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**CABINET**

**21 January 2015**

**Subject Heading:**

**Cabinet Member:**

**CMT Lead:**

**Report Author and contact details:**

**Policy context:**

**Financial summary:**

**Is this a Key Decision?**

**Is this a Strategic Decision?**

**When should this matter be reviewed?**

**Reviewing OSC:**

**ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS – HIGHFIELD ROAD**

**Councillor Damian White**

Lead Member for Housing

**Joy Hollister**, Group Director, Children's Adults and Housing

Sue Witherspoon  
Head of Homes and Housing

The Council is committed to maintaining and improving its council housing stock

The proposals included within this report amount to £1.853m which can be contained within the HRA Capital Programme for 2015/16

Yes

No

On completion

Towns and Communities

**The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives**

Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough	[X]
Championing education and learning for all	[]
Providing economic, social and cultural activity in thriving towns and villages	[]
Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents	[X]
Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	[]

## **SUMMARY**

This report sets out the detail of the Highfield Road estate, and a set of proposed improvements to be delivered in the course of the next financial year. The aim is that the improvements will enable a regeneration of the estate, to be completed in time to be associated with the date on which the Queen becomes the longest serving monarch – 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015. It is proposed that this should be associated with a renaming of the estate and its blocks, as part of those celebrations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees to establish a Residents' Steering Group to oversee the improvement deliver programme, and comment on the proposals
2. Agrees to consult the residents on the possibility of renaming the Highfield Road estate and the individual blocks to names which reflect the celebrations due to take place on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015.
3. Approves the expenditure of £1.853m from the HRA capital programme of 2015/16 to carry out the improvements detailed in **Appendix 1**. This approval will be subject to Council ratification (see financial implications).
4. Authorises officers to invite tenders from appropriate building firms to carry out the proposed works.

## **REPORT DETAIL**

1. The housing estate in Collier Row owned and managed by the Homes and Housing Department consists of 339 units of accommodation. These consist of one high rise block of 76 flats (Highfield Towers) and 33 other blocks of low and medium rise flats. There are also 16 houses of the Cornish type, which are built of non-traditional materials, and therefore require extensive recladding work to bring them up to a mortgageable standard.
2. The estate has never had a coherent identity or name, or a community association. The properties have been brought up to Decent Homes standard as part of the Council's overall programme of Decent Homes work, but there has not been a great deal of expenditure on the environment, or

communal areas which do not form part of the Government's Decent Homes standard.

3. This estate, as all properties have been brought up to the Decent Homes Standard. However, the Decent Homes standard is limited to the elements of the properties inside (such as bathrooms, kitchens, electrical and gas works, heating systems and the state of repair.). The estate has had only limited other investment in the environment, including
  - Tower block cladding in 1998
  - Overcladding of Cornish Blocks 1999/200
  - Decorations of low rise blocks 2005/6

4. Following an extensive survey of the estate by the capital works team within Homes and Housing, a programme of communal improvements has been drawn up which would give the estate a facelift, and an improved appearance and better environment. These improvements and costs are set out in Appendix 1.

5. The proposed works include:

- External decorations to the blocks
- Concrete and balcony repairs and renewal of screens where required
- Decoration of block entrances and stairs
- Upgrade to the door entry systems
- Improvements to the car parking and paths
- Landscaping and planting
- External wall insulation to non traditional houses
- Improvements to the bin stores and waste disposal areas
- Improvements to the boundary walls and fencing

Full details are set out in Appendix 1.

6. On September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 the current Queen will become the longest serving monarch, overtaking Queen Victoria. It is proposed to take the opportunity of this anniversary to re-name the blocks on the estate, and the estate itself after countries which are part of the British Overseas Territories, dominions or where the Queen is Head of State. It is expected that this will provide a new identity for the estate, and improved community cohesion.
7. As the owner of the building, the Council has the power to name the buildings, although leaseholders, as owners also have the right to be consulted as part of the process. The application is also subject to consultation with relevant bodies, who are the police, the ambulance service, the postal service and the Fire Brigade. The Fire Brigade has the power of veto of the naming of streets, if they consider that this might cause any confusion in directing emergency services.
8. In conclusion, the proposals set out here, which can be delivered in the course of the next financial year, should make a significant impact on the identity and appearance of the estate. It will bring much needed investment to an area of the borough which is on the edge of the borough, and feels itself neglected. The improvement programme will provide a focus for

engaging with the residents, and engender a feeling of pride in the community, the estate and the borough.

## **REASONS AND OPTIONS**

### **Reasons for the decision:**

The proposals within this report have been brought forward as the estate based on the Highfield Road, is considered to have a poor environment and lacks a coherent identity. The investment proposed will give the estate a new lease of life and improve the quality of life for the local residents.

### **Other options considered:**

#### Option 1

Do nothing, apart from essential maintenance. This option was rejected, as it is likely over time that the estate may become unpopular and difficult to let.

#### Option 2

Demolish and rebuild. This option was rejected as too expensive. There is an established community who would have to be rehoused during a demolition phase. There are also 83 leaseholders who would have to be bought out. This option therefore is not feasible financially.

The proposal is therefore considered the best way forward for this estate.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

### **Financial implications and risks:**

The proposals set out in Appendix 1 are estimated to cost £1,453,600 for the environmental works, and £400,000 to improve the non-traditional houses, a total of £1,853,600. It is possible to accommodate these works within the Council's overall HRA capital programme for 2015/16, by re-aligning priorities for environmental works. A full recommended HRA capital programme for 2015/16 will be submitted to Cabinet in February 2015, and then onto full Council for final approval.

### **Legal implications and risks:**

There is a legal power for the local authority to carry out improvement work to its housing stock. Where leaseholders are involved, there is a statutory obligation to consult the leaseholders under s20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, on the

proposed works, and the tenders received. Failure to comply with these regulations may result in non-recovery of leaseholder contributions.

There is a statutory process required to be undertaken when re-naming streets or blocks. This involves the Fire Brigade, the police, the Ambulance Service and the Postal Service. The proposed changes to the block names will therefore be subject to this consultation process.

**Human Resources implications and risks:**

There are no direct HR implications or risks, for the Council or its workforce that can be identified from the recommendations made in this report. This project will be managed within the staffing resources of the Homes & Housing department.

**Equalities implications and risks:**

The proposals contained within this report are likely to have a positive impact on the community, including improved insulation and reduced energy bills for low income households. A full Equality Impact Assessment is not considered necessary.

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>
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Stock condition information held in the Council's Asset Management system, Keystone

List of properties and proposed works and cost estimates contained within the Council's electronically held records.