

Appendix to the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 29 November 2018

Written Responses to Councillors' questions

- (i) Minute 9(c): Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Strategies (MTFS) 2018/19

Former Tenants Arrears –Question from Councillor Sue Ellington

Extract from draft minutes:

“Councillor Sue Ellington noted that whilst rent arrears for current tenants had gone down from £424,032 at the end of March to £413,314 at the end of September, there had been a corresponding increase in former tenants' arrears by approximately £31,000. *She asked whether the reduction in current tenants' rent arrears was attributable to eviction of any former tenants.* The Lead Cabinet Member for Housing indicated that she would arrange to provide a written response to Councillor Ellington, but referred to the difficulty of securing repayment of arrears from former tenants.”

Response from the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing

During the period 1st April 2018 - 30th September 2018, there were 9 tenancies subject to eviction proceedings, 4 of which resulted in the tenancies being ended. The termination of these tenancies added just over £15k of additional former tenant arrears, around 50% of the total.

The remainder of the increase in “former tenant arrears” was due tenancies ending for other reasons whilst still owing rent. These include the sad occasions when a tenant dies when there is a notional period of arrears for accounting purposes until keys are returned, or if a tenant hands in keys and gives up a tenancy without giving 4 weeks notice.

Arrears from former tenants are very difficult for the team to recover and are unlikely to be cost effective to do so for the value of rent owed.

- (ii) Minute 14(d) - Question from Councillor Peter Topping:

To ask the Council's representative on the Board of the Greater Cambridge Partnership if he has any views on the proposed off-road route for the A428 busway?

Response from the Deputy Leader of the Council:

As the Council's representative on the Executive Board of the GCP, I do indeed have views on the proposed off-road route for the Cambourne to Cambridge public transport link.

Prior to the meeting of the GCP Board on 6 December, the expression of views might have led to suggestions of pre-determination. However, as I am writing this after that meeting, I do not have this constraint.

I am yet to be convinced that any of the proposals before us is the 'right' solution for creating the new high quality public transport route from Cambourne and Bourn Airfield to Cambridge that we need for the delivery of Bourn Airfield as well as to support more broadly the sustained economic growth of the Greater Cambridge region.

The decision of the GCP on 6 December 2018 was to consult on the Madingley Mulch to Cambourne section of the route and to develop the outline business case for the whole route, with a view to a decision in October 2019.

During this process, I will be working with officers, local residents and other stakeholders on the large number of outstanding issues, including the environmental impacts, the landscape and heritage impacts, the realistic journey improvement, the ability of the scheme to achieve modal shift, the onward links to employment destinations to the north and the south of Cambridge, the wider economic benefits that can be attributed to the scheme, and the links to the emerging CAM plans.

Alongside the formal decision taken on 6 December, I am very pleased to have agreed a number of other things with the GCP, notably publication of the work done previously on the northern route options, undertaking to examine interim bus priority measures on Madingley Hill and ongoing engagement between the project officers and the LLF, in particular the LLF technical group, throughout the business case development process.

(iii) Minute 14(h) - Question from Councillor Mark Howell

Housing Capital Receipts are used to supply much needed housing for the residents of South Cambridgeshire. Can the Leader please guarantee that Housing Capital Receipts from South Cambridgeshire District Council will not be given to Central Government?

Response from the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing

This administration's approach to the use of Right-to-Buy receipts to fund 30% of new build council programme is exactly the same as that of the previous Conservative administration and we will continue to do all we can to avoid handing money back to the government. There is a well-developed pipeline of sites and houses being rigorously worked on by officers. The retained Right to Buy receipts from the sale of council homes are ring-fenced for the provision of affordable housing. The timeframe for spending is 3 years from its receipt. If the money is not spent within the timeframe then it must be returned to the Treasury with interest (at 4% above the Bank of England base rate, charged from date of receipt). To date our small Development team of 2 continue to successfully secure sufficient schemes on-site to ensure this spend by each quarterly deadline, with an element of acquisition of existing market homes where new build schemes have not come forward quickly enough. The new build has mainly been achieved by building useful relationships with key local developers and ensuring that we make successful competitive offers for the S106 affordable housing contribution on sites against other offers from our local Registered Providers. As a council that owns no developable land or larger sites (in comparison to the City Council for example) we are currently reliant upon securing sufficient S106 and exception-site opportunities to ensure Right to Buy spend. In future, and following the lifting of the HRA Borrowing Cap, officers are

exploring opportunities to expand the Council's development operation to continue to effectively spend Right to Buy receipts. To show our commitment to new Council houses, we are also looking to bring in additional new build development project officers to drive the current and future site pipeline forwards to help us ensure greater certainty of spend and increased numbers of new builds.

(iv) Minute 14(h) – Question from Councillor Grenville Chamberlain

Will the Leader confirm that she will continue to support the LLF's opposition to the proposed corridor from the Madingley roundabout to Grange Road?

Response from the Leader of the Council:

Until May, I was the Vice-Chair of the Local Liaison Forum (LLF). During my two years in that role, the focus of the LLF was on calling for a proper evidence base and, in particular, for an independent evidence base, to inform considerations around the project and potential routes. At the point at which I stood down, the LLF had been successful in persuading the GCP and the Combined Authority to commission some truly independent work which has resulted in the Arup report, although I recognise that the report has fallen short of what some had hoped to see.

It is important for the Council to remain engaged in the process. If I were to state my outright opposition at this stage, this would shut down the opportunity for engagement and it is important that we are "in it, to win it". We need to be part of the process and able to engage with the relevant parties in order to influence the outcomes and to ensure that, at the point at which a decision is made, there are proper evidence based choices on the table. If we signal our outright opposition prematurely, we lose the opportunity to be influential and to be part of the conversation. It is therefore vitally important that we remain part of the dialogue in order to influence the outcomes.