

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 18 January 2012 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

Councillors in attendance:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitors: Alison Elcox, Jose Hales, Liz Heazell and
Bunty Waters

Opposition spokesmen: Mark Hersom

Also in attendance:

Officers:

Tracey Cassidy	Supported Housing Manager
Rebecca Gane	Leasehold Services Co-ordinator
Anita Goddard	Housing Operational Services Manager
Stephen Hills	Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes
David Purnell	Asset Manager, Property Services
Ian Senior	Democratic Services Officer
Gwynn Thomas	Principal Accountant (Housing)
Paul Williams	Equality and Diversity Officer

50. 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.

51. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Housing Portfolio Holder signed, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2011, subject to the following:

Min. 40 (Spong Drove, Willingham)

At the end of the first sentence, the phrase "shared accommodation" should be "shared equity".

Min. 41 (Shared Ownership Policy)

At Point 4, the Portfolio Holder stated that the Minute should stress the self-selecting nature of the process. It should therefore be reworded to read, "Bidders would only be allowed to rent a property in their chosen village or a village nearby if they had risen to the top of the housing waiting list and had successfully bid for that property."

52. CAPITAL AND REVENUE ESTIMATES FOR THE HOUSING PORTFOLIO

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered the Revenue Estimates for 2012/-13 and the Capital Programme up to 2016-17 for the Housing General Fund.

The Principal Accountant highlighted the proposed housing charges that would affect tenants, licensees, leaseholders and residents during 2012-13. These changes were the result of new Housing Revenue Account (HRA) arrangements involving the implementation of a thirty-year Business Plan. This Business Plan would be reported direct to Cabinet, and was not therefore an issue at this Portfolio Holder meeting.

The Principal Accountant highlighted a number of aspects referred to in the report and its appendices.

The Corporate Manager (Affordable Homes) confirmed that the transfer of the Home Improvement Agency did not represent a cost saving, and that Performance Indicators were in place to assess the new joint arrangement. Officers were continuing to investigate the potential for the Agency to employ its own Occupational Therapist.

The Principal Accountant summarised the position relating to recharges and virements, and reminded the Portfolio Holder about the precautionary sum set aside in 2011-12 in respect of possible increased demand on the Homelessness service. The Portfolio Holder said that Homelessness officers had helped prevent homelessness, and supported the proposal to increase the precautionary sum to £140,000.

Councillor Ben Shelton said that he expected the issue of the Great Shelford shopping car park to have been resolved by the end of the current financial year, and commended South Cambridgeshire District Council's Lands Officer for her efforts in persuading the matter.

The Portfolio Holder reported on efforts being made to tackle the problem of empty homes.

The Housing Portfolio Holder

- (a) **endorsed** the Revenue and Capital Estimates for the Housing General Fund as shown at Appendix A to the report (Revenue) and Appendix B (Capital) and **recommended** them for inclusion in the overall estimates to be considered by Cabinet on 9 February 2012;
- (b) **confirmed** the proposals for housing general fund capital expenditure shown at *Appendix D(1-7)*, for inclusion in the capital programme,
- (c) **endorsed** the proposed housing charges for 2012/13 as shown in Appendix C and recommended them for approval by Cabinet, and
- (d) **requested** that Cabinet include £140,000, for possible additional expenditure on accommodation for homeless people, on the list of precautionary items for 2012/13.

53. AFFORDABLE HOMES RESTRUCTURING PLAN 2012-13

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his approval for staff changes necessary to meet the new demands arising from the introduction of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) self-financing regime and the changes to the housing regulatory framework.

The Corporate Manager (Affordable Homes) referred to Table 1 in the report, and to the figure for potential redundancies in the Sheltered Housing service, which at this stage

were indicative only. In Table 1, the Housing Options Administrative Assistant post should have appeared in the box below where it was shown.

Subject to consideration of a more detailed sheltered housing report in February 2012, the Housing Portfolio **recommended** that Cabinet approve the proposed restructure of Affordable Homes as set out in Table 1 in the report dated 18 January 2012, subject to sufficient funds being made available for potential redundancies.

54. RIGHT TO BUY CONSULTATION RESPONSE

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his approval for the draft response to the Government’s Right to Buy (RTB) consultation.

Those present discussed the implications of the various options. It was agreed generally that this Council should remain “master of its own destiny”, and that the National Model was totally unacceptable.

Stating his preference for the Local Model, the Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed to respond** as follows to the Government’s consultation on the Right To Buy

Question	Pros for Council	Cons for Council
<p>Q1. We would welcome the views on the proposals outlined above.</p>	<p>Council is pleased to support people in meeting their aspirations for home ownership.</p>	<p>Large numbers of sales could have a detrimental effect on the HRA business plan.</p> <p>There are very few Council homes in some villages and a significant number of sales may remove all of the social rented homes from that village. Limited land supply may then prevent the supply of affordable rented homes to that village.</p> <p>It is also likely that the availability of social rented homes will decrease considerably over the coming years through housing association conversions and newbuild homes let at Affordable Rents and we are concerned that further reductions in social rent through replacement RTB homes with Affordable Rents will have an adverse impact on the affordability and supply of</p>

		<p>housing to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in the district.</p> <p>The Council has concerns about the financial viability of 1:1 replacement</p>
<p>Q13. Which model for delivery of replacement housing do you consider the most appropriate, and why?</p>		
<p>Local Model</p> <p>Receipts retained by the Council to use as it wishes. Could choose to work in partnership with other councils and/or housing associations. Would not be restricted to funding new Affordable Rent housing.</p>	<p>Council wholeheartedly supports this model as it would be free to use money as needed by its own residents within South Cambridgeshire e.g. could be used for a regeneration scheme or even for a corporate project such as an IT project.</p>	<p>The Council will have no borrowing headroom in the early years of the business plan. As the receipt would only fund an Affordable Rented home this assumes that the full cost of developing that home would come from borrowing. It may prove difficult therefore for the Council to build all the replacement homes needed in the early years. However, the Council does have a good working relationship with its housing association partners and would welcome further opportunity to target funding for new affordable homes in the District through a partnership arrangement, until such time that the Council is in a position to build new Council homes in its own right.</p>
<p>local model with Direction</p> <p>Receipts retained by Council but restricted to funding the provision of new Affordable Rent homes. Could choose to work in partnership with</p>	<p>Council would welcome the opportunity to locally determine the use of the receipt.</p> <p>Suggested process would</p>	<p>The direction provided in the regulations should be sufficiently flexible to allow innovative schemes to be included e.g. the use of the receipts to bring back</p>

<p>other councils and/or housing associations.</p> <p>Direction would be specified in amendments to existing regulations and monitored</p>	<p>be easy to administer.</p>	<p>into use empty homes as Affordable rent homes not just new build schemes.</p> <p>The Council would lose the ability to use funds for other vital capital spending which may also be critical to the operation of the housing service or of wider community significance.</p>
<p>Local model with Agreement</p> <p>Receipts retained by Council but restricted to funding new Affordable Rent homes only and only with formal agreement of Secretary of State. This would require detailed proposals business plans to be developed and agreed. Secretary of State could choose to divert some of the funding from receipts elsewhere in the country.</p> <p>Could choose to work in partnership with other councils and/or housing associations.</p>	<p>Council would be grateful for the opportunity to make a business case for the use of receipts locally.</p>	<p>The process proposed would be resource intensive with no guarantee that the effort would be matched by the funds made available.</p>
<p>National Model</p> <p>All available receipts would be pooled and administered by the HCA and the Greater London Authority. Council would have to make specific bids to the HCA for funding on a continuous basis (continuous market engagement).</p>	<p>The Council has a good track record of working with partner housing associations and securing funds through the HCA processes and a track record for spending all of the money that is made available. The Council is a high demand growth area and would see this as an opportunity to secure more funding for Affordable Housing than that lost through RTB</p>	<p>There is loss of local self-direction, which does not sit well with other aspects of the Localism agenda.</p> <p>The work required to prepare bids for funding is a resource cost that would not be required if the receipts were already with the Council.</p> <p>There would be no guarantee of the Council receive its fair share of the</p>

	sales.	receipts pool with the potential that there would be an affordable homes deficit in a high demand area.
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55. AFFORDABLE HOMES HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Housing Portfolio Holder received and noted a report updating him about Health and Safety issues relevant to the Affordable Homes service.

56. EQUALITIES UPDATE - Q3

The Housing Portfolio Holder **received and noted** a quarterly update on equalities from October to December 2011.

The Equality and Diversity Officer confirmed that South Cambridgeshire District Council would meet the deadline of 6 April 2012 for publishing its equality objectives. The Portfolio Holder requested that all stakeholders be provided with paper copies of the document when available. The objectives would be reported to the Housing Portfolio Holder meeting in June 2012.

Equality Impact Assessments would form the basis of a report to a future Housing Portfolio Holder meeting. The Portfolio Holder made it clear that, if EqlAs were not completed by the deadline date, he would summon relevant Corporate Managers (or other appropriate lead officers) to his Portfolio Holder meeting to explain the reasons for the delay.

Those present noted the continued improvement in South Cambridgeshire District Council's standing in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index. The 2012 results had just been announced, and the Council had moved up another 115 places to be 205th out of 363 participating local authorities.

The Portfolio Holder congratulated the Equality and diversity Officer for being highly-commended as runner-up in the individual Equality and Diversity Champion of the Year category at the Equality and Diversity Awards event held on 14 October 2011. The Portfolio Holder also congratulated the Equality and Diversity Officer on his role as consultant to both Cambridge City Council and Uttlesford District Council.

57. BALLOT AND ELECTION OF TENANT PARTICIPATION GROUP MEMBERS

The Housing Portfolio Holder received and noted a report informing him about the following

- (i) The reasoning behind the ballot
- (ii) How the ballot was run
- (iii) The ballot results
- (iv) Resident Involvement and governance further developments

Jim Watson (a member of the Tenant Participation Group) attended the meeting and addressed those present.

The Portfolio Holder asked that the Tenant Participation Group be a standing item on future Housing Portfolio Holder agendas, and that one member of that Group be invited to address Members and officers present at Portfolio Holder meetings.

58. FORWARD PLAN

The Housing Portfolio Holder noted the Forward Plan as at 10 January 2012. Officers referred to a number of changes that had become necessary as a result of issues now being part of other projects. Further Issues were identified, and officers would provide Democratic Services with appropriate details so that an updated Forward Plan could be prepared.

59. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday 15 February 2012, starting at 5.30pm in the Monkfield Room.

The Meeting ended at 7.15 p.m.
