility, 2 said they wouldn't.

What they might use it was not well-defined, probably because it is not yet clear what would be available for residents but 1 person said they would become involved with the facility and another that they would use it to gain information.

Q5 Do you have any further comments to make?

2 people made comments. These were:

"Would find [a] Housing Officer [surgery] very useful – good idea"

"I think it is a good proposal"