

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 21 March 2012 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Jose Hales, Liz Heazell and Bunty Waters

Also in attendance: Alison Elcox, Ben Shelton and Hazel Smith

Officers:

Julie Fletcher	Housing Performance Improvement Team Leader
Anita Goddard	Housing Operational Services Manager
Stephen Hills	Affordable Homes Director
Schuyler Newstead	Housing Development & Enabling Manager
Ian Senior	Democratic Services Officer
Paul Williams	Equality and Diversity Officer

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mark Howell declared a personal interest as an employee of the Papworth Trust, a charity that includes a Registered Social Landlord.

Councillor Alison Elcox declared a personal interest by virtue of being a South Cambridgeshire landlord.

Councillor Ben Shelton declared a personal interest as an employee of a letting agent in Cambridge.

71. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Housing Portfolio Holder signed, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2012, subject to the addition of Councillor Bunty Waters to the list of those present.

72. HOUSING STRATEGY

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking approval for the Housing Strategy, which set out the Council's overall vision and key aims for the housing service over the next five years.

The Strategy's key themes had been encapsulated by the acronym HEART (Health and Wellbeing, Economic Growth and Development, Affordable Housing, Reducing Fuel Poverty and promoting energy efficiency, and Tackling Homelessness). The intention was that the Housing Strategy would help focus resources from across the Council and put housing at the HEART of Council activity. In particular, Councillor Sue Ellington, Environmental Services Portfolio Holder, explained how the Ageing Well Strategy, promoted by Health and Environmental Services, would support the Housing strategy.

With reference to Affordable Housing, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the aim to identify a potential public Gypsy and Travellers Site in partnership with Cambridge City Council and seek a development and / or management partner to take this forward by 2015.

The Housing Portfolio Holder and all those present congratulated the Housing Performance Improvement Team Leader and her Team for compiling such a comprehensive document.

The Portfolio Holder **approved** the Housing Strategy 2012-16.

73. **EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY**

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking approval for the Empty Homes Strategy, which set out the Council's plans for bringing empty homes back into use over the next five years.

The Corporate Manager (Affordable Homes) said that the Council already had enforcement powers at its disposal as a last resort but the Strategy would give the Council a proactive way to bring empty homes back into use through negotiation and collaborative working.

Those present agreed that local Members should be kept informed about the location of empty properties within their wards.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **approved** the Empty Homes Strategy 2012-16.

74. **TENANCY POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report on the Tenancy Policy.

The Portfolio Holder was minded to end the practice of offering secure 'lifetime' tenancies, replacing them with flexible tenancies for a fixed period of ten years with the review process taking place after nine years. Concern was expressed that this would create unnecessary uncertainty for elderly people but the Portfolio Holder highlighted the importance of treating everybody fairly and equally. Nobody would be asked to move unless suitable alternative accommodation meeting their needs could be offered.

An updated Policy would be presented to the Housing Portfolio Holder in September 2012 for final approval.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **approved** in principle for further development the Tenancy Policy, including:

1. **Tenancies for older people and disabled people**
To offer flexible tenancies for a fixed period of 10 years.
2. **Tenancies for all other people**
To offer flexible tenancies for a fixed period of 10 years.
3. **Introductory tenancies – giving landlords the opportunity to present the tenant with a trial period. If there are any problems associated with an introductory tenancy, the landlord may obtain possession by a court order after following due process, and it is not required to prove any grounds for possession. These tenancies are seen as a fast track tool to deal with anti-social behaviour.**
To introduce 12 month introductory tenancies to all new tenants.

4. Succession Rights

Right to succeed to a tenancy on the death of a tenant

To allow only one succession for spouses and partners but with safeguards in place to protect the vulnerable.

75. WILLINGHAM: ACCESS OVER BRICKHILLS - SALE PRICE OF EASEMENT

The Housing Portfolio Holder presented the decision he was minded to make in relation to a price for the access land owned by the Council at Brickhills, Willingham. Planning permission had been obtained and the in principle decision to sell had been given.

The Portfolio Holder stated that, if the developer could acquire the land at a reduced cost, then the price being demanded by the Council for the access land would also be reduced, down to a minimum of £120,000. It would be essential that the land value could be substantiated to the Council's satisfaction.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **confirmed** his decision made on Wednesday 15 February 2012 to transfer Title to the land shaded on the plan attached to the original agenda report and defined as vehicular access over SCDC land, for £136,800 (One hundred and thirty six thousand eight hundred pounds), subject to an overage provision to protect the Council's future interests and to payment of South Cambridgeshire District Council's legal costs by the applicant, **unless** the applicant is able to negotiate a lower price for the site from the landowners. The price of the easement, in this case, will be reduced to 25% (subject to an absolute minimum of £120,000) of the lowest price offered by the landowners. This offer will stand for a period of six months, to terminate on Friday 21 September 2012.

76. ALLOCATION OF ACCOMMODATION: CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

The Housing Portfolio Holder approved the letter attached to the agenda report as the Council's response to the CLG draft guidance.

77. SINGLE EQUALITIES SCHEME

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report on the new Single Equality Scheme 2012 – 2015.

Those present discussed the need for effective monitoring and enforcement of the Scheme, compliance with which should be treated as mandatory. In relation to Gypsies and Travellers, they noted the different functions of the Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy and the work led by the Planning section to identify of suitable sites for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

The Portfolio Holder expressed the hope that Equalities and Diversity considerations would become deeply embedded in every aspect of the Council's activity. The Single Equality Scheme should become an "Active Document" and its importance emphasised to every South Cambridgeshire District Councillor and South Cambridgeshire District Council employee.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **approved** the Single Equalities Scheme 2012-2015.

78. SERVICE PLANS 2012/13

The Housing Portfolio Holder received and noted the final draft of the Affordable Homes

Service Plan for 2012-13 to 2014-15.

With regard to the Mobile Warden Scheme, the Portfolio Holder said that it was yet to be determined how Mobile Warden Schemes should be funded so as to maximise their effectiveness.

79. HEALTH AND SAFETY WITHIN THE HOUSING SERVICE

The Housing Portfolio Holder **received and noted** a report updating him about Health and Safety issues relevant to the Affordable Homes service.

80. FORWARD PLAN

Those present noted a draft Forward Plan for 2012-13. Following the current meeting, a further report on Tenancy Policy Development would be presented to the meeting in September 2012.

81. TENANT PARTICIPATION GROUP

The Housing Portfolio Holder reported that the Tenant Participation Group would not be addressing this meeting.

82. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Housing Portfolio Holder meeting had been scheduled for Wednesday 13 June 2012, starting at 5.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.25 p.m.
