

**HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

8 March 2016  
5.30 - 6.55 pm

**Present:**

**Scrutiny Committee Members:** Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Avery, Ashton, Bird, Moore, Sarris and Gawthrop

**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

Head of Estates & Facilities: Trevor Burdon

Resident Involvement Facilitator: James Bull

Committee Manager: Toni Birkin

<b>FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL</b>
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**16/11/HSC Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Holland and Councillor Baigent. Councillor Gawthrop was present as an alternate.

**16/12/HSC Declarations of Interest**

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Interest</b>
Bird	16/18/HSC	Personal: Has used the service in the past.

**16/13/HSC Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

**16/14/HSC Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

## **16/15/HSC Replacement of St. Matthew's Street Garages**

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative).

### **Matter for Decision**

The report described a deteriorating problem with an underused and increasingly vandalised two storey garage block, comprising 82 separate units, at St. Matthew's Street in Petersfield ward. The report summarised existing problems at the site and included alternative options and a recommendation for demolition and replacement with a reduced number (38) of new ground floor garages which could be delivered within the budget available.

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

- i. Approved the proposals, as described in section 3.8.5 – 3.8.7 of the Officer's report to:
  - a) demolish the existing two storey garage structure and,
  - b) provide 38 new pre-cast concrete garages on the same site area;
- ii. Agreed to review, if necessary, the decision to erect new garages (2.1 (b) above) on the cleared site should the final provisions of the 2015/16 Housing and Planning Bill, prove onerous, in respect of payments for "disposal of high value property". In such circumstances, options for disposal, rather than the planned retention of garage site, may have to be re-considered.

### **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 regarding garages in St Matthews Street.

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

- i. Sought clarification regarding the cost of demolition and raised concerns regarding possible asbestos contamination.

- ii. Expressed surprise regarding recommendation 2.2, as this committee had previously expressed the view that it was opposed to any sale of Housing Revenue land.
- iii. Suggested that options to develop the site in partnership with a developer should be explored. Cross subsidy might allow this site to generate housing or profit.
- iv. Suggested that the report was addressing two unrelated issues; the problematic garages and the unknown impact of a future levy on high value assets.
- v. Stated that any sale of assets would be regrettable but losing this land would be preferable to selling housing stock.
- vi. Stated that there were currently no funds to build new council houses on this site or other sites.

In response to Members' questions the Head of Estates & Facilities said the following:

- i. Any asbestos contamination would be address when the buildings were demolished.
- ii. Demolition of the run down garages would increase the potential sale value of the land.

The Executive Councillor for Housing stated that this site should not be confused with other, mixed use, redevelopment of garage sites. Recommendation 2.2 was an acknowledgement of the fact that the impact of any future levy, which might be imposed retrospectively, was currently unknown. At present there was a lack of funds for development and considering this site as an option toward payment of a levy was a sensible approach. Loss of an underused garage site was preferable to any loss of housing stock.

The Director of Customer and Community Services stated that it was expected that there would be greater clarity about the levy after the June Housing Bill.

The Committee **resolved** by 11 votes to 0 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.

## **16/16/HSC Tenant & Leaseholder Survey & Focus Groups Results**

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative).

### **Matter for Decision**

As housing services continue to adapt to changes, it will become increasingly important to have effective methods for gathering feedback and making sure that services are making best use of available resources.

Recent satisfaction surveys and follow-up focus groups had proved an effective method for gathering customer satisfaction data – the results of which (appendix A of the Officer's reports) had been developed into an Action Plan (appendix B of the Officer's report).

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

- i. Agreed the Action Plan (appendix B of the Officer's report)
- ii. Agreed the suggested methodology for gathering ongoing customer feedback from tenants and leaseholders

### **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 regarding recent satisfaction surveys.

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

- i. Welcomed the very thorough and professional report.
- ii. Expressed concerns about the future need to prioritise actions as the funding shrinks. How would priorities be agreed?
- iii. Suggested that support services could be under threat at a time when welfare reforms began to impact on tenants.
- iv. Expressed concerns about communication problems experienced by leaseholders. Factual communications regarding repairs and contractors often contained error.

- v. Leaseholders had expressed concerns about a lack of consultation prior to expensive repairs.
- vi. The timing of communications was questioned and it was suggested that information was not shared in a timely fashion. It could be too early to be relevant or too late for proper consultation.

In response to Members' questions the Director of Customer and Community Services stated that:

- i. Initiatives were already in place to improving the tenants and leaseholders experience of the housing service and this would not necessarily increase costs. The action plan was achievable.
- ii. A follow up report later in the year would look at future priorities once more information was available from central government.

In response to Members' questions the Resident Involvement Facilitator acknowledged that response rates in some areas of the survey were low. He outlined the approach now taken to gathering information. On alternate years a survey was carried out and in the intervening year, more targeted work was undertaken. This might include in depth work with hard to reach groups or work targeting new tenants.

The Executive Councillor for Housing stated that in the past leaseholders had enjoyed services that had not been re-charged to them. The Council was duty bound to recover expenditure on leaseholder properties. Such matters were addressed on a case by case basis.

The Committee unanimously **resolved** to endorse the recommendations.

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.

### **Notice of Key Decision Not Included on the Forward Plan**

The Chair ruled that the following key decision be considered despite not being included on the Forward Plan published on 1 December 2013. It was impractical to defer the decision to allow for its inclusion in the next Forward Plan.

## **16/17/HSC The Housing Market in Greater Cambridge**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

### **Matter for Decision**

- i. Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire district together represented the important economic hub of Greater Cambridge. Housing was an essential contributor to supporting economic growth and the paper showed why this must include a mix of tenures including affordable housing and housing for social rent. The key characteristics of the housing market in Greater Cambridge and the impact of Government legislation were examined using local data and national studies. This supported the asks to Government in the final section of the paper. These asks would enable the City Council to continue to develop housing that is affordable to rent and buy across a range of tenures. This includes new council housing, to address a growing need as access to housing in the Greater Cambridge area moves rapidly out of the reach of many households.
- ii. At the time of writing the paper legislation affecting housing was going through the final stages of the parliamentary process, namely the Welfare Reform and Work Bill and the Housing and Planning Bill. The details of how aspects of the Housing and Planning Bill would work in practice had yet to be finalised. The terms of a potential devolution deal were also under discussion. The asks in this paper contributed to making the case for a better housing deal for Cambridge in our ongoing discussions with Government about the impact of legislation and devolution.

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

- i. Agreed to adopt the statement as a summary of the Cambridge Housing Market and the impact of impending legislation.
- ii. Agreed the asks in paragraph 3.5 as the foundations for negotiation with Government

### **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 Director of Customer and Community Services regarding the Housing Market in Greater Cambridgeshire.

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

- i. Suggested that Cambridge was becoming less viable and increasingly unhealthy.
- ii. Highlighted the work around Healthy Cities.
- iii. Suggested that this report was unlikely to achieve its desired result but agreed that it was worthwhile.
- iv. Suggested that some concessions had been made to the original proposals. For example, pay to stay taper rates had been agreed.

The Director of Customer and Community Services stated that the legislation was currently broad brush stroke and that there might be an opportunity to influence the details.

The Executive Councillor for Housing confirmed that he would continue to put pressure on central government and would endeavour to exert influence with the Housing Minister where possible.

The Committee unanimously **resolved** to endorse the recommendations.

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.

### **16/18/HSC Cambs Home Improvement Agency Fees**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

### **Matter for Decision**

The report requested approval to increase fees charged by Cambs Home Improvement Agency (HIA) with additional income used to fund additional technical capacity required in respect of changing health and safety requirements.

**Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved that fees charged by Cambs HIA to project manage Disabled Facilities Grant and Repair Assistance funded adaptations and repairs increase from 10% to 12% of the cost of the works.

**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 regarding the HIA fees.

The Committee expressed support for the service which was valued by users.

The Committee unanimously resolved 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.

**16/19/HSC Record of Urgent Decision taken by the Executive Councillor for Housing**

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

**9a** Approval to lease the HRA property known as The Engineer's House to the Cambridge Museum of Technology

The decision was noted.

**Thanks for Long Service**

The Chair, Councillor Todd-Jones, informed the Committee that this would be last meeting attended by Robert Hollingsworth, who was retiring, and Liz Bisset and Alan Carter who were moving in to new roles. He thanked them for

their support over the years and said that their experience and expertise would be missed.

He also thanked the tenant representatives, Caroline Orikot and Terry Sweeney who were not seeking re-election, for their work on behalf of Tenant and Leaseholders.

Members of the Committee voiced their support for sentiments expressed by the Chair. Terry Sweeney was said to have been the 'voice of the tenant' for many years and would be missed.

The meeting ended at 6.55 pm

**CHAIR**