



To: Executive Councillor for Housing
Report by: Director of Customer and Community Services
Relevant scrutiny committee: HMB 27.9.11
Wards affected: All

OPTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT TENANTS VOICE Not a Key Decision

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 A report was commissioned to provide independent advice to Housing Management Board and the Executive Councillor for Housing on the following:
- i. Are current arrangements for resident involvement robust and fit for purpose in a changing world?
 - ii. Should tenants and leaseholders have an “independent voice”, free from Council influence and interference?
- 1.2 The independent report has provided a thorough review of past and existing arrangements, and made a number of recommendations, based on consultation, evidence, and analysis. The report is complimentary about the Council’s existing arrangements for tenant involvement and engagement, but recognises that there are areas where this could be strengthened or improved.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

To agree the recommendations set out in section 12 of the attached report from Wiles consulting as follows:

- 2.1. Recommendations 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,and 13 adopted as they stand in the report, or amended.
- 2.2. Recommendations 5, if supported in principle, to have the resource implications clarified before decision at a later date.

Or

Recommendation not supported.

2.3. Recommendation 12, to be taken forward on the advice of resident representatives of HMB.

3. Background

3.1. A report was brought to the 8th March 2011 Housing Management Board (HMB) recommending that independent advice was commissioned to review existing resident involvement, and make recommendations for an independent voice for residents. This was supported by HMB and agreed by the Executive Councillor.

3.2. A steering group comprised of councillors and tenant representatives on HMB was set up to advise the Director of Customer and Community Services on the appointment of an external consultant, and to consider the consultant's report and recommendations prior to presentation at HMB. Colin Wiles of Wiles Consulting was appointed following a tender and evaluation process, and has now delivered his report and recommendations.

3.3. He was given a brief summarised into two questions:

- i. Are current arrangements for resident involvement robust and fit for purpose in a changing world?
- ii. Should tenants and leaseholders have an "independent voice", free from Council influence and interference?

3.4. The brief made it clear that there was not a preconceived view of the best options for the future; and that the object of the exercise was to get independent expert advice. The study took account of the local and national context; the views of tenants, leaseholders, councillors, and council officers; and considered current thinking on good practice and emerging issues.

3.5. The final report from Wiles Consulting is attached in full to this report. It makes a number of recommendations, and gives the reasoning for arriving at these conclusions. The recommendations of the report are as follows:

3.6. Summary list of Recommendations :

This is a list of recommendations arising from the points raised in the report. The adoption and implementation of these recommendations should be carried out in partnership with residents.

- i. To re-channel the budget of £80,000, previously used to support the Cambridge Federation, into other Resident Involvement activities.
- ii. To recruit a new member of staff to the Council Resident Involvement team, reporting to the Resident Involvement Manager. The suggested key duties of this post are as set out in section 11 of the main report.
- iii. To ensure that the work plan of the Resident Involvement Team has a high degree of guidance and involvement from residents.
- iv. To review the terms of reference of the Housing Management Board, and other formally established groups, to ensure that there is clarity over the lines of governance and accountability for the housing service.
- v. To consider holding resident elections to the Housing Management Board every two years.
- vi. To review the system of support and expenses for active residents, so that their efforts are properly rewarded and recompensed. This should include a review of IT support and the possible provision of IT facilities for current and new resident activists.
- vii. To review the arrangements for recruiting resident activists and for succession planning for resident involvement. The aim should be identify and recruit a new cohort of active residents who can be step into the shoes of current activists in the future, and to create a civic core of active residents who can be involved in resident involvement and wider community development issues.
- viii. To review the level of training and support for residents so that current and new resident activists can take on a range of roles within the tenant involvement framework, and be fully equipped to handle strategic housing issues as well as day-to-day service delivery issues.
- ix. To review the communications strategy for resident involvement so that all residents, and particularly activists, are kept informed of actions and activities on a need to know basis. This should

include a review of social media, more and better training on the use of IT and the provision of IT equipment where necessary, and the ability for all residents' groups to have access to effective printing facilities. It should also include a review of estate notice boards and the use of Radio Cambridgeshire and other local radio stations to publicise events.

- x. To re-launch the residents' forum and to make this the independent co-ordinating body for resident involvement in Cambridge. The details of its terms of reference would need to be developed but this could include the following: meetings to be open to all tenants and leaseholders and to be held four or five times a year; meetings to have a clear agenda with the ability to call officers to answer questions and an opportunity for elected HMB members to provide feedback; the ability to seek advice from independent advisers with an appropriate budget; a formal voting system using green and red voting cards for all registered residents; a clear commitment to the independence of the forum from all parts of the Council.
- xi. To consider some of the ideas for further development of resident involvement as highlighted in section 11. of the report.
- xii. To undertake a "healing" exercise with residents where the events surrounding the demise of the Cambridge Federation can be used as a positive learning exercise in order to move forward.
- xiii. To increase the level of grant funding to support residents' associations and other grass roots bodies. The grants previously awarded by the Cambridge Federation for environmental improvements should also be brought back under City Council control and integrated with other grant funding for resident support.

3.7. All of these recommendations have considerable merit. I would recommend supporting them without alteration, with the exception of the following:

3.8. Recommendation 5, to hold bi-annual elections needs further consideration in terms of the additional resources needed for this change. Further analysis would be needed if this were to be taken forward as a possible option, before any final decision.

3.9. Recommendation 12 needs to be seen to be worthwhile by potential participants. The views of HMB are sought as to whether this approach would be welcomed.

4. Implications

(a) Financial

The options recommended in this report will be delivered within the current budgetary provision of £78k for tenant involvement, previously provided as a grant to the Cambridge Federation.

(b) Staffing

The report recommends the creation of a new post, to be funded from the £78k budget allocation, referred to above.

(c) Equal Opportunities

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out identifying the importance of tenant involvement work for engaging all sections of the community.

(d) Environmental

Nil: the proposal has no direct climate change impact.

(e) Consultation

Consultation with various stakeholders is summarised in the background section, and detailed in the main report.

(f) Community Safety

The main report considers the importance of tenant involvement to build community cohesion within areas of the city where there are concentrations of social housing.

5. Background papers

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Equality Impact Assessment

6. Appendices

Cambridge City Council: A Review of Resident Involvement and options for an independent voice for Residents. Wiles Consulting. 2011.

7. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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