

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on  
Tuesday, 3 March 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr SM Edwards

### **Councillors in attendance:**

Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitor: Cllr Mrs JM Guest

### **Officers:**

Stephen Hills	Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes
Gwynn Thomas	Principal Accountant, Housing
Brent O'Halloran	Property Services Manager
Jenny Clark	Lands Officer

### **68. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs EM Heazell.

### **69. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING**

Subject to the addition of the words "The Portfolio Holder was further advised against making a broader statement in respect of the negative housing subsidy" to the draft response to Question1, Item 64, the minutes of the meeting held 2 February 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

### **70. PROJECT PLAN UPDATE**

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Housing, presented the Housing Futures Progress Report and advised the Portfolio Holder that good progress had been made against all strands of the project.

In reply to a question, the Portfolio Holder was further advised that work remained ongoing to recruit the fifth Independent Member to the Shadow Board, and all existing leads had been followed but without success. It would be suggested to the Shadow Board that no further action should be taken to recruit the fifth Independent Member until the result of the tenant ballot was known.

#### **Risk Log**

The Portfolio Holder was advised that risk 15, Failure to secure funding for a new housing association landlord, had been rated as a risk B4, up from B5. However in mitigation the Corporate Manager, Affordable Housing, further advised the Portfolio Holder that feedback from the Council's Consultants and other Housing Agencies suggested that the situation might be easing with potential lenders moving back into the market and interest rates improving.

#### **Budget**

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the budget remained on target.

### **71. FINANCE UPDATE**

The Principal Accountant, Housing, presented a report to provide the Housing Portfolio Holder with a financial update for the first ten months of 2008-09.

The Portfolio Holder was advised of the key factors under each budget heading:

### **Housing Capital Programme**

An underspend of £200,000 in the MRA Funded and Capital Works programme had been identified since the submission of the revised estimates in January. This was primarily a result of lower than anticipated demand for equity share buy-backs, not an underspend on the main capital programme.

The Portfolio Holder was advised against viring funds to improvement schemes if the work could not be completed and paid for before the end of the financial year.

### **General Fund**

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the homelessness budget was expected to be underspent, although it was noted that the number of homelessness applications had increased substantially.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that an element of the homelessness budget had been vired to enable temporary staff to be employed to address long-term sick absences within the homelessness team and to cope with the demand of the extra applications. In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was assured that the sick absences were being managed.

It was confirmed that an invoice had yet to be received for the Council's share of the Sub-Regional Homelink Service in relation to Choice Based Letting and Advisory Service. It was anticipated that this invoice would be received and paid before the end of the financial year.

### **Housing Revenue Account**

In response to a question in regards to IT project underspends the Corporate Manager, Affordable Housing, confirmed that:

- one project had been overbid, and
- a corporate Service Charges project, had stalled. The Portfolio Holder requested details so that he could raise the issue at the ICT Steering Group.

### **Action: Stephen Hills**

The Corporate Manager confirmed that the HRA was a deficit budget and explained that although technically it was underspent, it was being subsidised by the use of reserves. Without the subsidy the budget deficit would be £630k

The report was **NOTED**

## **72. HOUSING SERVICE PLAN UPDATE**

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Housing, presented the Affordable Homes Service Plan for the Portfolio Holder's approval.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that Housing Managers had worked up the plan

following the corporate template and that it included service objectives, reference to the '3 As' and relevant PIs (which were due to change in 2009/10).

### **Questions and Comments**

The Key Findings from the 2008 South Cambridgeshire STATUS Survey reflected the high needs of tenants in the area, and showed that the Council was justified in its spend on the needs of its tenants with disabilities.

Inconsistencies in the figures in the STATUS survey were identified and the Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, undertook to investigate, and amend, as necessary.

**Action: Stephen Hills**

It was confirmed that the table of resources shown at item 2.6 reflected the Housing Revenue Account, and not the Housing Service as a whole.

It was confirmed that Section A projects in item 3, Service Improvement Plan summary, would be undertaken irrespective of the outcome of the tenant ballot on the transfer of the housing stock. Section B projects would be undertaken in the event of stock retention. It was further confirmed that should there be a 'yes' vote there would be a new service improvement plan drawn up by South Cambridgeshire Village Homes (SCVH).

It was agreed to include the outcome of the Government's HRA review in the PESTE analysis, although it was noted that the timescale of the review might fall outside of the timeframe of the Service Plan.

It was confirmed that Supporting People funded services (Tenancy Support and Sheltered Housing) would transfer to SCVH in the event of a 'yes' vote by tenants.

It was confirmed that the Policy and Performance Manager had reviewed the Service Plan to ensure that links to the 3As had been made.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that 64% of residents being satisfied that their views were being taken into account was an improvement on the previous result. The Portfolio Holder requested details of the earlier survey.

**Action: Stephen Hills**

The Portfolio Holder requested a review of the minimum balance once the result of the tenant ballot was known.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** the Affordable Homes Service Plan.

## **73. AFFORDABLE HOMES PI REPORT**

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Housing, presented an update on key PI performance for Housing for 2008/09, together with a proposed revised format for the report. The Portfolio Holder was advised that the revised format that had been benchmarked from a best practice website and had been endorsed by the Tenant Participation Group.

The Portfolio Holder requested that a three-dot traffic light indicator system be used for consistency with other PI reports in the Council.

### **Questions and Comments**

It was confirmed that the rent entry on the PI report referred to the level of rent arrears

and, although unclear from the report, performance was good. The 'former' entry referred to arrears accrued by tenants that had subsequently vacated the property.

The Property Services Manager advised the Portfolio Holder that there were currently 44 properties overdue for a boiler check. He further advised the Portfolio Holder that to ensure full compliance would require the Council to enforce legislation and effect forced entry where tenants had denied it. The Portfolio Holder was advised that processes had been tightened in 2008/09 and there was a full audit trail for visits. The Portfolio Holder was further advised that the end of year figure would be close to target.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that the tenancy agreement included a clause to allow entry, but a clause for levying a charge for aborted visits did not exist. The Portfolio Holder requested that the possibility of introducing a charge for aborted visits be investigated.

**Action: Stephen Hills / Brent O'Halloran**

The Housing Portfolio Holder **APPROVED** the adoption of the new format for the PI table for 2009/10.

**74. ACCESS OVER LAND IN THE OWNERSHIP OF SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL AT ORCHARD CLOSE, COTTENHAM**

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, presented a report seeking the Portfolio Holder's consent to grant Hundred Houses a "right of access" over a strip of land that was currently in the ownership of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that access would facilitate a development of 11 affordable homes, on an exceptions site, for local people in Cottenham. Originally the proposal for the site had been a mix of shared ownership and rented units, however the current economic climate meant that all 11 units would be for renting.

The Portfolio Holder asked if there would be any scope to offer the properties for shared ownership at a later date. The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, advised that shared ownership was now less of a concern as the current need was for rented homes in the area.

The Housing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** that Hundred Houses be granted rights of access over the access strip at Orchard Close, Cottenham, at nil value.

**75. LAND OFF CRANES LANE: KINGSTON**

The Lands Officer presented a report requesting a decision by the Portfolio Holder on the transfer of land to the rear of 7-10 Cranes Lane, Kingston, to Kingston Parish Council.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that difficulty had been experienced in securing tenants for the allotments, that the land required regular clearance of ragwort and that it was prone to flooding, although it was unclear whether the land was designated floodplain.

The Portfolio Holder was further advised that the area had been considered in the Lands Appraisal but had been deemed to be unsuitable for development due to inadequate access and the impact that any development would have on the surrounding area. After discussion it was agreed that the same constraints would apply should the area be considered for provision of a travellers site.

After consideration of the options, the Housing Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to transfer the freehold of the land to Kingston Parish Council at the nominal price of one pound, subject to the following conditions:

- i) Payment of the Council's legal costs;
- ii) That the land shall not be used for any other purpose other than for allotment or public amenity use;
- iii) That no disposal of the land will be made by the purchasers or their successors in Title without the consent of the Council, consent not to be unreasonably withheld;
- iv) That the Council will receive any uplift in value of the land upon disposal by the purchasers or their successors in Title.

#### **76. APPLICATION TO PURCHASE GARDEN LAND AT 2 WRIGHTS GROVE, FULBOURN**

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, presented a proposal to sell garden land at 2 Wrights Grove, Fulbourn, currently held on licence under the First Time Buyer (FTB) scheme.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the Leaseholder wished to staircase their share of the property to 100% and to include the garden with the freehold of the property.

The Portfolio Holder was further advised that the retention of garden land on licence had the effect of dampening property prices thus making them more affordable. However as the Council no longer operated the FTB scheme, and as there was nobody on a waiting list for first time buyer properties, the Portfolio Holder was recommended to relinquish the Council's ownership of the garden to receive, in total, an amount of £16,800 from the Leaseholder for both the garden and the remaining share of the property.

In reply to a question the Portfolio Holder was advised that the property was one of two similar properties in Fulbourn, and that overall there were 32 such dwellings in the district.

After expressing a desire to consult with Fulbourn Parish Council, who had expressed an interest in the case, and be better informed about the First Time Buyer scheme, the Housing Portfolio Holder **DEFERRED** the decision to sell the garden land to the leaseholders.

#### **77. CONSULTATION - CHANGES TO THE REVENUE AND CAPITAL RULES FOR NEW COUNCIL HOUSING - DRAFT RESPONSE**

The Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes, presented the Portfolio Holder with a draft response to a government consultation document following the decision taken at his meeting on 5 February 2009.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that the proposals contained within the government document did not offer the Council any significant advantages, as 'there was no new money on the table' and it would be difficult to see how any advantage could be gained over existing Housing Associations as a result.

Taking into account comments made at the meeting of 5 February, and after reviewing the document, the Housing Portfolio Holder **ENDORSED** the draft response.

#### **78. FORWARD PLAN**

The Portfolio Holder requested that the decision to defer the application to purchase

garden land at 2 Wrights Close, Fulbourn, be reflected on the Forward Plan.

**Action: Stephen Hills**

The Portfolio Holder further requested that the Corporate Manager, Affordable Housing, liaise with Democratic Services to populate the Forward Plan with standard items.

**Action: Stephen Hills / Guy Moody**

The Forward Plan was **NOTED**.

**79. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date and time of the next meeting was confirmed as 2pm, Thursday 2 April 2009. The meeting will be held in the Monkfield Room.

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**The Meeting ended at 11.25 a.m.**

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