

# Public Document Pack

Housing Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 21 September 2017

## HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 September 2017

5.30 - 7.55 pm

**Present:** Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Baigent, Cantrill, Gawthrop, Holland, Page-Croft, Sheil and Abbott

Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Price

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

### **Officers:**

Strategic Director: Suzanne Hemingway

Trainee Housing Development Officer: Amelia Norman

Housing Development Officer: Mark Wilson

Environmental Health Manager – Commercial: Yvonne O'Donnell

Head of Estates & Facilities: Trevor Burdon

Business Manager & Principal Accountant (Shared Housing Finance Team):  
Julia Hovells

Environmental Health Officer: Claire Adelizzi

Head of Housing: Anita Goddard

Committee Manager: Toni Birkin

## **FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**

### **Change to Published Agenda Order**

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.

### **17/35/HSC Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Bird. Councillor Abbott was present as the alternate.

Councillor Holland left before the vote on item 17/40/HSC

### **Fire Safety Update**

The Head of Estates and Facilities assured the Committee that suggested upgrades and improvements to Fire Safety Equipment in residential units was on-going as part of this year's programme of works.

He undertook to investigate a report that that a resident had been left without working smoke detector for three weeks.

### **Thanks for Long Service**

The Chair requested that the Committees thanks be noted to the following long serving members of staff who were retiring from the Council: Liz Bisset, Alan Carter, Andrew Latchem and Trevor Burdon.

### **17/36/HSC Declarations of Interest**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Interest</b>
Councillor Cantrill	All	Personal: Is a Trustee of Wintercomfort
Councillor Baigent	17/44/HSC	Personal: Is a landlord. Did not take part in the vote on this matter.

### **17/37/HSC Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2017 were approved and signed as a correct record.

### **17/38/HSC Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

### **17/39/HSC Record of Urgent Decision taken by the Executive Councillor for Housing.**

#### **5a Shared Ownership Model Lease**

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

The Committee noted the decision.

The Committee made the following comments regarding the report:

- i. Welcomed the model lease.
- ii. Questioned what sort of lease tenants taking up the right to buy option were given.

The Business Manager and Principal Accountant confirmed that the Legal department were reviewing leases for some sites and that this could be rolled out to future leaseholders. There were currently eight different types of leases in use and these were last reviewed five years ago. Reviewing them again would be expensive and time consuming.

## **17/40/HSC Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy**

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

### **Matter for Decision**

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Strategy provided 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**

- i. (Recommendation 2.1) Approved the Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy, to include all proposals for change in:
  - Financial assumptions as detailed in Appendix B of the Officer's report.
  - 2017/18 revenue budgets as introduced in Section 5 of the Officer's report, resulting from changes in financial assumptions and the financial consequences of change, as introduced in Section 5, detailed in Appendix D of the Officer's report and summarised in Appendix G of the Officer's report.
  - The revised Rent Setting Policy as detailed in Appendix L of the Officer's report.
- ii. (Recommendation 2.2) Approved 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 of the document, for decision at Council on 19th October 2017.

**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 and Principal Accountant.

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

- i. Suggested that the coming year would be challenging for tenants.
- ii. Stated that members of the public did not understand the terms such as Local Housing Allowance levels or Social Rents or Affordable Rents.
- iii. Improved media messages would allow people to understand the constraints on new homes delivery.
- iv. Questioned why such high reserves were being retained.
- v. Councillor Cantrill welcomed the strategic approach but questioned the ability to deliver the 500 new homes target. He suggested that reserves should be used to address current issues and to deliver 300 homes in addition to the 200 that were already in the pipeline.

The Strategic Director stated that the timeframe set by Government for the delivery of the 500 homes required that work be started on site within 5 years rather than 500 new homes completed. The current programme included a number of small sites. Larger sites were in the pipeline and detailed reports would follow regarding future projects. She confirmed that the Combined Authority would hold the City to account for the delivery of new homes.

The Business Manager and Principal Accountant said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Stated that a budget was in place to buy new homes on the open market, in the short term, should Right to Buy receipts be in danger of being lost due to delays in using them.
- ii. Confirmed that some units of shared ownership had proved difficult to sell due to the price and the lack of parking. The units would be revalued with the options of repricing or conversion to rented accommodation under consideration.

- iii. The move out of the South Area Office had resulted in savings. However, as no suitable sub-let had been agreed, the savings were less than those predicted.
- iv. Confirmed that reserves were always maintained at a three million pounds minimum contingency fund. However, levels were currently higher than expected due to retention of Right to Buy receipts. Delays in the hand-over of new build properties also increased reserves as final payment had not been released on the intended dates.

The Strategic Director and the Business Manager and Principal Accountant made the following comments in response to Councillor Cantrill's suggestion that the depot site on Mill Road could be delivered as 100% affordable housing:

- i. The identified housing need was for one bed properties and building them all in one place would not produce a mixed or balanced community.
- ii. Other development had been required to offer a mix of housing tenures and failure to do so on this site would be hard to defend.
- iii. The site was a general fund asset the Council had a duty to secure the best value for such assets. This would impact on any future decisions.

The Committee asked for more information regarding Council owned garages, such as: who was currently using them, how many were empty and how many were too small to accommodate modern cars. The Strategic Director undertook to produce a briefing note on council garage stock.

The Committee resolved by 10 votes to 0 with 2 abstentions to endorse the recommendation 2.1 (i) in the Officer's report.

The Committee resolved by 5 votes to 0 with 2 abstentions to endorse the recommendation 2.2 (ii) in the Officer's report.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

### **17/41/HSC New Social Housing on Housing Revenue Account Infill Site at Wulfstan Way**

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

### **Matter for Decision**

This report provided details of the indicative capacity study to develop the vacant land to the rear of 53 and 55 Wulfstan Way to provide up to 6 new homes. The site was to be brought forward in the Council's social housing programme, to be included in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and was recommended to be delivered through Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP).

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

- i. Noted the indicative mix of the proposed scheme
- ii. Approved the capital budget of £819,500 for site option 1, detailed in the report to cover construction costs, professional fees and on costs to deliver a scheme that meets identified needs of the City.
- iii. Approved that delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director to enable the site to be developed through Cambridge Investment Partnership.

### **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 Trainee Housing Development Officer.

The Trainee Housing Development Officer said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The land agreements were being finalised and discussions were ongoing with residents.
- ii. In response to questions from the committee further investigation into right of way and access issues would be undertaken.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

### **17/42/HSC New Social Housing on Housing Revenue Account Infill Site at Colville Road Garages**

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

**Matter for Decision**

The report requested that the site was 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 programme.

The report requested approval for a capital budget for the HRA in relation to the site at Colville Road Garages.

**Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Noted the indicative mix of the scheme.
- ii. Approved the scheme capital budget of £692,987 detailed in the report to cover the construction cost of a scheme, professional fees and other costs to deliver a scheme that meets the identified needs in the City.
- iii. Approved that delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director to enable the site to be developed through Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP).

**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 Development Officer.

The Business Manager and Financial Accountant confirmed that standard procurement rules would apply and should the spend exceed the budget by 15% or more, it would be brought back to committee for further approval.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

**17/43/HSC The Homelessness Reduction Act - Service Implementation**

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

**Matter for Decision**

The report provided an overview on the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The report also outlined the following:

- The financial support available to local authorities to support the wider statutory responsibilities created by the Act
- The anticipated additional resource requirements for the Housing Advice Service and the rationale for assessing these
- New initiatives that the Council has, or is proposing to, put in place to support its new range of statutory responsibilities
- The Homelessness prevention grants programme for 2018-19

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

- i. Noted the new provisions within the Homelessness Reduction Act and, in particular, the extended range of statutory homelessness duties the Council is obliged to perform under the new Act.
- ii. Agreed, subject to any changes that may be made as part of the budget setting process and the formal adoption of the 2018/19 budget by Council, to support a budget bid for additional staffing resources as set out in paragraphs 3.19 to 3.23 of the Officer's report.
- iii. Approved the proposals outlined in this report for expenditure from the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant as outlined in paragraph 3.23 and that any funds carried forward from this grant can be allocated under delegated authority to the Head of Revenues and Benefits, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing.
- iv. Approved, subject to any changes that may be made as part of the budget setting process and the formal adoption of the 2018/19 budget by Council, the proposed homelessness prevention grant funding allocations as outlined in appendix 3 of the Officer's report and agreed to delegate authority for decisions around spending the unallocated funds of £14,358 to the Head of Revenues and Benefits in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing.
- v. Delegated authority to the Head of Revenues and Benefits, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing, to determine expenditure from the Government's 'new burdens' funding allocation to this local authority, once received later in the autumn.



**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. Sought clarification regarding the position of existing service users.
- ii. Suggested that the six month safety net was not long enough and would result in a revolving door of repeat applications.

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

- i. Those already in the system could continue under existing rules or choose to withdraw and re-apply under the new system.
- ii. The provisions required applicants to engage with the service.
- iii. Applicants were not limited regarding the number of times they could apply but circumstances must have changed.
- iv. There would be many partnership options for discharging the duty to assist.
- v. Intentionality was not an issue in the initial stages of the process. The pilot scheme had found that the higher levels of support available had resulted in a much lower levels of finding of intentionality.
- vi. A bid had been submitted to the General Fund for additional staffing costs to cover six additional posts.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

**17/44/HSC Fee Structure for Fixed Penalty Notices for Housing Act 2004 Offences**

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

**Matter for Decision**

In April of this year The Housing Act 2004 was amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016. The 2016 Act introduced a range of measures to crack down on rogue landlords including the introduction of civil penalties of up to £30,000 as an alternative to prosecution for certain specified offences.

In serving a Civil Penalty Notice under these amendments the Council must decide a charge on a case by case basis rather than having a fixed fee. Cambridge intends to address this in the same method as other local authorities by creating a charging matrix.

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

- i. Approved the charge levels for the enforcement of Civil Penalty notices for relevant Housing Act 2004 offences as set out in 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 Environmental Health Officer.

The Environmental Health Officer said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Standard Civil Penalty recovery notices would be used to pursue payment defaults.
- ii. Confirmed that an initial investigation would establish who was responsible for the property. In the case of an absent landlord, this could be a management agency. Action would be taken against that person or agency.
- iii. The policy would be reviewed annually to monitor its impact.
- iv. The use of any income raised would be restricted to further enforcement work.
- v. Sub-letting leaseholders would be subject to the same regulations.

The Head of Environmental Health confirmed that further regulation on this matter was expected some-time next year. This could result in a further review of staffing levels expected as some point next year.

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 0 to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

### **17/45/HSC Proposed Changes to the Residential Team Structure within Environmental Health**

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

#### **Matter for Decision**

Approval was sought for the cessation of the Property Accreditation Scheme including the deletion of the current employment post of Property Accreditation Officer.

Due to a number of factors the effectiveness and value of the Property Accreditation Scheme had greatly reduced therefore a shift of staffing resource was proposed from this non-statutory scheme over to maintained enforcement within the Residential Team with the aim of ensuring continual improvement of standards within the Private Rented housing.

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

- i. Approved the cessation of the Property Accreditation Scheme including the deletion of the current employment post of Property Accreditation Officer.
- ii. Approved increased enforcement activity facilitating further improvements within the private rented sector

#### **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 Environmental Health Officer.

The Committee expressed support for the proposal.

The Committee resolved by 5 votes to 0 and 2 abstentions to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

## **17/46/HSC Conversion Of Kingsway Clinic Into Units Of Social Housing**

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

### **Matter for Decision**

A clinic had been provided on the ground floor at Kingsway Flats in Arbury since 1965. The current tenants, the NHS, were vacating the premises at the end October 2017. A current lack of demand for this type of property, combined with the poor layout and condition of the clinic and the re-provision of these NHS services elsewhere, made it unlikely that a new tenant would be found.

A team of architects were commissioned to carry out a feasibility study to investigate the possibility of converting the clinic into further units of accommodation to let for general needs purposes and provide the estimated costs of carrying out the work.

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

Agreed that the Kingsway Clinic to be converted into 2, 1-bed and 2, 2-bed flats for use as general needs housing, funding the works, estimated to be approximately £477,000, from the existing budget ear-marked for acquisition or new build housing using retained right to buy receipts.

### **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 and Principal Accountant.

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

- i. Sought clarification regarding rent levels.
- ii. Questioned how the final option had been selected.
- iii. Expressed regret that none of the properties offered disabled access.

The Business Manager and Principal Accountant stated the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Confirmed that option 2 (2, 1-Bed and 2, 2-bed) had been selected as the conversion costs were similar for all options but the returns would be higher for this configuration.
- ii. The properties would be offered at affordable rent levels and would be set at Local Housing Allowance level including service charges.
- iii. Confirmed that there was an expectation that Right to Buy receipts would be used to fund properties to be let at affordable rent levels rather than social rent levels.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

The meeting ended at 7.55 pm

**CHAIR**

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