

Briefing note: Use of temporary accommodation in Harlow
(as at 17.02.20)

Key overview:

- *Lewisham Council currently leases 40 flats across two buildings in Harlow, Terminus House, and Templefields House. These buildings were office blocks that were converted into residential flats under permitted development.*
 - *The flats are leased from Caridon Property Limited on three year leases, which terminate between 2020- 21.*
 - *The properties leased by Lewisham are all 2 bedroom properties suitable for families (rather than studio / single person accommodation). Lewisham chose to lease family sized unit properties only so as not to place a significant burden on the host borough.*
 - *Lewisham Council is assured that the properties meet strict compliance and safety requirements. The properties are completed to a high standard.*
 - *Caridon Property Limited have confirmed that they are not aware of any specific cases of ASB caused by households placed by Lewisham Council.*
 - *Lewisham Council has assigned a dedicated Resettlement Officer to be a point of contact for all Lewisham residents placed in Harlow.*
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1. Placements in Harlow – Templefields and Terminus House

- 1.1. The Council is currently leasing 40 flats across two buildings in Harlow, Templefields and Terminus House. Lewisham leases the flats from Caridon Property Limited on three year leases. The leases contain a break clause allowing the Council to terminate the lease with one month's notice.
- 1.2. Both buildings were originally out of use office blocks. Caridon Property Ltd purchased both buildings and converted them from commercial to residential properties.
- 1.3. **Terminus House** is located in Harlow Town centre and is surrounded by good transport links and a wide array of amenities. The building is spread over 11 floors totalling 222 self-contained studio & 2 bedroom flats. The Council is leasing 24 x 2 bedroom properties in Terminus House.
- 1.4. **Templefields House** is spread over two floors (Ground and 1st Floor) totalling 122 self-contained studio flats and 50 two bedroom flats. The Council is now leasing 16 x 2 bedroom properties in Templefields House, after handing 3 properties back in November 2019.
- 1.5. Caridon are responsible for the building and tenancy management. Caridon are a well-established company with a strong reputation among local authorities as a company that provide good quality accommodation and provide a comprehensive and responsive property management service.
- 1.6. Lewisham was mindful from the outset not to place an excessive number of families in these two locations so as not to place a significant burden on the host borough. Lewisham Council only lease family sized accommodation and not studios or single person units.
- 1.7. Lewisham residents are occupying 32 out of the 40 properties that are being leased from Caridon Property Limited. 8 self-contained units are void and Lewisham Council is in the process of nominating new suitable households to be placed in the void properties.

- 1.8. Terminus House is well placed in the Town Centre and provides residents with a number of local amenities within short walking distance. Amenities such as restaurants, banks, post offices, local supermarkets and GPs are all within walking distance of Terminus House. There are a number of schools and colleges in the area, giving residents a varied choice of educational institutions for their children. Harlow Town and Harlow Mill Rail Station are situated within a mile of Terminus House and both have direct trains that go to Liverpool Street Station in London. There is a bus garage situated at the bottom of Terminus House with a number of buses that run around Harlow and other local areas.
- 1.9. Templefields House is situated a little further out from the town centre but is only approx..10 mins walk to the Tesco superstore. The local bus service is also approx.. 10 mins walk from Templefields House. There are schools and nurseries within easy reach, for example the local primary school is 0.8m, approx. 15 minutes walk.
- 1.10. To safeguard the welfare of tenants and to better manage the placement process, there is an out of London (OOL) placements protocol being developed by London Councils. Once fully developed it will be considered by London authorities including Lewisham.

2. Compliance and Safety

- 2.1. Prior to entering into a lease agreement, Lewisham were assured as to the safety of the buildings in relation to statutory building regulations, fire risk assessments and gas and electrical safety. The safety of the block and leased flats are monitored on an ongoing basis by Caridon Property Limited and Lewisham Council.
- 2.2. The recent conversion of both buildings means that all properties within these buildings are newly refurbished, with brand new appliances, electrics, bathroom, flooring and kitchens. All properties have been completed to a high standard.
- 2.3. The Council has an improved compliance process which has been recently implemented for all privately managed leased accommodation, including Terminus House. Terminus House has no gas in the individual flats as they are all electric. This new process now sees a new NICEIC EICR certificate carried at the change of tenancy, which is reviewed by the Councils compliance officers and qualified electricians at Lewisham Homes. This ensures that households are being placed into accommodation that is safe.

3. Anti-Social Behaviour

- 3.1. A number of reports of ASB have recently been highlighted by media eg the recent Panorama documentary. Caridon Property Limited have confirmed that they are not aware of any specific cases of ASB where households placed by Lewisham Council have been the cause. There have been some reports of ASB received from Lewisham households to the housing reviews team, which are passed on to Caridon by Lewisham.

- 3.2. As the accommodation provider, Caridon is responsible for monitoring and managing ASB within their buildings. Both buildings are secure with a key/fob required for entry. Security is present on both sites from 10am – 3am Monday to Friday and then 6pm to 3am Saturdays and Sundays, with additional office staff on site Mondays to Friday from 7:30am-6pm. CCTV systems are installed and operational at both sites.
- 3.3. Caridon have an ASB policy in place and encourage all residents to report any form of ASB via phone, email or to a member of the Caridon onsite staff. Once reported Caridon will undertake an investigation into the allegations and proceed with the required actions, such as eviction, or referral to the placing authority or police. Caridon work closely with the police in Harlow and have assisted the police on a number of occasions, which has resulted in the arrest of a number of offenders.
- 3.4. A recent inspection of Terminus House was undertaken by a Resettlement Officer from the Property and Business Accounts Team. During the inspection, the communal areas, were looked at. The Resettlement Officer confirmed at the time of his visit that there was no signs of ASB in the form of smells or signs of drug use, graffiti, urine or congregations of gangs. The Resettlement Officer will continue to undertake scheduled inspections to monitor this, in addition to the onsite staff from Caridon Property Limited. To ensure our residents are being placed in safe and secure accommodation which is managed to an acceptable standard, a visit of Terminus House was undertaken as a result of the concerns raised by Cllr Mark Ingall of Harlow Council. This visit was conducted on Monday, 27th January 2020, it was attended by Cllr Paul Bell, Madeleine Jeffery – Director of Housing Services, Fenella Beckman – Head of the Private Sector Housing Agency and Sukhi Nijjar – Property & Business Accounts Service Manager.

Upon inspection of Terminus House, it was found the accommodation was suitable and more importantly safe for our residents. There is adequate measures in place in terms of security and health & safety measures, such as sprinkler systems, fire extinguishers and all floors entrances are fob controlled.

- 3.5 There have been two incidents where police attended Templefields House regarding drug use/intent to supply. The police first attended Templefields House on 25th November 2019 on the basis of the information provided by Caridon staff members and then there was a follow up on 1st Dec 2019. As a result the police arrested a tenant (not Lewisham) and two other non-resident individuals.
- 3.6 Similarly, our understanding is that the police also attended Terminus House, again regarding drug use/intent to supply. The police first attended Terminus House in or around Sept 2018 and then in or around May 2019, again, it was on the basis of the information provided to the police by Caridon. The perpetrator targeted by police in May 2019 was the partner of a Lewisham resident. The partner was suspected of supplying drugs within Templefields House complex. The partner has been banned from the building, although our resident is still in occupation of her accommodation.
- 3.7 Both Terminus House and Templefields House have sufficient security measures in place to provide safe and secure accommodation for our residents but there are no guarantees. Some of the current measures in place are:-
- CCTV in all hallways, lifts and communal parts monitored on site.
 - Full time security staff at Templefields House from 10am – 3am weekdays and from 10am – 2am weekends.
 - Full time security staff at Terminus House from 10am – 3.30am
 - Reception offices which are staffed during working hours.
 - Hourly patrols of all hallways and communal areas.

- Fob access to each floor, so people just cannot go from one floor to the next.
- Regular liaison meeting with police and Harlow Council.
- All security staff wear body cams.

4. Our children and families in Harlow

4.1 Lewisham Officers want the best for our children in temporary accommodation and work to minimise any adverse impact on the children and their families

4.2 Caridon are working closely with local nurseries and primary schools to ensure that the children who live in Harlow have access to nurseries and schools as soon as they arrive.

4.3 The schools are within walking distance of both Terminus House and Templefields Houses. There are also play areas that are covered by CCTV so that children can play in a safe environment

4.4 Recently over Xmas Caridon converted one of their flats into a Santa's Grotto for a month so that children could visit Santa (for free) to get their Xmas pressies. There are regularly children's discos and other activities specifically aimed at supporting and enhancing the quality of life for our children.

4.5 Lewisham's Resettlement Officer and Caridon also work with families on preparing them for work either through undertaking skills courses and other training or getting work placements

5. Resettlement in Harlow

5.1. Lewisham Council have assigned a dedicated Resettlement Officer, who will act as a point of contact for all residents that Lewisham has placed in Harlow. The remit of this function will be to provide support and address any concerns that households may have about their housing. This dedicated Resettlement Officer will also work with households placed in Harlow to help them secure private rented accommodation, in order for them to settle into more secure housing.

5.2. The appointed Resettlement Officer recently carried out an inspection of Terminus House on 21/11/2019. The purpose of this inspection was to inspect the communal areas, liaise with the onsite Caridon staff and meet residents that Lewisham Council had housed there. The Resettlement Officer was able to gain access into 9 properties (Flat 39, 41, 42, 44, 131, 133, 137, 136 and 139) and confirmed the condition of the properties was of a good, suitable standard. A number of residents also advised that they were happy and had formed a close knit community with other Lewisham residents. The same Resettlement Officer will be working closely with our residents in Templefields House to move them into the private rented sector in order to discharge our full housing duty, unless they are successful in bidding for social housing.

5.3. The Resettlement Officer has been making efforts to engage with local estate agents to establish working relationships, in order to secure private rented accommodation for residents in Terminus House. This project will enable households to access more secure and settled private rented accommodation. Due to the location of Terminus House, households have had to change key services to Harlow, such as schools, GP's and hospitals. By being placed in more secure

private rented accommodation, it will allow households to continue to lay down roots and will reduce the threat of disruption to households day to day living.

- 5.4. In an attempt to engage with local estate agents in Harlow, the Resettlement Officer has used property portals such as Zoopla and Rightmove to search for properties that are priced similarly to the local housing allowance rate in Harlow. The agents are then contacted via the phone. The feedback received so far have mainly been that a number of estate agents do not have any landlords on their books that are willing to accept households on universal credit. The Resettlement Officer will continue to engage with estate agents and will meet with households in Terminus House and encourage them to do the same.
- 5.5. As well as landlords reluctance to accept households on universal credit, another challenge to accessing private rented accommodation in Harlow, is the difference between the local housing allowance rate and the market rent for the area. The local housing allowance for a 2 bedroom property is £174.82 per week (£757.68pcm). Searches on property portals such as Rightmove show that 2 bedroom rents in Harlow range from £1,000pcm- £1,200pcm, which is considerably more than the available local housing allowance for the area. The Council, however offer a one off cash incentive to local estate agents which can make up for the difference in rent.