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Peterborough City Council is set to lease Elizabeth Court in the city's Park ward to provide additional temporary accommodation for homeless households.

The city council is proposing to lease 53 properties from Cross Keys Homes for the next five years.

Elizabeth Court was purchased by the housing association last year and is currently empty with previous residents all happily rehoused elsewhere.

The council, subject to cabinet member approval, would pay Cross Keys Homes a total of £366,122 each year for the 53 properties. However, where households are eligible, the council would be able to claim 100 per cent of this cost back through housing benefit subsidy.

By using accommodation at Elizabeth Court, rather than hotels or bed and breakfasts for the equivalent number of homeless households, it's estimated the council would save close to £800,000 per year.

Councillor Irene Walsh, cabinet member for communities and environment capital, said: "In the past year Peterborough has seen a noticeable increase in the number of homeless applicants who are owed a full housing duty.

"This increase in homelessness is a national issue with many areas across the country facing similar pressures. We've therefore had to use hotels to accommodate those in need and this is expensive and not a good fit for families.

"This proposal is a big step forward and was identified as an opportunity through work with Medesham Homes, the company set up by the council and Cross Keys Homes to build new homes in the city. Alongside other measures we have had to take, it will ensure we have more properties to support Peterborough households in need and to reduce the housing cost to the city."

Improvement works at Elizabeth Court, which will take place prior to households being accommodated, would include replacing bathrooms and kitchens as well as general repairs. The re-fit is set to cost approximately £788,000 and would be funded by money received from other developments in the city, subject to cabinet member approval.

It's expected that all properties would be occupied by July 2017.

Claire Higgins, chief executive of Cross Keys Homes said: "Cross Keys Homes is passionately committed to helping to solve the housing crisis in Peterborough – and particularly the shortage of temporary accommodation. We truly welcome this great opportunity to work in partnership with Peterborough City Council to provide high quality accommodation for those facing a very difficult time in their life.

"Just as we do in our other temporary accommodation, we will also use our expertise to support Elizabeth Court tenants into permanent homes and to address any other challenges they are facing. This is so that, if at all possible, we can prevent them becoming homeless ever again."

The number of households in temporary accommodation in Peterborough has doubled in the past two years with the council currently supporting approximately 200 households.

After five years the lease could be reviewed or the site could deliver a new development of affordable housing.

