

Formal Council Questions and Responses

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1 **Question to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children) : 2023/11 - Cambridge House**

Councillor Al-Nuaimi asked:

The Question is enquiring about the future plans for a property in Newport on which a Cabinet Member decision was taken on 21 March 2022. recorded in the decision schedule.

The decision taken by the then Cabinet for Assets was to dispose of the property, preferably to a registered Social Landlord. The Cabinet Member deemed the property to be surplus to Council requirements 12 months ago. some of the reasons are to be found reasons lie in the excerpts below:

Summary: The premises were used for many years as a children's home. The provision of that service has altered, and the premises is no longer required operationally. The Council's Corporate Strategy and Asset Management Group has considered the future use of the premises and recommends that it should be offered for purchase to RSLs to provide much needed supported accommodation, or failing that a sale at market value, to be sold by way of public auction.

There has been a children's home at the site for over 30 years. As a children's home, it is a very large building which is out of kilter with current best practice in children's residential care. The building layout is challenging to manage for children who have experienced trauma and present with behaviours that require specialist care. The building is in poor condition physically and for continued safe use requires extensive capital spend. Being situated in the middle of the City poses extensive challenges because of the risks of children being exploited and criminally targeted. It is no longer considered suitable as a property to provide safe care and a decision was taken to close the facility on 17 May 2021.

Since then, the House has remained empty, as it seems the decision to dispose of the house has been changed to one which favours the repurposing of the property for another use, which is as yet unexplained or communicated to the Ward members.

In actual fact the empty building has become an attraction to rough sleepers who have set up tents, lit up fires in the grounds and even tried to break into the property, setting the alarm... These have become a source of angst and concern to the immediate neighbours and other residents in the surrounding area. The neighbours have had good reasons in the past to be concerned about the management of the House when was used as a Children home.

The very recent South Wales Argus article [the house, Newport, could be used for asylum seeker children | South Wales Argus](#) has for the first time disclosed that house will be used to house Asylum seekers. However, to date Ward Councillors have not received any information about this intention.

I am therefore asking the Cabinet members for Social Services and the Cabinet Member for Assets to provide detailed answers to the following questions:

1. Why has the decision taken 12 months ago to dispose of the property to an RSL, been changed, and especially after a strong case was made by the then Cabinet member, for the property to be sold to provide much needed affordable rented accommodation, to be used either as temporary or permanent accommodation for those on the 8000 strong housing waiting list?
2. What are the new plans for the property, and at what stage are they exactly now?
3. with respect to the proposed use of the property to house Asylum seekers, please provide the number of persons to be housed and whether there will be resident staff to look after the client group and to manage the service?
4. what plans exist to inform neighbours and nearby residents and to consult them on these plans and when is it going to happen?

Councillors Mudd and Marshall responded:

Thank you for the question.

On 13 April 2023 senior officers and Councillor Marshall met with local Ward Members (Councillor Al- Nuaimi and Councillor Thomas). Senior officers shared a written briefing note, and a comprehensive discussion was held, during which all of the points raised in this QAAT were discussed.

It was explained that the position has changed since the initial decision was made to dispose of Cambridge House to an RSL. In light of the proposed legislation for eliminating profit from children's social care and the requirement to support UASC we need to continue to develop our placement services across the City in order to safely and effectively meet the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens. The proposed reopening of Cambridge House and the possibility of a home for disabled children will be part of this work.