

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on
Wednesday, 13 June 2012 at 5.30 p.m.

Portfolio Holder: Mark Howell

Councillors in attendance: Pippa Corney, Alison Elcox, Jose Hales,
Lynda Harford, Mark Hersom, Ray Manning,
Mick Martin, Ben Shelton, Hazel Smith,
Edd Stonham, Bunty Waters and Tim Wotherspoon

Officers:

Debbie Barrett	Traveller Site Team Leader
Jenny Clark	Lands Officer
Jonathan Dixon	Principal Planning Policy Officer (Transport)
Julie Fletcher	Housing Performance Improvement Team Leader
Anita Goddard	Housing Operational Services Manager
Stephen Hills	Affordable Homes Director
Ian Senior	Democratic Services Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Jose Hales declared a personal interest as a member of Melbourn Parish Council.

Councillor Lynda Harford declared a personal interest as a letting agent.

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

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

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Housing Portfolio Holder signed, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2012,

3. GYPSY & TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT - INTERNAL REVIEW

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report about the outcome of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment internal review.

The Housing Director reminded those present about the history and source of this study, including its previous consideration by the Housing Portfolio Holder in October 2011. He pointed especially to paragraphs 12 to 14 of the report as containing the principal matters to be considered. The Housing Director stressed the importance of applying the correct methodology in calculating Need, given the unique demands placed on South Cambridgeshire in the context of the nine Local Authorities covered by the study.

Those present were happy with the information now before them, and raised no queries about changes made since October 2011. Of the two Options detailed in the report though, they were unanimous in their support of Option A as the best way of progressing this matter. They argued that Option B was likely to deliver broadly the same data, and consume both time and money that could be better directed elsewhere. In response to concern about an assumed turnover in pitch occupation of 4%, the Housing Director assured Members that, while 4% was a fair assumption for the time being, that figure would be reviewed for accuracy on a five-yearly basis.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **approved** the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment as part of the evidence base to inform Council planning framework (Option A in the report) subject to the correction to the cumulative total of new pitches estimated for South Cambridgeshire, taking the forward projection of future need from the year 2021 down from 47 pitches to 20 pitches.

4. MELBOURN: GARAGE TO THE REAR OF CAR PARK, HIGH STREET

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report on the future of the garages at the rear of the car park off High Street, Melbourn.

Councillor Jose Hales (a local Member) observed that the garages were not extensively used. Describing the garages as a "blot on the landscape", he said that Melbourn Parish Council was planning to spend £30-40,000 on enhancing the car park, and was prepared to contribute towards the cost of demolishing the garages.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed** to extend the long lease of the car park at High Street, Melbourn to Melbourn Parish Council to include the garage site to the rear of the car park, subject to Melbourn Parish Council contributing 50% of the cost of demolition and clearance or £3,000 (whichever is the lesser), South Cambridgeshire District Council meeting its own legal costs, and the terms of the lease extension remaining the same as those for the existing lease of the car park.

5. INTERIM AMENDMENTS TO THE LETTINGS POLICY

The Housing Portfolio Holder considered a report seeking his agreement to make interim changes to the Council's existing lettings policy in order to enable applicants to bid for properties that are in line with the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) size criteria, and to make available all properties within the Council's stock (other than that designated as sheltered accommodation or for those over pensionable age), for letting to general needs households, without age restrictions.

The Portfolio Holder said that the principal motive behind the proposal was to make sure, as far as was possible, that people did not fall into debt following housing benefit changes being made by central Government. The Housing Director added that officers from the Affordable Homes and Benefits sections were working together in preparation for the changes coming into effect from April 2013, and that it was estimated that approximately 500 families in the District are likely to be affected. He conceded that claimants would still lose Housing Benefit even if they wanted to move to smaller dwellings but there were no suitable properties available.

The Housing Portfolio Holder said that in offering people the option to downsize, the Council could not guarantee to do so in the village of choice. The Housing Director added that an alternative option to finding smaller properties for individuals might be to try and match up two or three people and offer a property that met all of their needs, or for existing tenants to take on lodgers. Options to tackle the issues of under-occupation are currently being investigated.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **agreed** to the amendments to the lettings policy to take immediate effect to enable:

1. **Option A** - Applicants to bid on the appropriate size of property for their household in line with the LHA criteria.
2. **Option C** - The Council to treat all properties (except those specially identified as sheltered housing or housing for people of pensionable age) as general needs accommodation without any age criteria/ restrictions.

6. TENANT PARTICIPATION GROUP

The Housing Portfolio Holder announced that the Tenant Participation Group had not asked to address Members at this meeting.

7. FORWARD PLAN

Those present noted a draft Forward Plan for 2012-13.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled Housing Portfolio Holder meeting would take place on Wednesday 19 September 2012, starting at 5.30pm.

The Meeting ended at 6.00 p.m.
