

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 18 October 2017 at 3.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Lynda Harford

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors
and Opposition spokesmen: Kevin Cuffley
Hazel Smith

Also in attendance: Anna Bradnam

Officers:

Stephen Hills Director of Housing
Heather Wood Head of Housing Advice and Options
Julie Fletcher Head of Housing Strategy
Victoria Wallace Democratic Services Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Housing Portfolio Holder signed as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2017.

3. REVIEW OF THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

The Housing Director presented the report which provided an update on the review of the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (CHIA) and sought approval of the next steps regarding the operations of the CHIA.

The Portfolio Holder and Members were informed that the Council was having to consider how to continue the service based on the withdrawal of Cambridgeshire County Council's revenue support for the service. Members were informed that the County Council's analysis of the service had been based on incorrect information so officers felt this needed to be revisited, whilst recognising the financial pressures on the County Council. Members were also informed that the Clinical Commissioning Group no longer contributed funding to the service.

The Portfolio Holder felt that this was an essential service and that in order to continue to provide the service, there was no option other than to increase fees. It was noted that even with an increase in fees, charges may still be less than those elsewhere.

The Housing Portfolio Holder:

- a) Approved Option A: to lobby the County Council as part of a collective appeal from the local authorities, to try and negotiate a different settlement.
- b) Recommended Option C to Council: to review the fees charged by the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (CHIA) with a view that the HIA should be self sustaining. This would require fees to be increased from their current 15% to at least 18%, the exact level of fee to be determined in consultation with the County Council in time for the Council's budget setting meeting in February 2018.

4. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS AND THE JOINT HOUSING ADAPTATIONS AGREEMENT

The Head of Housing Strategy presented the report which provided an update regarding the county wide review of disabled facilities grants and sought approval of the joint Housing Adaptation Agreement proposed by Cambridgeshire County Council.

Members were informed that:

- The maximum disabled facilities grant was £30,000 which in a minority of cases may not cover the full cost of the adaptation. Top-up funding was therefore required. Generally, top-up funding had been secured through working with charitable organisations and in one instance, crowd funding had been successful. As a last resort, the County Council had been able to step in to help with the top-up funding required. As the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation from the Better Care Fund to district councils had increased, the County Council was asking district councils to provide top-up funding rather than the County Council. Therefore the Portfolio Holder's agreement was being sought to enable the Council to provide top-up funding if funding was available. A county wide review was underway to look at existing policies, with a view to implementing a county wide Joint Adaptations Policy in 2018, setting out how the Disabled Facilities Grant could be spent. This would provide consistency across the county and make the process for disabled facilities grants more streamlined.
- Council and housing association properties with adaptations, were re-let where possible to those in need of an adapted property. Members were informed that these properties were assigned a mobility code to enable the allocation of suitable homes to individuals.

The Portfolio Holder:

- a) Approved the Joint Housing Adaptations Agreement that provides a framework from which the districts will work towards developing a Joint Adaptations Policy (Option A).
- b) Approved as an interim before the Joint Policy is agreed, the flexibility within the Council's existing policies to provide for 'top up' funding where necessary and subject to available funding (Option B).

5. AFFORDABLE HOMES SERVICE PLAN 2018/19

The Housing Director presented the revised Affordable Homes Service Plan for 2018/19.

The Interim Assistant Director of Housing explained the implications to the Council of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which would lead to significant requirements of the service in order to be legally compliant. Modelling had been carried out and according to this, it was anticipated that a 60% increase in staff may be needed. There would be sanctions if the Council did not comply with the new regulations. A draft response to the consultation on Code of Guidance would be prepared and the input from the Housing Portfolio Holder would be sought. A member briefing on the Homelessness Reduction Act would be held on 15th January 2018. To date, the Council had met all its homelessness prevention duties. The homelessness prevention service was being as cost efficient as possible and where shared projects existed (such as the Homelessness Trailblazer bid), shared posts were in place to carry out this work. However the majority of the work undertaken was case work, which was carried out most effectively at district level.

In response to a query regarding the work of the Council in relation to gypsies and travellers, members were informed that a gypsies and travellers officer was in post within

the Housing Department. The implications of the change in definition of gypsies and travellers in planning policy terms and the findings of the recent survey, were currently being considered as part of the Local Plan examination. The results of this were expected shortly.

In response to a query regarding retirement villages and the provision of council housing for older people in new communities, members were advised that the Housing Strategy would address this and that recommendations of the Council's task and finish group looking at social isolation, had been presented to the Local Health Partnership. The Housing Director continued to work with County Council officers to develop a county wide older people's housing strategy and a draft was being reviewed of work on the modelling of future housing need for older people. This looked at how aspirations had changed.

The Housing Portfolio Holder endorsed the actions identified in the Affordable Homes Draft Service Plan 2018/19.

6. TENANT PARTICIPATION GROUP

There was no update from the Tenant Participation Group.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 21st March 2018 at 3.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 4.50pm
