

**HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

12 March 2019

5.30 - 7.45 pm

**Present:**

**Scrutiny Committee Members:** Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Bird (Vice-Chair), Massey, McGerty, Payne, Sheil and Thittala

**Executive Councillor for Housing:** Councillor Johnson

**Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives:** Diane Best, Lulu Agate, Kay Harris, Diana Minns, Christabella Amiteye and Jean-Louis Ayivor

**Officers:**

Strategic Director: Suzanne Hemingway

Strategic Director: Fiona Bryant

Head of Housing: David Greening

Head of Housing Strategy: Helen Reed

Head of Housing Development Agency: Claire Flowers

Resident Engagement Officer: Emily Watts

Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets: Lynn Thomas

Committee Manager: Toni Birkin

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL****19/13/HSC Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Cantrill

**19/14/HSC Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

**19/15/HSC Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

**19/16/HSC Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

### **19/17/HSC Advance Information of Urgent Decision**

The Strategic Director (SH) informed the Committee of an urgent decision that needed to be made shortly. Full details had not been available in time for this Committee and therefore, an out of cycle decision would be needed in the next few weeks. An audit of electrical testing had revealed a number of properties with out of date testing certificates and an additional budgetary allocation would be needed to address the issue.

### **19/18/HSC Estate Improvement Programme**

This item was Chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair)

#### **Matter for Decision**

As part of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) medium-term financial strategy (MTFS), Housing Scrutiny Committee approved £1 million per annum for 5 years of capital funding for estate improvements. These funds are available from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019. An additional revenue resource of £100,000 had been ear-marked in 2019/20 to allow for any revenue investment required to support the programme. The report introduced members and tenant and leaseholder representatives to the approaches officers were taking to deliver those improvements.

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

- i. Endorsed the approach taken by officers to establish the Estates Improvement Scheme (EIS) as outlined in the report.
- ii. Agreed that officers would produce a written annual member briefing, outlining the progress made under this programme, to be sent to all members by email at each financial year end for the lifetime of the programme.

#### **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 Housing.

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

- i. The estate walkabouts had been welcomed by residents.
- ii. Councillor Massey suggested Councillors could promote future walkabouts.
- iii. Stated that information to leaseholders needs to be very clear regarding any future maintenance cost of improvements.
- iv. Suggested that hoardings could be used to inform the public when improvement work was being undertaken.
- v. Expressed the hope that improvement work would look at designing out crime.
- vi. Suggested that some works, such as street lights work, might have been delayed in order to transfer the work to the improvements budget.

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

- i. Priorities in the improvement programme would be shaped by safety issues and business decisions. Where possible the improvement work would be completed alongside any planned maintenance work.
- ii. Walkabouts would be advertised in Open Door.
- iii. The service took a holistic approach regarding its community responsibility. Estate improvements should not result in anti-social behaviour being relocated to other areas.

Councillors asked if there was an easy way to identify which street lights belonged to the City Council and which were the responsibility of the County Council. Lynn Thomas (Head of Maintenance and Asset Management) undertook to investigate this matter.

The Committee resolved by 11 votes to 0 to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

### **19/19/HSC Resident Engagement Review**

This item was Chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair)

#### **Matter for Decision**

- i. In March 2017 Housing Scrutiny Committee approved a Resident Involvement Strategy 2017-20. Whilst this continues to outline the objectives of the service, there was a need to consider the engagement

activities in more detail to ensure that the opportunities for involvement on offer allow participation from a broad cross section of residents.

- II. The aim of the report was to seek approval for the implementation of the Review proposals.

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

- i. Approved the Resident Engagement Review (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 Resident Engagement Officer.

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

- i. Welcomed the report and expressed support for the range of engagement options being proposed.
- ii. Stated that the current engagement model was excellent and that successes should be celebrated.
- iii. Suggested that the Gardening Competition rules needed to be reviewed to see if there were any conflicts with the Zero Tolerance Policy regarding items on shared balconies and walkways.

The Resident Engagement Officer said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Officers and Tenant Representatives had met with other representative from other authorities to share ideas.
- ii. A digital platform was under consideration. It would be simple for tenants to use and similar to Facebook.

The Strategic Director (FB) suggested that existing digital platforms should be fully investigated before alternatives were considered.

The Committee resolved by 11 votes to 0 to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

## **19/20/HSC Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2019-2022**

This item was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones (Committee Chair)

### **Matter for Decision**

The report sought approval of a new Housing Strategy for Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils. The draft Strategy is at Appendix A of the report.

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

- I. Approved the overarching vision statement laid out in the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2019-2023 (attached as Appendix A to this report): 'Healthy, Safe, Affordable: Homes and Communities for All'.
- II. Approved the vision laid out in the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2019-2023 (attached as Appendix A to this report): 'We want Greater Cambridge to be a place where:
  - a) Everyone has access to a suitable home, and residents are able to live as healthily, safely, and independently as possible:
  - a) Everyone has access to a suitable home, and residents are able to live as healthily, safely, and independently as possible;
  - b) The housing market functions effectively, providing homes which are affordable to people on all incomes; to meet the needs of residents and support the local economy;
  - c) There is a wide and varied choice of good quality, sustainable homes of different sizes, types and tenures, including new provision of council homes, to meet the needs of a wide range of different households and age groups;
  - d) Homes are warm, energy and water efficient, with built-in resilience to climate change and fuel poverty;
  - e) Homes are affordable to live in, located in high quality sustainable environments, served by jobs and neighbourhood facilities, appropriate green space, effective and sustainable transport links and other necessary infrastructure.
  - f) People from all walks of life live in harmony, within mixed, balanced and inclusive communities; and homes and communities continue to meet the needs of residents into the future.

- g) We have strong relationships with residents, developers and partners that enable housing and services to be delivered effectively, and that support innovation where appropriate.
- III. Approved the objectives laid out in the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2019-2023 (attached as Appendix A to this report):
- a) Building the right homes in the right places that people need and can afford to live in;
  - b) Enabling people to live settled lives; and
  - c) Building strong partnerships.
- IV. Approved the priorities laid out in the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2019-2023 (attached as Appendix A to this report):
- a) Increasing the delivery of homes, including affordable housing, along with sustainable transport and infrastructure, to meet housing need;
  - b) Diversifying the housing market and accelerating delivery;
  - c) Achieving a high standard of design and quality of new homes and communities;
  - d) Improving housing conditions and making best use of existing homes;
  - e) Promoting health and wellbeing through housing;
  - f) Preventing and tackling homelessness & rough sleeping; and
  - g) Working with key partners to innovate and maximise resources.

### **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 Housing Strategy. She confirmed that as this was a joint strategy shared with South Cambs, there could be minor changes to the text at a later date as South Cambs had not yet agreed the Strategy. She assured the Committee that if the changes were anything more than minor textual changes, the report would come back to this Committee for further consideration.

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

- i. Expressed concerns that South Cambs could amend a Strategy that this Committee had already approved.

- ii. Suggested that it could be difficult to synchronise the definitions and delivery of affordable housing, shared ownership and viability assessments across the two authorities with such different land values.
- iii. Questioned why the Executive Councillor was now open to prefabricated options such as 'Pocket Homes', when the previous post holder had rejected this idea when it had been proposed as a Liberal Democrat motion to Council.

The Head of Housing Strategy and the Strategic Director (SH) stated the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The City does not have a self-build programme but does maintain a self-build register. Demand in the City was low due to land values.
- ii. The City and South Cambs were both working closely with the County Council to maintain housing support and Housing First initiatives. In the long term these offered the best value for money and the best outcomes for service users.
- iii. Agreed that a full report on homelessness initiatives and services would be brought to this Committee later in the year.
- iv. Confirmed that cross authority working was well established following work on the Local Plan and consultations were on-going regarding future priorities.
- v. Confirmed that the Combined Authority had produced a Housing Strategy last year.
- vi. Stated that it was important that the City had a robust strategy that reflected its position.
- vii. Developers would always push against viability assessments and a defensible position was needed.

Councillor Johnson stated that no decision had been made regarding Pocket Homes but confirmed that he was exploring a range of options with an open mind.

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

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

## **19/21/HSC Cambridgeshire Adaptations & Repairs Policy**

This item was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones (Committee Chair)

## **Matter for Decision**

The proposed Cambridgeshire Repairs and Adaptations Policy was aimed at helping people to live safely and independently at home. It stemmed from requirements for housing, health and social care services to work more closely together to enable people to manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.

It would replace Cambridge City Council's current Grants & Loans Policy. It proposes four categories of financial assistance for eligible residents, together with the option to fund additional partnership projects or other services to meet the objectives of the policy.

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

- i. Approved the draft Adaptations & Repairs Policy shown at Appendix A of the report; and
- ii. Delegated authority to the Strategic Director to make decisions - in consultation with the Executive Councillor, Chair & Vice Chair of Housing Scrutiny Committee, and Housing Opposition Spokesperson - around whether to convert capital Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) to revenue, should the DFG grant conditions allow; to fund partnership projects or other services to meet the objectives of the draft Adaptations & Repairs Policy shown at Appendix A of the 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 Housing Strategy Manager.

The Committee welcomed the report.

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

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

## **19/22/HSC Update on the Programme to Build New Council Homes Funded Through the Combined Authority**



This item was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones (Committee Chair)

### **Matter for Decision**

The report provided an update on the programme to deliver 500 Council homes with funding from the Combined Authority.

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

- i. Noted the continued progress on the delivery of the Combined Authority programme.
- ii. Noted the funding structure for the Combined Authority programme.

### **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 Housing Development Agency.

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

- i. Confirmed that the number of fully adapted properties to be delivered exceeds the initial targets. The remaining properties in the programme would be built to lifetime's homes standards and would be adapted at a future date to suit the occupant's needs.
- ii. Hill was a respected and trusted delivery partner who shared the council's high standards.
- iii. The majority of the properties in the pipeline would be 1 and 2 bedroom units as this had previously been identified as the type of properties in highest demand. Larger properties could be delivered on some schemes subject to evidence of demand.

Councillor McGerty questioned why the small site on the corner of Hill's Avenue had not been included in the programme. Office's confirmed that the estimated development cost per unit cost was too high. It was suggested that the site could be used temporarily as a community garden as it was currently an eyesore. The Strategic Director (SH) undertook to investigate this option.

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

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

The meeting ended at 7.45 pm

**CHAIR**