

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 17 February 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Val Barrett

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors
and Opposition spokesmen: Liz Heazell

Opposition spokesmen: Frances Amrani

Also in attendance:

Officers:

Stephen Hills	Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes
Anita Goddard	Housing Services Manager
Steve Annetts	Housing Asset and Investment Manager
Sid Webb	Repairs Operations Manager
Jenny Clark	Lands Officer
Paul Williams	Equality and Diversity Officer
Guy Moody	Democratic Services Officer

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Portfolio Holder declared a personal interest as an employee of the Papworth Trust, which has an RSL as part of its operation.

Cllr Frances Amrani declared a personal interest, as her brother is a Council tenant.

47. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Subject to the following amendments the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

Minute 41, paragraph 6 be amended to read:

‘ In reply to a question about the selling on of pre 1996 leases the Portfolio Holder was advised that this would need to be verified by the legal team’.

Minute 41, paragraph7, be amended to read

‘The Portfolio Holder requested that any tenant losing alarm equipment provided by the Council be asked to fund the full cost of replacement.’

There were no matters arising.

48. COMBERTON: FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE PROVISION OF ELEVEN AFFORDABLE HOMES ON A RURAL EXCEPTION SITE AT "THE VALLEY"

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, introduced a report to seek approval to use money received through S.106 Agreements in lieu of affordable housing to contribute towards the provision of 11 new affordable homes on a rural exception site with full planning permission at ‘The Valley’, Comberton.

In reply to a question concerning why only 2 and 3 bed units would be provided the Portfolio Holder was advised that local needs had been taken into account and provision of 2 and 3 bed units would meet the greater number of those needs. Additionally, 1-bed units were considered unsustainable in the longer term and 4 bed units had proved difficult to let in some areas.

In reply to a further question the Portfolio Holder was advised that nomination rights would be through the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **APPROVED** funding, not exceeding £110,000 during the financial year 2010/11, to help deliver 11 new affordable homes on a rural exception site at The Valley, Comberton, subject to a grant being confirmed by the HCA, start on site being achieved by 31st March 2010 and the Council being given credit for the donation.

49. COTTENHAM: DISPOSAL OF CAR PARKING AREA TO THE SIDE OF 34 STEVENS CLOSE

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, presented a report to seek a decision by the Housing Portfolio Holder to transfer the car parking area to the side of 34 Stevens Close, Cottenham on a 125 year lease arrangement to Sanctuary Hereward to enable the provision of a 3 bedroom specialist adapted bungalow.

In reply to a question concerning the value of the land, the Portfolio Holder was advised that professional valuation agents were employed and that comparison exercises had been undertaken to ensure that valuations were fair and reflected true market rates.

In reply to a further question the Portfolio Holder was advised that the sum requested to facilitate the development would be from the same 'pot' as the scheme at 'The Valley, Comberton. The Portfolio Holder was further advised that schemes for individual dwellings tended to attract higher grants per property than group schemes in order to make the projects viable.

Concern was expressed that the local Members and the Parish Council did not appear to have been consulted and, subject to the agreement of the local Members, and the Parish Council, the Housing Portfolio Holder **AGREED**:

- a) That the car parking area adjacent to 34 Stevens Close, Cottenham be transferred to Sanctuary Hereward at nil value on a 125 year lease basis to enable the development of a 3 bed adapted bungalow.
- b) That a grant of not more than £60,000 from the commuted sum affordable housing pot be used to assist Sanctuary Hereward in the development of this unit.

50. HASLINGFIELD: ALLOCATION OF COMMUTED SUM MONEY, WISBEYS YARD

At the invitation of the Portfolio Holder the local Member, Cllr Liz Heazell, updated the meeting on the current status of the project, and in particular the tenants in Fountains Lane.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that as the tenants' housing needs had been met there were no objections to the scheme proceeding.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **APPROVED** funding, not exceeding £37,000, to cover the cost of moving both residents at Fountains Lane twice, using monies received through

S.106 Agreements in lieu of affordable housing.

51. GREAT SHELFORD: WOOLLARDS LANE CAR PARK

Jenny Clark, Lands Officer, was in attendance for this item.

The Lands Officer presented a report to seek a decision by the Housing Portfolio Holder regarding the reinstatement clause in the lease of Woollards Lane car park, Great Shelford.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the reinstatement clause in the current lease was a cause of concern for the Parish Council due to the potential costs involved. It was thought unlikely that the clause would ever be enforced, but in order to protect the site as a public car park, the Council believed it necessary to offer the guarantee requested by the Parish Council.

The Portfolio Holder was further advised that should the lease not be relet the Council could be liable for the cost, estimated at £10,000, of reinstating the car park to meadowland in 2010.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that the lease period had been shown as 24 years as that was the duration of the current lease. The Portfolio Holder requested that any new lease be for a longer period if possible.

Action: Jenny Clark

The Housing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** that South Cambridgeshire District Council be responsible for reinstatement of the site to meadowland upon expiration, or sooner determination, of a new lease granted to the Parish Council for a term of at least 24 years commencing May 2010 and subject to agreement on lease terms.

52. EQUALITIES: QUARTERLY UPDATE (APR - DEC)

The Equality and Diversity Officer presented a report to provide the Housing Portfolio Holder with an update on equalities from April to December 2009.

The Portfolio Holder was advised of progress on the Policy Framework, Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA), Training and Development, Communications and Awareness raising and other promotional activities. The Portfolio Holder was further advised that EQIA information had been posted on both InSite and the Internet site.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that there were 45 EQIAs rated high or medium and, of those, 29 had been completed. It was expected that all high and medium risk EQIAs would be completed by the end of March 2010. In total 54 EQIAs had been completed. The Portfolio Holder asked that his thanks to all involved in the EQIA completion process be passed on.

In reply to a further question the Portfolio Holder was advised that an appointment to the vacant Equalities Project Officer post had been made, and details of a secondment would be announced soon.

The Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report.

53. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, presented the updated financial position for

the housing accounts.

Housing Capital Programme

The Portfolio Holder was advised that it was expected to deliver the budget within 2% of target.

The Portfolio Holder was further advised that the budget for repurchase of equality share properties was demand driven and, so far this year, there had been less demand than in previous years.

Housing General Fund

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the budget was 'broadly on target'.

The Portfolio Holder was further advised that an under spend indicated that the Council had been effective at preventing homelessness however the budget situation remained volatile as the effects of the downturn worked through the economy.

Housing Revenue Account

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the budget for the Housing IT system (Orchard) replacement would be rolled forward into 2010/11 as replacement options were appraised.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that overall it was expected that housing budgets would be within 1% of target.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that the maintenance of the sheltered housing service would be paid for, in part, by increased rents, while the windfall cash from the CLG would be used to fund disabled adaptations and bolster the Grounds Maintenance budget.

The report was **NOTED**.

54. AFFORDABLE HOMES QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, presented a report to provide an update on key performance indicators for 2009/10.

Referring to the 'at a glance' table provided at Appendix A, the Portfolio Holder requested that item 1, Emergency Repairs, display a gold star to indicate 100% achievement of target.

The Portfolio Holder requested an explanation of item 7, Average relet time, before the next meeting in order to clarify the meaning of the reference to repairs.

Action: Stephen Hills

The Repairs Operations Manager presented a table to indicate the level of repairs that had been carried out on a monthly basis for the year to date.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that all emergency repairs had been carried out within the agreed timeframe. The supporting information had been forwarded to HouseMark, a benchmarking organisation for the Housing sector, and the Council were currently recognised as the best performing authority nationally in this category.

The Portfolio Holder was further advised that of the 8867 repair notifications received approximately 25% were classed as emergencies, which were all completed in time, 25% were classed as urgent, all of which had been completed within the 5 day target, and only 59 general repair cases had slipped beyond the overall target completion time of 20 days.

The Portfolio Holder expressed congratulations and thanks to all concerned with achieving this level of performance.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the Service Plan for 2009/10 was 'mostly completed'. There were no questions on the Service Plan.

The report was **NOTED**.

55. SAFETY CHECKS: GAS AND ELECTRICITY

The Planned Maintenance Manager presented an update on progress on the Council's gas and electrical safety procedures.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that it was possible to use Environmental Health legislation to force entry to premises if the tenant refused access, however the Portfolio Holder was further advised of delays in the process, which were perceived to be in the legal service at the Council.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that there were currently 26 boilers that had not been checked within a period of 12 months. Of these 12 were a 'hard core' that had not been checked since 2008. All were currently being taken through the legal process.

The Portfolio Holder reaffirmed his desire to see no outstanding boiler checks, and made the following comments:

- That should a contractor arrive at an empty property to check a boiler and smell gas they should enter the premises by whatever method necessary
- The Council should not shy from taking whatever steps necessary to resolve cases where entry had been denied.

In reply to a comment that out of hours appointments were being refused, the Portfolio Holder was advised that the current contractor should provide appointments between 8am and 8pm, Monday to Friday, and Saturday mornings. The Portfolio Holder requested that any evidence to support the refusal of appointments within these timeframes be forwarded to the Planned Repairs Manager.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that there was no legal obligation on former tenants who had exercised the 'right to buy' option to undertake a yearly gas boiler inspection. Equity Share holders were required to produce a CP12 Gas Safety Certificate on a yearly basis and the Council offered a service to facilitate that requirement.

In reply to a question concerning the number of electrical checks carried out the Portfolio Holder was advised that older properties had been targeted for the first tranche of checks and that so far 229 checks had been carried out.

The Portfolio Holder requested that a further update be presented at his March meeting and that the Repairs Operations Manager, the Planned Repairs Manager and a member of the Legal Team attend for that item.

Action: Steve Annetts, Fiona McMillan and Sid Webb

The Portfolio Holder requested that the maintenance crews be thanked for their work in this area.

The report was **NOTED**.

56. FORWARD PLAN

The following amendments to the Forward Plan were **NOTED**.

March. Add:

- Mobile Warden Scheme – (Gemma Barron)
- Gas Checks Update. The Portfolio Holder requested that the Repairs Operations Manager, the Planned Maintenance Manager and a member of the Legal Services Team attend for this item.

The dates of the April and May meetings were confirmed as:

- Wednesday 21st April
- Wednesday 19th May

57. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the date of the next meeting as Wednesday 17 March 2010.

The Meeting ended at 6.40 p.m.
