

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing and Environmental
Services Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Monday, 28 April 2008 at 11.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs DSK Spink MBE, Portfolio Holder

Councillors in attendance: Mrs HM Smith Opposition Spokesman

Officers: Holly Adams Democratic Services Officer
Anita Goddard Housing Services Manager
Cathy Hembry Housing Advice and Options Manager
Stephen Hills Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes
Mike Knight Housing Strategy Manager
Brent O'Halloran Property Services Manager
Gwynn Thomas Principal Accountant (Housing)

Action

89. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

DECISION ITEMS

90. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUSINESS PLAN 2008/09-2012/13

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, presented the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, which had been produced with the involvement of all aspects of the Housing Service. The new five-year plan, which would be subject to an annual review and refresh process, focussed on those services which had been funded by the HRA, and there had not been any substantial changes made since the draft plan was considered by the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet earlier in the year.

The plan represented the current position of retention of the existing housing stock; this would be updated if required, particularly to the Housing Maintenance Plan to which substantial reductions would have to be made if the stock were retained. The Corporate Manager drew attention to the significant revenue savings required by 2012/13 to maintain a guideline minimum £1 million balance in the HRA.

The Housing and Environmental Services Portfolio Holder **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2008/09-2012/13 be approved.

91. HOUSING SERVICE PLAN 2008/09

The Housing Service Plan 2008/09 reflected housing stock retention, but would be changed if necessary to address the outcome of the Housing Futures project. The annual review and refresh of the plan had begun

already at bi-weekly housing management meetings and the broader six-weekly housing team forum, ensuring regular monitoring and overview, and the targets in the plan fed into individual appraisals.

The Housing and Environmental Services Portfolio Holder **AGREED** the final Housing Service Plan 2008/09.

92. REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING

The Sheltered Housing Service Review had begun in 2005 and a review of the impact of the changes introduced had begun at the end of 2007, including workshops with all Sheltered Housing staff and a number of tenants. The overall impression was that the review had established very positive outcomes, facilitating improved teamwork and a more flexible and targeted service for tenants. The action plan had been included in the 2008/09 service plan to ensure that residents' concerns were addressed, but some issues would require substantial resources and would be considered as part of the Housing Futures project.

The Housing and Environmental Services Portfolio Holder

- (a) **AGREED** that officers develop a detailed and costed action plan for further improvements and that actions identified therein be incorporated into normal budgeting cycles; and
- (b) **NOTED** the outcomes of the changes made through the sheltered housing review and the progress made towards achieving the objectives in the new vision for the sheltered housing service.

93. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The draft Homelessness Strategy focussed on prevention, building on the previous strategy, and included associated action plans arising from the Service Plan. A lack of resources for young people had been identified and officers were looking at a possible sub-regional scheme with the Council's partners. Given the current economic climate, the Council was preparing for an elevated level of enquiries about repossessions and was developing service level agreements with the local Citizens' Advice Bureaux about debt management.

The Housing and Environmental Services Portfolio Holder **APPROVED** the draft Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 for consultation and wished the Housing Advice and Options Manager all the best in her future role as director of Wintercomfort.

94. RESPONSIVE REPAIRS IMPROVEMENTS CONTRACT

The Property Services Manager explained that a four-year contract had been let to the Council's Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) and Cambridge City Council's City Services DLO in October 2004, with the option for a further one-year extension. The high levels of performance and of customer satisfaction with the existing service were noted, as were the possible complications that could arise if the contract were changed before the outcome of the Housing Futures project was known. The Corporate Manager, Affordable Housing, confirmed that the recommendation, to extend the current contract for one further year, meant that Gershon savings would have to be identified elsewhere and

that consultants already were working on identifying areas for efficiency savings which would lead to revenue savings.

The Housing and Environmental Services Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to extend the current responsive repairs improvements contract until October 2009.

INFORMATION ITEMS

95. SERVICE PLAN 2007/08 PROGRESS SUMMARY

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, explained that the progress summary was an example of how Service Plans were monitored regularly. The outstanding issue of the Tenant Handbook had been rolled forward into the 2008/09 Service Plan and the Housing Services Manager confirmed that work on the handbook was now well advanced, with the draft currently under review. The Portfolio Holder felt that it was imperative to finalise the handbook before tenants were balloted on the Housing Futures project so that they had a clear understanding of what services the Council offered.

The Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the 2007/08 Service Plan progress summary.

96. HOUSING FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Housing Financial Update included only those controllable areas of the budget and not recharges, which could not be influenced. There was a small overspend expected on the capital programme, approximately £40,000 on a £10 million budget, but the housing programme as a whole would not be overspent.

The Housing and Environmental Services Portfolio Holder, noting that both requests were within the budget, **ENDORSED** referral to the Resources Portfolio Holder of:

- (a) a roll-forward request of approximately £6,000 and no more than £10,000 for the lettings advisory service (Choice-Based Lettings); and
- (b) a roll-forward request of £12,500 from the tenant participation budget for production of the Tenant Handbook.

STANDING ITEMS

97. FORWARD PLAN

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, added the following issues to the Forward Plan for the June / July 2008 meeting:

- Choice-Based Lettings review;
- Service Plans 2008/09 progress review;
- Housing Performance Indicators;
- Update on stock retention options and effect on service provision;

- Equity share review.

98. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be determined in the new municipal year.

99. PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Housing and Environmental Services Portfolio Holder thanked all officers in Housing and Environmental Services for their co-operation over the years, which she had found to be a very happy time. She also thanked Councillor Mrs HM Smith for her contributions and Councillor Mrs Smith thanked the Portfolio Holder for making her feel welcome. The Housing and Environmental Services Portfolio Holder wished officers all the best in the future.

The meeting ended at 12.55 p.m.
