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Empty council properties are being refurbished as part of a pioneering initiative to provide temporary housing to help Bristol's homeless move towards independent living.

Alec French Architects has been appointed by Bristol City Council to convert boarded-up shops and empty office buildings it owns into stepping-stone homes as part of the authority's Move On Accommodation Project.

The aim of the initiative is to increase the range of accommodation options for people recovering from homelessness in Bristol.

Alec French is retrofitting vacant office buildings and empty shops at The Square in Knowle to create seven homes, and in Kingsland Road which will provide another eight temporary homes.

The firm is also in discussions with the council about retrofitting additional vacant premises in the Stockwood area of Bristol which would create another ten homes including family-sized units with wheelchair access. The family homes would provide both permanent and temporary accommodation options as part of the Move On Accommodation Project.

Alec French Architects has accredited in-house retrofit specialists for working on existing buildings and improving their energy efficiency. Renewable energy systems including heat pumps will be installed in all

buildings that are being converted to homes as part of the Move On Accommodation Project.

Louis Lane, associate director at Alec French Architects, said: “These properties have been specially redesigned to provide much-needed temporary and sustainable accommodation for Bristol’s homeless and those in real need of safe, comfortable homes.

“We’re proud to be involved in this pioneering project to help people rebuild their lives and make the transition from homelessness towards independent living.”

Councillor Barry Parsons, chair of the council’s Homes and Housing Delivery Committee said: “There is no single solution to the temporary accommodation challenge we and other councils face, but it is clear that whilst the housing crisis continues to cast a shadow over the city, we will continue to face difficulties in ensuring support is there for those who need housing.

“We cannot tackle this challenge alone, and I would like to thank our partners who are helping us provide more households with accommodation that meets their needs, reduce the use of hotel rooms and support greater financial stability in the long term.

“Bringing empty buildings back into use while helping people recover from homelessness is a win-win for Bristol.

“We want to make Bristol a city where rough sleeping is rare, brief, and non-recurrent, and any stay in temporary accommodation is short, safe, and secure.”

Reimagining of these buildings is the latest project undertaken by Alec French Architects on behalf of Bristol City Council. The firm recently delivered the council’s flagship low-carbon development at Lawrence Weston, providing 57 much-needed new social homes across five sites in Capel Road and also developed LaunchPad in Fishponds to offer 31 modular homes for low-income households.

The Capel Road project replaces a series of defective post-war reinforced concrete council houses, which were demolished around 2012.