

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 January 2018

5.30 - 8.55 pm

Present:

Scrutiny Committee Members: Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Bird (Vice-Chair), Baigent, Cantrill, Gawthrope, Holland, Sheil, Agate, Best, Harris, Marais, Minns, Powell-Hardy and Price (Executive Councillor)

Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Price

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

Officers:

Strategic Director: Suzanne Hemmingway

Strategic Director: Fiona Bryant

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

Interim Head of Housing Development Agency: Cath Conlon

Growth Projects Officer (Community & Culture): Julian Adams

Empty Homes Officer: Danae Evans

Project Officer (Private Rented Sector): Philip Winter

Committee Manager: Toni Birkin

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**18/1/HSC Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Page-Croft.

18/2/HSC Declarations of Interest**18/3/HSC Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the 21 September 2017 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

18/4/HSC Public Questions

None

18/5/HSC Record of Urgent Decisions taken by the Executive Councillor for Housing

5a Ditchburn Place

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:

Councillor Holland requested a review of this decision. In view of the collapse of Carillion, an in house service provision might be a better option.

Diana Minns expressed disappointment that the decision had been taken out of cycle and that the Committee had not been able to fully debate the issues raised.

The Strategic Director (Suzanne Hemmingway) stated that the timeframes for making the decision had been dictated by the County Council. The non-tender decision had been based on cost. The City Council could not deliver within the allowed budget.

Councillor Cantrill asked if subsidising the services from City funds had been considered.

The Strategic Director confirmed that it would not be possible to subsidise the service from Housing Revenue Account funds.

The Executive Councillor expressed concerns about the City subsidising County Council functions. However, was happy to look again at this decision and would raise the Committees concerns with the County Council.

5b Housing Related Support for Older People

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

The Committee noted the decision.

18/6/HSC Repairs Standards and Recharging

This item was deferred to a later meeting.

18/7/HSC HRA Garages Charging Review

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

Matter for Decision

The Housing Revenue Account managed a portfolio of 1,652 garages and 43 parking spaces, which were let as separate tenancies on a weekly rental basis to a variety of customers, including council housing tenants, leaseholders, and other residents of the city, charities, business and commuters.

The current complex variable charging structure for garages had been in place since a whole scale review of garages in 2013/14. It was now considered timely to review and simplify the process, particularly in light of new garages and parking spaces available as part of the new build programme and in preparation for the intended replacement of the existing Housing Management Information System.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the garage and parking space charging structure as outlined in Appendix A of the Officer's report.
- ii. Approved delegated authority to the Strategic Director to designate an area of garages or parking spaces as being in a high value or high demand area, and therefore attracting the higher rental charge.

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, Shared Housing Finance Team.

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

- i. Questioned the even-handedness of charging some tenants more for their garages based on their addresses.
- ii. Questioned why tenant representatives had not been involved in the review and requested better engagement in the future.

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

- i. Confirmed that if renting a garage or parking space was a condition of the tenancy, then those charges would be eligible for housing benefit.
- ii. Confirmed that where tenants were facing an increase in garage costs, these could be phased in over a 5 year period.
- iii. Garages in high value areas would not be classed as high value assets.
- iv. Confirmed that sensible decisions would be made regarding future development where the boundary between high and low garage rents crossed the site.
- v. Housing officers were responsible for marketing garage and discussed options with potential tenants on site visits.
- vi. Potential tenants were never forced to take a property with a garage which incurred a cost and was unwanted.

The Committee resolved by 9 votes to 2 and one abstention to endorse the 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.

18/8/HSC Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Setting Report 2018/19 to 2022/23

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

Matter for Decision

The Housing Revenue Account Budget-Setting Report provided an overview of the review of the key assumptions. It set out the key parameters for the detailed recommendations and final budget proposals, and is the basis for the finalisation of the 2018/19 budgets.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor for Housing took a view on a key decision which materially differed to that of the Housing Scrutiny Committee. Under 2.5 of Part 4D Executive Procedure Rules of the Council's Constitution, the matter was referred to the Leader of the Council for decision.

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, Shared Housing Finance Team. The Committee noted the updated Equality Impact Assessment.

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

- i. Sought clarification regarding additional funding required for work at Ditchburn Place and questioned why the original bid had not covered all phases of the required upgrade work.
- ii. Welcomed the provision of an Estate Champion van.
- iii. Asked when the Transformation of the Housing Service would be reviewed and what level of tenant involvement could be expected.
- iv. Suggested that additional funding would be needed to address the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit.
- v. Sought clarification on leaseholder charging.
- vi. Requested further details on the housing register regarding what the number of household on the list translated to in numbers of people waiting to for housing. (The Principal Accountant undertook to provide this information outside the meeting).

Councillor Price stated that the phase one of the Ditchburn Place refurbishment had been agreed under a Liberal Democrat administration.

Councillor Cantrill objected to the response and requested that the minutes record that he had been seeking a value for money answer. It had not been his intention to make a political statement.

Councillor Cantrill introduced the Liberal Democrat Alternative Budget.

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

- i. John Marias expressed support for the proposals.

- ii. Kay Harris stated that the ROAM group supported the proposal to recharge repairs requested for works that were tenant responsibility as the costs involved were significant.
- iii. Suggested that the funding for communal areas should be shared across all tenures as council only estates were a thing of the past.

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

- i. Confirmed that the proposed amendment to rents for larger new built properties would bring them into line with existing social rent tenants at target rent.
- ii. New tenants would not be in a more advantageous position than existing tenants in a comparable sized property.
- iii. In response to question on the impact on the 30 year business plan, she stated that the rent reduction would equate to approximately the cost of one new property a year.
- iv. The additional funding for communal areas would be a single sum, spread across, two-years of capital expenditure. Savings would need to be made elsewhere in order to fund the work.

Councillor Price stated that the number of council housing units was now half what it was in 1989. Any reduction in the new build programme would impact on those on the waiting list.

Reducing rent for larger properties would be unfair as families come in all sizes and occupy a variety of properties. Children often shared bedrooms making property size a poor indicator of family size.

The Strategic Director (Suzanne Hemingway) stated that provisions had been planned to address potential problems caused by Universal Credit. A budget proposal for a general fund provision to support all Cambridge residents impacted by the introduction of UC would be considered by Strategy and Resources Committee. Advice and support was currently provided in partnership with other agencies. The full impact of Universal Credit could be some years away.

Councillor Cantrill summed up the alternative budget and suggested that the housing market in Cambridge was broken. In response to comments from the tenant representative he proposed expanding the protection from repair recharges could be expanded to all older or vulnerable tenants.

The following votes was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair /Tenant Representative)

Resolved (**by 6 votes to 5**) to vote on the Liberal Democrat alternative budget point by point where they differed from the substantive recommendations.

The Liberal Democrat alternative budget:

(bii) (**7 votes in favour to 5 against**). The amendment was carried.

(K) (**7 votes in favour to 5 against**). The amendment was carried.

(L) (**7 votes in favour to 5 against**). The amendment was carried.

The Committee adjourned for 10 minutes.

The Strategic Director, (Suzanne Hemingway) confirmed that revenue bid agreed above could stand with or without the linked capital budget. If the Executive Councillor decided not to endorse the recommendations, the decision would be passed to the Leader for decision.

The following votes were chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

The Liberal Democrat alternative budget:

(N) (**2 votes in favour to 5 against**). The amendment was lost.

(S) (**2 votes in favour to 5 against**). The amendment was lost.

The following vote was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair /Tenant Representative)

Resolved (**8 votes to 1 and 4 abstentions**) to endorse the recommendations A to L, as amended, of the budget proposals.

The following votes were chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Resolved (**5 votes to 0 and 2 abstentions**) to endorse the original report recommendations M to V of the budget proposals.

The Executive Councillor could not agree the recommendations. Therefore, under 2.5 of Part 4D Executive Procedure Rules of the Council's Constitution, all recommendations agreed by the Scrutiny Committee would be submitted to the Leader of the Council for determination.

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

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

18/9/HSC Housing Portfolio Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals for 2018/19 to 2022/23

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report detailed the budget proposals relating to this portfolio that were included in the Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2018/19 which would be considered at the following meetings:

Date	Committee	Comment
22 January 2018	Strategy & Resources	Consider proposals / recommendations from all Scrutiny Committees in relation to their portfolios
25 January 2018	The Executive	Budget amendment may be presented
12 February 2018	Strategy & Resources	Consider any further amendments including opposition proposals
22 February 2018	Council	Approves General Fund Budget and sets Council Tax

The report also included a recommendation concerning the review of charges for this portfolio.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

Review of Charges:

- i. Approved the proposed charges for this portfolio's services and facilities, as shown in Appendix A to the Officer's report.

Revenue:

- ii. Noted the revenue budget proposals as shown in Appendix B of the Officer's report.

Capital:

- i. Noted that there were no capital bids or savings presented for this portfolio.

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, Shared Housing Finance Team.

Diana Minns suggested that consultation methods should be reviewed and improved as current response rates, from families in particular, were very low.

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

18/10/HSC New Social Housing on Markham Close Garage Site

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report provided details of the indicative capacity of the site at 1-12 Garages, Markham Close. Originally highlighted on the Development Rolling Programme (updated HSC June 2017) it was estimated that the site had the potential to deliver 2 affordable homes. Following a more detailed inspection this had now been revised to 4 No. 1 bedroom flats.

The report sought approval of a capital budget for the HRA based on the indicative capacity study which had been undertaken for the site and the outline appraisals referenced in the report.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the indicative mix of the proposed scheme
- ii. Approved the indicative capital budget of £855,190 to cover all construction costs, professional fees and associated fees to deliver a scheme that meets an identified housing need in Cambridge City. This sum had been allocated in the most recent publication of the Budget Setting Report (January 2018).
- iii. Approved that the site is offered to Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP) to progress for development to deliver a scheme which will meet the strategic aims of the Council in the delivery of new social housing. The scheme will be developed in accordance with the CIP process which had been approved at Strategy & Resources Committee on 9th October 2017.
- iv. Noted that the Executive Councillor had a delegated authority to approve the transfer of land to CIP for the redevelopment of the site at a later date. This would be subject to CIP demonstrating that its development proposal meets the Council's strategic aims for the site and the development and delivery milestones are in accordance with the CIP Approvals Process agreed at S&R Committee on 9th 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 Interim Head of Housing Development Agency. The Committee noted that the site was in King's Hedges Ward and not Queen Edith's as stated in the report.

The Interim Head of Housing Development Agency said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The numbers of properties that could be accommodated on the site was constrained by neighbouring properties and a restricted access route.
- ii. The Planning Department and County Council Highways Department had not expressed any concerns about the proposals.

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.

18/11/HSC New Social Housing on Gunhild Way Garage Site

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report provided details of the indicative capacity of the site at 1-12 Garages, Gunhild Way. Originally highlighted on the Development Rolling Programme (updated HSC June 2017) it was estimated that this site has the potential to deliver 2 new family homes.

The report sought approval of a capital budget for the HRA based on the indicative capacity study which has been undertaken for the site and the outline appraisals referenced in the report.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the indicative mix of the proposed scheme.
- ii. Approved the indicative capital budget of £585,720 to cover all construction costs, professional fees and associated fees to deliver a scheme that meets an identified housing need in Cambridge City. This sum had been allocated in the most recent publication of the Budget Setting Report (January 2018).
- iii. Approved that the site is offered to Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP) to progress for development to deliver a scheme which will meet the strategic aims of the Council in the delivery of new social housing.

The scheme will be developed in accordance with the CIP process which was approved at Strategy and Resources Committee on 9th October 2017.

- iv. Noted that the Executive Councillor had a delegated authority to approve the transfer of land to CIP for the redevelopment of the site at a later date. This would be subject to CIP demonstrating that its development proposal meets the Council's strategic aims for the site and the development and delivery milestones are in accordance with the CIP Approvals Process agreed at S&R Committee on 9th 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 Interim Head of Housing Development Agency.

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

- i. Questioned how the properties being delivered matched the current needs of those on the Housing Register.
- ii. Discussion of points to be raised in the response to CIP: it's not for profit status, how it was monitored for value for money and how it was funded.

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

- i. Clarified the position regarding disabled adapted properties. These would be delivered by the development programme but would not be available on every small scale development.
- ii. Stated that lessons learnt from concerns raised about security of mailboxes on other sites would be incorporated into the design process.
- iii. A design guide was in place for projects and an expert in "Secure by Design" would review plans.

The Executive Councillor stated that in house staff had delivered new build properties to a high standard. However, the team lacked the capacity to deliver all small scale project.

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.

18/12/HSC Community-Led Housing

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

- i. The award of grant by the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) Community Housing Fund to local authorities to promote community-led housing, has led to a new initiative being proposed by South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council. It was designed to help community groups deliver housing schemes on land identified by the community; help make sure designs are right for the local area and meet the needs of people in need of affordable housing.
- ii. The scheme would allow interested groups each to bid for up to £4,500 to scope a project in their area as well as explore and develop capacity to take approved schemes forward.
- iii. This report sought delegated authority for awarding grants to such groups.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Delegated authority to a Strategic Director to award grants of up to £4,500 each to community groups, to assist them to develop proposals for community-led affordable housing through such models as Co-housing, Community Land Trusts or self-build schemes.

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 Growth Projects Officer (Community & Culture).

The Growth Projects Officer (Community & Culture) said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The Grants would be widely publicised and expressions of interest would be welcomed from many groups including: Co-operative housing Groups, Community Land Trusts and low income groups.

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.

18/13/HSC Review of the Empty Homes Policy

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The Empty Homes Policy 2012 was in need of revision following operational changes and the introduction of the Empty Homes Loan (2017).

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor approved the proposed changes and the adoption of the revised Empty Homes Policy 2017 attached as 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 Empty Homes Officer (Private Rented Sector).

The Committee noted the following correction to 10.3 bullet point 4, of the Empty Homes Policy:

~~The City Council's leasehold services if the owner wishes to sell and previously exercised their Right to Buy.~~

Is deleted and replaced with:

The City Council's leasehold services, if the owner had previously exercised their Right to Buy and wishes to sell.

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

- i. Thanked the Officers for their hard work on the project.
- ii. Welcomed the achievement to-date.

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.

18/14/HSC New Build Affordable Housing Update

This item was Chaired by Councillor Mike Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

This report provided an up-date on the sites in the Council's New Build Housing Programme – whether recently completed; under construction or being assessed in terms of feasibility and viability for development. The latter is known as the Rolling Programme.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor noted the up-dated position of schemes.

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 Strategic Director (Fiona Bryant).

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

- i. Sought clarification regarding the status of funding if projects were suspended.
- ii. Sought clarity on staffing structures and the differing roles of the two Strategic Directors.

The Strategic Director said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Clarified the term windfall sites as being sites not currently in council ownership which could be brought forward for development in partnership with other parties.
- ii. Confirmed that scheme proposals moved on an off the list. Funding for suspended schemes was retained in the central pot.

The Committee and the Executive Councillor noted the report.

18/15/HSC Decision notice

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm

CHAIR