

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30 September 2014

5.30 - 7.45 pm

Present: Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Avery, Baigent, Blackhurst, Holland and Robertson

Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Price

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diane Best, Kay Harris, John Marais, Diana Minns (Vice Chair: Tenant / Leaseholder Representative), 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

Head of Legal Services: Simon Pugh

Housing Strategy Manager: Helen Reed

Area Housing Manager: Sandra Farmer

Business Manager / Principal Accountant: Julia Hovells

Housing Advice Service Manager: David Greening

Operations Manager: Lui Graziano

Involvement Facilitator: James Bull

Committee Manager: Claire Tunnicliffe

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

The following items were Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

14/20/HSC Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Bird. Councillor Gawthrop attended as the alternate.

The Chair informed the Committee that former Councillor Birtles had resigned from the Council with immediate effect and would not be present.

14/21/HSC Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor Avery	14/30/HSC	Personal: Alternate Member of the Planning Committee
Councillor Holland	14/30/HSC	Personal: Alternate Member of the Planning Committee
Councillor Gawthrope	14/30/HSC	Personal: Member of the Planning Committee
Kay Harris	14/26/HSC	Personal: Member of ROAM and resident inspector.

14/22/HSC Minutes

Diane Best who attended the Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 July 2014 requested that her declaration of interest be added under item 14/9/HSC.

Kay Harris who attended the Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 July 2014 requested that her second declaration of interest be added under item 14/12/HSC.

Name	Item	Interest
Kay Harris (Tenant Representative)	14/9/HSC: Leasehold Services Update.	Personal: Member of ROAM and resident inspector.
Kay Harris (Tenant Representative)	14/12/HSC: Affordable Housing Programme	Personal: Member of ROAM and resident inspector
Diane Best (Leaseholder Representative)	14/9/HSC: Leasehold Services Update.	Personal: Leaseholder Representative

Minutes of 1 July 2014 were then approved and signed as correct record.

14/23/HSC Public Questions

There were no public questions.

The following items were Chaired by Diana Minns

14/24/HSC Write-Off of Former and Current Tenant Arrears

Matter for Decision

Write off of six former tenant arrears.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the six cases of former tenant arrears totalling £15,216.21 detailed in the attached appendix be written off, due to recovery activity being exhausted or being unable to recover the debt.
- ii.

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 and the Committee made no comments in response to the report.

The Committee:

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.

14/25/HSC Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Mid-Year Financial Review

Matter for Decision

The Housing Revenue Account Budget Setting Report, considered and approved in January / February of each year is the long-term strategic planning document for housing landlord services provided by Cambridge City Council.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Mid-Year Financial Review provides an opportunity to review the assumptions incorporated as part of the longer-term financial planning process, recommending any changes in response to new legislative requirements, variations in external economic factors and amendments to service delivery methods, allowing incorporation into budgets and financial forecasts at the earliest opportunity.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing under Part 1 of the Housing Scrutiny Agenda:

- i. Approved the Housing Revenue Account Mid-Year Financial Review attached, to include all proposals for changes in:
 - Financial assumptions as detailed in Appendix C of the document.
 - Revenue budgets as introduced in Section 4, detailed in Appendix D, and summarised in the HRA Summary Forecast at Appendix G of the document.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing under Part 2 of the Housing Scrutiny Agenda:

Recommend to Council:

- Proposals for changes in existing housing capital budgets, as introduced in Sections 6 and 7 and detailed in Appendix E of the document, with the resulting position summarised in Appendix H, for decision at Council on 6th November 2014.
- Inclusion of a new scheme in the Housing Capital Investment Plan, relating to the replacement of air cooling systems at the area housing offices, at a cost of £11,000.

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:

- i. Thanked the Business Manager / Principal Account for such a clear and comprehensive report.
- ii. Noted a saving of £20,000 from the Resident Involvement Budget and queried how the saving would be made.
- iii. Expressed concern that any future reductions to the Resident Involvement Budget would equate to a reduction to services.
- iv. Reiterated the importance retaining the Resident Involvement Budget for future developments to ensure that support could be provided.
- v. Requested further information on 101a Gywdir Street and asked if there would be any implications to residents in neighbouring properties.
- vi. Noted that when the shift had been made to self-financing, external advice had been sought and asked had that external advice been updated and how often.

In response to Committees comments, Officers and the Director of Community and Customer Services stated the following:

- i. With regards to the Resident Involvement Budget, savings would be from staffing across the cost centre. The majority of savings had been taken from the balance in reduction of full time hours for one staff member to 22.5 hours.
- ii. Concerning the Resident Involvement Budget, it was important to look at output and outcomes of what was hoped to be achieved. The Council would be looking at the results of the residents' survey which would give indicators of what should be explored in the longer term.
- iii. Invited all Committee Members to meet with Officers of the Resident Involvement Team who would advise in detail the work programme and the long term goals.
- iv. At the time of writing the report the business case for 101a Gywdir Street was still being evaluated with a number of options assed. It had been confirmed that the existing bedsit would be refurbished within its existing footprint. The occupier had been informed and there would no impact on the residents on the same site.

- v. External Advice was sought on a regular basis from organisations such as SECTOR and The Chartered Institute of Housing.
- vi. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was due to be reviewed and it was highly probable that further advice would be sought after the review.

The Committee:

Resolved (11 Votes to 0, with 2 abstentions) to approve the recommendations under Part 1 of the Housing Scrutiny Agenda:

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.

The following vote was Chaired by Councillor Todd Jones.

Resolved (unanimously) to approve the recommendations under Part 2 of the Housing Scrutiny Agenda:

Committee Manager's Note: Tenant and Leaseholders Representatives did not vote on this recommendation.

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.

The following items were Chaired by Diana Minns

14/26/HSC Repairs Improvement Plan - Performance Update

Matter for Decision

The decision to implement a 2 year improvement plan for the responsive repairs and voids service was approved at the meeting of Housing Management Board on 28 Sept 2010. The Executive Councillor subsequently agreed to extend the period by a further 1 year to enable further investigation into the procurement of alternative IT solutions and to implement the most

appropriate option. A report detailing the success of the improvement plan was discussed at the meeting of Housing Management Board in October 2013, at which the decision was made to retain the delivery of the service by the in-house team, providing the high service standards achieved during the period of the improvement plan were maintained.

A further report was requested in October 2013 to demonstrate the impact and improvements on service delivery once mobile working has been established for a period of months. The tables included below make a comparison between service delivery before and after implementation of mobile working and the new integrated Orchard software.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Agreed that a review report be presented to the June cycle each year which monitors annual performance and provides certainty that the decision to retain the service in house is still valid.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Operations Manager.

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

- i. Commented that it was good to see improvements were being made and the service was going well.
- ii. Asked if the data for residents satisfaction had been circulated and how this compared with the recent star survey
- iii. Queried if the introduction of South View Solutions (SVS) mobile working affected the number of post or pre inspections which were carried out.
- iv. Requested an explanation as to why the 'appointments made' had significantly increased.
- v. Questioned what the target figure was referenced in the report.

In response to Committees comments Officers and the Director of Community and Customer Services stated the following:

- i. Data on satisfaction for repairs has been obtained but it did not differentiate between planned and responsive repairs.

- ii. Further work was required to determine if the data was linked to the planned maintenance programme or the responsive repairs programme. Once the work had been completed the results would be shared.
- iii. Mobile working did not directly affect the post or pre inspections.
- iv. Before the consolidation of mobile working there had been several categories which had now merged into the 'Appointments Made'. All jobs were now appointed.
- v. The target was 98%.

The Committee:

Resolved (unanimously) to approve 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.

14/27/HSC Tenant Complaints Panel

Matters for Decision.

The report proposed a model for a tenant complaints panel inline with the changes introduced by the Localism Act in 2013. If a tenant (or leaseholder) remained unsatisfied with the outcome of a complaint at the conclusion of the landlord's complaints process, they may submit their complaint to a Councillor, an MP, or a Tenant Panel which represents a new option for complaints.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the proposed model for a new Tenant and Leaseholder Complaints Panel.

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 Residents Involvement Facilitator.

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

- i. Questioned if there would be enough work for the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel.
- ii. Asked if consideration had been given for a joint panel with other Local Authorities.
- iii. Suggested that the Officer explore the possibility of partnership working.
- iv. Queried if an environmental complaint would go the Tenant and Leaseholder Complaints Panel.
- v. Enquired to the number of complaints that went to the Housing Ombudsman in the last twelve months.
- vi. Enquired how Tenant / Leaseholder Representatives would be recruited to the post.

In response to Committees comments Officers and the Director of Community and Customer Services stated the following:

- i. The long term goal for the Panel would be to give advice and become the first level of mediation, in effect a Tenant Advice Bureau.
- ii. Agreed to investigate the possibility of partnership working.
- iii. An environmental complaint could go to the Panel, although there were exceptions.
- iv. The Housing Ombudsman would deal with complaints from the tenants and the leaseholder only. It was about getting the services provided by the landlord right and not social behaviour.
- v. As the Housing Ombudsman had only recently taken on the complaints regarding Council stock there were no comparable figures.
- vi. Reports had been referred to the General Ombudsman but not maladministration
- vii. A number of tenant and leaseholder had expressed an interest in the Panel through the recently completed star survey. Those residents would be contacted to discuss the matter further.

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.

The following items were Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

14/28/HSC Findings by the Local Government Ombudsman of Maladministration in Respect of the Council's Homelessness Function

Matters for Decision.

The report referred to The Local Government Ombudsman findings of maladministration in respect of three complaints. The complaints related to the Council's homelessness functions.

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 had 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

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to

- i. Endorsed the actions taken by officers in response to the findings 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 received a report from the Head of Legal Services, the Council's Monitoring Officer.

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

- i. Questioned at which point had the former Executive Councillor been informed of the issues.
- ii. Queried how many people were still being housed miles outside of Cambridge.

- iii. Asked if people were still being housed in bed and breakfast accommodation in Peterborough.
- iv. Stated that this had been a wakeup call for the Council and wanted reassurance this would not reoccur again.
- v. Enquired if people were placed in bed and breakfast because capacity had been exceeded or the particular configurations of the households did not match what was available.

In response to Committees comments Officers, the Director of Community and Customer Services stated the following:

- i. At the time the letter from the Ombudsman did not indicate that it was a Maladministration case in the way that would be expected.
- ii. The matter had been discussed with the former Executive Councillor, but could not give an exact time frame when this was.
- iii. A report had also been presented to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee on the homeless service. As there were indication that the certain areas of the service needed to be addressed. Among the areas that were addressed were:
 - Increasing the number of temporary housing in the City.
 - Tighter monitoring of caseloads.
 - Closer monitoring the length of time it was taking to resolve cases.
- iv. A number of actions taken at time had been completed.
- v. Bed and breakfast accommodation in Peterborough had not been used for at least eight months.
- vi. Between 1 April 2013 and 25 October 2013, the Council had housed five families in bed and breakfast for no more than six weeks. Since then no families had been housed in Bed and Breakfast for more than three weeks.
- vii. Since November 2013 there have been no more than three households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation at any one time.
- viii. The Configuration of the household could be an issue but occasionally other issues were identified.
- ix. The Council were now in a much better position than at the time.

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.

14/29/HSC Intermediate Market Housing

Matter for Decision.

The report referred to the high demand for housing in Cambridge and the surrounding area, and house prices and private rent levels are high. As a result, there is a significant proportion of local people who do not receive priority for social housing for rent, but are also unable to afford to access good quality market housing. As house prices and rents continue to rise faster than incomes the issue is becoming more and more acute.

The report provided data and information on demand for, and costs and affordability of, market and intermediate market housing in Cambridge; Outlined the main models of intermediate housing available, including shared ownership, equity loans, intermediate rent and rent to buy, and some variations on those models; Summarised the Council's current strategic approach to intermediate housing, and made recommendations around priorities moving forward.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Endorsed the need to address a range of intermediate housing needs amongst people who cannot afford to buy or rent good quality housing on the open market but who also do not have priority for social housing for rent.
- ii. Considered options for a social lettings agency to help meet the needs of the intermediate housing market in Cambridge, including consideration of future development of the sub-regional lettings agency Town Hall Lettings.
- iii. Prioritised exploring how different models of intermediate market housing for rent might be delivered through the Council's Affordable Housing Development programme.

- iv. Provision of intermediate market housing is prioritised in the future is considered as part of the review of the Council's Housing Strategy due to take place during 2015.

v. 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 Strategy Manager.

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

- i. Indicated disappointment that the Committee were looking at various intermediate shared ownership schemes and not Council Housing.
- ii. Recognised shared ownerships schemes were financially viable but would like it to be made clear that the Committee should be looking to see an increase in Council Housing.
- iii. Stated that there was a lack of Council Housing in Cambridge.
- iv. Recognised that the Council was doing its best under the restrictions that were placed upon it.
- v. Specified that the many developments for example in Trumpington did deliver affordable housing for some people.
- vi. Acknowledged that shared ownership properties brought a balance to the City.
- vii. Welcomed the report as it offered a variety to meet a range of needs.
- viii. Stated that shared ownership offered an opportunity for those who couldn't afford to buy at market prices.
- ix. Asked which social economic groups the report was referring to.
- x. Asked what the percentage of older people who wanted to downsize had been referenced in the report.
- xi. Noted that Cambridge University on the North/ West development were using a simple formula to target their market audience. Could the profiles of the market audience be identified as to who the Council were aiming for?
- xii. Asked what the income to qualify for intermediate housing was.
- xiii. Questioned if there would be / was a difference between social housing and intermediate housing.

- xiv. Asked what the percentage was for those people who build up their share.
- xv. Where there any housing associations who could assist the Council in the intermediate market as there were examples of Housing Associations being innovative in field.
- xvi. Enquired if there was a time scale.

In response to Committees comments Officers, the Executive Councillor for Housing, the Director of Community and Customer Services stated the following:

- i. Applicants for intermediate housing must be earning less than £60,000 per year, an amount that had been set by the Government.
- ii. The target market for Intermediate housing were usually people up to 35 years of age, who were earning an income but could not afford housing on the open market.
- iii. There was limited information nationally on the figures for the market for older people who wanted to downsize.
- iv. The profile for the renting sector was changing as people are renting for longer which had impacted on the market figures.
- v. In the last ten years the standard of social housing had been built to the same level, if not better than other forms of marketing housing, which it was envisaged would not change.
- vi. Investigation would be ongoing to determine the areas of need as there were different social and economic groups who were not accessing the housing and a better understanding was required.
- vii. The policy will be developed further with the intermediate market as the marker.
- viii. Officers working toward developing a better understanding of the market.
- ix. Ideally the Council would be building a high percentage of Council Houses but unfortunately were not in a position to do so.
- x. People who are on an average income who are being forced out of buying / renting in the City and are not eligible for Council Housing. The report offers an alternative for this situation.
- xi. A review carried out in 2013 on shared ownership provided the figures for people who had built up their share.
- xii. She believes that the Council are as enterprising as some Housing Associations, if not more so.
- xiii. A new housing strategy would be brought back to a future Committee meeting.

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.

14/30/HSC Council Housing at Homerton College Redevelopment

Matter for Decision The report referred to the Homerton College scheme which is the first to be brought forward in the next phase of the Council's own Social Housing Programme and is notable to be the first opportunity to work on a site not owned by the Council.

The report described the funding background to the next phase of the Social Housing Programme and explains that the factor that is driving our decision making on which schemes to prioritise is the need to spend Right to Buy receipts within a given time limit.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing resolved to:

- i. Approved in principle for the Council to deliver social housing on the Homerton College scheme - noting that a final scheme will be brought back to Committee for scrutiny and approval.
- ii. **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. Congratulated the Head of Strategic Housing and his team.
- ii. Queried if and how many properties would be tailored for disabled users, such as wheel chair access.
- iii. Stated it would be helpful for the Government to remove the constraints, particularly on the amount that the Council could borrow in order to move forward.
- iv. Acknowledged that it was a good news story for the Council but expressed disappointment that the properties did not have to be built to code level five.
- v. Asked if it was too late to negotiate with the developer to build to code level five.
- vi. Noted the news release as being slightly misleading as the Housing Scrutiny Committee had not formally agreed the report and planning permission had not yet been granted by the Planning Committee.
- vii. Asked if the percentage of affordable housing would change.

In response to Committees comments Officers, the Director of Community and Customer Services stated the following:

- i. Noted the comments regarding the press release.
- ii. As the scheme is well on the way to a detailed planning application the Council has very limited influence on the detail.
- iii. Very pleased that the Council that are part of the project.
- iv. With future projects it is hoped that the Council work in partnership from the start and would be able to influence such factors as building to code level five.
- v. The 40% affordable housing should not change as it would be a breach of planning policy.

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.

14/31/HSC Record of Urgent Decision**12a Acquisition of Market Housing on 146 Programme Development Sites**

The Committee noted that the Executive Councillor for Housing had approved the acquisition of 13 market housing on 146 Programme Development Sites, Atkins Close, Colville Road and Wadloes Road

This decision was required as the Council's Acquisition and Disposals policy stipulates that such decisions will be made by urgent decision as this allows for Officers to gather the required information and costs to then present a paper, which will provide a decision before that information and those costs become out dated. The housing market could change significantly in a month therefore being able to agree a price at a certain point in time is paramount to agreeing to purchase properties. Agreeing to the price for these properties was vital to the agreement with Keepmoat and the ability to start the legal process to purchase these properties

The Executive Councillor

- i. Approved the purchase of 4 market dwellings on the Atkins Close (garage re-development) site at an estimated cost of £1,106,400.
- ii. Approved the purchase of 6 market dwellings on the Colville Road (re-development) site at an estimated cost of £1,051,350.
- iii. Approved the purchase of 3 market dwellings on the Wadloes Road (vacant housing land) site at an estimated cost of £736,500.
- iv. Gave delegated authority to the Director of Customer & Community Services to enter into a build contract with Keepmoat for the delivery of dwellings on the Wadloes Road site should this be deemed appropriate.

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 7.45 pm

CHAIR

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