

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 18 March 2015 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

Councillors in attendance: Anna Bradnam, Kevin Cuffley, Philippa Hart,
Hazel Smith, Bunty Waters

Also in attendance:

Julie Fletcher	Acting Head of Housing Strategy and Development
Anita Goddard	Head of Housing and Property Services
Wendy Head	Chairman, Tenant Participation Group
Stephen Hills	Director of Housing
Les Rouse	Vice Chairman, Tenant Participation Group
Duncan Vessey	New Business Initiatives Manager (Housing)
Victoria Wallace	Democratic Services Officer
Paul Williams	Equality and Diversity Officer
Heather Wood	Housing Advice and Options Manager

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mark Howell declared a non-pecuniary interest as an employee of the Papworth Trust.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

3. COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT AND ASSOCIATED ACTIONS

The New Business Initiatives Manager presented the Community Impact Statement which set out the beneficial impact on communities of the Affordable Homes service. Discussion ensued:

- Members were assured that the Council recognised that the design of houses had an influence on the physical and emotional wellbeing of residents. The Portfolio Holder clarified that housing design had been addressed, with Portfolio Holder and other Member involvement in the design of council housing for the future. The Director of Housing emphasised that great effort was made with the physical design of both the exterior and interior of social rented housing, which was often a superior build quality to mass built private homes. Members were informed that housing satisfaction was monitored on an ongoing basis.
- Achieving the objective of 'promoting opportunities to grow your own food and eat a healthy and balanced diet' was queried with gardens becoming increasingly smaller in new build properties. Whilst it was recognised that this was an aspirational target, it was highlighted that allotments for residents were not always utilised and that this would be something that would be promoted further.

The New Business Initiatives Manager presented the Financial Inclusion Strategy. The following comments were made:

- The Portfolio Holder requested the removal of Paragraph three on page two of the Strategy.
- The implications of zero hours contracts and housing benefit were discussed. Members were informed that with the introduction of universal credit, such changes in circumstances should be picked up by the Council more quickly.
- The Portfolio Holder expressed concern that the Credit Union was Cambridge-centric but was assured that this was not the case.
- Concern was raised over the Council continuing to grant fund a number of Citizens Advice Bureaus that were outside the District. The Portfolio Holder clarified that the Council recognised that it was often geographically easier for South Cambridgeshire residents to access some Citizens Advice Bureaus located outside the District boundary and therefore contributed to their funding.
- Energy conservation improvements to homes were discussed and Members made the Portfolio Holder aware of positive feedback from their wards of the external cladding the Council had added to homes, for energy conservation. Councillor Cuffley informed the Portfolio Holder and other Members that residents in Sawston had been particularly impressed with this and were seeing the financial benefits of the improvements reflected in their energy bills, and it was thought that the appearance of the area had improved where external cladding had been added to properties.
- Energy conservation and fuel poverty regarding the gypsy and traveller community was discussed. Information was being disseminated to Eastern Region Gypsy and Travellers and a platform was being sought to showcase the work the Council had done on this.
- Access to affordable contents insurance for Council tenants was discussed. It was not known why take up of this had been low but the Council would continue to offer this to tenants. It was noted that many tenants who had been flooded in Bar Hill in August 2014, did not have contents insurance.

The Digital Inclusion Strategy was presented and discussed:

- Universal credit for single claimants was being introduced from December 2015. This could only be applied for online and the Digital Inclusion Strategy was aimed at helping residents to be able to do this.
- Passwords for wifi installed in 40 communal rooms at sheltered housing schemes across the District would be given to sheltered housing residents to enable them to access this wifi in their homes, provided the signal was strong enough.
- South Cambridgeshire District Council's ICT service would manage the 40 PC's located in communal rooms.

The Credit Union funding proposal was discussed:

- It was clarified that Credit Union services would be on a first come first served basis for Council tenants.
- Jam jar accounts that the Credit Union offered, would help tenants/leaseholders to manage their money. To find out the balance of their jam jar accounts, account holders would have to telephone the Credit Union or visit the office.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **APPROVED:**

- a) The Community Impact Statement.
- b) The Financial Inclusion Strategy.
- c) The payment of £10,000 (ten thousand pounds) to the Rainbow Anglia Credit

- Union Ltd.
- d) The Digital Inclusion Strategy.
 - e) The in principle appointment of a fixed term post to help deliver the Digital Inclusion Strategy action plan.

4. **AFFORDABLE HOMES DRAFT SERVICE PLAN 2015/16**

The Acting Head of Housing Strategy and Development presented the Affordable Homes Draft Service Plan 2015/16. Discussion and comments were:

- The reasons for failed negotiations regarding purchase of an additional Gypsy and Traveller site at Chesterton Fen Road, were discussed. Members were informed that the reason for this was that the site had become financially unviable for the Council. Although the Council was no longer considering this site, it was continuing to look at and for other sites.
- Members were informed that work would continue on homes of non-traditional construction.
- Since the report was written, the pilot stage of the Lifeline Plus project had been extended.
- The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the key objective of the Ermine Street Housing project was income generation. The money generated would go directly to Council services, thereby providing socio economic benefit.

The Housing Portfolio Holder:

- a) **APPROVED** the Affordable Homes Service Plan for 2015/16.
- b) **NOTED** the progress of existing projects within the 2014/15 Service Plan.

5. **EQUALITY SCHEME 2015-2020 (2015-2016 VERSION)**

The Equality and Diversity Officer presented a consultation draft Equality Scheme for 2015-2020 (2015-2016 version) and explained that suggested changes from Executive Management Team would be incorporated before this went to consultation, which would be after Easter 2015.

The Portfolio Holder was made aware that EMT had requested more background information to be provided in order to strengthen the reasons for dementia being highlighted as a priority for the Council.

Councillor Hart requested that Members be included in the Council's Mental Health training for staff.

The Portfolio Holder was informed that the commitment regarding the Gypsy and Traveller Community would be strengthened, to include work that was being undertaken by the Council in this area.

The Portfolio Holder was made aware that the Executive Management Team had requested that the commitment to the mental health of children and young people be expanded to include new communities.

Members commended the Equality and Diversity Officer for the thorough report that had been prepared and for the priority areas that had been identified.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **ENDORSED** the pre-consultation draft of the Council's Equality Scheme for 2015-2020 (2015-16 version), subject to amendments discussed and EMT approval.

6. HOUSING ADVICE AND OPTIONS SERVICE REVIEW

The Housing Advice and Options Manager presented the Housing Advice and Options Service Review.

The Portfolio Holder was informed that the Government had given all local authorities the option to apply for Gold Standard status to reflect the housing advice, options service and homelessness assistance provided to local residents. A self-assessment had been carried out, which had identified a number of improvements needed to the service and which the service was keen to implement.

The Portfolio Holder was informed that going for the gold standard did not provide any benefits such as access to further funding for example, other than for the service to be able to refer to itself as 'gold standard'. The Portfolio Holder advised that the service should not apply for the gold standard if this meant undertaking a lot of work to achieve this, given there would be no direct benefit by doing so, but that the service should continue to identify gaps and make improvements in response to these.

The Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the results of the self-assessment and actions identified to improve the service.

7. TENANT PARTICIPATION GROUP

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the new Vice Chairman of the Tenant Participation Group to the meeting. The Chairman of the Tenant Participation Group (TPG) provided an update on the TPG:

- The Tenant Participation Group was being run by the tenants themselves who were setting their own agenda and undertaking their own work.
- The TPG was undertaking a scrutiny review of sheltered housing and support, the results of which would be reported in June 2015.

8. FORWARD PLAN

The Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the work programme.

9. TRANSFER OF LAND AT OSP 148 CHURCH LANE, GREAT EVERSDEN

This item was deferred.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on 17 June 2015 at 5.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.10 p.m.
