

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 16 October 2013 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Bunty Waters

Opposition spokesmen: Mark Hersom

Also in attendance: Val Barrett, Kevin Cuffley, Lynda Harford,
David McCraith and Ben Shelton

Officers:

Jenny Clark	Lands Officer
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
Heather Wood	Housing Advice and Options Manager

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following interests were declared:

Councillor Lynda Harford	Non-pecuniary interest as an estate agent
Councillor Mark Hersom	Non-pecuniary interest as a landlord in South Cambridgeshire
Councillor Mark Howell	Non-pecuniary interest as an employee of the Papworth Trust, a charity that includes a Registered Social Landlord.
Councillor Ben Shelton	Non-pecuniary interest as an employee of a letting agent in Cambridge

10. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Housing Portfolio Holder signed, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2013, subject to the attendance of Councillor Val Barrett and Councillor Lynda Harford being recorded.

11. LINTON: SALE OF LAND ADJACENT 70 BALSAM ROAD

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking to sell, on the open market, land adjacent to 70 Balsam Road, Linton.

The Head of Housing Strategy and Development supported the sale on the basis that it would be too costly for the Council to build a single property.

No Members present opposed the proposed sale.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed** to sell the land adjacent to 70 Balsham Road, Linton on the open market, subject to planning permission for the development of one dwelling.

12. DESIGN GUIDE FOR NEW BUILD COUNCIL PROPERTIES

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report on the essential principles to follow in the design of the Council's own affordable housing projects.

Darren Heffer from Saunders Boston, the Consultant retained by the Council to help develop the Design Guide, explained that the document was intended to be a general starting point from which site specific guidance could be drawn up.

Councillor Lynda Harford cautioned against incorporating stairs into living areas because this served to reduce the amount of usable space. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged this and said that flexibility was key, enabling details to vary in different situations.

Referring to the Code for Sustainable Homes, Councillor Ben Shelton questioned the cost of building to Code Level 4, and suggested that Code Level 3 might be more appropriate concentrating on high standards of insulation. In reply, the Housing Portfolio Holder said it would be a false economy to keep costs down at the outset as future expectations could require greater cost in terms of upgrading the Code Level.

Those present discussed aspects of the Design Guide. In particular, the Portfolio Holder explained that the intention was to minimise any on going maintenance liability for the Council. The Housing Operational Services Manager explained that combi-boilers would not be installed because, if they failed for any reason, the user lost both heating and hot water.

Referring to paragraph 7.6 (smoke detectors), the Housing Portfolio Holder instructed officers to requires developers to install carbon monoxide alarms in all dwellings.

Referring to paragraph 9.3 (landscaping), the Portfolio Holder instructed officers to amend the width of paths from 1.2 metres to 1.5 metres in order to make them more accessible to wheelchair users.

Councillor Harford noted that highways should be designed to adoptable standards but urged officers to require such design to result in adoption by the Local Highways Authority as soon as possible. Unadopted pieces of land should either be incorporated as garden land or made subject to a service charge.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **approved** the content of the Design Guide, subject to minor modification, enabling officers to introduce a consistent approach to the standards in new build Council properties

13. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013-2018

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report on the new Homeless Strategy for 2013-18 and associated policies. He observed that South Cambridgeshire District Council had an excellent record of preventing homelessness in the first place.

The Head of Housing Advice and Options explained that the new strategy contained a set of actions to prevent homelessness and a set of actions to maximise the availability of

temporary accommodation. Those present discussed homelessness generally.

The Portfolio Holder asked about discharging the Council's duty towards a homeless person. The Head of Housing Advice and Options said that applicants sometimes bid for a property but then don't accept it if successful. In some circumstances the Council could then discharge its duty to that person/household. The Portfolio Holder recognised the need to be practical whilst retaining an element of flexibility. The Director of Housing said officers would monitor the situation and report back. Those present discussed the relationship between the private rented sector and the Council's homelessness duty.

The Housing Portfolio Holder:

- **Approved** the Homeless Strategy and action plan for 2013-18 Appendix A and B, subject to review in 12 months time
- **Approved** the Discharging Duty Policy Appendix C
- **Approved** the Reconnections Policy Appendix D as amended.

14. USE OF COUNCIL HOUSING AS TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report on a draft Policy setting out when council homes could be used as temporary accommodation and clarifying the terms upon which a Licence Agreement or a Non Secure Temporary Tenancy Agreement would be granted.

Those present supported the Policy and noted the significance of the Council having its own housing stock for this purpose.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **approved** the Policy on the use of Council housing as temporary accommodation at Appendix 1 of the report, and more specifically:

- a) The use of Licence Agreements pursuant to the Housing Act 1996 Section 188 (pending a homeless decision) and Section 190 (2) (intentionally homeless).
- b) The use of a Non Secure Temporary Tenancy pursuant to Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 where the Council has a duty to house until such time that suitable alternative accommodation can be found.
- c) The use of a Non Secure Temporary Tenancy where a former tenant has died or moved away and the remaining household has been given discretionary agreement to stay temporarily until more suitable accommodation can be found.

The Housing Portfolio Holder gave **delegated authority** to the Director of Housing to amend the Tenancy Policy to specify the inclusion for the use of Licences and Non Secure Temporary Tenancies, as defined in the Policy at Appendix 1.

15. AFFORDABLE HOMES DRAFT SERVICE PLAN 2014/15

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report updating him on the revised actions for the Affordable Homes Service Plan for 2014-15.

The Portfolio Holder noted that Priority 11 (Strategy review of homes of non traditional construction) would take place in June 2014 rather than in 2016 as stated in the report.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed** to carry over from 2013-14 the following:

- Development of neighbourhood teams and hub offices
- Development of options to best meet the refurbishment needs of the Council's stock including
 - A review of Wilford Furlong and
 - the Robinson Court (Gamlingay) redevelopment
- Continuing to extend and broaden the pool of temporary accommodation including overseeing the completion of the hostel at Robson Court (Waterbeach)
- Establishing a pilot scheme to set up the new Housing Company

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed** to add as Service Plan priorities the following

	Action	Expected completion	Notes
8	Digital inclusion	March 2016	Project to explore the potential take up of internet based services and to identify the barriers to tenants accessing services using internet technology.
9	Financial inclusion	March 2016	Project to explore the potential use of Credit Unions and other measures to assist those tenants that may not have access to bank accounts. Linked to welfare reform mitigation work.
10	Review of policy changes to adapt to welfare benefit changes, including impact of Universal Credit etc.	March 2015	Some changes may be required within 2014 – review will consider where we have got to & check that everything is working as it should and identify any changes needed.
11	Strategy review of homes of non traditional construction	June 2014	To pull together a coherent and timed strategy to deliver those elements needed to address the non traditional properties as well as those properties identified for demolition in the HRA business plan.
12	Tenancy fraud	July 2015	Funded CLG project starting in July 2013.
13	Explore Homelessness Gold Standard	Mar 2015	External accreditation of Council's homelessness service. Dependent upon outcome of peer review taking place in 2013.
14	Delivery of new Older persons	Jan 2015	Work needed to roll out new housing related support contract for older people. Dependent

	housing related support service		upon outcome of procurement process being carried out by County Council in 2013/14.
15	Handyman service	March 2015	Activation of service to offer small jobs to elderly and disabled households. Already part of Mears contract but needs to be implemented.
16	Review of Mears contract	March 2015	Mid term review. If the outcome is that a fresh procurement exercise is needed a decision will need to be taken in early 2015 to allow enough time to complete the work required.
17	Explore Housing Foyer	March 2015	Work with the County Council and a housing association HA partner to develop a feasibility report.
18	Review of disabled adaptations in HRA stock	March 2015	Project to review work completed, policy matters, identified need, contractors performance, HIA links, OT performance etc
19	Estate inspection project	March 2015	Project to review the need for a welfare garden scheme, any patterns in ASB and links to grounds maintenance.

16. TENANT PARTICIPATION GROUP

There was no written or verbal update from the Tenants Participation Group. Upon hearing that the Group's Chairman, Wendy Head, was ill, the Housing Portfolio Holder asked that his best wishes and those of fellow Councillors be passed on.

17. WORK PROGRAMME

Those present noted the Work Programme for the Housing Portfolio for the period up to October 2014.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled Housing Portfolio Holder meeting would take place on Wednesday 18 March 2014, starting at 5.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.
