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Housing Scrutiny Committee

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Tuesday, 18 June 2019

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 June 2019
5.30 - 7.40 pm

Present: Councillors Bird (Vice-Chair), Cantrill, Hadley, Porrer, Sheil, Thittala, McGerty and O'Reilly

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

Assistant Head of Finance / Business Manager: Julia Hovells

Head of Housing: David Greening

Head of Housing Strategy: Helen Reed

Head of Housing Development Agency: Claire Flowers

Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets: Lynn Thomas

Housing Development Manager: Jim Pollard

Committee Manager: Claire Tunncliffe

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

19/23/HSC Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Lord and Todd-Jones and Diana Minns (Tenant / Leaseholder Representative).

Councillor McGerty attended as an alternate for Councillor Lord.

19/24/HSC Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Reason
Councillor Cantrill	19/32/HSC	Personal: Trustee of Wintercomfort
Kay Harris	19/31/HSC	Personal: Secretary of Campkin/Hawkins Residents Association member

19/25/HSC Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 12 March 2019 were approved and signed as a correct record.

19/26/HSC Appointment of Vice-Chair (Tenant/Leaseholder Rep) for 2019/20

Diana Minns was appointed as Vice Chair (Tenant / Leaseholder Representative) for 2019/20.

19/27/HSC Public Questions

A representative from the Friends of St Albans Road Recreation Ground addressed the committee and raised the following points with regards to the Meadows and Buchan Street development in the north of the city:

- i. Referenced in the City Council's Open Spaces and Recreation Strategy Document that Arbury ward had the lowest proportion of protected open space anywhere in Cambridge.
- ii. With on-going housing developments around the city why were the Council proposing to further reduce the protected open space on St Albans road recreation ground in order to build council flats, rather than find an alternative location.
- iii. Planning proposals was build a new Centre on the recreation ground before the old Meadows centre was demolished.
- iv. Facilities would be crammed onto the remaining smaller area and a number of trees felled; how would this enhance the remaining recreation space?
- v. Many residents and users of the space objected to the development.
- vi. The officer's report for item 11 of the agenda referred to the Meadows & Buchan Street scheme public consultation held in March 2019, followed by a meeting regarding the open space proposals.
- vii. This public consultation was poorly attended as many residents were not aware this had been taking place; no leaflets were sent out and advertising was extremely limited.
- viii. Had attended the subsequent meeting with two other residents. Had not been aware that this meeting was open to the public until two days before.
- ix. Maintenance had been poor on the recreation ground, with benches decaying; hedges hacked back to a low level to simply management.

- x. The existing Meadows was losing its character; how would Cambridge City Council maintain the proposed features of the recreation ground after the development. Did not believe it could.

In response the Executive Councillor for Housing said the following:

- i. Thanked the resident for attending the meeting to express their views and those of the residents association.
- ii. There were currently 2500 people on the Council's housing register in need of affordable housing accommodation.
- iii. Central government had provided funds for the Council to assist with the development of 500 homes or more.
- iv. Space and land were at a premium; the Council were trying to maximise the space to provide the much needed homes.
- v. The Council were still engaging and listening to residents on how best to use the current footprint of the Meadows site.
- vi. Had not yet been determined the total percentage of the open space which would be lost to the development; potentially the figure could be reduced.
- vii. The football pitch and play area would be kept, improvements would be made to biodiversity.
- viii. The Council would ensure that it built a community centre that the city would be proud of.

The following supplementary points were made:

- i. Understood the need to build council houses; there had been large developments in the north of the city with Orchard Park and Darwin Green. The north had been 'hit hard'.
- ii. There were large amounts of green open spaces in the south of Cambridge which had remained untouched; with a further 15-20% being taken away on the recreation ground.
- iii. The recreation ground was heavily used; people drive there from Huntingdon Road as there was not the open space in Darwin Green.
- iv. The recreation ground needed to be kept as it was for the residents' mental health and wellbeing.

The Executive Councillor responded:

- i. The planning application had not yet been formally submitted.
- ii. When the application was submitted there would be an opportunity to make a formal objection as part of the planning process. Those individuals who had made a written representation on the application could also address the Planning Committee when the application came before them for consideration.

- iii. Through the Council's local letting policy developments are built where communities can thrive and be successful; addressing different needs.
- iv. The new development will be a benefit to the community and the city.

19/28/HSC To Note Decision Taken by the Executive Councillor for Housing

6a Testing of Electrical Wiring Installations in Council Houses
The Committee noted the decision.

19/29/HSC 2018/19 Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital Outturn, Carry Forwards and Significant Variances

Matter for Decision

The report presented, for the Housing Revenue Account:

- i. A summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the final budget for 2018/19 (outturn position)
- ii. Revenue and capital budget variances with explanations
- iii. Specific requests to carry forward funding available from budget underspends into 2019/20.
- iv. A summary of housing debt which was written off during 2018/19.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved carry forward requests totalling £772,500 in revenue funding from 2018/19 into 2019/20, as detailed in Appendix C of the Officer's report (Part 1 of the recommendation)
- ii. Approved carry forward requests of £5,256,000 in HRA and General Fund Housing capital budgets and associated resources from 2018/19 into 2019/20 to fund re-phased net capital spending, as detailed in Appendix D and the associated notes to the appendix of the Officer's report is recommended to Council (Part 2 of the recommendation)

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 Assistant Head of Finance / Business Manager.

The Assistant Head of Finance / Business Manager informed Members that officers will be bringing the revised housing revenue business plan to Committee in September including an updated Assessment Management plan.

However the outturn figures which had been reported at this meeting had raised concern, areas highlighted were repairs spending, the over reliance of the external contractors and increased costs.

The Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets conformed that investigation work had started immediately on revenue, repairs and voids. Officers needed to ensure the service was being managed well financially and operationally. An external consultant would be used to provide additional capacity to assist with these reviews and would be reported to the Housing Scrutiny Committee once completed.

In response the Strategic Director, Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets and the Assistant Head of Finance / Business Manager stated the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Noted the concerns regarding the underspend in the Decent Homes Programme; to deliver the programme was dependent on a number of factors, such as having planned maintenance contractors in place and the workforce to survey the work and place the task orders. There had also been some tenant refusals.
- ii. Issues with staff shortages in the Technical Services team had meant the complete programme had not been delivered as not all surveys and orders could be not undertaken. Had recruited to some of the vacant posts.
- iii. Acknowledged the comment there were trained resident inspectors who could inspect void properties and make recommendations.
- iv. Agreed the maintenance of Council homes was important and staff were committed to make sure the standards were met.
- v. Could not comment on a particular complaint raised in Committee but the emergency had been dealt with promptly and had been in touch with the complainant and apologised for the length of time they were waiting for the work to be made good.
- vi. This complaint and others had highlighted that some of the Council's processes were not as good as they should have been; processes required modernising and improvement which was why the review had been brought forward.

- vii. The review would explore whether the quality of the housing stock was deteriorating due to the lack of investment.
- viii. The Assessment Management Plan would determine what detailed work was required to the Council's housing stock.
- ix. Significant funding had been taken out of housing maintenance and the delivery of housing services as a result of Government policy changes in 2016.
- x. The new business plan would take into account investment in the Council's own stock and the ability to provide new homes; the balance of investment would be something that the Committee would consider at a future meeting.
- xi. The review would also examine if the organisational structure was fit for purpose
- xii. Planned to build stronger services which would be more responsive to repairs.
- xiii. A new housing management system had been purchased which would improve the business processes and reporting processes and trends would easily be identified.
- xiv. The review would consider whether any rental surplus in the Housing Revenue Account should be used for investment in new homes be set aside to redeem debt.
- xv. Any major variances of over £20,000 were recorded and reported. The column showing 'other' would be the total of all the other cost centres where there were small variances.
- xvi. One in fourteen Council tenants had transitioned to universal credit.
- xvii. The Disabled Facilities Grant came from Government and used in the private sector not for disabled adaptations in the Council's housing stock. As it was a Government grant this had to be requested to be carried forward to use in 2019/20.
- xviii. The new housing management system will allow residents to access their accounts online.
- xix. Welcomed the suggestion of a resident online annual review; officers would work with the Resident Engagement Officer to look at the best ways that residents could provide feedback.

The Committee resolved by 8 votes to 0 to endorse part 1 of the recommendation

The Committee resolved by 5 votes to 0 to endorse part 2 of the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations

19/30/HSC 2018/19 General Fund Revenue and Capital Outturn, Carry Forwards and Significant Variances

Matter for Decision

The report presented, for the General Fund Housing portfolio.

- i. A summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the final budget for 2018/19 (outturn position)
- ii. Revenue and capital budget variances with explanations
- iii. Specific requests to carry forward funding available from budget underspends into 2019/20.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider and make known their views on the proposals for consideration by the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources at the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 1 July 2019.

Decision of the Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved carry forward requests of revenue funding from 2018/19 to 2019/20, as detailed in Appendix C of the Officer's report, noting that none were proposed for this portfolio on this occasion.
- ii. Approved carry forward requests of £200,000 in capital resources from 2018/19 to 2019/20 to fund re-phased net capital spending, as detailed in Appendix D 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 Assistant Head of Finance / Business Manager.

The Committee were advised this would be the last year that individual reports were produced for each portfolio for presentation to the relevant scrutiny committee. In line with the revised budget scrutiny process followed for the 2019/20 budget, one combined 2019/20 General Fund outturn report covering

all portfolios would be produced for scrutiny at Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

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

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

19/31/HSC New Build Housing - Campkin Road

Matter for Decision

The report referred to the devolution deal with Central Government and sought approval for a capital budget for the scheme based on the indicative capacity study which had been undertaken for the site and the outlined appraisals referenced in the Officer's report and for the delivery route to be adopted.

Decision of the Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the scheme in principle, recommending to Council, the inclusion of an indicative capital budget for the scheme of £15,964,921 in the Housing Capital Investment Plan, to cover all of the site assembly, construction costs, professional fees and associated other fees to deliver a scheme that meets an identified housing need in Cambridge City.
- ii. Approved that, subject to Council approval of the budget, delegated authority be given to the Exec Cllr for Housing in conjunction with the Strategic Director to enable the site to be developed through Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP) subject to a value for money assessment to be carried out on behalf of the Council.
- iii. Authorised, subject to Council approval of the budget, the Strategic Director in consultation with the Executive Councillor for housing to approve variations to the scheme including the number of units and mix of property types and sizes outlined in this report.
- iv. Approved the use of the updated Council Home Loss Policy attached as Appendix 3 of the Officer's report.
- v. Delegated authority, subject to Council approval of the budget, to the Strategic Director to commence Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) proceedings on Leasehold properties to be demolished to enable the development should these be required.
- vi. Delegated authority to the Strategic Director to serve initial Demolition Notices under the Housing Act 1985.

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 Senior Development Manager Housing.

In response to comments and questions from the Committee the Senior Development Manager Housing said the following:

- i. Did not have the percentage figures for the area of land the site was to be built on.
- ii. The form of the development had been set by the need to keep the line of trees which ran along Campkin Road.
- iii. Acknowledged there had been previous problems with shared ownership tenures concerning the letting and selling of these properties. The Committee had previously discussed these issues and possible solutions such as changes to the tenure to reintroduce as homes for rent.
- iv. The scheme was for all council rented homes.
- v. There was currently no shared ownership in this scheme.
- vi. The key factor was to deliver rented affordable housing in the city.
- vii. Was aware that parking in the area was difficult. The scheme's proposal was a ratio of 0.65 parking spaces to each dwelling.
- viii. Did not believe the development had a major impact on the availability of open spaces; the most significant aspect of the open space was the line of trees earlier referenced.
- ix. In line with planning policy 5% of the dwellings would be wheel chair adapted.
- x. Through the Climate Change Strategy and action plan the Council were due to go to tender to install electric charging points across the council car parks. The electric charging points would also be addressed through the Council's individual planning applications.
- xi. Tenants affected by the development would be given emergency housing status. They would also be permitted to move back but this would be at a higher rental rate. However there would a range of compensation packages for a loss of their homes in the first instance and

for those tenants who were under occupied would have the option to downsize.

The Executive Councillor informed the Committee the unsold shared ownership units on the Virido development had been approved by Homes England to be turned into Council rented accommodation. Approval from Planning was required to finalise this.

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

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

19/32/HSC The Homelessness Reduction Act – 12 Month Review

Matter for Decision

The reported referred to The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 ('the Act'), came into effect on 3 April 2018. The Act placed major new duties on authorities to relieve or prevent homelessness.

Decision of the Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the contents of the report and endorsed the approach the Council had taken as described in the appendix of the officer's report in relation to applying its new powers.

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 which outlined The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the key aspects of the new act.

In response to questions and comments from the Committee the Head of Housing said the following:

- i. With regards to the hidden homeless, intelligence was gained from housing forms submitted to the Council. Applicants would indicate if they

were sofa surfing, moving between properties, or if they had a bedroom of their own in the accommodation where they were staying.

- ii. Officers would follow up with those individuals if there was sufficient concern of an imminent threat of homelessness.
- iii. There had been 212 referrals in six months under the duty to refer from statutory bodies (such as the prison services) to the Council.
- iv. Under the homelessness partnership the council shared good practice with other local authorities.
- v.

The Executive Councillor for Housing thanked the Head of Housing and his team for the work that they had undertaken dealing with the increase in caseloads. He also welcomed the Government's decision to scrap the section 21 notice, the 'no fault' eviction issued to tenants from their landlords.

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.

19/33/HSC Update on the Programme to Build New Council Homes Funded Through the Combined Authority

Matter for Decision

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

Decision of the 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.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Head of Housing Development Agency.

In response to questions and comments from the Committee the Strategic Director and Head of Housing Development said the following:

- i. The Council had its own sustainability housing standard which all dwellings across the housing programme met or exceeded.
- ii. The Council's standard surpassed the national sustainability requirements.
- iii. Each development was treated differently regarding sustainability, as each site had different constraints and requirements.
- iv. The Mill Road development had a 19% improvement on the sustainability building regulations. This was due to certain factors such as a fabric first approach, solar panels, heat and power systems which would reduce admissions significantly.
- v. Electric vehicle charging points would be installed on certain developments.
- vi. Stopping the use of fossil fuels on a development would be a long term project for officers to investigate.
- vii. Passive house standards was impacted by the site constrained as well as type of homes built.
- viii. It was not currently possible to deliver a passive house standard on higher level apartments.
- ix. Reiterated the Council's build programme had been designed to meet a high level of sustainability.
- x. The consultation process on the Meadows and Buchan Street development had been voluntary. This was in advance of the statutory consultation process which would follow.
- xi. Over three thousand leaflets had been distributed to advertise the Meadows and Bucham Street public consultation. Posters had been displayed throughout the area and advertised online. The exhibition finished at 9.00pm for people to attend after work.
- xii. A follow up meeting was then arranged to discuss concerns raised at the exhibition which covered the loss of open space.
- xiii. In respect of the Cromwell Road development the plans put forward had been for 295 houses, which was above the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) proposal of 225 houses. The profit margin was lower for the council's joint venture partner compared to what they would have received developing the site themselves.
- xiv. Had listened to public consultation on the Meadows and Bucham Scheme. Officers were currently working with architects on how to enhance the public open space; therefore no clear response could have

been given to the public speaker. The public consultation was still open on this matter.

- xv. The demand for housing in the area which the Meadows and Bucham Street stood was one of the highest in the city.
- xvi. The relationship with the Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP) was 50/50 joint venture but set up as an independent company. All of the accounting was by open book and had audited accounts

The Committee resolved by 5 votes to 0 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

19/34/HSC Compulsory Purchase of Long-term Empty Property

The Housing Scrutiny Committee undertook a public interest test and resolved by 4 votes to 3 to exclude members of the public from the meeting on the grounds that, if they were present, there would be disclosure to them of information defined as exempt from publication by virtue of paragraphs 1 & 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Matter for Decision

The report outlined a long term empty property which had been unoccupied for 6 months or more and as such further action by the Council was required to bring it back into use.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the Compulsory Purchase powers pursuant to Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 in respect of in respect of the empty property referenced in the officer's report, in order to acquire the property and bring it back into residential use.
- ii. Authorised proceedings to make a Compulsory Purchase Order and officers are instructed to take all necessary action to implement the resolution.
- iii. Approved the capital funding as outlined in section 4 (Financial Implications) of the officer's report is made available in respect of the acquisition and associated costs which will be recovered through the sale of the property.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Empty Homes Officer.

The Committee welcomed the report.

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.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

CHAIR