

To: [REDACTED]

Title: Briefing Note for The Rams Lodge – 10 years leasing arrangement

From: [REDACTED]
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This briefing note sets out the benefits of developing a longer-term lease arrangement for the Rams Lodge site in the Withington ward.

1. Introduction

Manchester City Council is seeking to develop alternative temporary singles accommodation for homeless adults as an alternative to placing into B&B type accommodation. The Council and Homelessness Service has a very real need for accommodation for vulnerable homeless people within the city.

The driver for this development is in response to the high numbers of single homeless households owed a homeless duty who are currently placed in B&B's whilst awaiting placement into suitable temporary accommodation. In addition to the increase in the number of people presenting as homeless in Manchester, is the marked increase in the complexity of peoples' circumstances and need, when approaching the homelessness service.

There are currently 270+ homeless adults in B&B accommodation with an average length of stay of 200+ days. Accommodating homeless people in B&B's with very limited facilities, often shared, for a prolonged period has a significant and detrimental impact on the wellbeing of people with complex support needs.

B&B type accommodation is not directly managed by the Council. The pressure on Homelessness Services to provide adequate support in such locations across the wider GM area is extremely challenging. The social and health impacts on individuals who make up this population is considerable in such settings. The use of B&B accommodation results in a high cost to the Council and causes a sizeable budget pressure for the City Council. Seeking to develop a longer-term lease approach for the Rams Lodge enables the Council to deliver a much improved and supportive temporary accommodation offer, which is trauma informed and responsive to the needs of vulnerable homeless people. In addition, this will reduce the use of costly B&B accommodation and supports the strategy to reduce budget pressure for the Council.

2. Rams Lodge - an alternative to B&B for single homeless people

Homelessness Services recognises the need to develop alternative temporary accommodation that better meets the needs of complex adults and delivers a robust move on offer into sustainable tenancies.

The Rams Lodge Hotel was established as an '*Everyone In*' site in 2020 an initiative to accommodate all rough sleepers in the city during the pandemic. When *Everyone*

In sites were stepped down Homelessness Services retained Rams Lodge, to continue the use of the site for vulnerable homeless adults, both male and female. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) provided some Rough Sleeper Initiative funding towards the continued use of the site based on positive outcomes demonstrated through the retained use of the site.

As an alternative to B&B accommodation the site provides 30 bedspaces for male and female singles. The accommodation provides self-contained en-suite rooms. There is 24/7 onsite support team, a security concierge service, a catering and laundry offer, linked to supportive partner agencies. The aim is to enable people to thrive and move on into independent settled accommodation of their own.

Homeless people with complex needs often struggle to engage with, and access, vital health and support services when accommodated in a B&B. For homeless individuals with multiple complex needs, as statistics show, without access to suitable and appropriate accommodation their long term stay in a B&B is protracted and inevitable. Behaviours will become more entrenched, detrimental to recovery and potentially life limiting.

Rams Lodge is operated by MCC's Homelessness Services as an 'in-house temporary accommodation site'. At Rams Lodge a person-centred approach with key worker support develops trust and rapport with residents. Weekly support sessions are delivered in a safe and confidential environment. The Rams Lodge offers clients an intensive support model enabling high levels of client engagement with other services to better meet need. A strength-based and trauma informed approach is taken to work alongside an individual and with agreement to refer them into relevant services.

Staff on site deliver a wraparound support offer for each client working in collaboration with relevant support services making referrals to a variety of partner organisations. Partners range from Rough Sleeper and Navigator Services, Change Grow Live drug and alcohol services, community mental health services, Urban Village community health services, Centrepont, charitable organisations/VCSE, GMP, NHS, Housing First models, other temporary accommodation and supported housing providers as well as the Private Rented Sector Team.

Referrals into Rams Lodge are taken from the B&B Support Service as well as the Housing Solutions Service and direct from partner organisations.

3. Move on from Rams Lodge

The average length of stay for an individual at Rams Lodge is around 6 months which is shorter than many other vulnerable singles accommodation sites. All residents on site undertake a homeless assessment. Move on statistics demonstrate the positive performance and success of the model. Most residents engage well with the support offer and whilst move on statistics are positive, even for those who may leave the site without a move on solution in place, the engagement with services whilst living at Ram's Lodge is a demonstrable positive outcome.

There is considerable success in the positive '*move on's*' achieved for people who have been entrenched in rough sleeping/long term B&B stays/behaviours that have hindered positive move on to settled accommodation before.

4. Income and investment

Due to the current short term 12-month lease arrangement between the proprietor and the council, income generated from housing benefit is only recoverable at the bed & breakfast rate which is much lower than the actual costs of the accommodation. This is resulting in a huge budget pressure for the service against rental costs paid for the accommodation.

The Homelessness Service intends to enter into a 10-year lease agreement with the proprietors of the accommodation. The signing of a 10-year lease between both parties will ensure that housing benefit payable for the site is brought in-line with those levels payable at other MCC in-house temporary accommodation sites. Establishing a 10+ year lease for the site would alter the way in which Housing Benefit regulations are applied and will enable the Council to claim an increased level of payable housing benefit for each client staying in the accommodation.

Entering this agreement between the Council and the proprietor will enable investment in, and improvement of, the site. This arrangement will ensure works take place to improve and enhance the accommodation for residents. One such piece of work is the replacement of all metal frame windows for double glazed units which will improve the carbon efficiency of the entire building.

The development of a long-term lease strategy will enable stability and retention of the workforce by confirming permanent contracts of employment. A longer-term lease for this site will ensure the Council only makes exclusive use of this accommodation. This approach will enable the Council's Homelessness Service to deliver a strong local presence in this residential area with commitment to working closely with the local community and neighbourhood.

5. Programming life skills development and well-being activities at the Rams Lodge

Whilst the Rams Lodge has operated on short term lease arrangements the ability of the Homelessness Service to establish a positive programme of client activities to develop life skills and positive wellbeing on site has been hampered. Staff turnover is higher where length of employment contract cannot be confirmed which in turn impacts on the ability to develop the service offer.

The establishment of a long-term lease will ensure stability of the workforce and enable development of a long-term management plan to develop a programme of onsite engagement activities for residents. This will mirror programmes delivered at other council Homelessness Temporary Accommodation sites. The service has found that providing a range of engagement activities for clients helps enormously in supporting mental wellbeing, physical health improvement, enabling development of skills to help people to thrive when moving into their own tenancies. Developing a programme of activities and initiatives for clients on site provides an engaging and occupying offer for people. The ability of clients to take part in creative activities on site enables people to develop healthier and more constructive daily routines.

Developing the management plan for the site will focus upon assisting people to get the correct agency help they may need, secure more permanent residential accommodation and assist with health and potential employment issues. Addressing these factors will enable people to live independently and move forward positively in their lives.

The service will develop initiatives with agencies and organisations to create a culture of increased dwell time within the building. For example, we plan to work with residents to design and create a garden with raised beds in the rear area; to develop construction projects and vegetable growing initiatives with residents. A programme of eating well, developing cooking skills and eating economically will be delivered in partnership with Cracking Good Food for residents. A programme of therapeutic arts and crafts activities will be developed with residents. The service is keen to initiate this element of the offer to clients in addition to the current approach of signposting clients into supportive organisations and charities.

At other sites we have worked with community volunteers to link clients in our accommodation into wider community initiatives. This encourages respect and commitment to community cohesion and enables the establishment of a positive culture of being a good neighbour in the community. We are very keen to establish a similar approach at the Rams Lodge in the future and would welcome developing collaborative initiatives in the Fallowfield and Withington area.

We find that many vulnerable clients accessing homelessness accommodation have often not registered with a GP surgery for many years. We work closely with the Urban Village Medical practice and will continue to do so to ensure all clients are registered with that practice and so not place any additional pressure on local GP practices.

6. Service liaison with elected Members and community

Accommodation service managers have met with local Members alongside the Deputy Leader Joanna Midgley to discuss the above proposal. All are fully supportive of the approach, recognising the need for continuation of the service.

The service has been made aware of concerns raised by nearby residents via the Anti Social Behaviour Action Team (ASBAT) or direct with site managers of incidents of anti-social behaviour in the Withington /Wilmslow Road area. As a good neighbour in the community, all allegations are taken seriously, concerns investigated, and any required actions are taken swiftly.

There have been assumptions by some residents that issues of street drinking, drug taking and anti-social behaviour on the Wilmslow Rd/Withington corridor are directly related to homeless residents at the Ram's Lodge. Service investigations have found previous incidents did not relate to Ram's Lodge clients but to residents of the nearby Lansdowne Hotel and surrounding HMO's. The Lansdowne was a B&B hotel previously used on the MCC Hotel Framework. The poor management of the Lansdowne and subsequent pushing of poor behaviour off site into the local streets resulted in the service ceasing use of the site in 2021.

Homelessness Services has a close working relationship with Neighbourhood ASBAT team and works in partnership and collaboration to address any issues in the community that emanate from vulnerable, homeless clients. ASBAT have indicated that the Rams Lodge under the management of Homelessness Services is a well-managed and responsible site. Any issues raised are promptly 'nipped in the bud'.

Managers from the service have met with nearby residents, and the Fallowfield Community Guardian Co-ordinator and managers of the nearby Mitford Court sheltered accommodation scheme. Meetings have been arranged to provide assurance of our service offer at The Rams Lodge site. This has been very well received. Contact details of site managers for Rams Lodge have been shared to ensure any concerns or issues can be quickly raised and resolved. A regular meeting with the group has been offered and contact details of staff and security on site – which are available 24 hours a day – shared with all. The service has put in place regular security staff street patrols around the wider vicinity of the accommodation. Rams Lodge clients and residents are aware of these to mitigate against any antisocial behaviours from Rams Lodge clients in the vicinity.

Additionally, the service operates a set of house rules requiring client's compliance in the license agreement. Any misconduct at or in the vicinity of the site can seriously jeopardise continued accommodation at the site for individuals. This detail has been shared with members of the local community to provide assurance that any issues reported can result in serious consequences for clients of Ram's Lodge. This means that the site being effectively managed by Homelessness Services enables the public to be assured over the responsive and responsible management of the site and of who is accommodated and in the case of any misconduct – who is not.

The pressure upon Homelessness Services to accommodate homeless single people does not mean that the service will cease to use the Rams Lodge if the change of use planning application is not granted. If the 10-year lease agreement cannot be established this will result in a continued significant budget pressure for the Council.

If the Council were to cease using The Rams Lodge as in-house managed temporary accommodation, it's owners will operate it as a hotel for vulnerable people. This could be accessed by anyone including MCC's Homelessness Service, Adult Social Services, Greater Manchester Mental Health Service, Probation Services or other Local Authorities. This would mean Council staff would not however be based on site which would result in a loss of control over how the site is managed and who is accommodated within it. Potentially, as has been the case with

other hotel sites in the area it could be considered by the Home Office for use as an asylum contingency hotel the decision for which the Council has no control over.