

HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD

27 September 2011
5.30 - 6.55 pm

Present:

Executive for Housing: Catherine Smart

Councillors: Blackhurst (Vice-Chair), Bird, Blencowe, Brierley, Pippas, Pogonowski, Price, Rosenstiel and Znajek

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diane Best (Chair), Kay Harris, Brain Haywood, John Marais and Terry Sweeney

Officers: Liz Bisset (Director of Customer & Community Services), Glenn Burgess (Committee Manager), Bob Hadfield (Head of Repairs & Maintenance), Robert Hollingsworth (Head of City Homes) and Julia Hovells (Finance & Business Manager)

Others present: Colin Wiles (Wiles Consulting)

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

11/40/HMB Apologies

None

11/41/HMB Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Terry Sweeney	11/48/HMB	Personal: Close relative resides at Ditchburn Place

11/42/HMB Minutes

The minutes of the 14 June 2011 meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

11/43/HMB Public Questions

None

11/44/HMB Write-Off of Former Tenant Arrears

Matter for Decision: Write-Off of former tenant arrears.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing:

- Agreed to write off three cases of former tenant arrears totaling £7,454.29

Reason for the Decision:

As per Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations:

There was no debate on this item.

As a result of member's questions regarding Debt Relieve Orders, officers agreed to circulate a briefing note.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted): No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

11/45/HMB Water Hygiene Contract

Matter for Decision: Carrying out of a two-stage procurement process and awarding of a corporate contract for Water Hygiene services.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing:

- Authorised the carrying out of a two-stage procurement process and delegated authority to the Director of Resources to award a Corporate contract for Water Hygiene services for a period of three years with the option to extend by two years.

Reason for the Decision:

The Council's current water hygiene services contract comes to an end on 31st March 2013 and the Council therefore needs to appoint a new contractor

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations:

The Committee received a report from the head of Repairs and Maintenance.

The Scrutiny Committee considered and endorsed the recommendations by 13 votes to 0 (unanimously)

The Executive Councillor for Housing approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted):

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

11/46/HMB Update on the position regarding Self Financing for the HRA

Matter for Decision: Approval for officers to send a response to the CLG Consultation 'Streamlining council housing asset management: Disposals and use of receipts'.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing:

- Noted progress to date in the work streams in preparing for the implementation of self-financing for the HRA.
- Approved that officers prepare and send a response to the CLG Consultation 'Streamlining council housing asset management: Disposals and use of receipts', in consultation with the Executive Councillor, Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokespersons.

Reason for the Decision:

As per Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations:

The Committee received a report from the Finance and Business Manager.

It was noted that Treasury had recently announced that the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing rates would be reduced to pre Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) October 2010 figures. As an example the current borrowing rate for a fixed 30 year maturity loan stood at 4.65%, and the comparable pre CSR rate would be 3.77%. This will have a significantly positive impact on the Councils business model.

In light of this it was therefore unlikely that the City Council would need to raise funds through open market / bond placements. The joint procurement exercise being undertaken with South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) to secure external borrowing advice would however continue, at least for phase I of the work, allowing the receipt of advice on options for the mix of PWLB borrowing that the Council may opt to take.

In response to members questions the Finance and Business Manager and the Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed the following:

- i. Other options such as internal borrowing or borrowing from other local authorities would still be looked at, but that it was unlikely that the Council would raise funds through bond issuance, as the revised PWLB rates were currently significantly lower than those available in the market place.
- ii. Self-financing was in part a reallocation of the £18 billion housing debt that currently existed within the system. PWLB had requested indications from Local Authorities of their likely borrowing route and it was likely that

many, as Cambridge did, had confirmed that PWLB would be their default position. If all local authorities chose to use PWLB as their preferred borrowing route PWLB would be expected to be able to accommodate this.

- iii. Only the City Councils agreed settlement figure of £220 million has been confirmed as being available to borrow from PWLB at the reduced pre CSR rate. If the Council opted to borrow up to its borrowing limit of £230 million, the rate is expected to revert to the current rate.
- iv. The Director of Resources would continue to seek external advice on preferred borrowing options and any final decision would be taken based on the market at the time.
- v. It was likely that a further scheme would come forward to be considered for disposal/demolition. This would be discussed through the Community Services Scrutiny Committee.
- vi. It was important that any portfolio of debt meets the longer term housing management and investment need for the housing stock, with financial options being considered for presentation to members, for agreement of a preferred financial model for the Council.
- vii. It was hoped that a communication regarding self-financing could be sent out to all tenants and leaseholders in early December. Tenants would receive this with their rent statements, while leaseholders would receive a separate communication.
- viii. Further briefings would be available for all members in due course.
- ix. The final recommendations would be discussed at the Housing Management Board, with the final decision being taken to Full Council.

The Executive Councillor for Housing formally thanked the Finance and Business Manager and her team for all their hard work.

The Scrutiny Committee considered and endorsed the recommendations by 13 votes to 0 (unanimously).

The Executive Councillor for Housing approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted):

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

11/47/HMB Options for an Independent Tenants Voice

Matter for Decision: Agree recommendations as set out in the 'Review of resident involvement and options for an independent voice for residents' independent report.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing:

Agreed:

- To re-channel the budget of £78,000, previously used to support the Cambridge Federation, into other Resident Involvement activities.
- To recruit a new member of staff to the Council Resident Involvement Team, reporting to the Resident Involvement Manager (with key duties as set out in section 11 of the independent report).
- To ensure that the work plan of the Resident Involvement Team has a high degree of guidance and involvement from residents.
- To review the terms of reference of the Housing Management Board, and other formally established groups, to ensure that there is clarity over the lines of governance and accountability for the housing services.
- That the decision concerning holding resident elections to the Housing Management Board every two years would be brought back to this committee for further consideration at a later date.
- To review the system of support and expenses for active residents, so that their efforts are properly rewarded and recompensed. This will include a review of IT support and the possible provision of IT facilities for current and new residents activists.
- To review the arrangements for recruiting resident activists and for succession planning for resident involvement. The aim will be to identify and recruit a new cohort of active residents who can step into the shoes of the current activists in the future, and to create a civic core of active residents who can be involved in resident involvement and wider community development issues.
- To review the level of training and support for residents so that current and new resident activists can take on a range of roles within the tenant involvement framework, and be fully equipped to handle strategic housing issues as well as day-to-day service delivery issues.
- To review the communications strategy for resident involvement so that all residents, and particularly activists, are kept fully informed of actions and activities on a need to know basis. This will include a review of social media, more and better training on the use of IT and the provision of IT equipment where necessary, and the ability for all residents' groups to have access to effective printing facilities. It will also include a review of estate

notice boards and the use of Radio Cambridgeshire and other local radio stations to publicise events.

- To re-launch the Residents' Forum and to make this the independent co-ordinating body for resident involvement in Cambridge. The details of its terms of reference will need to be developed but this could include the following: meetings to be open to all tenants and leaseholders and to be held four or five times a year; meetings to have a clear agenda with the ability to call officers to answer questions and an opportunity for elected HMB members to provide feedback; the ability to seek advice from independent advisers with an appropriate budget; formal voting using green and red voting cards for all registered residents; a clear commitment to the independence of the forum from all parts of the Council.
- To consider some of the ideas for further development of resident involvement as highlighted in section 11 of the independent report.
- That recommendation 12 of the independent report (regarding a 'healing exercise' with residents where the events surrounding the demise of the Cambridge Federation could be used as a positive learning exercise in order to move forward) not be taken forward on the advice of the resident representatives of HMB.
- To increase the level of grant funding to support residents' associations and other grass roots bodies. The grants previously awarded by the Cambridge Federation for environmental improvements will also be brought back under City Council control and integrated with other funding for resident support.

Reason for the Decision:

As per Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations:

The Committee received a report from the Director of Customer and Community Services.

Colin Wiles gave an introduction to the independent resident involvement report. He stated that he was very impressed with the dedication and overall level of resident involvement that took place in Cambridge City.

In response to members questions Colin Wiles and the Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed the following:

- i. Succession planning was important for resident involvement. Whilst the recommendations had not been prescriptive, one option suggested for further development had been youth-panels.
- ii. It was confirmed that the current budget of £78,000 (not £80,000 as indicated within some sections of the report) would be retained and redirected into other activities.
- iii. Section 11 of the independent report suggested ideas for further development of resident involvement. With the committees agreement officers would need to look at good practice across other local authorities and consult tenants and leaseholders prior to bringing back some firm proposals for further consideration.
- iv. Whilst officers held strategic meetings with cross-district colleagues, there was currently no opportunity for residents to meet and discuss common issues. The suggestion of a cross-district scrutiny panel could therefore be an option for further development.
- v. Highlighted previous good work undertaken by the Resident Involvement Team, but acknowledged additional work could be undertaken to encourage more ethnic minorities to get involved.

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

- i. The re-launched Residents' Forum should be consulted and have an input into the development of a youth-panel.
- ii. More involvement between City Council tenants and Housing Association tenant groups could be beneficial.
- iii. When establishing a youth-panel more than one approach and method may be needed. The Council would also need to tap into current support networks, such as those of parents of young children.
- iv. Supported the idea of exploring holding residents elections to the Housing Management Board every two years but concern was raised by some members that a split election would undermine the single transferable vote process. It was also noted that by electing all five co-opted members at the same time you achieved a more representative group.
- v. Whilst it got good value for money from its services, Cambridge City was currently in the lower quartile of spending for resident involvement. In order to fully implement some of the options explored in the independent report it may be necessary to look at increasing the budget.
- vi. Emphasised the importance of encouraging 'grass-root' resident involvement and developing increased numbers of community activists. This would, in time, then feed into the more structured levels of resident

involvement such as the Residents' Forum and co-opted membership to the Housing Management Board.

- vii. Resident involvement could be more closely linked to the Councils ongoing community development work and tied in with local events such as the Arbury Carnival. It was however noted that resident involvement and community development needed to remain as separate entities.

The Executive Councillor for Housing confirmed that whilst, at their inception, Area Committees were purposely excluded from looking at City Homes issues there may be a need to review this in the future.

Resident representatives clearly indicated that they would not support the suggestion in recommendation 12 of the independent report for a 'healing exercise' with residents regarding the demise of the Cambridge Federation. Whilst they appreciated why it had been included in the independent report, they felt that the issues had been discussed in full and that it was time to move forward. It was however acknowledged that there might be an appropriate time in the future for further discussions to take place.

The Executive Councillor for Housing formally thanked Mr Colin Wiles for his comprehensive independent report.

Councillor Blencowe proposed that recommendation 5 of the independent report concerning resident elections taking place every two years should be considered by the Housing Management Board at a later date.

On a show of hands this was carried by 13 votes to 0 (unanimously).

Councillor Rosenstiel proposed an amendment to recommendation 2.3 of the officer's report to read (addition underlined):

Recommendation 12, not to be taken forward on the advice of resident representatives of HMB.

On a show of hands this was carried by 13 votes to 0 (unanimously).

The Scrutiny Committee considered and endorsed the amended recommendations by 13 votes to 0 (unanimously).

The Executive Councillor for Housing approved the amended recommendations

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted):

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

11/48/HMB Extension of current Independent Living Service contract for provisions of 24 hour Emergency Alarm Telephone Response Service

Matter for Decision: Deferral of the decision to tender and award a new contract for the provision of a 24 hour telephone answering service.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing:

- Authorised the Director of Customer and Community Services to defer the decision to tender and award a new contract for the provision of a 24 hour telephone answering service until it was known whether the Council had been appointed by the County Council to provide support services beyond April 2012.
- Authorised the Director of Customer and Community Services to extend the existing contract with Eldercare (New Church Housing Services Limited) for a period of up to two years.

Reason for the Decision:

As per Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations:

The Committee received a report from the Business and Finance Manager.

The Scrutiny Committee considered and endorsed the recommendations by 12 votes to 0 (unanimously).

The Executive Councillor for Housing approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted):

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

The meeting ended at 6.55 pm

CHAIR