

**HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

21 June 2016

7.40 pm

**Present:**

**Scrutiny Committee Members:** Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Bird (Vice-Chair), Avery, Gawthrop, Holland, R. Moore, Page-Croft and Smart

**Executive Councillor for Housing:** Councillor Price

**Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives:** Diane Best, Kay Harris, John Marais, Diana Minns, Mandy Powell-Hardy and Lulu Agate

**Officers:**

Strategic Advisor - Housing and Welfare Reform: Liz Bisset

Managing Director, Housing Development Agency: Alan Carter

Head of Housing Services: Tom Bremner

Area Housing Manager: Sandra Farmer

Head of Estates & Facilities: Trevor Burdon:

David Greening: Housing Advice Service Manager

Business Manager & Principal Accountant: Julia Hovells

Manager Temp Housing & Housing Support: Frances Swann

Committee Manager: Toni Birkin

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL****16/20/HSC Apologies**

There were no apologies.

**16/21/HSC Appointment of Vice-Chair (Tenant/Leaseholder Rep) for 2016/17**

Diana Minns was appointed as Vice Chair (Tenant / Leaseholder Representative) for 2015/16.

**16/22/HSC Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

**16/23/HSC Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016 agreed and signed as a correct record.

**16/24/HSC Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

Councillor Bick addresses the Committee as a Ward Council as part of the discussion on item 16/28/HSC. Details can be found with that item.

**16/25/HSC 2015/16 Revenue and Capital Outturn, Carry Forwards and Significant Variances – HRA**

Recommendation 2a was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative) and recommendations 2b was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones.

**Matter for Decision**

The report presented a summary of the 2015/16 outturn position (actual income and expenditure) for services within the Housing Revenue Account, compared to the current budget for the year.

**Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- a) Approved carry forward requests totalling £1,987,000 in revenue funding from 2015/16 to 2016/17, as detailed in Appendix C of the Officer's report.
- b) Approved that carry forward requests of £2,171,000 in HRA and General Fund Housing capital resources from 2015/16 to 2016/17 to fund rephased net capital spending, as detailed in **Appendix D** and the associated notes to the appendix of the Officer's report is recommended to Council.

**Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

**Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

**Scrutiny Considerations**

The Business Manager/Principal Accountant (Shared Housing Finance Team) said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Underspends were based on fixed targets and evidence of where savings had been realised.
- ii. There were high demands on the fencing budgets and the carry forward reflects funds that had been committed but not yet delivered.
- iii. Members were assured that the disabled adaptations services had sufficient staff to deliver the service. The fluctuating spends were a characteristic of the services where high cost adaptations could not be predicted.
- iv. The Strategic Advisor - Housing and Welfare Reform explained that a clearer policy and criteria was under development. She stated that the intention was to make the criteria used to assess claims clearer to service users. There could be occasions when it was unrealistic to adapt a property and moving might be suggested as a better option.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor for Housing approved the recommendation.

## **16/26/HSC Housing Transformation Programme**

Recommendation 2.1 was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative) and recommendation 2.2 chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones.

### **Matter for Decision**

National changes in housing and welfare reform were having a major impact on the Council's housing services in Cambridge, requiring a reshape of services in order to achieve the substantial savings that are required to balance the Housing Revenue Account. The report set out a strategy for achieving savings, mindful of the need to continue to deliver decent services, and which recognised that housing supports some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged within our community.

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Agreed the programme of reviews for Revenue funded services listed in paragraphs 5 of the Officer's report.
- ii. Agreed the programme of reviews for Capital funded services listed in paragraph 6 of the Officer's report.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Strategic Advisor - Housing and Welfare Reform.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Expressed concerns that Cambridge City Council had been cheated by central government into accepting debts.
- ii. Suggested that a policy of non-compliance was adopted.
- iii. Suggested that other authorities would follow if this was to happen.
- iv. Next week's devolution decision could have a big impact on any decision made today.
- v. Questioned the definition of affordable housing.
- vi. Suggested that Officer's work with other authorities to lobby government.

The Executive Councillor for Housing stated that he did not think non-compliance was the answer as the likely outcome would be a decision imposed by someone else. For the best outcome it was better to work within the system.

In response to Members questions, the Strategic Advisor - Housing and Welfare Reform stated:

- i. Residents would be consulted on proposed savings at an early stage of the decision making process. Without any savings it was likely that the HRA account would be bankrupt within ten years.
- ii. All services would be looked at for potential savings and this would include support services.
- iii. It was likely that there would be an impact on arrears. However, specialist staff had been recruited to provide debt and benefits advice.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

### **16/27/HSC 2015/16 Revenue and Capital Outturn, Carry Forwards and Significant Variances – Housing General Fund Portfolio**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

### **Matter for Decision**

The report presented a summary of the 2015/16 outturn position (actual income and expenditure) for services within the Housing Revenue Account, compared to the current budget for the year.

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

Agreed that the following proposal be submitted for consideration by the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources at the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 4 July 2016:

- i. Proposed carry forward requests in revenue funding from 2015/16 to 2016/17, as detailed in Appendix C of the officer's report, noting that none are proposed for this portfolio on this occasion.
- ii. Proposed carry forward requests of £210,000 in capital resources from 2015/16 to 2016/17 to fund rephased net capital spending, as detailed in Appendix D of the Officer's report.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Business Manager/Principal Accountant (Shared Housing Finance Team).

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. The empty homes loans budget appeared quite large for a limited return. Could better use be found for the funds?
- ii. Agreed that all homes should be lived in.
- iii. Supported the efforts of officers to return properties to us.

The Business Manager/Principal Accountant (Shared Housing Finance Team) undertook to provide estimated numbers of empty homes in Cambridge.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor for Housing approved the recommendation.

## **16/28/HSC Homelessness and Strategic Approach to Homelessness in Cambridge City**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Councillor Bick addressed the Committee as a Ward Councillor and made the following points:

- i. The Motion considered at the April Council meeting was seeking measures to alleviate the problem of rough sleepers.
- ii. This was on the increase.
- iii. Members had nothing but admiration for those working with rough sleepers.
- iv. Expressed disappointment that the action plan spanned two years when action was needed now.
- v. Rough sleepers present different needs to other homeless individuals.
- vi. It was not just about the lack of a home but included many other issues.
- vii. They were not a subset of the wider homelessness population and needed different solutions.
- viii. Visible increase was unsettling to the wider population.
- ix. Wider population were not unsympathetic or uncaring and concerns about specific individuals were widespread.
- x. However, fears were also on the increase.
- xi. Residents reported a desire for more action to be taken to resolve the problem.

### **Matter for Decision**

The report outlined the extent of homelessness pressure in Cambridge, set within a national context of rising numbers of homeless households. The report distinguished between households where the council has a statutory duty under part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act (as amended) and those households to whom the council has no duty. Despite the distinction, the Council commits considerable resources into tackling and preventing homelessness for all of those unfortunate enough to be affected by it.

The report also reflected on the Council's recent performance in attempting to address homelessness in Cambridge and provided Members with a summary of strategic measures that had been employed or had been identified to tackle the issue.

**Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Noted the information on homelessness pressure and service performance as outlined in this report
- ii. Approved the homelessness strategy action plan as detailed at appendix 1 of the Officer's report.

**Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

**Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

**Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Housing Advice Service Manager.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Street dwellers were a community and were fearful about moving into secure accommodation which would leave them isolated from that community.
- ii. Discussion of points raised in the response to benefit changes and the impact on under 35 year olds.

The Housing Advice Service Manager said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. One of the key issues for street homeless in Cambridge was finding a way for them to access housing when they had no recourse to public funding.
- ii. The street outreach team endeavoured to take immediate action and would develop individualised action plans.
- iii. There were twelve known rough sleepers who had no recourse to public funding.
- iv. Action plan dates were completion dates and were realistic.
- v. Tenancy sustainment support was offered to rough sleepers moving into secure accommodation.
- vi. Confirmed that the situation was constantly changing and needed continuous review.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

**16/29/HSC Local Government Ombudsman Decision Relating to Temporary Accommodation**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

**Matter for Decision**

The Committee was asked to note that the Local Government Ombudsman has upheld a complaint relating to the provision of temporary accommodation.

In these circumstances, the Head of Legal Services, as the Council's Monitoring Officer, has an obligation to report the findings to the Executive. The Executive is obliged to set out what action has already been taken in respect of the findings, what action it intends to take and the reasons for taking the action.

**Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Endorsed the actions taken by officers in response to the finding of the Local Government Ombudsman.

**Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

**Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

**Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

**16/30/HSC New Social Housing on Housing Revenue Account Infill Sites**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

**Matter for Decision**

The report provided details of additional sites to be brought forward in the Council's social housing programme, to be included in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) garage and small in-fill sites development.

The report requested approval to a capital budget for the HRA garden and back land development.

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved the additional three sites to be developed for housing.
- ii. Noted the indicative unit types and approved that they be progressed for planning approval
- iii. Approved the capital budget of £708,630 for the additional development.
- iv. Approved that delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director to enter into a legal agreement with building contractors for these sites as part of the HRA Garage and Infill Sites 2015/16 Programme.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Managing Director, Housing Development Agency.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Sought clarification regarding the impact of devolution.
- ii. Discussed potential risks.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

### **16/31/HSC Social Housing Programme**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

### **Matter for Decision**

In July 2014, the Executive Councillor for Housing approved a three year rolling programme of housing sites in the Council's ownership for consideration for development, redevelopment or disposal.

The report provided a review of the programme and specifically sought approval of a revised Three Year Rolling programme that included sites to be investigated in 2016/17 to 2018/19.

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved revisions made to produce the 3 Year Rolling Programme 2016/17 to 2018/19 in the context of the wider Social Housing Programme.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Managing Director, Housing Development Agency.

He confirmed that any funds delivered by devolution needed to be spent within five years. This was agreed to mean starts on site rather than completed projects.

The Managing Director, Housing Development Agency asked the Committee to note that there were no sites added to the programme this year.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

### **16/32/HSC Cambridgeshire home improvement agency - adaptations plus framework procurement**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

### **Matter for Decision**

Cambridge City Council was the lead authority with overall management responsibility for the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (CHIA) shared service. In accordance with the City Council's corporate governance, the paper, therefore, sought approval for the CHIA Board decision to procure a

comprehensive contractor framework for delivery of adaptations work managed by the Agency. The procurement value was projected to be between £3.5m to £3.7m/year although there was merit in building in some flexibility in the framework to allow for possible future growth. The contract term was initially three years with an option for a one year extension and procurement would be subject to the full terms of EU Procurement legislation.

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved the CHIA Board decision to proceed with a 3+1 year contractor framework for provision of all adaptations work and specialist equipment.
- ii. Authorised Cambridge City Council (on behalf of the partners) to invite and evaluate tenders and to appoint contractors for inclusion in a framework for delivery of all types of adaptations work and provision of specialist equipment.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Head of Estates & Facilities.

The Head of Estates & Facilities confirmed that an initial three year contract had been proposed based on legal advice.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.  
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

### **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to exclude members of the public from the meeting on the grounds that, if they were present, there would be disclosure to them of information defined as exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The minutes below relate to discussion of the open report only and not the confidential appendice.

## **16/33/HSC Disposal of 23 Magrath Avenue**

### **Matter for Decision**

The report was presented, in line with the existing HRA Acquisition and Disposal Policy, to obtain approval for the disposal of a specific HRA asset on the open market.

Following introduction of the Housing and Planning Act in May 2016, the report also proposes a scheme of delegation for the policy and process changes that will be required in response to the need to dispose of higher value vacant dwellings, in anticipation that the authority will receive detailed guidance imminently, and would need to react with some speed.

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved disposal on the open market, in line with the confidential project appraisal attached at Appendix A, of the HRA asset at 23 Magrath Avenue.
- ii. Delegated authority to the Strategic Director (or Strategic Housing Advisor in the absence of a Director), in consultation with the Executive Councillor, Chair and Opposition Spokesperson, to approve a policy and associated process to allow the authority to respond quickly to the need to meet a levy derived from the requirement for all local authorities to dispose of higher value vacant dwellings.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Business Manager/Principal Accountant (Shared Housing Finance Team).

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Requested that in future policy decision should be reported separately to operational matters.

- ii. Discussion of points around the need to implement changes quickly and how best to forward plan when there were so many unknowns.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

**CHAIR**