

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 July 2014
5.30 - 9.00 pm

Present:

Scrutiny Committee Members: Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Birtles (Vice-Chair), Avery, Baigent, Bird, Blackhurst, Gawthrope and Holland

Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Price

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diane Best, Kay Harris, John Marais, Diana Minns, Caroline Oriokot and Terry Sweeney

Officers:

Director of Customer & Community Services: Liz Bisset

Head of City Homes: Robert Hollingsworth

Head of Strategic Housing: Alan Carter

Area Housing Manager: Andrew Latchem

Area Housing Manager: Sandra Farmer

Business Manager / Principal Accountant: Julia Hovells

Team Manager (Residential): Robin Ray

Resident Involvement Facilitator: James Bull

Committee Manager: Claire Tunncliffe

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

14/1/HSC Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Robertson. Councillor Gawthrope was present as the alternate.

Apologies were also received from Mr Sweeney.

14/2/HSC Appointment of Vice-Chair (Tenant/Leaseholder Rep) for 2014/15

Diana Minns was appointed as Vice Chair (Tenant / Leaseholder Representative) for 2014/15.

14/3/HSC Re-ordering of the Agenda

Under paragraph 4.2.1 of the Council Procedure Rules, the Chair used his discretion to alter the order of the agenda items. However, for ease of the reader, these minutes will follow the order of the agenda.

14/4/HSC Minutes

Councillor Todd-Jones who attended the HMB meeting on 4 March 2014 requested that his name was added to the list of Councillors who were present at the meeting.

Minutes of 4 March 2014 were then approved and signed as correct record.

14/5/HSC Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Kay Harris (Tenant Representative)	14/9/HSC: Leasehold Services Update.	Personal: Member of ROAM and resident inspector.

14/6/HSC Public Questions

There were no public questions.

14/7/HSC Oral Report from the Executive Councillor and Proposals for 'Lead Councillors'

The Committee received oral reports from the Executive Councillor for Housing, Councillor Price and the Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Todd-Jones.

Councillor Price advised the aim of the new Housing Scrutiny Committee was to enhance the focus on Housing and to reduce Officer, Tenant / Leaseholder Representatives and Councillor time. There had been occasions in the past when the same item would appear on the former Housing Management Board agenda and the Community Services Scrutiny Committee agenda, all items now would be on the same agenda.

Councillor Price explained it was important that the Housing Scrutiny Committee continued vital resident involvement with the Tenant / Leaseholder Representatives as part of the Committee.

The Committee were informed that the following items would be addressed in the new municipal year 2014/15:

- An increase in the fencing budget
- Social house buildings (using potential garage sites)
- Major Environment Improvement Project being undertaken with existing funds that have been moved around in the accounts year on.
- Reviewing the whole of the Revenue Account.

Councillor Price explained that two Lead Councillors had been selected to work with Officers in the Housing Sector, for the following:

- Councillor Baigent, Lead Councillor for Private Rented Housing: To assist the Executive Councillor for Housing in developing policy on private rented housing, starting with a review focusing on the priorities in the Annual Statement.
- Councillor Robertson, Lead Councillor for Homelessness: To assist the Executive Councillor in developing policy on homelessness, starting with a review focusing on the priorities in the Annual Statement.

Councillor Todd Jones, Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, spoke of the new format of the meeting. 'The new Vice Chair (Tenant / Leaseholder Representative) would chair the first part of the meeting and would no longer alternate with a Councillor Chair as was the case with the former Housing Management Board. They would have the casting vote, which they did not have when Chair of the Housing Management Board.' All six Tenant / Leaseholder Representatives were non-voting members of the second part of the meeting concerning strategic housing matters, rather than having three non-voting representatives as was the case on the Community Services Committee.'

14/8/HSC Standard Item: Write-Off of Former and Current Tenant Arrears

Matter for Decision

Write off of current tenant arrears

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Approve one case of current tenant arrears totalling £2,605.52 as detailed in the appendix to the Officer's report be written off, due to the expiration of a Debt Relief Order.
- ii. Approve the nineteen cases of former tenant arrears totalling £54,414.29 also detailed in the attached appendix; be written off due to recovery activity being exhausted.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

This item was not requested for pre-scrutiny.

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

- (i) Viewed the report as usual information that should be brought to the attention of the committee.
- (ii) Noted as no report had been presented to the March 2014 Committee the figure of £54,414.29 for former tenant arrears was higher than had been presented in the past.

The Executive Councillor 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.

14/9/HSC Leasehold Services Update

Matter for Decision

The report referred to the Leasehold Services offered by Cambridge City Council and provided an update on those services.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Instruct Officers to review the level of staff resources in the Leasehold team.
- ii. Instruct Officers to set up a working group to progress the action plan as outlined in appendix 2 of the Officer's report.
- iii. Instruct Officers to report back on progress of the working group in 2015.
- iv. Instruct Officers to review the Building Insurance covered in 7.1 of 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 Area Housing Manager.

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

- i. Welcomed the report.
- ii. Thanked Diane Best for her hard work as a Leaseholder Representative.
- iii. Agreed the report clearly explained the role and issues of Leasehold Services.
- iv. Stated that the report did not highlight the good work of City Homes enough, particular in the area of Resident Involvement review meetings.
- v. Acknowledged the hard work of the Resident Involvement Officer supporting the Leaseholders and working to resolve any maintenance issues that had been brought to their attention.
- vi. A meeting of the Leaseholder Forum would be taking place week commencing 7 July where a presentation would be given by the Building Insurance Company. This tied in with the Officer's recommendation to review the Building Insurance.
- vii. Stated a better relationship was required between the Repairs Team and the Housing Team to ensure that repairs were undertaken more efficiently and effectively.
- viii. Asked what was the process to sub-let a property and if that procedure was always followed.
- ix. Observed that there were properties which had been sub-let through an agency.

- x. Noted that properties which were sub-let to students created a transient population.
- xi. Requested if an information sheet could be provided to show the terms and conditions for sub-letting and who the property could be sub-let to.

In response to Members' questions the Executive Councillor for Housing and Officers confirmed the following:

- i. An Estate and Facilities Manager had been appointed to work alongside the Housing team to address maintenance issues. This had improved the dialogue between the Planned Maintenance Team and Housing Team to work more efficiently.
- ii. It would depend on the lease as to the process that must be followed to sub-let. The Leaseholder would pay a one off fee for notification.
- iii. As the subject of sub-letting was a complex issue rather it would be beneficial if questions on this issue were put direct to the housing team.
- iv. If it is believed that there is an issue with a Leaseholder sub-letting a property, this should be reported to the Housing Team who would investigate the matter.

The Committee:

Resolved unanimously to approve the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor 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.

14/10/HSC Resident Involvement Update

Matter for Decision

To consider the annual Resident involvement report which had focussed on the following:

- Volunteer recruitment
- Digital inclusion
- Complaints resolution
- HSC Tenant and Leaseholder representatives allowances

The Chair reminded those present that all Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives had declared a prejudicial interest in item 2.2 of the Officer's report, regarding the allowances and would leave the room.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Approve the on-going focus of resident involvement on volunteer recruitment, digital inclusion and complaints resolution.
- ii. Approve the increase of the HSC Tenant & Leaseholder representative allowances.

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 Resident Involvement Facilitator.

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

- i. Thanked the Resident Involvement Facilitator for their hard work on the report.
- ii. Recognised the importance of digital inclusion for all residents and the importance of training to allow residents to have the ability to get on-line.
- iii. Suggested Cambridge Central Library should be included in the campaign, particularly in the training of users.
- iv. Encouraged Officers to contact the Library to discuss the issue of digital inclusion further.
- v. Noted the monthly payment for a fixed internet connection would be considered a high charge by some residents.
- vi. Queried who the scheme was aimed at and if it was possible to opt out before the contract ended.
- vii. Questioned if it was possible for residents to have their own wireless broadband connection in sheltered accommodation.
- viii. Asked how the Housing Regulation Panel would work with the new Housing Scrutiny Committee.

- ix. Questioned how the allowances for Tenant and Leaseholder representatives were benchmarked
- x. Asked if there was a list of Community Internet Access points across the City which people can use.

In response to Members' questions the Executive Councillor for Housing and Officers confirmed the following:

- i. It was possible for individual residents living in sheltered schemes to have their own broadband installed.
- ii. Aimed to increase the shared broadband in the sheltered accommodation.
- iii. Acknowledged the monthly charge to get on line would be costly to some residents. But Officers had looked at the best deals available while working with local charities had reduced the cost.
- iv. Interesting to note that none of the telecommunications offered a reasonable price package.
- v. The Housing Regulation Panel would continue to work within the service wide remit and envisaged that there would be no change.
- vi. Aim to develop the Complaint Panels to the same standards working practices and standards as the Housing Regulation Panel.
- vii. A list of Community Internet Access points was available but recommended that publication was delayed as wider City initiative was being worked on.
- viii. It is difficult to benchmark the allowances due to the lack of comparison with Local Authorities.

The Committee:

Resolved unanimously to approve the recommendations in 2.1 of the Officer's report.

Resolved unanimously to approve the recommendations in 2.2 of the Officer's report.

The Executive Councillor approved both the recommendations.

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

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

14/11/HSC 2013/14 Revenue and Capital Outturn, Carry Forwards and Significant Variances - HRA

Matter for Decision

The report presented a summary of the 2013/14 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

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Agree that the carry forward requests, totalling £3,393,320 as detailed in Appendix C, are to be recommended to Council for approval.

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.

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

- ii. Queried why the cost of Council Tax had to be met from the Housing Revenue Account in respect of void properties was significantly higher than anticipated.
- iii. Asked if the the higher cost of Council Tax was likely to occur for the next financial year and what can be done to avoid this from happening again.

In response to Members' questions the Executive Councillor for Housing and Officers confirmed the following:

- i. Would like to make the Committee aware that when referring to underspend this equates to savings that had been carried forward through planning and hard work of those involved.

- ii. Explained that when the Government reduced funding for Council tax support, a number of exemptions were removed to void properties due to Council Tax discounts and Exemptions Policies from April 2014, in conjunction with lengthy void periods in properties vacated for demolition.
- iii. Advised it was unlikely that the cost of Council Tax would be as high for this financial year as some of the properties would be demolished negating the cost. In terms of general void properties it was aimed to turn these round quickly.

The Committee:

Resolved unanimously to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

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

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor

14/12/HSC 2013/14 Revenue and Capital Outturn, Carry Forwards and Significant Variances - Housing Portfolio

Matter for Decision

The report presented a summary of the 2013/14 outturn position (actual income and expenditure) for services within the Housing portfolio, compared to the final budget for the year. The position for revenue and capital was reported and variances from budgets were highlighted, together with explanations.

Requests to carry forward funding arising from certain budget underspends into 2014/15 were identified.

It was noted that outturn reports being presented in this Committee cycle reflect the reporting structures in place prior to the recent changes in Executive portfolios. In light of those changes (together with the requirement to report outturn on the basis of portfolios in place during 2013/14) members of this committee are asked to consider the proposals to carry forward budgets and make their views known to The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resource, for consideration at Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Committee prior to their recommendations to Council.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Agree the carry forward requests, totalling £84,000 as detailed in Appendix C, are to be recommended to Council for approval.
- ii. Seek approval from Council to re-phase spending of £25,000 in respect of energy efficiency improvements in the private sector into 2014/15, and £9,000 in respect of the scheme to upgrade facilities at 125 Newmarket Road, as detailed in Appendix D.
- iii. Seek approval from Council to carry forward net capital resources of £11,633,000 from 2013/14, to fund re-phased capital spending in the Housing Capital Investment Plan, as detailed in Appendix E and the associated notes, re-profiling investment as follows:
 - Re-phase £8,993,000 into 2014/15
 - Re-phase £2,390,000 into 2015/16
 - Reduce investment in 2016/17 by £87,000
 - Re-phase £337,000 into the period post 2018/19
- iv. Recognise a delay into 2014/15, for receipt of the remainder of Homes and Communities Agency Grant for the affordable housing new build and re-development programme of £889,000 and the associated £1,509,000 in capital receipts for the land on which the market housing is being delivered on the remainder of the 146 programme sites.
- v. Seek approval from Council to carry forward an additional £100,000 of the net underspend in the Housing Capital Programme into 2014/15, to fund an enhanced level of investment in fencing, as proposed as part of the Labour Alternative Budget in February 2014.
- vi. Note the resulting need to defer the use of both £2,909,000 of revenue funding of capital expenditure into 2014/15, as considered as part of the HRA revenue outturn at Housing Committee and £1,828,000 of major repairs reserve funding, both of which will be required to fund the requested re-phasing in capital investment.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Business Manager/Principal Accountant.

The Director of Customer & Community Services then referred to the profiling of the capital programme and recognised that this could be improved. Work

would be carried out on the 146 programme sites throughout the year, as it had not been anticipated how long negotiations with lease holders on these sites had taken which had changed the profiling. Future work with contractors would also be improved to ensure anticipated spending profiles would be more accurate.

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

- i. Welcomed the comments that lessons had been learnt and that the process would be better managed.

The Committee:

Resolved unanimously to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor 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.

12 Affordable Housing Programme Matter for Decision

The report provided a review of the programme and specifically sought approval of three year rolling programme that includes sites to be investigated 2014/15 to 2016/17. The report set this request for approval to the revised three year programme in the context of the delivery of Affordable Housing through the planning system, and the new Council housing programme.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Approve revisions to the 3 Year Rolling Programme 2014/15 to 2016/17 in the context of the wider Affordable Housing Programme with the exception of sites that require resident consultation for 2015/16 & 2016/17 which would be brought forward with a revised process for engaging with residents.

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 Strategic Housing.

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

- i. Queried if the process for resident consultation was sufficient.
- ii. Questioned if the resident consultation should be developed further for particular residents.
- iii. Asked what was the time frame for resident consultation.

The Committee:

In response to Members' questions the Executive Councillor for Housing and Officers confirmed the following:

- i. There was no reason why the resident consultation could not be changed to meet the needs of the residents.
- ii. There was no time limit concerning resident consultation.

Councillor Baigent proposed the following amendment to the Officer recommendation (additional text underlined).

- ii. Approve revisions to the 3 Year Rolling Programme 2014/15 to 2016/17 in the context of the wider Affordable Housing Programme with the exception of sites that require resident consultation for 2015/16 & 2016/17 which would be brought forward with a revised process for engaging with residents.

The Committee **resolved unanimously** to endorse the amendment to the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved to endorse the amendment to the recommendation.

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

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

14/13/HSC Exclusion of the Press & Public

The Committee resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting by virtue of paragraph 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

14/14/HSC Procurement of an Affordable Housing Development Partner

Matter for Decision

The report referred to the procurement of a house builder partner to develop, or re-develop, Affordable Housing to be owned and managed by Cambridge City Council across a number of sites in the city. This could include market housing, Affordable Housing as well as mixed use, commercial and housing developments.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. To approve the procurement of a development partner.
- ii. To give delegated authority to the Director of Community Services, following consultation with the Housing Revenue Account Principal Accountant and the Head of Legal Services, to complete the procurement process and legal documentation to select a development partner.
- iii. To note that any proposed Development Agreements for individual sites will be brought back to Committee for scheme specific approval.

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 Strategic Housing.

No comments were made.

The Committee:

Resolved unanimously to endorse the amended recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the amended recommendation.

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

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

14/15/HSC Power to Charge for Certain Enforcement Action Under the Housing Act 2004 (the "ACT")**Matter for Decision**

The report provided information regarding the Act that enables local authorities to make a reasonable charge as a means of recovering certain expenses incurred in serving an improvement notice, making a prohibition order, serving a hazard awareness notice, taking emergency remedial action, making an emergency prohibition order, or making a demolition order. The expenses are in connection with the inspection of the premises, the subsequent consideration of any action to be taken and the service of notices.

Authorities are able to charge for each course of action including, where emergency remedial action is taken, for any subsequent notices.

In March 2012 the Community Services Scrutiny Committee (decision 12/25/CS) gave permission to seek to recover the costs against the recipient of the Notice or Order. The report is a review of the charges set in this decision in light of recent case law.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Approve the attached policy document as detailed in Appendix A which supersedes the previous Policy Document Charging for certain enforcement action.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

This item was not requested for pre-scrutiny.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

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

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor

14/16/HSC Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (Cambs HIA) - Extension of Contract

Matter for Decision

The report referred to the City Council shared service agreement with South Cambridgeshire District Council and Huntingdonshire District Council to provide a joint home improvement agency service. The agreement expires at the end of March 2015. The shared service known as Cambs HIA has been a successful venture in sustaining services previously delivered independently by the respective district councils at a reduced cost. The Government had introduced the Better Care Fund which presented opportunities to develop Cambs HIA further.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Agree to extend the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency Shared Service Agreement to the end of March 2016.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

This item was not requested for pre-scrutiny.

The Executive Councillor approved the amended recommendation.

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

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor

14/17/HSC Record of Urgent Decision

16a Opportunity to Bid to Increase the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
Opportunity to Bid to Increase the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Committee noted that the former Executive Councillor for Housing had approved the delegation of authority to the Director of Customer and Community Services to agree a bid under the Local Growth Fund :Housing Revenue Account Borrowing Programme (2015 /16 & 2016/17)

This decision was required as the deadline for bids to the £300m fund was on 16 June 2014.

The Head of Strategic Housing informed the Committee that he would be happy to arrange a briefing in July post committee on the bid process.

14/18/HSC Future Meeting Times for Housing Scrutiny Committee

The committee agreed to keep the start time of the meeting to 5.30pm.

14/19/HSC Disposal of 18a and freehold to 18b Magrath Avenue

Matter for Decision

The Chair had ruled that under 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 the item be considered despite not being made publicly available for this Committee five clear days prior to the meeting.

The report provided information to the disposal of HRA dwelling asset at 18a Magrath Avenue, Cambridge as a joint venture with the long leaseholder of 18b Magrath Avenue. The project to re-supply the two replacement dwellings will be presented as part of a wider future development project, with the capital receipt from this sale used as one of the funding streams for the new assets.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

Financial recommendations

- i. Approve the project in principle, with the Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources asked to ultimately approve the project to dispose of an HRA asset, subject to resources being available to fund any associated capital and revenue implications.
 - The total capital cost of the project is estimated to be £5,000
 - The capital receipt that the Council would expect to realise is in the region of £237,500, depending upon market forces at the point of sale.
 - The revenue impact of the initial disposal would be negligible, with the loss of rental income for the dwelling being offset by a reduction in management and maintenance expenditure, and the ability to earn interest on the capital receipt.
 - The net ongoing revenue return for this project would be £4,300 per annum in the longer term, assuming the capital receipt was in future used to fund two replacement dwellings.

Procurement recommendations:

- ii. Approve the carrying out and completion of the procurement of an agent to act on behalf of the Council and the owner of 18b Magrath Avenue, in agreement with said owner. The cost of this work is

expected to be in the region of £7,200, so one quote will be required, with the Councils' share of this cost to be met from the anticipated capital receipt for the sale.

Subject to:

- i. The permission of the Section 151 Officer being sought prior to proceeding if the quotation or tender sum exceeds the estimated contract.
- ii. The permission from the Executive Councillor being sought before proceeding if the value exceeds the estimated contract by more than 15%.

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.

No comments were made.

The Committee:

The Executive Councillor 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

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

CHAIR