



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF PLACE, PLANNING AND GROWTH**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
23 JULY 2026**

FRIARY FIELDS PROPERTY ACQUISITION

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to acquire Friary Fields, Maldon, a property comprising six self-contained one-bedroom flats, for use as Temporary Accommodation (TA).
- 1.2 The acquisition will increase the Council's supply of in-district temporary accommodation, reduce reliance on costly nightly paid and out of area placements, and provide a long term housing asset that supports the Council's statutory homelessness duties. Approval is also sought for a total capital budget of up to £800,000, comprising the acquisition cost together with essential refurbishment and compliance works required prior to occupation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That a capital budget of up to £800,000 be approved to fund the acquisition of the property and any essential refurbishment, compliance and associated works required to bring the accommodation into use as temporary accommodation.
- (ii) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Place, Planning and Growth, in consultation with the Chairperson of the Strategy and Resources Committee and the Section 151 Officer, to agree the final purchase price, approve the scope of essential refurbishment works within the approved capital budget, and complete the acquisition subject to satisfactory survey, valuation, legal and financial due diligence.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017).
- 3.1.2 The Housing team actively manage the service, seeking to minimise the number of people who need TA, and reduce the length of stay before a permanent solution can be found. Nevertheless, over recent years the number of households requiring temporary accommodation has averaged around 40 households.
- 3.1.3 The Council continues to experience sustained demand for TA, particularly from single person households requiring one bedroom accommodation
- 3.1.4 While out of district placements enable the Council to fulfil its statutory duties, they are not always the most appropriate outcome for residents. Such placements increase travel distance to employment, education, healthcare and support services and may separate households from critical family, community and social networks. Whilst overall homelessness demand has remained relatively stable, significant pressures remain due to limited availability of suitable accommodation within the district, reduced move-on opportunities and increasing reliance on externally sourced nightly paid accommodation.

3.2 Stephens House

- 3.2.1 In 2025 Maldon District Council acquired Stephens House in Heybridge. This was previously a mother and baby unit and was converted into five self-contained flats, including one accessible unit for the provision of TA. This has been a very successful scheme and has reduced the pressure on high cost nightly paid accommodation out of area. The availability of in-district TA has supported better outcomes for residents by allowing them to remain within their local community close to their support networks, demonstrating the value of increasing the Council's own supply.

4. FRIARY FIELDS

- 4.1 Following the success of Stephens House, the Strategic Housing Working Group has asked Officers to explore whether similar schemes could come forward to increase the Council's supply of TA.
- 4.2 Friary Fields is a property close to Maldon High Street comprising six self-contained one-bedroom flats. The property was previously used as low-level supported accommodation for residents with mental health conditions and provides an excellent opportunity to increase the Council's temporary accommodation stock.
- 4.3 Condition surveys have identified that, whilst the building is fundamentally suitable for its intended use, a programme of refurbishment, compliance and improvement works will be required prior to occupation. These works include essential health and safety, compliance and maintenance items, together with some replacement of ageing fixtures and fittings to ensure the accommodation is safe, compliant and suitable for long-term use as temporary accommodation.
- 4.4 The property provides an opportunity to increase local TA capacity and improve the Council's ability to respond to homelessness presentations within the district.

- 4.5 The acquisition would reduce reliance on expensive nightly paid accommodation and support improved outcomes for homeless households through provision of local, self-contained accommodation.
- 4.6 An independent valuation has been carried out. Officers are currently seeking to negotiate a purchase price, reflecting the condition of the property and the investment required prior to occupation. A condition survey has identified refurbishment and compliance works which have been included in the overall total requested.
- 4.7 In order to avoid the need for further Committee approval should negotiations or final works costs vary, approval is sought for a total capital budget of up to £800,000. This represents the maximum financial commitment and does not commit the Council to spending the full amount.
- 4.8 The Council has engaged Delta Housing, who have confirmed their willingness to manage the scheme on the Council's behalf, as it does with Stephens House. Subject to the final agreement of lease and management arrangements, Delta Housing will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the accommodation, including tenancy management, property maintenance and resident support functions. The Council will retain nomination rights to ensure the accommodation continues to meet local TA needs. This approach will provide a professionally managed service whilst reducing the operational burden on the Council and enabling efficient mobilisation of the scheme.
- 4.9 A Business Case is set out in **APPENDIX 1**.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The acquisition of Friary Fields presents an opportunity to increase the Council's supply of local TA at a time when suitable one-bedroom accommodation remains in short supply.
- 5.2 The proposal will reduce reliance on costly out-of-area placements, improve housing outcomes for homeless households and provide a long-term housing asset that can continue to support service delivery during and beyond Local Government Reorganisation.
- 5.3 Subject to satisfactory completion of valuation, surveys, legal due diligence and financial appraisal, together with acquisition and refurbishment costs remaining within the approved capital budget of £800,000, the proposal is considered a prudent investment that supports both operational service requirements and the Council's longer term strategic objectives.

6. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

6.1 Supporting our communities

- 6.1.1 The proposal will provide safe, self-contained accommodation in a sustainable location for households experiencing homelessness and improve access to accommodation within the district.

6.2 Investing in our District

- 6.2.1 The acquisition will create a long-term Council housing asset and strengthen local accommodation provision for residents in housing need.

6.3 Growing our economy

- 6.3.1 Reducing homelessness and housing instability supports residents' ability to access employment, training, and local services.

6.4 Delivering good quality services

- 6.4.1 The acquisition will improve service resilience, increase local accommodation options and reduce dependence on external accommodation providers.

7. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The acquisition will increase access to suitable temporary accommodation within district, improving customer experience and quality of life by reducing disruption caused by out-of-area placements.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – The proposal will support vulnerable households who are disproportionately affected by homelessness and housing insecurity. No adverse equalities impacts have been identified.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – Risks include unforeseen property defects, changes to refurbishment costs, compliance requirements, subsidy recovery assumptions and management arrangements. These risks will be mitigated through detailed surveys, legal due diligence, financial modelling and appropriate governance arrangements. Success of the acquisition will be monitored through ongoing performance measures including reduction in the use and cost of nightly paid accommodation, reduction in out of area placements, occupancy levels, and length of stay within TA. These indicators will be reviewed regularly to ensure the scheme continues to deliver the intended financial and operational benefits. Where performance does not meet expectations, options will be considered including review of management arrangements, alternative use of the asset, or wider service reconfiguration to ensure best value for the Council.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Approval is sought for a capital budget of up to £800,000. This comprises the negotiated purchase price together with provision for essential refurbishment, compliance and associated works required prior to occupation.
- (v) Seeking approval for a single capital budget provides flexibility to accommodate the final negotiated purchase price and any additional essential refurbishment works identified through detailed inspections, avoiding the need to return to Committee for further approval whilst ensuring that total expenditure does not exceed the approved capital budget.
- (vi) The ongoing revenues and costs associated with the acquisition of Friary Fields will be set out and included in future MTFS reports.
- (vii) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The accommodation will be managed by Delta Housing on behalf of the Council under a management agreement. As a

result, outside of the acquisition, no additional staffing resource is anticipated within the Council for the day-to-day management of the scheme. The arrangement will minimise operational impacts on existing services whilst ensuring the accommodation is professionally managed and maintained.

- (viii) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation** – Whilst Local Government Reorganisation will result in Maldon becoming part of a new unitary authority, statutory homelessness duties will continue throughout the transition period and beyond. The acquisition provides additional housing capacity that can be incorporated into future service delivery arrangements and supports continuity of provision during the transition.

Background Papers:

APPENDIX 1: Business Case

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