

### 3. EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION: REFUGEE AND MIGRANT SERVICE

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The purpose of this report is to present a proposal for the purchase of a property initially to be used for emergency accommodation by the Refugee and Migrant Service.

#### BACKGROUND

Discussion has occurred between representatives of the Refugee and Migrant Service (RMS) and the Council about their need for emergency housing.

The Refugee and Migrant Service in Christchurch receives an intake of refugees approximately every two months. RMS's housing requirements extend beyond the needs of new intake families, e.g. neighbourhood incompatibility, family break-up, which may require the urgent placement of family members into alternative accommodation.

The Refugee and Migrant Service has requested that the Council make a suitable property available at a concessional rental with an initial one-year lease. The Service's specific housing needs are for a 4-6 bedroom house or two adjoining units each with 2-3 bedrooms. The ideal geographical situation is within the inner city area with close proximity to main bus routes.

#### PROJECT PROPOSAL

Council staff have identified a 4-bedroom property at Bealey Avenue that meets the needs of the Refugee and Migrant Service. This property is currently on the market with the owners seeking offers over \$199,000. The Council has not entered into any negotiation to purchase this property. This property has been extensively refurbished and is on a 0.0524-hectare site.

In searching for suitable properties, a Council owned property located at 174 Fitzgerald Avenue was identified. This house is on the site of an old pumping station but requires significant expenditure to bring it up to an acceptable standard – an estimate of cost for this work has been sought but is not yet available. This property has a current capital value of \$180,000.

#### CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL POLICY

Key issues identified by the Council's 1996 Housing Study included:

*“(e) Priority housing needs including replacement for lost inner city bedsits, single men, single women, solo parent families (one child), semi dependent elderly, refugee accommodation, short-term accommodation for youth at risk.”*

Affordable housing goals and actions adopted as policy by the Council include:

*“That the Council liaise closely with all agents responsible for providing accommodation for the elderly and other people in need.”*

#### DISCUSSION

##### Properties Under Consideration

As noted above, a suitable property is available for purchase in Bealey Avenue, which would not require any additional expenditure by the Council – price: offers over \$199,000. An alternative property owned by the Council is located in Fitzgerald Avenue but this will require immediate expenditure to resolve maintenance requirements and bring it up to today's standards.

##### Longer Term Scenario

The Refugee and Migrant Service has requested the Council consider making a property available at concessional rent for an initial one-year lease period. The concessional rent aspect is consistent with the Council housing rental policy. The initial one-year lease period does not present any significant problem in relation to either of the properties as they are both capable of attracting tenants but would also be suitable for emergency accommodation for other agencies consistent with Council policy.

## **Compatibility with the Council's Vision and Goals**

As the Council has a goal of liaising closely with agencies responsible for providing accommodation for the elderly and other people in need, the acceptance of the proposal to provide a house for emergency accommodation to the Refugee and Migrant Service would be seen as tangible evidence of the Council's commitment to this goal.

The RMS receives support from Housing New Zealand in placing clients in longer-term accommodation but this does not meet the need for an emergency facility.

## **Costs**

The cost of purchasing a property or upgrading the property at 174 Fitzgerald Avenue is projected to be less than \$200,000. Provision was made in the 2001/02 Property (Housing) budget for the sum of \$300,000 for non specific partnership opportunities; no expenditure has yet occurred against this item with the consequence that funding is available from the 2001/02 budget.

As a condition of the lease, RMS will meet all costs associated with insurance, rates, and non structural maintenance.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a means of assisting RMS in providing suitable emergency accommodation it would be appropriate for the Council to make a property available at a concessional rental. Should the need for this type of accommodation diminish in the future the property would be suitable for alternative inner city accommodation purposes consistent with the Council's housing rental policy.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Council endorse the principle of entering a housing partnership with the Refugee and Migrant Service.
  2. That the Housing Subcommittee review the housing options available and report directly to the Council.