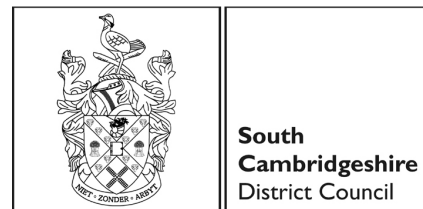


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12 March 2013

To: Councillor Mark Howell, Portfolio Holder

Jose Hales
Mark Hersom
Bunty Waters

Scrutiny and Overview Committee
Opposition Spokesman
Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Dear Sir / Madam

You are invited to attend the next meeting of **HOUSING PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S MEETING**, which will be held in **MONKFIELD ROOM, FIRST FLOOR** at South Cambridgeshire Hall on **WEDNESDAY, 20 MARCH 2013 at 5.30 p.m.**

Yours faithfully
JEAN HUNTER
Chief Executive

Requests for a large print agenda must be received at least 48 hours before the meeting.

AGENDA		PAGES
PROCEDURAL ITEMS		
1.	Declarations of Interest	
2.	Minutes of Previous Meeting The Portfolio Holder is asked to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2013 as a correct record.	1 - 4
DECISION ITEMS		
3.	GT CHISHILL: Transfer of track to Waller's Close	5 - 12
4.	BASSINGBOURN: Disposal of garage sites off Mill Lane	13 - 18
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INFORMATION ITEMS		
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STANDING ITEMS		
8.	Tenant Participation Group	

9. Forward Plan

55 - 56

The Portfolio Holder will maintain, for agreement at each meeting, a Forward Plan identifying all matters relevant to the Portfolio which it is believed are likely to be the subject of consideration and / or decision by the Portfolio Holder, or recommendation to, or referral by, the Portfolio Holder to Cabinet, Council, or any other constituent part of the Council. The plan will be updated as necessary. The Portfolio Holder will be responsible for the content and accuracy of the forward plan.

10. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 19 June 2013 at 5.30pm

OUR VISION

South Cambridgeshire will continue to be the best place to live and work in the country. Our district will demonstrate impressive and sustainable economic growth. Our residents will have a superb quality of life in an exceptionally beautiful, rural and green environment. The Council will be recognised as consistently innovative and a high performer with a track record of delivering value for money by focussing on the priorities, needs and aspirations of our residents, parishes and businesses.

OUR VALUES

We will demonstrate our corporate values in all our actions. These are:

- Trust
- Mutual respect
- A commitment to improving services
- Customer service

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Disturbance by Public

If a member of the public interrupts proceedings, the Chairman will warn the person concerned. If they continue to interrupt, the Chairman will order their removal from the meeting room. If there is a general disturbance in any part of the meeting room open to the public, the Chairman may call for that part to be cleared.

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SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 23 January 2013 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Bunty Waters

Also in attendance: Ben Shelton

Officers:

Jenny Clark	Lands Officer
Anita Goddard	Housing Operational Services Manager
Stephen Hills	Affordable Homes Director
Ian Senior	Democratic Services Officer
Gwynn Thomas	Principal Accountant (Housing)
Paul Williams	Equality and Diversity Officer

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

21. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Housing Portfolio Holder signed, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2012.

22. LONGSTANTON: DISPOSAL OF LAND OFF HADDOWS CLOSE

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his approval for the transfer and sale of land off Haddows Close, Longstanton, as indicated on the plan attached at Appendix A.

Those present discussed a variety of options in the context of Longstanton Parish Council's present circumstances. The Portfolio Holder was keen to find a way of providing a community facility if at all possible.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed**

1. to offer the freehold of the area hatched red on the plan attached to the report to Longstanton Parish Council for £4,000 for allotment use and to keep that option open for 12 months
2. to transfer the area hatched blue on the plan to Longstanton Parish Council at Nil cost also for allotment use.
3. That South Cambridgeshire District Council should pay its own legal costs as well as those of Longstanton Parish Council
4. That, if after 12 months Longstanton Parish Council had not taken up the offer to buy the land hatched red on the plan, that land should be offered for sale to the occupiers of no. 21 Haddows Close, Longstanton for use as garden land, each party to pay their own legal costs.

23. GT CHISHILL, TRANSFER OF TRACK AT WALLER'S CLOSE

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his approval for the transfer of land at Waller's Close, Great Chishill, as indicated on the plan attached at Appendix A.

Those present discussed a number of options having regard to the potential cost to the District Council of repairing it, and the likely extent of any ongoing maintenance liability. The Portfolio Holder was adamant that, were the land to be transferred at all, it should be to the owner of the land on which the rabbit sanctuary is located, rather than to the rabbit sanctuary itself. Those present then discussed alternative possible solutions were that land to cease being used for charitable purposes and instead be used in a commercial way. It was observed that usual uplift provision would not work in this case, and the Portfolio Holder instructed officers to draw up an appropriate restrictive covenant so as to give the District Council the opportunity to determine a land value and obtain payment should the land be developed for profit at some time in the future.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed**

1. to transfer the freehold of the track at the end of Waller's Close, Great Chishill at Nil cost to the owner of the rabbit sanctuary land at the rear, following repairs paid for by South Cambridgeshire District Council to the track surface, the transfer to include a covenant restricting the use of the track to serve the rabbit sanctuary only.
2. that, should the track be used in future for commercial or housing development on private land rather than solely for charitable purposes, the owner must apply to South Cambridgeshire District Council for release of the restrictive covenant. If this is agreed, it will be subject to the owner paying to the Council any increase in the value of the access from Waller's Close.

24. HRA REVENUE AND CAPITAL ESTIMATES FOR THE HOUSING PORTFOLIO

The Housing Portfolio Holder received and noted a report about the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Estimates for 2013-14 and the HRA Capital Programme up to 2017-18.

Those present focussed on the Council's increased spending power following the HRA funding changes, and on rent levels.

25. QUARTERLY EQUALITIES UPDATE (Q3 2012/13)

The Housing Portfolio Holder **received and noted** a quarterly update on equalities from October to December 2012.

Referring to paragraphs 6 to 13 of the report, the Portfolio Holder welcomed the Council's progress relating to the Equalities Framework for Local Government, and stressed that he wanted to achieve the status of 'Excellent'.

The Portfolio Holder noted that the procedure for carrying out Equality Impact Assessments had now been streamlined. As a result, he instructed officers to ensure that, should an Assessment be more than two months overdue, the relevant Portfolio Holder and Director would be summoned to explain the situation at the next available Housing Portfolio Holder meeting.

26. LEARNING FROM CUSTOMER FEEDBACK (CELEBRATING SUCCESS AND SHARING BEST PRACTICE)

There was no discussion under this heading.

27. TENANT PARTICIPATION GROUP

There was no representative present at this meeting.

28. FORWARD PLAN

The Housing Portfolio Holder noted that the Forward Plan would be updated and attached to the next agenda.

29. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Housing Portfolio Holder meeting had been scheduled to take place on Wednesday 20 March 2013, starting at 5.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 6.20 p.m.

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SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

20 March 2013

AUTHOR/S: Director of Housing

TRANSFER OF TRACK AT WALLER'S CLOSE, GREAT CHISHILL**Purpose**

1. To seek agreement by the Housing Portfolio Holder for the transfer of land at Waller's Close, Great Chishill, as outlined red on plan.

Recommendations

2. That the Housing Portfolio Holder agrees that the freehold of the track at the end of Waller's Close, Great Chishill be transferred at nil cost to the owner of the rabbit sanctuary land at the rear, subject to specified conditions (Option Two).

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The track at the end of Waller's Close forms part of the only vehicular access to the rabbit sanctuary from Hall Lane. The sanctuary land is privately owned together with a further length of access track that extends westwards from the Council's track.
4. By transferring the track to the owner of the rabbit sanctuary, all future maintenance will become his responsibility.
5. The track is surplus to Council requirements.
6. The track is not a community asset as it serves private land only so there would be no local benefit in transferring it to the Parish Council. The Council's interests and the future use of the sanctuary land can be sufficiently protected with the conditions of transfer together with the covenant included in the 1988 conveyance of the remainder of the track.

Background

7. Waller's Close is adopted as public highway apart from the garage forecourt and the track at the end, which are in Council ownership.
8. The rabbit sanctuary land was once the site of sewage works, transferred by the Council to Anglian Water in 1979, who then sold the land, with right of access over Waller's Close and the track when the works became redundant.
9. The owner of the rabbit sanctuary land has a right of vehicular access over the Council's part of the track and garage forecourt in Waller's Close. The Council's part of the track forms about half of the full length of the track leading to the rabbit sanctuary.
10. Vehicular use of the track is by employees of and visitors to the rabbit sanctuary only. Waller's Close is the only link to the rabbit sanctuary from Hall Lane. Nos 3 – 7 Waller's Close use the track to access their properties by foot only.

11. The Council is legally responsible for maintaining the track and necessary repairs to the surface were recently carried out at the price of £5,716.60.
12. At the meeting on 23rd January 2013, the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed the following:
 - i) To transfer the freehold of the track at the end of Waller's Close, Great Chishill at Nil cost to the owner of the rabbit sanctuary land at the rear, following repairs paid for by South Cambridgeshire District Council to the track surface, the transfer to include a covenant restricting the use of the track to serve the rabbit sanctuary only.
 - ii) That, should the track be used in future for commercial or housing development on private land rather than solely for charitable purposes, the owner must apply to South Cambridgeshire District Council for release of the restrictive covenant. If this is agreed, it will be subject to the owner paying to the Council any increase in the value of the access from Waller's Close.
13. The matter is now subject to reconsideration following a request by Great Chishill Parish Council that the track be transferred to them.
14. If a formal offer is made to him, the owner of the rabbit sanctuary land has agreed to accept transfer of the freehold of the track at nil cost subject to the specified conditions and thus to take on full responsibility for its future maintenance.

Considerations

15. The track is not in the category of a 'ransom strip' as if ownership is transferred, Council owned land would remain between the track and the public highway. It is thus likely to be of little value.
16. It is in the Council's long term interest to dispose of the land.
17. The Parish Council's reasons for requesting ownership of the track are as follows (quote from Parish Chair):
 - i) "We have doubts as to the long term viability of the rabbit sanctuary. There have been questions as to the financial wealth of the project, and it is very dependent upon the continuing enthusiasm of the founder and manager, [CC]. Whilst the operation is run as a charity, the land on which it sits on is owned by [Mr C]. In the event that the sanctuary was closed, and in the context of Localism and possible changes on-going in planning guidelines, the Parish Council would like some control in the event that an application for alternative use was made.
 - ii) Whilst the Parish Council is generally supportive of the charities objectives, there have been a number of problems; visitor/staff parking, rubbish burning, and light intrusions causing irritation to the residents of Wallers Close. For this reason the Parish Council objected to permanent planning permission. SCDC recognised this and granted time limited permission. Whilst problems have diminished recently, the transfer to the Parish Council would provide increased leverage in the event of future problems."

18. Following a meeting with officers, the owner of the rabbit sanctuary land made a submission to the Council giving his own reasons why the track should be transferred to him. A summary of his submission is as follows:
- i) Has rented and then owned the land where the sanctuary is for 20 years and has no interest in owning the access road other than to allow the Rabbit Residence Charity to continue with their charity work to rescue and re-home unwanted pet rabbits. Restrictions imposed by the planning consent are adhered to.
 - ii) Have never had nor has any intention to consider the land to be used in any other way than the above, in the near or distant future.
 - iii) Communications with the Council (as owner of the track) started following submission of a claim for damage caused to cars using the access road. Council officers accepted that the track was in need of repair. They asked if he would be interested in taking ownership of the track following repairs and thus responsibility for future maintenance, since the Council had no use for the road.
 - iv) Agreed to drop car damage claim if ownership of the road passed to him.
 - v) At meeting with officers on 18th February, discussed interest in road received by SCDC from Great Chishill Parish Council. The Parish Council have no meaningful use for the road as it leads only to his land. The preferred owner of the road should be himself on behalf of those who use it, have a vested interest in its future maintenance and who will appease the Waller's Close residents' considerations.
 - vi) The fears of the Parish Council regarding future change of use of his land are unfounded.
19. It should be noted that with regard to 18 iv), it has been explained to the owner of rabbit sanctuary land that his insurance claim is a totally separate issue from the transfer of ownership of the track and will not in any way influence the decision whether or not to transfer ownership to him.
20. The length of track in private ownership that extends westwards from the Council's track was sold by the Council in 1988 subject to a covenant as follows: "not to use the land hereby conveyed for any purpose except for the purposes of access to and in connection with the use of the Purchaser's adjoining land as agricultural land and not to use the land hereby conveyed for the purpose of changing the use of the Purchaser's adjoining land from agricultural land".
21. A similar covenant can be included in the transfer to ensure that the track serves the existing use of the land as a rabbit sanctuary or for agricultural use only. Alternatively or in addition, a claw-back clause can be included to protect the Council's interests.
22. The above covenants are regarded as sufficient to protect the Council's future interests together with the future use of the sanctuary land.
23. The track is not a community asset as it serves private land only so there would be no local benefit in transferring it to the Parish Council. In addition, the Parish Council

would be taking on financial obligations by becoming responsible for its maintenance. The Parish Council would always be consulted with any future planning applications.

Options

- 24. Option One – Retain track in SCDC ownership
- 25. Option Two – Transfer the freehold of the track to the owner of the rabbit sanctuary land at nil cost, subject to a condition that it serves the rabbit sanctuary land only either in its existing use or for agricultural use only.
- 26. Option Three – Transfer the freehold of the track to Great Chishill Parish Council at nil cost, subject to a condition that it serves the rabbit sanctuary land only either in its existing use or for agricultural use only.

Implications

27. Financial	With Option One, the Council would continue to be liable for maintenance in the future With Option Two or Three, the Council would be relieved of maintenance liability in the future
Legal	Legal advice will be sought to carry out the sale.
Staffing	None
Risk Management	No risks associated with sale.
Equality and Diversity	None
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No Not relevant
Climate Change	None

Consultations

- 28. Councillor Hales supports the transfer of the track to the Parish Council at nil cost.
- 29. Councillor Barrett has no objection to the transfer of the track to the owner of the rabbit sanctuary land.
- 30. Previous to the Portfolio Holder’s meeting of 23rd January, Great Chishill Parish Council made the following comments: “Strongly disagree that repairs to the track should be carried out by SCDC and the track transferred to the owner of the rabbit sanctuary land, for the following reasons:
 - (i) Resources could be better used elsewhere, eg more parking spaces in Waller’s Close
 - (ii) The rabbit sanctuary is a charitable trust who do not own the land and they do not have the resources to take on responsibility for maintenance of the track
 - (iii) The rabbit sanctuary’s temporary planning permission to operate expired in March 2012 and they are still waiting for the determination of a planning application to operate on a permanent basis”

It was explained to the Parish Council that SCDC had a legal obligation to carry out repairs to the track. In response to (i), the Council is currently investigating the possibility of constructing an additional parking space in Waller’s Close.

Effect on Strategic Aims

31. **AIM: To make sure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer outstanding and sustainable quality of life for our residents**

Transferring ownership of the track would relieve the Council from the costs of maintaining it in the future, thus allowing resources to be directed elsewhere

Conclusions / Summary

32. The owner of the rabbit sanctuary land, who has right of access over the Council's track and the garage forecourt in Waller's Close, has agreed to accept the freehold of the track at nil cost, subject to specified conditions and thus take on full responsibility for its future maintenance. Great Chishill Parish Council has also expressed interest in acquiring the track at nil cost. It is in the Council's long term interest to dispose of the land but a decision is now required regarding who should be the new owner, taking into account all considerations including the reasons put forward by each party.

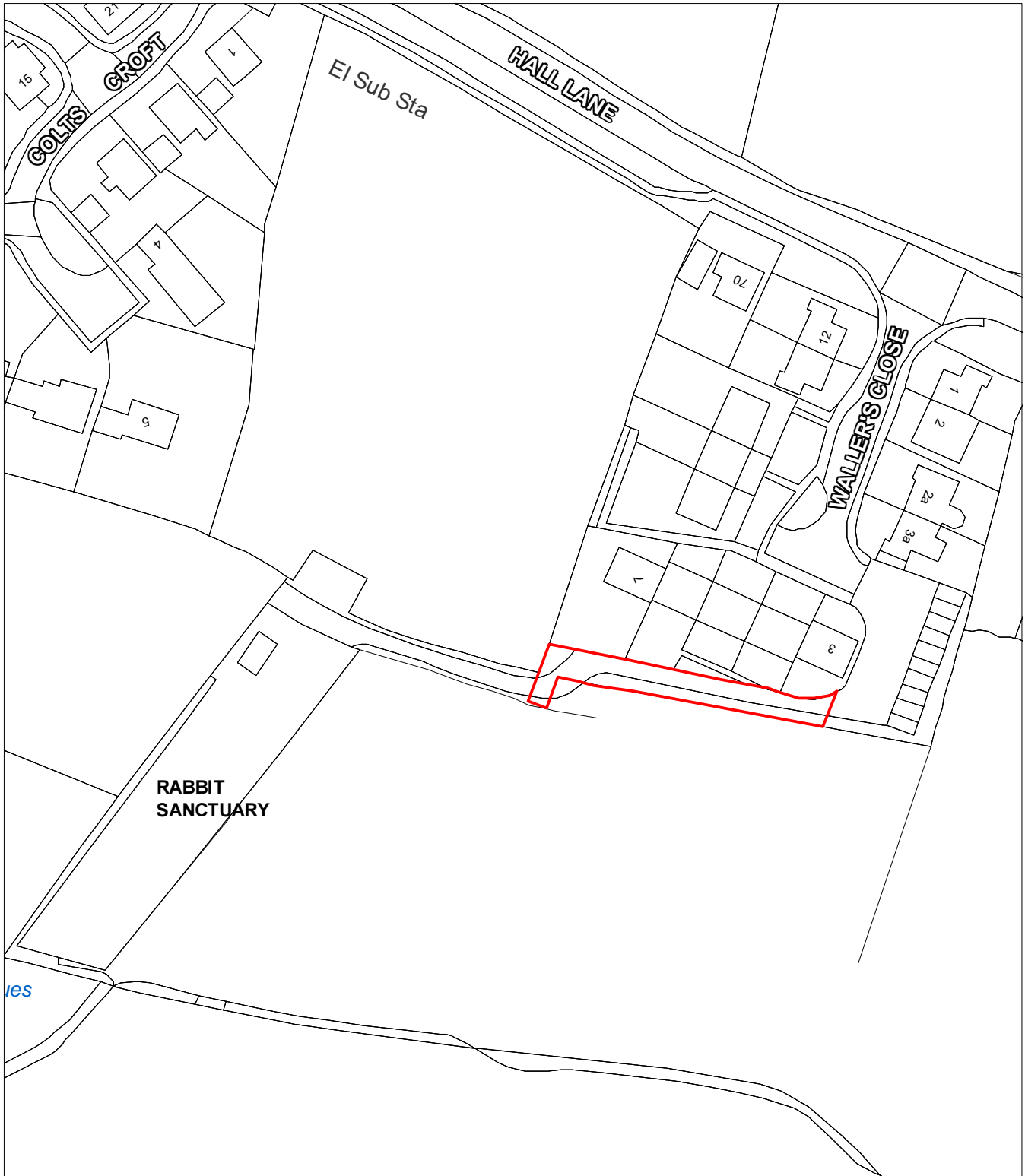
Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

None.

Contact Officer: Jenny Clark – Lands Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713336

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TRACK AT WALLER'S CLOSE, GREAT CHISHILL



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SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

20 March 2013

AUTHOR/S: Director of Housing

DISPOSAL OF GARAGE SITE OFF MILL LANE, BASSINGBOURN**Purpose**

1. To seek agreement by the Housing Portfolio Holder for the disposal of the Council's garage site off Mill Lane, Bassingbourn as outlined red on plan.

Recommendations

2. That the Housing Portfolio Holder agrees that, depending on the outcome of any planning applications on the pub site, the site is offered for sale to a purchaser of the pub site at the price of £100,000 plus legal costs, for use as a parking and amenity area to serve either new housing or a new /reopened pub on the pub site. (Option Three).

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The site is surplus to Council requirements.
4. The Council should expect to receive the development value in any sale.
5. With local opposition to the development of new housing either on the garage site or on the adjacent pub site and a wish to see the pub reopened, it is suggested that a formal offer to sell the Council's site is not made until the outcome of any relevant planning applications submitted for the adjacent site is known.

Background

6. The site in question is one of two garage sites serving the Council's estate at The Fillance and Mill Lane, Bassingbourn.
7. The site consists of 10 units (nos 1-11), 5 of which are currently rented. The other site off The Fillance also has 10 units (nos 12-21), 4 of which are rented.
8. The forecourt of the site (1-11) is large and has been subject to anti-social behaviour by young people with cars and motor bikes.
9. 2 Mill Lane and 25 The Fillance both have a vehicular right of way over the site to access their own on-plot garages and there is a pedestrian access over the site for residents of The Fillance, via a path that enters one corner of the site.
10. Adjacent the garage site is a public house (The Pear Tree) which is closed and the site is currently for sale. Interest in purchasing the garage site has been received from a prospective purchaser of the pub site. His proposed redevelopment of the pub site (subject to planning permission) involves building eight new 3-bed terraced houses, four of which would be affordable. The original plan was to construct an underground parking area for these dwellings, the cost of which the developer has

estimated at £80 - £90K. He would prefer to use the adjacent garage site as a parking and amenity area for the new dwellings.

11. A valuation of the site was requested from Pocock & Shaw, who has assessed it at £40,000 if sold on the basis of its existing use. Since the site itself has potential for the development of housing, however, the Council should expect to receive the development value in any sale which is £100,000. The developer who expressed interest in the site has confirmed that he would be prepared to pay this price.

Considerations

12. The site is being considered for disposal as it is surplus to the Council’s requirements and attracts anti-social behaviour. It is proposed that the 10 units on the other garage site off The Fillance will be rebuilt and will be sufficient to satisfy the local demand for garages to rent.
13. The site itself, following demolition of the garage units, has the potential for the development of 2 - 4 small affordable dwellings, with the existing rights of way over the site being retained.
14. The site also has the potential to serve as a parking and amenity area for a new development on the pub site, whether this is for new housing or for a new pub.
15. There is local opposition to the development of new housing on the pub site and garage site and a wish to see the pub reopened. The pub site is in private hands and the Council (as owner of the garage site) has no control over its sale nor its future use. Whether or not planning permission is granted for new housing on the pub site could have a bearing on the future use of the garage site.

Options

16. Option One – Retain site in SCDC ownership and consider its redevelopment for Council housing in the future.
17. Option Two – Place site on open market, starting at development value (£100,000) and accept highest bid, either for redevelopment of site for housing or to serve adjacent pub site either for housing or new pub.
18. Option Three – Depending on the outcome of any planning applications on the pub site, offer site for sale to a purchaser of the pub site at the price of £100,000 plus legal costs, for use as a parking and amenity area to serve either new housing or a new /reopened pub on the pub site.
19. Option Four – Only offer site for sale to a purchaser of the pub site if it is to be used as ancillary parking to serve new/reopened pub.

Implications

20. Financial	With Option One, the Council could benefit from additional social housing on the site With Options Two to Four, the Council would be aiming to sell the site at market value
Legal	Legal advice would be sought to carry out any sale.
Staffing	None

Risk Management	No risks associated with sale.
Equality and Diversity	None
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No Not relevant
Climate Change	None

Consultations

21. Councillor Cathcart has registered his concern at the possible sale of the site to a developer and would prefer it to be used for parking to serve a new pub on the adjacent site. His reasons are as follows:
- i) "I am still hopeful that the pub could be opened again as a public house for the local community. In the past the pub has suffered from inadequate parking and the incorporation of part of the existing District Council car park into the environs of the Pear Tree would make it a more attractive and viable proposition for a future business. Although the Pub has been closed for over a year, there are plenty of examples of pubs being reopened again and there is widespread support in the local community for the pub to open again.
 - ii) For the entire car park to be sold to a developer would result in over development and would deprive the local council residents of much needed garage space and further encourage parking on the road which is already a problem."
22. Bassingbourn Parish Council are opposed to the sale of the site by the Council to a developer. They hope that The Pear Tree will remain as a public house and will not support any application for change of use to residential, should the pub site be sold.
23. Residents living adjacent the site at 2 Mill Lane, 23 and 25 The Fillance and 65 North End were consulted on the future of the garage site. The only response was from the owners of 65 North End, who strongly object to any new housing being built on the garage site due to concerns regarding overlooking. They would prefer the site to be used for parking either for the use of the local community or to serve a new development or new pub on the pub site (they would prefer a new pub).
24. The Housing Development and Enabling Manager supports Option Three.

Effect on Strategic Aims

25. **AIM: To make sure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer outstanding and sustainable quality of life for our residents**
A sale of the site at market value to support the future use of the adjacent pub site, subject to any planning permissions, should ensure that the site is used to benefit the local community and that the Council receives best value for its asset.

Conclusions / Summary

26. The garage site is surplus to Council requirements. It has both its own development potential and the potential to support the future use of the adjacent (private) pub site which is currently for sale, as a parking and amenity area either for new housing or a new pub. With local opposition to new housing in that area and a preference for the

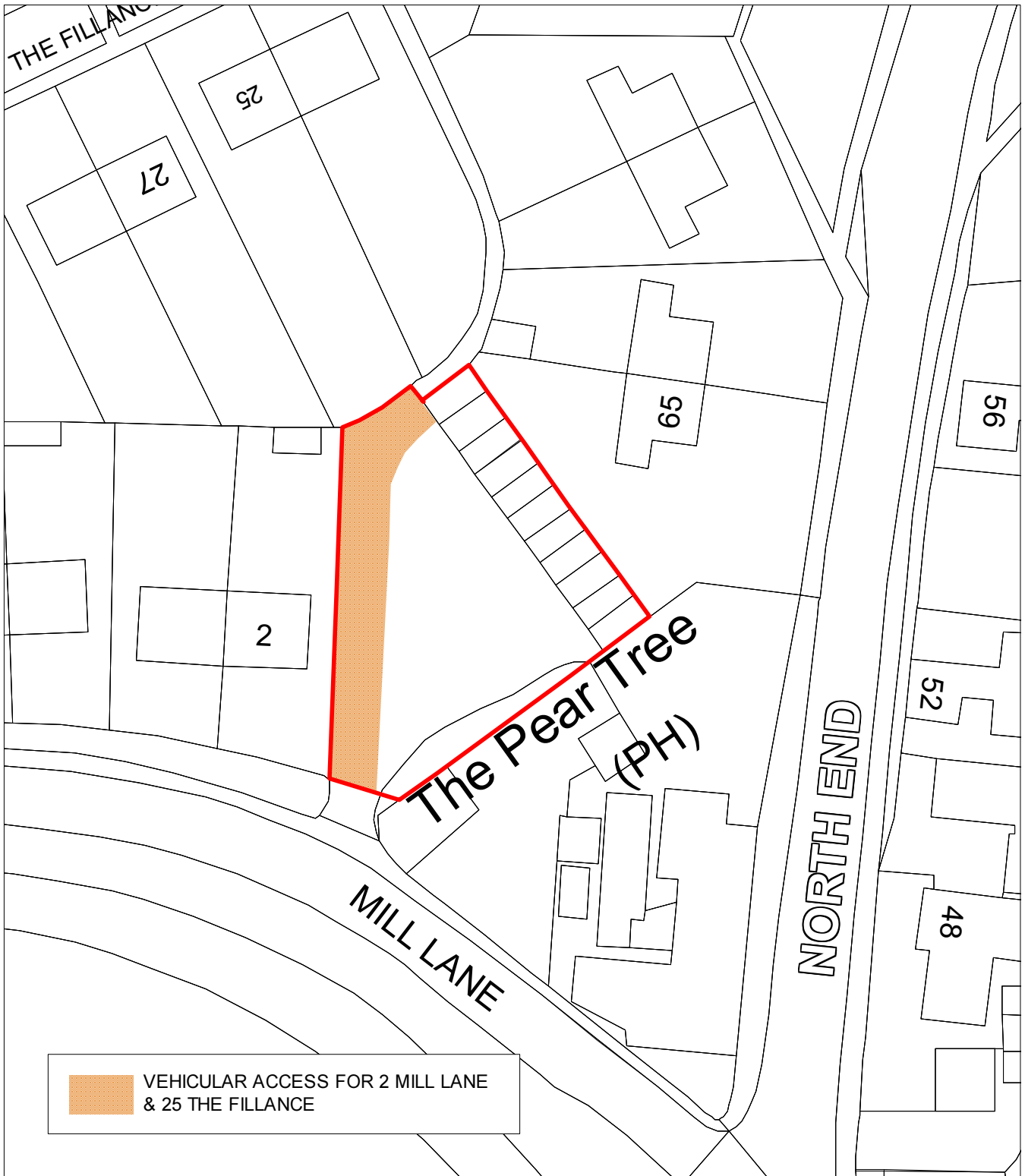
pub to be reopened, it is recommended that no formal sale offer on the garage site is made until any planning applications on the pub site have been determined.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

None.

Contact Officer: Jenny Clark – Lands Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713336

GARAGE SITE OFF MILL LANE, BASSINGBOURN



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SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

20 March 2013

AUTHOR/S: Director of Housing

HANDLING OF CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS**Purpose**

1. To seek approval from the Housing Portfolio Holder for a 'Handling of customer compliments, comments and complaints' policy, specifically for Affordable Homes brought about by the changes in the Localism Act 2011 to include the Housing Ombudsman and designated persons/tenant panel.

Recommendations

2. That the Housing Portfolio Holder approves the 'Handling of Customer compliments, comments and complaints' Policy as set out in appendix A

Reasons for Recommendations

3. To comply with the new legislation under the Localism Act 2011 to allow for the provision of a designated person/tenant panel in complaint resolution. There is also now a dedicated Housing Service Ombudsman who will deal with complaints regarding the Landlord Service.

Background

4. Previously, the Affordable Homes service utilised the corporate complaints policy as published in January 2010. Due to changes brought about by the Localism Act 2011, a review of the complaints policy for Affordable Homes was necessary to incorporate the provision of designated persons.
5. Designated Persons are defined as:

- An MP
- A local councillor for the district in which the complainant's home is located
- A designated tenant panel

The introduction of designated persons is intended to involve local politicians and local people in resolving local housing issues. A designated person will help resolve the complaint in one of two ways; they can try and resolve the complaint locally through negotiation and conciliation, or they can refer the complaint straight to the Housing Ombudsman.

Designated persons/tenant panels have no legal authority over a landlord's policy or procedure. The formal and only legally defined role of a designated person/tenant panel is to refer complaints from tenants to the Housing Ombudsman.

Considerations

6. The Localism Act 2011 makes it a requirement for Local Authorities to have in place or at least be working towards a process by 1st April 2013, whereby complainants have the option to involve a designated person/tenant panel in resolution of their complaint. We are currently looking into the options for a Tenant Panel and will be providing further information and training to local members on their role as a designated person.
7. The 'Handling of compliments, comments and complaints' Policy is intended to ensure that all customers wishing to comment on the service are clear on the process that their complaint will follow and the options now available to them.

As part of the review of the complaints process for Affordable Homes, monitoring and reporting of complaints will form part of the quarterly performance management, alongside reporting on performance indicators, benchmarking and value for money. This will be reported to the Tenant Participation Group, Housing Portfolio Holder and Housing Services Management Team.

Implications

8. Financial	None
Legal	The Council has a duty under the Localism Act 2011 to promote and recognise tenant panels. It does not necessarily require one to be forthcoming as long as it can be demonstrated that we have engaged with tenants and made them aware.
Staffing	None
Risk Management	None
Equality and Diversity	The policy has taken into account equality and diversity issues. The report ensures that we are able to accept complaints in any format and offer the option of policies available in alternative languages
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No The only change from the corporate policy is the introduction on the designated person/tenant panel and the introduction of the Housing Ombudsman.
Climate Change	No

Consultations

9. The Resident involvement Officer is currently in consultation with tenants to see whether there is an appetite to establish a tenant panel, of which the Council will recognise.

Consultation with Children and Young People

10. None

Effect on Strategic Aims

11. **We will ensure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer outstanding and sustainable quality of life for our residents.**
The 'Handling of Customer compliments, comments and complaints' policy will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that we meet our key aims

Conclusions / Summary

12. The Policy gives customers a clear and concise process by which their complaint will be handled and the options available to them.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

South Cambridgeshire District Council Corporate Complaint Policy
Localism Act 2011

Contact Officer: Emma George – Housing Policy Officer
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Handling of Customer Compliments, comments and complaints

Affordable Homes Policy Document

February 2013

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1. Introduction

South Cambridgeshire District Council, Affordable Homes is committed to providing excellent customer service and aims to be a listening council, providing first class services to all. Due to changes brought about by the Localism Act 2011 from 1 April 2013 the complaints policy has been reviewed to include the role of 'designated person/tenant panel', which is an additional facility for the Landlord Service.

The views of our customers are important to us, they help us shape services to support the needs of our communities. Providing insight into what we are doing well and where we can improve enables the Council to provide a responsive service that changes and adapts with the needs of customers.

Affordable Homes will treat compliments, comments and complaints with respect and seek to understand the customer's point of view.

The Council will endeavour to resolve problems at the time they are brought to attention, within the constraints that apply and to the customer's satisfaction. Where this is not possible the formal complaints procedure should be applied.

Our values are:

- Trust
- Mutual Respect
- Customer Service
- Commitment to improving services.

2. Scope

This document sets out how the Affordable Homes Service within the Council responds to compliments, comments and complaints.

This policy supports the Corporate Customer Service Strategy and is linked with the Handling of Unreasonable or unreasonably Persistent Complaints Policy.

Compliments, comments and complaints – Definitions

All compliments, comments and complaints will be monitored by the Data Quality Officer in Affordable Homes and reported through the internal performance management process. This will form part of our feedback to tenants through the Annual Report/Tenants Newsletter and inform Tenant Scrutiny.

3.1 Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or concern, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of actions by the Council and its staff, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.

Any of our customers wishing to make a complaint can do so freely in an easy and simple way by:

- Email or write to us – this is the preferred method as it means you can include as much detail as you feel necessary
- You can fill in the online complaints and compliments form at www.scamb.gov.uk/complaints
- Alternatively you can fill in a form at reception in our Cambourne offices
- You can ring us and we will note your complaint

A complaint is not a service request. A service request is defined as a customer contact that for the first time brings a matter to the Affordable Homes Service's attention and requests a service offered by the housing department.

Anti social behaviour cannot be dealt with via the formal complaint system, and there is a specific neighbourhood support team that can help you with this. If, however the team fail to deal with your complaint in the appropriate manner, then we may be able to deal with the maladministration under the complaints process.

The complaints process should not be used for customers who are requesting a review in relation to:

- The termination or extension of an introductory tenancy
- The offer of a fixed-term flexible tenancy
- The decision not to offer a further tenancy at the end of a fixed term flexible tenancy
- The decision of a homeless application
- Allocation appeal

In these circumstances there is a separate review process to be followed. If, however, you are not happy with the way your review has been conducted, then you are entitled to submit a complaint through the complaints process.

3.2 Comment

A comment can be described as a volunteered personal opinion or belief, feedback or remark expressed by a customer. Unless specifically requested, there is not an automatic assumption that the service will reply to comments. However, where it is felt appropriate or where the customer indicates they expect a reply, this should be sent within 10 working days.

Customer comments are managed outside of the complaints process. All comments for Affordable Homes will be monitored and reported to the appropriate Service Manager/Team Leader.

3.3 Compliment

A compliment is defined as a customer statement of positive recognition or praise for a service or member of staff.

Compliments will be celebrated within Affordable Homes and shared as good practice as part of the Affordable Homes performance management process.

4. Complaints, Process

The complaints process has a three stage structure.

- Stage one and two complaints are investigated by the Council.
- Stage three complaints are investigated by the Housing Ombudsman Service or the Local Government Ombudsman

For all landlord services, tenants may wish to involve a designated person once stage 2 of the procedure has been exhausted. In practice this means that if a complaint is not resolved at the end of the landlord's complaints procedure, the tenant can:

- refer the matter to a designated person OR
- wait 8 weeks and refer the matter directly to the Ombudsman.

A designated person has no legal authority over a landlord's policy or procedure.

Complaints relating to strategic housing, such as housing advice or homelessness should be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman by the complainant.

Stage 1

Stage one complaints will be registered and acknowledged within three working days by the Data Quality Officer, Affordable Homes. Customers will be kept fully informed about who is handling their complaint, how to contact them and what will happen next and by when.

Registered complaints will be passed to the appropriate Service Manager/Team Leader, who will review the complaint and either respond personally or arrange for the appropriate Officer to respond within 10 working days of acknowledgement.

Officers responding to complaints are encouraged to speak with complainants during the investigation of the complaint to help gain a greater understanding of the complainant's point of view. We will endeavour to resolve complaints at the first stage wherever possible.

All stage one responses will be signed by the Service Manager/Team Leader, or in their absence by the Head of Service.

The Service Manager/Team Leader will send the response directly to the complainant, providing a copy of the response to the Data Quality Officer.

Stage 2

A complaint will enter stage two of the process if the complainant advises that they are dissatisfied with the result of stage one.

Stage two complaints will be registered and acknowledged within three working days by the Data Quality Officer.

Registered complaints will be passed to the Head of Service, who will review the complaint and liaise with the appropriate Service Manager/Team Leader.

The Head of Service will send the response directly to the complainant within 20 working days of acknowledgement, providing a copy of the response to the Data Quality Officer.

All stage two responses will be signed by the Head of Service.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied at this stage they can ask for 'designated persons/tenant panel' to review their complaint, as detailed below.

4.1 Designated Persons

The Localism Act 2011 provides that council tenants are able to ask for their complaints to be considered by a 'designated person' when the Council's complaints procedure has been exhausted. This provision will start on 1st April 2013.

The designated persons are defined in the Localism Act as

- an MP
- A local councillor for the district in which the complainant's home is located
- A designated tenant panel.

The introduction of designated persons is intended to involve local politicians and local people in resolving local housing issues. A designated person will help resolve the complaint in one of two ways; they can try and resolve the complaint themselves or they can refer the complaint straight to the Housing Ombudsman.

Designated persons have no legal authority over a landlord's policy or procedure.

MPs and local councillors have always been involved in complaints procedures as advocates for tenants and they will continue to have that role. The specific role as designated persons is different as they play a more specific part in helping to resolve the complaint locally through negotiation and conciliation.

The formal and only legally defined role of a designated person, as set out in the Localism Act, is to refer complaints from tenants to the Housing Ombudsman.

If the complaint is still not resolved following the intervention of the designated person either they or the tenant can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. Designated persons may refer complaints to the Ombudsman at any time after the Affordable Homes complaint procedure has been exhausted. This must be done in writing. A tenant may refer their complaint directly to the ombudsman (without a referral from a designated person) 8 weeks after the exhaustion of the complaints procedure

4.2 Designated Tenant Panels

A designated tenant panel is defined as a group of tenants who have been recognised by a social landlord for the purpose of acting as a 'designated person'.

Landlords do not have to set up a designated tenant panel. They can work with their tenants to establish a panel, or tenants can form a panel themselves. For a designated tenant panel to be effective in the role it is essential that landlord and tenants work together to establish one that will work for them both.

Designated Tenant Panels fulfil the same role as the designated person. They can help to resolve a complaint in two ways; by working with the Council to resolve the complaint or referring the complaint straight to the Housing Ombudsman. The tenant panel can try to put things right in whichever way it thinks will work best. This could be for example, by acting as an advocate for the complainant, by giving advice, providing a review of the way the complaint has been handled or being more proactive and suggesting a solution.

Tenant panels are required to be recognised by the Council and as such registered with the Housing Ombudsman.

Stage 3

The Housing Ombudsman

A complainant may approach the Housing Ombudsman at any stage of the complaints process, although the Ombudsman will not usually investigate complaints unless the Council has had an opportunity to investigate at stages one and two first.

If the complainant wishes to send their complaint direct to the Housing Ombudsman, following exhaustion of the Affordable Homes complaints process, they may do so, however a period of eight weeks must lapse before the Housing Ombudsman will consider their complaint. If however the complainant chooses to evoke the use of the 'designated person/tenant panel' the complaint can be forwarded in writing to the Housing Ombudsman following immediate exhaustion of the Affordable Homes complaints process.

The Ombudsman will then contact the Council for their account of the complaint, at which point they may ask for any information relevant to the case.

Following investigation, the Housing Ombudsman will write to the complainant notifying them of their decision. The Council will also receive a copy of their findings, with relevant action points, if applicable.

Local Government Ombudsman

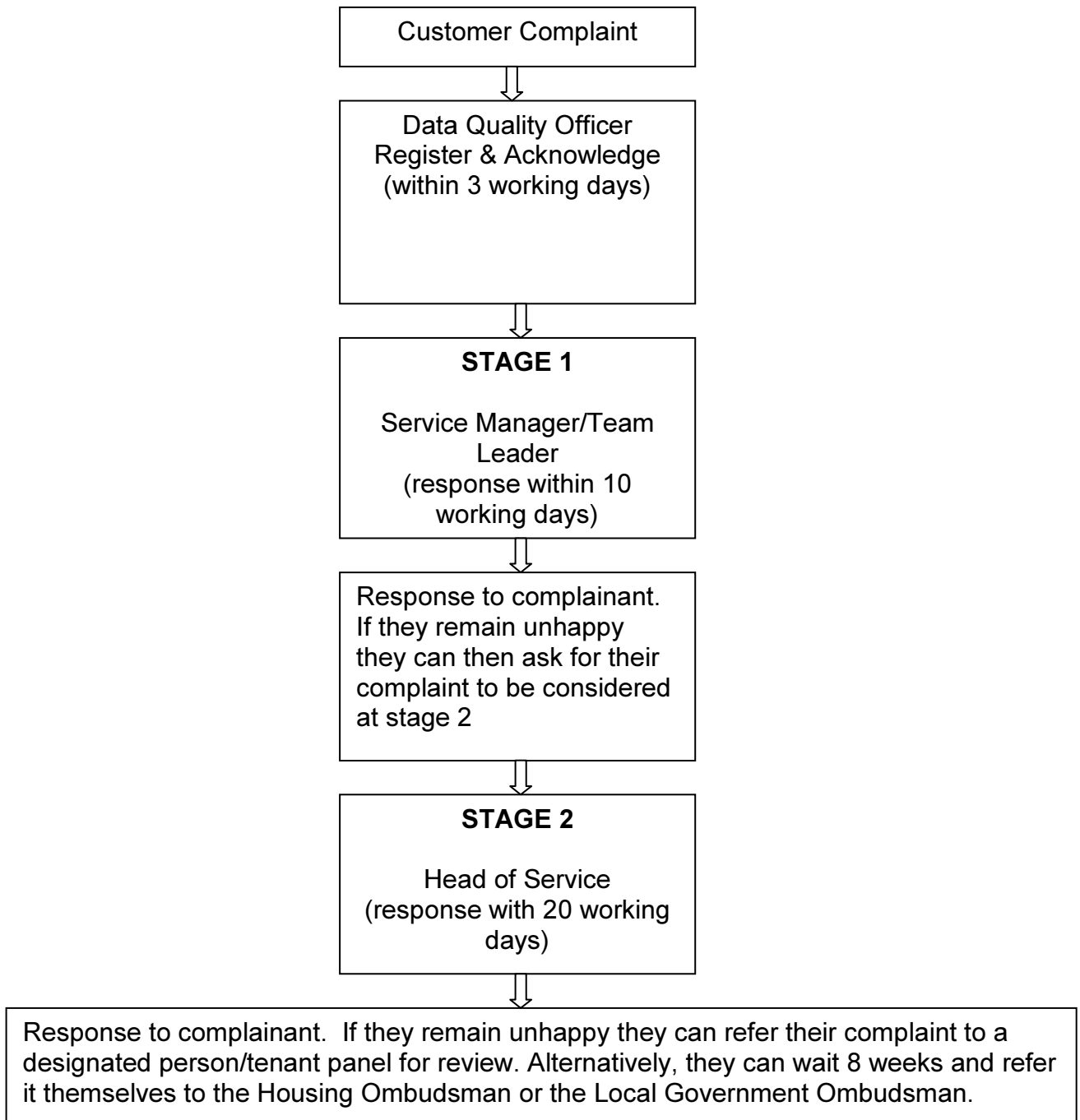
The Local Government Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman are a separate function. Primarily all complaints regarding Landlord Services will be dealt with via the Housing Ombudsman.

Responding to Compliments, comments and complaints

The Local Government Ombudsman will still retain governance over complaints received in respect of the strategic housing service, such as housing advice or homelessness.

Although the designated person/designated tenant panel has no powers to refer to the Local Government Ombudsman, the complainant can still approach them for advice/assistance.

Stage 1 & 2 Complaints Flowchart



5. Exceptions

The following exceptions apply to this policy:

- Under normal circumstances Affordable Homes is unable to investigate complaints relating to issues that are greater than 12 months old.
- The complaints process cannot be used to complain about the conduct of Councillors. Complaints of this nature should be directed to the Monitoring Officer at monitoring.officer@scambs.gov.uk.
- The complaints process excludes complaints made by our suppliers, partners and other public authorities regarding our business relationships.
- Staff grievances cannot be dealt with through the complaints process. Staff grievances are covered in the Grievance Policy and Procedure.

6. Learning from complaints

Affordable Homes values complaints and uses the information to inform service planning that shape services that support the needs of the customer. To this end all respondents to complaints are required to complete a 'Learning from Complaints Form'.

The purpose of this is to see if we can see a pattern and learn from trends of complaints and to see if there are re-occurring themes. These trends may well result in a review of processes and procedures if deemed necessary.

The Learning from Complaints Form provides an opportunity for officers to review the complaint and identify any lessons learnt and any corrective action taken. A copy of the form should accompany a copy of the response sent to the Data Quality Officer.

Learning from complaints will be recorded centrally by the Data Quality Officer and reported to the Housing Portfolio Holder and feed into the Affordable Homes performance management process, including Tenant Scrutiny and publicised through the Annual Report to Tenants/Tenants Newsletter. This will also be reported corporately to the Executive Management Team and the Lead Member on a quarterly basis.

7. Reporting complaints and compliments

Quarterly reports will be published as part of the Affordable Homes performance management process and compared against other social landlords. These reports include the following quantitative data:

- Volume of complaints
- Complaints by stage
- Theme of complaints
- Acknowledgement and response rates
- Satisfaction rates
- Number of services changed, improved or withdrawn resulting from complaints

This information will assist the Housing Service to shape the services they provide. The information gathered will be shared with members of the TPG and any recognised Tenant Panel.

The Compliments, comments and complaints Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis or when statutory requirements change.

This information will also be included as part of the corporate monitoring of complaints by the Executive Management Team and the Lead Member for customer service.

8. Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complaints

The Housing Service recognises that customers may exert pressure on the department when making a complaint, as they believe that they have failed in its service to them. Such pressure may be persistent, but in most cases this is reasonable and acceptable.

A small minority of complainants may pursue their complaints in ways that can impede the investigation of their complaint, or impose a significant and disproportionate resource requirement on the authority. Such actions can occur during the investigation of a complaint, or once investigations have been completed. In these cases, a complainant may be considered unreasonably persistent.

Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants are not covered within this policy. The corporate policy for Unreasonable or Unreasonably Persistent Complainants should be used when considering restrictive measures with customers.

Violent or abusive behaviour towards staff will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Please refer to the Council's policies and reporting guides relating to health and safety and violence at work for further information.

9. Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints should be passed to the Data Quality Officer who will register the complaint and pass to the appropriate Service Manager/Team Leader for investigation.

10. Confidentiality and Data Protection

In accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act, the Council will maintain the confidentiality of all personal information, and not disclose it outside of South Cambridgeshire District Council without the express permission of the complainant.

All personal data is subject to the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA). All processes involving personal data must comply with the Act, and all users must ensure they follow the [Data Protection Policy](#).

11. Role Descriptions

This section describes the roles and responsibilities of individuals and teams involved in the Compliments, comments and complaints Policy.

11.1 Members and Officers of the Council

Members and Officers of the Council are required, in the first instance, to forward all compliments, comments and complaints relating to the Affordable Homes service to the Data Quality Officer.

1.2 Data Quality Officer

The Data Quality Officer in Affordable Homes will be responsible for monitoring all compliments, comments and complaints to ensure the appropriate Service Manager/Team Leader or Head of Service deals with the complaint in a timely manner. Quarterly information will be collated and reported as part of the performance management process.

1.2 Service Manager/Team Leaders

The Service Manager/Team Leaders within Affordable Homes will deal with all Stage One complaints.

Service Manager/Team Leader	Responsible Area
Housing Services Team Leader	Tenancy Management
Housing Options and Allocations Team Leader	Allocations, including management of the Housing Register
Housing Advice & Options Team Leader	Housing advice and homelessness applications
Asset Manager	Administrator or Orchard and Keystone to ensure information held on Council properties is correct at all times
Supported Housing Manager	Supported Housing function and associated communal rooms
Planned Maintenance Manager	Scheduled works on Council properties
Repairs & Quality Assurance Manager	Third party contract issues
Resident Involvement Team Leader	Tenant involvement including tenant publications such as Annual Report and Tenants Newsletter
Housing Performance Improvement Team Leader	Housing strategy, policy development, performance monitoring, empty homes (private sector)

Designated Person/Tenant Panel	<p>A list of all local councillors can be found at www.scambs.gov.uk/content/councillors-wards-and-parishes.</p> <p>We are consulting our tenants on the options for a tenant panel.</p>
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11.3 Head of Service

The Head of Service within Affordable Homes will deal with all Stage Two complaints.

Head of Service	Responsible Area
Head of Housing Services	Tenancy management, supported housing, Gypsy & Traveller management and property services, including repairs, capital improvement programme and leasehold services
Head of Housing Advice & Options	Housing advice, homelessness and choice based lettings
Head of Housing Strategy & Development	Housing strategy, development, policy development, service improvement and resident involvement

11.3 Director of Service

The Director of Housing, is responsible for overseeing all complaints for the Affordable Homes service as part of the performance management process.

11.4 Responding Officer

The responding officer, either the Service Manager/Team Leader at Stage One or Head of Service at Stage Two, is responsible for investigating and responding to the complaint in accordance with the Customer Service Standards detailed below:

- If the investigation into your complaint will not be completed within ten working days, you will receive a letter informing you of the progress and expected timescales.
- If we have made a mistake, you will receive an apology.
- If we were at fault, you will be told what measures are being taken to put things right.

Investigations should be carried out objectively and responding officers should aim to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction within the limitations that apply.

The response should be sent direct to the complainant and a copy provided to the Data Quality Officer.

Affordable Homes Service Plan 2013/14 – 2015/16

March 2013

1. About Our Service

This service plan covers both the strategic housing functions of the council and also its landlord role. The service plan for Affordable Homes should be read in conjunction with the Housing Strategy 2012/13 to 2016/17 and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan.

The Housing Service has three primary functions:

- A landlord service providing housing management and property maintenance services to tenants.
- As the strategic lead for housing issues within the District. This includes an enabling service working in partnership with other local authorities and housing associations to ensure the development of new affordable homes within the District and in partnership on strategic sites close to Cambridge City
- Housing advice and options service seeking to prevent homelessness and to provide accommodation for those in housing need (including those who are already homeless), through a new choice based lettings scheme and other housing options. The provision of this service delivers several statutory requirements for the local authority.

The structure of the Housing Service therefore reflects these primary functions and consists of four main service areas:

Housing Services Structure

Service Area	Specialist Teams	Objective
Housing Services	Housing management, sheltered housing, Carecall, Gypsy & Traveller management	Deliver housing landlord services and tenant involvement and promote sustainable communities
Property Services	Property surveyors, capital improvements programme, responsive and void maintenance management, leaseholder services, property sales	Provide decent housing through the delivery of effective maintenance & improvements
Housing Advice & Options	Housing advice, homelessness team, Choice Based Lettings	To provide housing advice to enable people to understand their housing options to sustain & improve their current home or access alternative good quality & suitable housing.
Housing Strategy & Enabling	Enabling function, housing strategy, development, policy development and service improvement and resident involvement	To ensure that sufficient new schemes are identified for future development, approved schemes are delivered to meet identified needs and to ensure that new or

		<p>emerging needs are properly identified for future provision. To track policy changes and good practice and ensure that the housing service is operating efficiently and effectively.</p>
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The Council's housing stock comprises of nearly 5,800 dwellings, and over 1,100 garage units. The stock is spread over 102 villages of South Cambridgeshire. The stock is mainly traditional low-rise house and bungalow construction, but there are a small number of non-traditional property types. There is a relative high proportion of sheltered accommodation at approximately 25% of all homes spread across 43 schemes. There are around 500 leasehold properties.

The Housing Service Plan is guided by the Council's corporate objectives. The Council has adopted the following vision for 2013/14:

“South Cambridgeshire will continue to be the best place to live and work and study in the country. Our district will demonstrate impressive and sustainable economic growth. Our residents will have a superb quality of life in an exceptionally beautiful, rural and green environment.

The Council will be recognised as consistently innovative and a high performer with a track record of delivering value for money by focusing on the priorities, needs and aspirations of our residents, parishes and businesses.”

This is supported by three guiding aims and a number of specific actions. The aims are:

“We will listen to and engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money.

We will work with partners to create and sustain opportunities for employment, enterprise, and world-leading innovation.

We will make sure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer outstanding and sustainable quality of life for our residents.”

For Affordable Homes there are specific actions to:

- Set up a new way of delivering equity share, market sale and private rented properties.
- Delivering a range of homes that are affordable and where people want to live in areas that support economic growth
- Increase the supply of temporary accommodation
- Establishing projects to consider the options for upgrading and improving Council homes
- Addressing the needs of Gypsies and Travellers

- Building the first of the new Council houses in the New Build Strategy 2012-2015

And as part of a corporate project taking a leading role in:

- Establishing a Council 'back to work' project and promote apprenticeships across the district to equip all our young people for productive life.

The overall service objective for Housing is as follows:

To be the best housing service by providing good quality housing across all tenures that is accessible to all that enhances residents' quality of life, their health and wellbeing, that supports economic growth and social opportunities, alongside improved energy security and reduced carbon footprints.

In essence we want to promote the Council housing service as putting the HEART into housing:

Heath & wellbeing
Economic Growth and development
Affordable housing
Reducing fuel poverty and promoting energy efficiency
Tackling homelessness

2. Our Performance and Plans to Improve

The relationship between the service specific objectives and the corporate priorities are demonstrated in the 'golden threads' that run through the Service Improvement Plan and which inform individual appraisals and work plans.

An essential part of Affordable Homes is the role that tenants and leaseholders play in helping to shape the service. All sections of Affordable Homes have a role to play in supporting resident engagement and the lead officer is based within the Housing Strategy & Enabling team.

Performance in housing is currently measured in three ways:

- The set of SCDC performance indicators selected for measurement using CORVU, adopted in 2008/09. These incorporate the relevant national indicators as well as local indicators. All the indicators were refreshed in 2011/12 following consultation with frontline staff and tenants.
- Housing service managers use key 'heartbeat' indicators to monitor service performance in key areas: rent arrears, repair times and satisfaction, relet times and gas servicing. The indicators are a monthly snapshot. All of these key indicators are benchmarked using Housemark. This information is also used to produce 'performance at glance' for the residents' consultative forum and the Portfolio Holder. The 'performance at a glance' uses traffic light indicators and 'direction of travel' arrows to visually express the trends.

'Performance at a glance' categories
Emergency repairs attended to within 24 hours
Urgent repairs completed within 5 days
Routine repairs completed within 23 days
Average time to complete a repair
Satisfaction with repairs service
Average to relet a property (general needs minor repairs) BVPI 212
Number of overdue gas services
Level of current rent arrears
Rent loss through empty dwellings

In addition there are a number of strategic housing performance indicators that are reported to the Portfolio Holder and Tenant Participation Group quarterly and in the case of the asset management PIs annually. These are:

Strategic Performance Indicators
Average length of time for families with children in hostel accommodation
Homelessness prevention
Numbers on temporary accommodation
Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)

For Affordable Homes a key part of our work is to manage performance in housing maintenance. Around 2/3rds of the total budget is spent on housing maintenance so the five year Housing Maintenance Plan (HMP) is a key document. This forms part of the HRA Business Plan.

Service Improvement Projects

This Service Plan identifies a number of key drivers for change. The following projects are designed to address these:

Council Aim	Service Plan Action	Objective	Lead Officer	Timescale
1	1. Increase supply of temporary accommodation. *	To reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by the Council. The project will need to link with other initiatives such as the Empty Homes Strategy and the New Build Strategy but also needs to explore all available options and develop an action plan.	Sue Carter/Heather Wood	Activities will run throughout the year. There will be an initial review in November 2013 to assess the effectiveness of the programme and identify the strategy being taken.

1	2. Improve joint work on homelessness with the County Council.	To seek ways to better communicate with the County on the issues of mutual concern relating to homeless households. To identify improved ways of using budgets to improve the quality of service to households and potentially reduce cost for both Councils.	Sue Carter/Heather Wood	A review of progress made will be undertaken by December 2013.
2	3. Explore the setting up of a new delivery vehicle to deliver equity share, market sale and private rented properties.*	To address un met housing need from across a wider set of incomes bands than those identified by affordable housing products. This is important to meet the needs of those on the lowest banding of the housing register and to meet the needs of the growing economy within the district. The Council will need to work in partnership with other public sector bodies which may include the County Council.	Stephen Hills	South Cambs Holdings Ltd established January 2013. A scoping paper will be produced for Cabinet, June 2013
2	4. Establish a Council back to work project including a Council led apprenticeship scheme.*	To try and mitigate the impact of welfare benefit changes. To promote positive practice amongst all employers within the district.	Anita Goddard	Strategy to be completed by June 2013. Review of progress scheduled for November 2013.
3	5. Complete the build of the Council's first new Council house in the new strategy*	The first of the 200 houses in the 2012-2022 period identified in the New Build Strategy.	Schuyler Newstead	Completion between December 2013 & March 2014.

3	6. Project to consider the options for upgrading and improving the Council homes at Wilford Furlong, Willingham.*	To consider the potential redevelopment of the area to improve the energy efficiency and overall quality of the homes.	Schuyler Newstead	Project feasibility to be reported February 2014
3	7. Robson Court, Waterbeach hostel development	Work with Sanctuary Carr-Gomm to redevelop the hostel site to provide new provision in the form of self-contained units whilst still providing a supportive environment for homeless families and single people	Schuyler Newstead	Planning permission approved. Anticipated start on site Autumn 2013 with an 18 month build out programme.
3.	8. Redevelopment of Robinson Court, Gamlingay	Current properties not fit for purpose and difficult to let. Scheme to be redeveloped to provide good quality affordable homes through a shared equity scheme.	Schuyler Newstead	Residents consulted. Progress on scheme reliant on moving tenants out.
3.	9. Bidding for/ implementation of new Supporting People contract for older people*	To ensure we are in the best position to bid/tender for the SP contract so that our sheltered housing schemes remain attractive places to live and are sustainable	Tracey Cassidy	Service restructured in preparation for SP contract. Contract to commence Jan 2014.
3.	10. Communal Room and Alarm System Review	To consider best use of the council's assets, including charging for use, usage and identifying efficiency savings and reviewing the alarm system	Tracey Cassidy	March 2014
3.	10. Homelink developments including the private sector module	To ensure the Homelink system is fully operational to take into account policy changes from April 2013 and work towards a private rented sector module	Sue Carter/ Heather Wood	Changes to the Locata system to be completed by March 2013. Private Rented Sector Module to be investigated as

		to advertise private rents		part of project work around access to accommodation for single people
3.	11. Warm Homes Strategy Delivery (including EU project)	Continue to access grants to improve the thermal efficiency of the Council stock and introduce innovative sustainable energy efficient heating solutions. To continue installation of solar panels whilst the feed-in tariff is still attractive to funders	Anita Goddard	Delivery of Warm Homes Strategy up to 2016.
1.	12. Develop tenant engagement in particular the setting up of tenant led scrutiny*	To work with the newly elected Tenant Participation Group and other tenants to set up an Independent Tenant Scrutiny Panel, as set out in the Localism Act 2012. Review the Resident Involvement Strategy.	Gill Anderton	April 2014
3	13. Gypsy and Traveller accommodation Project *	To seek funding and sites to help deliver the Council's obligations for Gypsy and traveller accommodation.	Stephen Hills	Progress review scheduled for March 2014.

*Linked to delivering specific Council actions

In addition to these key projects there are various other pieces of work which include participating in corporate and cross agency work monitoring and responding to the changes in welfare benefits.

3. The Context of Our Plan

The main context is provided by the Housing Strategy 2012/13 to 2016/17.

a) External drivers

Political

- The Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) became the regulator of council housing services from April 2012 in addition to its role as regulator of housing associations. As part of meeting the HCA standards the Council publishes an Annual Report to Tenants. This sets out how well we have met the national standards to date and also identifies how these standards are to be adapted to reflect a 'local offer' to tenants. The actions required to meet that local offer are included within the service plan.
- The changes to regulation from April 2012 put greater emphasis on Tenant Scrutiny. Landlords are required to be more pro-active in self- regulation and in involving tenants in the scrutiny process. Tenant Scrutiny aims to give tenants more power in holding their landlord to account for their decisions, performance and conduct. A specific action is identified within the Service Plan to help achieve this change in policy.
- Community empowerment – the Localism Act 2011 seeks to encourage public service delivery to be rethought in conjunction with the local people.

Economic/Social

- The Cambridge Sub Region Strategic Housing Market Assessment demonstrates clearly that South Cambridgeshire has an affordability problem that not only affects many current households but will be a problem for emerging households, despite the increased building rate expected through the strategic growth sites.
- Private rented sector restructuring in response to economic conditions and welfare benefit changes. The demand for rented homes has increased and landlords are increasingly able to charge higher rents and move away from schemes to provide homes for people in receipt of housing benefit.
- Changes to the HRA subsidy system from April 2012 to a self financing regime has seen the Council take on a debt of £205M. In return for taking on this debt the Council is now able to keep its rental income in full and gives us the freedom to plan investment, with increased financial capacity to reinvest into our existing housing stock and provide new affordable homes – as set out in the HRA Business Plan and New Build Strategy.
- The welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults. The Housing Service is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Public Funding for New Affordable Housing the resources available for new homes have been cut back by 60% in the Comprehensive Spending Review period starting 2011. It is too early to understand how the use of 'Affordable Tenancies of up to 80% of market rents will impact upon the ability of housing associations to develop new homes.

Technical

- Housing Benefit changes – Local housing allowance/Broad Rental Market Areas may lead to increased demand on mediation services and has the potential for increased levels of homelessness.
- Housing Benefit changes for existing social rented tenants of working age that are considered to be under-occupying. Already seeing an increase in demand for smaller accommodation (1 and 2 bed properties). Potential for increased rent arrears for those considered to be under-occupying

- Implementation of direct payments of housing benefit. Currently being piloted ahead of Universal Credit, but early indications show an expectation for increased rent arrears. Early figures released show on average payment collection rates of 92% (with figures ranging from 88%-97% across the different areas).

Environmental

- Geography of district – the essentially dispersed and rural nature of the district with no central market town as a natural focus has a significant bearing on service delivery e.g. providing a focus for tenant participation activity, co-location of services etc.
- Climate change issues may lead to increased costs or delivery problems – e.g. off site construction methods may not suit small village development needs.

b) Our Key Partners

The housing service is delivered in partnership with a range of other organisations. The major partnerships are listed below.

The impact of these partnerships is maximised by a combination of activities including the hosting of events and meetings, regular attendance at liaison meetings, attendance at sub regional bodies, some service level agreements, the provision of information to partners and engagement in forums as well as direct funding of partners via cash (commuted sums) or other resources (e.g. free land). Joint procurement is adopted where this provides better value for money.

- Other local authorities
- Supporting People
- Various housing associations
- DAAT & CDIP
- MAPPA
- Homes & Community Agency
- County Council
- Probation & Youth Offending Team
- DIS Learning Partnership
- Connexions
- Office of Children & Young People Services
- Parish councils
- Various contractors
- Tenant Participation Group
- Various developers
- CAB & voluntary organisations
- Cambridge sub-Regional Housing Board
- Local Safeguarding Children's Board

This list is not exhaustive as there are at least 50 groups, working parties and liaison where housing services work with external partners. The Council has adopted a more vigorous risk management process for all partnership working from 2008 onwards. This has identified Supporting People as one of the Councils key partnerships.

c) Our Strengths & Weaknesses

There are a number of factors affecting the ability of the Housing Service to deliver its service obligations. These are shown below as strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- Affordable Homes has a measurably low cost base and overall high performance
- There is a strong commitment to team working across the service and a focus on working with other services areas within the Council and external partners.
- Customer focus – The staff are committed to providing the best service they can
- There is good self awareness of what needs to improve

Weaknesses

- Need to improve transparency of value for money
- Need to improve performance management
- Need to improve customer profiling

Opportunities

- Opportunities include sub regional working, and partnership working with Cambridge City, continues to afford opportunities to share service delivery.
- An improved focus on resident engagement and tenant participation
- The opportunity to increase efficiency arising from the implementation of new web based systems such as ADAPT for all polices and procedures.

Threats

- Supporting People tendering – the proposed changes could have a significant effect on the resources allocated to meet the cost of running our sheltered housing schemes and the future of the staff involved.
- The overall economic downturn may significantly increase the demand on the Council housing advice service and the cost of providing temporary accommodation may rise.

4. Are we meeting the diverse needs of all our customers and communities?

The customers of the Housing Service incorporate the following groups:

- Tenants of SCDC
- Leaseholders
- People applying as homeless
- People seeking to be housed by SCDC or housing associations
- People seeking housing advice
- Gypsies and Travellers living on sites managed by SCDC
- Parish Councils
- Housing associations
- Internal customers e.g. Planning Service

The list shows that the customer base is much wider than just the existing tenants. More work is needed to understand the profile of this customer set including issues of diversity. In February 2012 the Council undertook a STAR survey and 'Your Service' questionnaire. This information has helped to inform our performance monitoring and also start to build up our customer knowledge on the range of profile characteristics amongst our tenant base. This work will continue to evolve into a rolling programme to enable us to capture the profile of all tenants. Work is also underway as part of the Housing Register review to ensure we are collecting more information on housing applicants, such as financial circumstances and disabilities, this will be updated through an automated system.

There is a Tenant Participation Agreement (Compact) in place. This is an agreement with the Council and its tenants to work in partnership to ensure the best possible service is delivered to tenants. In addition there is a Resident Involvement Strategy 2010 which will be

reviewed in 2013. The Resident Involvement Team continues to work with the Tenant Participation Group, all other tenant forums, as well as internal and external stakeholders and partners to deliver the Resident Involvement Strategy action plan.

The review will propose improvements to the framework, our agreements and associated documentation. The review will incorporate staff and tenant views. It is envisaged that this work will shape the strategy and resulting action plan and also provide direction to maximising resident engagement.

The basic framework at present consists of an overarching Elected Tenants Participation Group, which includes representation from the three sheltered housing forums, the leaseholder forum, resident groups, and Village Voices.

From 2013 tenants and leaseholders will receive regular newsletters rather than rely on the housing pages of the Council magazine which will now only carry housing stories that are newsworthy for the whole district. This will enable more detailed information to be shared with tenants and leaseholders.

The website contains information on resident involvement and how residents can be involved. The Tenants Handbook is available on the website and in hard copy for those who want it and this contains further information on how residents can be involved.

The Council is currently drafting an Ageing Well Strategy outlining the key issues affecting the health and wellbeing of older people.

d) Our Resources

The primary resources for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) come from rents and charges. The market value of Council housing stock is around £960M. Additional resources also come from supporting people grants to help residents of sheltered housing in low incomes to pay for the support element of their service charge. These issues are detailed within the HRA Business Plan.

The Council's main capital asset is the housing stock. There are three types of valuations commonly used. The resource accounting valuation is that required by the CLG for their statistical returns and represents the market value of the stock with sitting tenants. The resource accounting valuation is shown below:

Whilst the main landlord activity is funded through the HRA mainly by rent the Council also carries out a number of strategic housing functions, which are mostly funded by the General Fund. The table below summarises.

Service area	Specialist teams	HRA/General Fund
Housing Services	Housing management, sheltered housing, leaseholder services, Gypsy & Traveller management, Carecall, house sales	Mostly HRA
Property services	Property surveyors, capital improvements programme, responsible and void maintenance management, Direct Labour organisation	HRA
Housing Advice &	Housing advice, homelessness team,	Mostly General Fund

Options	housing allocations/Choice Based Lettings	
Housing Strategy & Enabling	Enabling function, housing strategy development	Mostly General Fund

e) Value for Money Overview

Affordable Homes worked with a Scrutiny 'task and finish' group during 2010, to carry out a full review of value for money within housing. This group included three tenant representatives. The product of this review is a greater awareness of where VfM activity is currently in place and an action plan for how gaps in the approach to VfM are to be addressed. This action plan has been refreshed during 2012.

The Annual Report to Tenants includes a VfM statement and VfM forms one of the service standards of the housing regulator.

f) Workforce Overview

There are around 100 staff delivering the housing service. The roles are diverse and include many customer facing roles as well as office based staff and staff with technical roles. There are few problems with recruitment and retention.

The workforce is diverse and contains people across a wide range of ages, people with different disabilities, people with family commitments and an overall balance of male and female staff.

The appraisal process is the primary mechanism through which to identify training and support needs. However a more systematic assessment of training and skills gaps is required to plan a more targeted strategy for staff development. Investors in People accreditation was successfully secured by the Council during 2009 and silver level awarded in 2012.

The 'Our Staff' project is being launched in 2012 to ensure that the needs of the housing staff are catered for and to connect with the corporate programmes such as the leadership Programme, the organisational Development Strategy, the induction programme and other corporate HR initiatives.

As part of the 'Our Staff' project we have entered into a strategic partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing. This offers a tailored programme of training, policy and practice advice to ensure our staff have the knowledge and expertise required to deal with the day-to-day challenges. So far the CIH have provided briefing sessions on tenure reform, specific training around supported housing and also direct access to a Policy Officer to support the Strategic Housing Team, as well as supporting individual training requirements. We are also a member of a number of organisations that promote good practice, including Housemark, Housing Quality Network and the Eastern Region Benchmarking Club.

g) Risk Overview

The major risks associated with the Housing Service are identified in the Affordable Homes Risk Register which is updated quarterly by the Housing Services Management Team and reviewed annually by the Executive Management Team. High scoring risks may also be reflected in the Corporate Risk register. Individual projects often have a separate risk register associated with the delivery of that project.

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SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

20 March 2013

AUTHOR/S: Director of Housing

HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY 12 MONTH REVIEW**Purpose**

1. To provide the Housing Portfolio Holder with an update on the progress of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) 12 months after the establishment of the shared service.
2. This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

3. That the Housing Portfolio Holder notes this report.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The HIA has been established with a three year programme and good progress has been made in the first year. A decision on the future direction of the HIA will not be required until 2014.

Background

5. The Council took the decision in 2011 to set up a new shared service to run the Home Improvement Agency on behalf of Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.
6. Cambs HIA went live April 2012 and brought together formerly separate teams from the three councils under one management (Cambridge City) hosted at South Cambridgeshire Hall and with IT support from Huntingdonshire.

Considerations

7. The set up and transition phase which included the TUPE transfer of staff to Cambridge City, some redundancies and the recruitment of a new manager all went smoothly.
8. The objectives set for the new service were:
 - To achieve operational savings
 - To improved resilience
 - To provide a platform for improved performance over time
9. The operational costs in 2010/11 for all three 3 councils was £695,000. The operational costs in 2012/13 for the new shared HIA is £516,000 (7% under budget) the objective to achieve savings has therefore been met.

10. The new team is now fully operational as a single service with a shared IT system. There have already been examples where staff capacity has been used flexibly across the district boundaries and increased caseloads have been accommodated. The objective to improve resilience has therefore been met also.
11. The focus in the first year has been on integrating the team and establishing new shared IT and working procedures. A key learning point is that combining three services into one is a huge challenge and was perhaps underestimated. There was therefore a slower start than hoped for but the team is now fully in place and working together.
12. There were also some early IT problems but the shared data system between Cambs HIA and council's grants officers is now operational and has been positively received.
13. Joint working with Occupational Therapists has started e.g. the establishment of a shared DFG leaflet and simplified procedures. More joint working with OTs is planned.
14. The platform for improved service has therefore been established.

Options

15. A revised Business Plan is planned for 2014. This will follow workshops with staff and stakeholders during 2013 to review the work completed to date and to identify areas for further improvement.
16. This will be preceded by some further fine tuning of working procedures to maximise efficiency.
17. Whilst the operational costs have been held within budget, there has been a slowdown in fees coming in. This will form the focus of activity for 2013/14.

Implications

18. Financial	Operational cost efficiencies have been made but effort is now required to ensure that fee generation is increased and maintained.
Legal	The Council has a duty to meet the needs of disabled residents in the district and to oversee the spending of the Disabled Facilities Grant.
Staffing	None
Risk Management	The HIA Board is working closely with the HIA Manager to ensure that fee income targets are met during 2013/14
Equality and Diversity	The work of the HIA is aimed at meeting the needs of disabled people.
Equality Impact	Completed for original policy proposal.

Assessment completed	
Climate Change	None

Consultations

19. None

Consultation with Children and Young People

20. None

Effect on Strategic Aims

21. We will make sure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer outstanding and sustainable quality of life for our residents. Assisting people with disabilities to live independently in their own home is a critical factor in providing and maintaining sustainable communities.

Conclusions / Summary

22. A fully operational and functioning shared home improvement agency service has been established in the first 12 months. Work is now underway to further improve the efficiency of the service.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

None

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Housing Forward Plan – 2013/14 DRAFT

Date	Agenda item	Key Y/N	Purpose	Lead Officer
June 2013	Arms length company scoping review	Y	Decision	Stephen Hills
	Design & Quality Charter	N	Decision	Schuyler Newstead
	Asset Management Policy	Y	Decision	Anita Goddard
Oct 2013	Service Plan objectives	N	Decision	Stephen Hills
	Homelessness Strategy	Y	Decision	Sue Carter/Heather Wood
	Resident Involvement Strategy update	N	Decision	Gill Anderton
	New Build Strategy update	N	Monitoring	Schuyler Newstead
	Sheltered Housing contract tender update	N	Monitoring	Tracey Cassidy
March 2014	Temporary Accommodation review (to include joint working with County update)	N	Monitoring	Sue Carter/Heather Wood
	Update on new Build Strategy progress To include pipeline update etc.	N	Monitoring	Schuyler Newstead
	Wilford Furlong project	N	Decision	Schuyler Newstead
	Gypsy & Traveller accommodation needs progress report	N	Monitoring	Stephen Hills
	Barriers to employment /back to work project	N	Monitoring	Dawn Graham?

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