

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 16 November 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Jose Hales and Liz Heazell

Opposition spokesmen: Mark Hersom and Edd Stonham

Also in attendance: Alison Elcox and Ben Shelton

Officers:

Tracey Cassidy	Supported Housing Manager
Anita Goddard	Housing Operational Services Manager
Stephen Hills	Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes
Schuyler Newstead	Housing Development & Enabling Manager
Philly Sewell	Democratic Services Officer
Gwynn Thomas	Principal Accountant (Housing)
Paul Williams	Equality and Diversity Officer

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mark Howell declared a personal interest as an employee of the Papworth Trust, a charity that includes a Registered Social Landlord.

Councillor Alison Elcox declared a personal interest by virtue of being a South Cambridgeshire landlord.

Councillor Ben Shelton declared a personal interest as an employee of a letting agent in Cambridge.

39. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed** the minutes of meeting held on 19 October 2011 as a correct record, subject to the following change:

Minute 35: Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment

Questions concerning reliability: To amend the second paragraph to read "...for instance the assumption that *Gypsy and Traveller families* did not share pitches..."

The Portfolio Holder thanked Councillor Shelton for being an excellent Vice Chair, and thanked the Democratic Services Officer for the concise and accurate minutes of what was a complicated discussion.

40. SPONG DROVE, WILLINGHAM

The Housing Development & Enabling Manager reported that this project sought to build 19 new affordable homes, 11 of which would be rented and 8 would be shared accommodation. These were due for completion in June 2012. The £152,000 requested from the commuted sums budget would be used to purchase the necessary 19 plots of land. Members noted that the 3 local Members had been consulted and were happy with this development.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to approve funding not exceeding £152,000 to be allocated for this project in the delivery of 19 new affordable homes at Spong Drive.

41. **SHARED OWNERSHIP POLICY**

The Corporate Manager (Affordable Housing) reported that this was a follow-on from an agreed interim change to the shared ownership sales policy (16 March 2011), and was recommending this change be made permanent.

The Shared Equity for the Elderly scheme enabled a person over the age of 60 years who met qualifying criteria to buy a property on one of the Council's sheltered housing developments.

The current policy operated as follows:

- a) applicants for a Council house aged over 60 who had sufficient capital through ownership of a property and/or in savings at the time they apply, or who had owned a property at any time within five years of their application, would normally be expected to take part in the leasehold equity share scheme, and
- b) if an applicant wished to live in a village with no sheltered housing scheme, in order to receive support from family or other formal or informal care networks, then they may be offered a non-sheltered bungalow but would be expected to take part in the shared ownership scheme.

In both types of case the applicant would be expected to purchase an equity share on a property, even if that property had previously been part of the rented stock.

The Corporate Manager (Affordable Housing) reported that the Council had 162 properties that, since September 2010, had been transferred to the Council's General Fund ownership. This ensured that once the property had been bought back and resold the full amount is returned to the Council, thus enabling the scheme to be self-funding. This also meant that resale of the property was critical to ensure the General Fund stayed in balance. Now that the re purchased properties have to be re sold, there will over time be a loss of social rented homes unless a policy change is implemented.

It was noted that now that the Council had a financial requirement to sell its equity share properties to balance the General Fund it was proposed that those with the capacity to purchase a shared equity home should be encouraged to do so from the stock of available equity share properties rather than from the social rented stock. Not selling any additional sheltered properties under the equity share scheme was expected to help with the sale of the properties held by the General Fund for resale. However, if those who would currently be expected to purchase were allowed to rent instead this had the potential to make it more difficult for both the Council and existing leaseholders to resell equity share properties.

The Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to the following policy changes:

1. To stop selling homes from the rented stock as equity share other than those designated for this purpose by the Council e.g. where properties are being sold as shared ownership as part of a refurbishment project.
2. To encourage and facilitate applicants with the necessary financial resources to buy from the available pool of existing equity share properties for sale. This would include properties that have been bought back by the Council and those properties that are for sale directly by existing equity shareholders.
3. If applicants had a need to be in a particular village they may bid for a property

using the Homelink Choice Based Lettings route and would be assessed in accordance with Homelink policies. The existing lettings policy already had conditions that limit the chances of those who have the resources to access open market housing from being granted a social rented tenancy.

4. Successful bidders would only be allowed to rent a property they had successfully bid on if there were no equity share properties that they were able to buy currently for sale in that village or the nearby villages.

This policy would come into effect as soon as practically possible and no later than 1 April 2012.

42. SERVICE PLAN PRIORITIES 2012/13

The Corporate Manager (Affordable Housing) reported that previous service plan incorporated the HRA Business Plan, but owing to the introduction of the self-financing regime for Council housing from April 2012, this was now a separate item. The Service Plan took account of the changes to national policy including the introduction of the Affordable Rent tenure, changes to the Housing and welfare benefits and proposed changes to allocations guidance.

Members ran through the plan and discussed some of the projects. It was noted that the Government guidelines concerning Allocations was expected shortly and, following a brief consultation period, was likely to be enforceable from June 2012. Members praised the Housing Advice team and Housing Service officers for their excellent support and advice as to residents' range of options.

The Housing Portfolio Holder requested the final Service Plan be presented at a future meeting; he then **ENDORSED** the Service Plan Actions identified.

43. SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2011/12 - Q2

Service Performance Indicators

Members reviewed the Affordable Homes Performance Indicators for Quarter 2, and remarked on the excellence progress made. Members noted:

- the average time taken to re-let a general needs property (minor repairs) took 16 days, beating the target by 4 days.
- the target rent loss through empty dwellings was 4% or less, as opposed to the observed performance of 0.76%.
- the level of current rent arrears was 1.37%, on target for the 1.4% or less objective.

Members discussed the cautionary budget and good performance for homeless prevention, and noted the cancellation of the FITS Project.

The Housing Operational Services Manager reported that a draft bid for the Whaddon Traveller site was going to be submitted to Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), and gave a verbal update on the Blackwell Traveller site, which was due to be completed on 25 November 2011. Members noted that the build was on target and underbudget, with the option to use the additional funding for enhancements (i.e. grounds maintenance). Energy Performance Certificates were being carried out, and a high level of satisfaction was reported from residents and staff employed on the site.

Financial Performance

The Principal Accountant (Housing) reported that The Housing Revenue Account was healthy with a net underspend.

The Capital Programme was on target, but could potentially be affected by the Equity Share Sales decision (minute 41 refers). Members noted that 'uncommitted' sums referred to those that were planned for use, but were yet to receive a signed contract.

The General Fund had both over- and underspends outlined in appendix B. Overspend was attributable to an incomplete contract leasing a car park to Shelford Parish Council. The Portfolio Holder stated that if this were not complete by the next meeting in January 2012 then the terms of the deal would be reconsidered.

The Housing Portfolio Holder congratulated staff for the positive results, and **NOTED** the report.

44. EQUALITIES UPDATE - Q2

The Equality and Diversity Officer reported that owing to a delay of Governmental approval of specific duties regulations, the deadline for the Council to publish equality information had been postponed to 31 January 2012. It was noted that work was on target to meet this date, and the regulations would fit into the forthcoming Single Equality Scheme, and a new Corporate Equalities Action Plan for 2011/12 had been developed to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Members noted that, following a corporate decision, the Equality and Diversity Steering Group had been disbanded on 15 September 2011. The Portfolio Holder noted the accomplishments achieved, and thanked every member of this group for their commitment and hard work. Members hoped the Executive Management Team taking over this responsibility would continue the high standard of work.

It was noted that:

- All the Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) were complete, and a progress review would be presented at a future Portfolio Holder meeting.
- A post-consultation draft of the Single Equality Scheme would also be presented at a future meeting.
- The Council had entered the Stonewall Equality index for the third year running, and the marking process might include a visit to the Council. Results would be announced early 2012.
- The equalities workshop given on 22 June 2011 to explore the link equalities and Local Government and the challenges ahead in light of the Equality Act 2010, was being repeated on 30 November 2011.

A small group of officers and the Housing Portfolio Holder had attended the Bedfordshire Race and Equalities Council Regional Equality and Diversity Awards Ceremony. SCDC were awarded with the 'Leading Change' Award for Cambridgeshire, and Paul Williams was highly commended in the equality and diversity champion of the year award. The Portfolio Holder thanked Bedfordshire Council for a superb event, and Members congratulated Paul and all the officers involved in achieving these well-deserved honours.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report.

45. HEALTH AND SAFETY WITHIN THE HOUSING SERVICE

The Housing Operational Services Manager corrected a typo in the report: the Council maintained zero non-compliance on gas servicing.

It was noted that figures pertaining to Equity Share properties submitting gas inspection certificates would be presented at the Portfolio Holder meeting in January 2012.

In relation to fire safety in sheltered housing, Members noted that work was underway to ensure fire safety compliance was up-to-date. It was established that communal room alarms were connected to the call centre, and further research would be undertaken concerning communal loft space.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report.

46. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW: UPDATE

The Corporate Manager (Affordable Homes) presented the update report, confirming that the Supporting People Team (SPT) would be undertaking a competitive tender of the sheltered housing support contract during 2012 to be in place for April 2013. In addition providers of sheltered housing support in the County will be receiving approximately 35% less in grant from April 2012. It was noted that the timetable attached as Appendix A was subject to slight adjustments owing to delayed information received from County.

Members noted that this was different from the future report from the Task and Finish panel, which would set out the options and recommendations to be considered.

Members discussed the partnership working arrangements, particularly with regards to consultation, and reported that a meeting had been held with the Portfolio Holder at County. The Housing Portfolio Holder agreed to provide additional support if required.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report.

47. HOMELESSNESS REPORT

The Corporate Manager (Affordable Homes) presented the report, which outlined the homeless procedures in place for households leaving privately rented accommodation. This report had been requested at the Portfolio Holder meeting in July 2011.

Members discussed various options to encourage private landlords to participate in the scheme, including use of Waterbeach properties, and more detailed adverts for South Cambs magazine.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **NOTED** the report.

48. FORWARD PLAN

The Housing Portfolio Holder requested that the final version of the Service Plan be presented at a future meeting. He then **noted** the Forward Plan.

49. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 18 January 2012 at 5.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 7.15 p.m.
