

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 June 2022

5.36 - 9.25 pm

Present: Councillors Thittala Varkey (Chair), Robertson (Vice-Chair), S. Baigent, Gawthrope Wood, Holloway, Howard, Lee, Porrer and Herbert

Executive Councillor: Bird (Executive Councillor for Housing)

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diana Minns (Vice Chair), Lulu Agate, Christabella Amiteye, Diane Best, Mandy Powell-Hardy and Colin Stevens

Officers present:

Director of Enterprise and Sustainable Development: Fiona Bryant

Committee Manager: Sarah Steed

Meeting Producer: Boris Herzog

Officers present virtually:

Assistant Head of Finance and Business Manager: Julia Hovells

Head of Housing: David Greening

Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets: Lynn Bradley

Head of Housing Development Agency: Claire Flowers

Corporate Energy Manager: Juliet Nicholas

Housing Services Manager: James McWilliams

Housing Service Manager (Supported Housing): Laura Adcock

Senior Development Manager: Ben Binns

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

22/22/HSC Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Pounds, Councillor Herbert attended as alternate.

22/23/HSC Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor Gawthrope Wood	22/33/HSC	Personal: Mother in Law had a community alarm.
Councillor S.Baigent	All	Personal: Was a member of the Women's Homeless Action Group.
Councillor Robertson	22/30/HSC	Personal: Was a trustee of

		Cambridge Cyrenians who was a partner of the Housing First project.
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22/24/HSC Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22/25/HSC Appointment of Vice-Chair (Tenant/Leaseholder Rep) for 2022/23 and introduction of Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives

Diana Minns was appointed Vice-Chair Tenant Representative for Municipal Year 2022/23.

22/26/HSC Public Questions

There were no public questions.

22/27/HSC Estates & Facilities Compliance Update

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair)

Matter for Decision

The report provided an update on the compliance related activities delivered within the Estates and Facilities Team, including a summary on gas servicing, electrical testing and fire safety work.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the current position of the Council regarding Compliance and the progress of ongoing associated works.

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 Property Compliance and Risk Manager.

The Property Compliance and Risk Manager and the Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Cadent are the supplier for the gas assets (meters) at Kingsway, Princess and Hanover Courts. Inspections had been carried out where meters had not yet been removed.
- ii. Electrical testing should be carried out every 5 years. Thought there would be an 18-month time lag to be up to date with testing due to the pandemic and delays experienced in gaining access to properties to be able to carry out testing / inspections. There were a number of work streams which would feed into this report for example kitchen upgrades and wholesale electrical improvements. Confirmed that officers were still seeking to ensure that gas and electrical testing was done at the same time as gas checks were currently at 100% compliance, whereas electrical testing had a slightly lower compliance rate. Also confirmed that the letter process for electrical checks would be changed to be more in line with gas letters.
- iii. The compliance rate for the electrical testing 10-year programme stood at over 85% as access to undertake checks had been difficult as a result of the pandemic.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendation.

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.

22/28/HSC Procurement of Contractor(s) to Deliver Energy Efficiency and Associated Works to Council Housing – 2022-24

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair)

Matter for Decision

As part of a programme of energy efficiency improvements to the Council's existing housing stock it was planned to procure contractor(s) to install various measures including external wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, ventilation upgrades and solar PV panels to Council properties in various locations.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the issue of tenders and authorised the Director of Neighbourhoods and Communities to award a contract(s) to a contractor(s) to deliver energy efficiency and associated works to Council housing from 2022 -2024, with an option to extend for one or more periods up to a maximum of two years.

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 Corporate Energy Manager.

The Corporate Energy Manager said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. External wall insulation had been installed on 150 properties in 2020/21 and it was hoped that it would be installed in 80-90 properties this year.
- ii. The contract would be awarded following a formal procurement process and bidders would be assessed against certain criteria including value for money. There was an option included in the recommendation for the contract to be extended for up to 2 years subject to satisfactory performance by the contractor.
- iii. Noted that some of the council housing stock did have 'E' energy ratings but these were being reviewed and prioritised for retrofit works where possible.
- iv. Noted that retrofit improvements to properties could include solar panels, new windows / doors and insulation.
- v. New energy efficient improvements would be considered for example underfloor insulation and air source heat pumps had been installed in a couple of council owned properties.
- vi. Noted that delays in the implementation of the MRI Asset Management ICT system was due to a national issue.
- vii. Council Tenants could contact the Council to check if their property had loft insulation. Whether a property had loft insulation would be checked when the housing stock condition survey was carried out.
- viii. The Council is planning to submit a bid to the 'Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund wave 2' later this year which if successful would be used to undertake additional improvements in terms of energy efficiency of council homes.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendation.

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.

22/29/HSC HRA Outturn Report 2021/22

Recommendation i was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair) and recommendation ii was chaired by Councillor Thittala Varkey.

Matter for Decision

The report presented for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

- A summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the final budget for 2021/22 (outturn position).
- Revenue and capital budget variances with explanations
- Specific requests to carry forward funding available from both revenue and capital budget underspends into 2022/23
- A summary of housing debt which was written off during 2021/22.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved carry forward requests totalling £12,561,760 in revenue funding from 2021/22 into 2022/23 as detailed in appendix C of the officer's report.
- ii. Recommends to Council to approve carry forward requests of £22,055,000 in HRA and General Fund Housing capital budgets and associated resources from 2021/22 into 2022/23 and beyond to fund re-phased net capital spending, as detailed in appendix D of the officer's report and the associated notes to the appendix.

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 and Business Manager.

The Assistant Head of Finance and Business Manager and Head of Maintenance and Assets said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Carry forward requests detailed in appendix C of the officer report, had been submitted to ensure there was financial resource to enable required cyclical maintenance works to be carried out.
- ii. Officers were exploring a number of different ways to improve access to council properties so that essential maintenance works and checks could be carried out. This included offering later appointment times. Also confirmed that the Responsive Repair Team would always make appointments with tenants and confirm an appointment by letter; officers would not attend a property without prior notice / appointment. Tenants would be contacted three times before the property would be classified as a 'no access'. Also noted (as per agenda item 22/27/HSC) that officers were exploring aligning gas / electrical safety checks to try and ensure all necessary safety checks could be done in one visit.
- iii. Noted that tenants were within their rights to refuse to have works done to their property provided that there was no detriment to the property or health and safety risk.
- iv. Contractors were also being asked to explain whether a 'no access' was due to a tenant refusing works or if it was due to no response from the tenant.
- v. Noted comments about better and realistic communication with tenants if there were delays in carrying out maintenance works. Would speak with Tenant Representatives outside of the meeting about their ideas for better communication what more could be done.
- vi. Confirmed that the profiling of spend would be revisited as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in September, so the position would be reviewed at that point to see what progress had been made and if there was any residual impact of the challenges over the last two years that needed to be adjusted for.
- vii. Confirmed that the average time period to turn over a void property was 6 weeks. Noted that there were a significant number of void properties which were being returned back to the Council in poor condition which increased the period of time it took to bring them back into use. There were a variety of reasons why a property was being returned in a poor condition this included long standing tenants who had declined planned maintenance works and also a few tenants who had caused damage to properties. Different teams within the Housing Department were working together to share information on property condition when visits were made to properties.

- viii. Confirmed that the fire door contract was terminated due to poor performance by the contractor. The Council had since reprocured the contact and a new contractor was now in place.
- ix. The term 'debt reinstated' meant that a debt which had previously been written off could be reinstated if a person re-presented themselves to the city council for housing. Some debts were 'statute barred', which meant the council were unable to pursue the debt after a 6 year period with no interaction had passed. Some debts were written off due to 'special circumstances' this could include mental health concerns or if someone had been subject to domestic violence.
- x. Noted that the Decent Homes Budget was being carried into 2023/24 but would still be subject to labour and materials availability.

The Committee resolved by 12 votes to 0 to endorse the recommendation i.

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

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations i and ii.

22/30/HSC Housing First Interim Review

This item was chaired by Councillor Thittala Varkey (Chair)

Matter for Decision

Housing First is an approach to helping rough sleepers to leave the streets which differs from other, longer-established approaches in a number of respects.

Cambridge City Council, in partnership with the County Council, agreed to set up and jointly fund a Housing First pilot in the city. The pilot would be assessed in two stages: an interim report carried out at a mid-point in the scheme and a later independent report once the scheme had been running for a sufficient length of time to allow a full appraisal. This is the mid-point report.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the report and the interim findings and noted the recommendations for further examination, the most important of which were set out paragraph 3.4 of the officer 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 Services Manager (Housing Advice).

The Housing Services Manager (Housing Advice) said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Any decision to bring the Housing First Service in-house would need to consider several variables including consultation with the County Council (as a partner in the project with the City Council) and Housing First employees. Commented that if the service was brought in house this could facilitate better integration with other services for rough sleepers.
- ii. The comments made by support workers within the report would be a consideration in the future review of the service. Noted that there needed to be better integration of the Housing First service within the broad spectrum of housing services for rough sleepers. There needed to be a balance between the needs of individuals and other people who may be vulnerable (neighbours / tenants etc).
- iii. Stated that the County Council would always be involved as a partner with the Housing First project, the question which was raised in the report was whether Housing First would sit better within the City Council in terms of this being the best fit for Cambridge.
- iv. Noted concerns raised about Housing First 2 and the good neighbour role but felt there was still not enough information about this at the moment to draw conclusions as there were currently only two.
- v. Confirmed that there would be a review of the modular homes project but there was insufficient information at the moment to do a like for like comparison to Housing First.
- vi. Six modular home units at Newmarket Road were funded completely independently of the council. Officers were currently in discussions about funding for further units. Housing First was a good fit for some people but was not appropriate for everyone. Needed to get more Housing Association involvement in the project.
- vii. There were a number of considerations / eligibility criteria taken into account as to whether Housing First was appropriate for a particular individual. Housing First may be appropriate where other housing options had failed.
- viii. Acknowledged that the case studies in the report were from males but female clients did not come forward to take part.

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.

22/31/HSC Report on proposed development Scheme at Fanshawe Road

This item was chaired by Councillor Thittala Varkey (Chair)

Matter for Decision

The report sought budget and approval to proceed with the redevelopment of Fanshawe Road flats, adjacent houses, and garages to provide 93 new highly sustainable, affordable homes on the site, with enhanced open space, as well as improvements to the community pavilion on neighbouring Coleridge recreation ground.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved that the scheme be brought forward and included in the Housing Capital Programme, with an indicative capital budget of £27,937,291.53 to cover all site assembly, construction costs, professional fees and further associated fees, to deliver a 100% affordable housing scheme which meets the identified need in Cambridge City. Budget would be drawn down from the sum already earmarked and approved for investment in new homes.
- ii. Authorised 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, sizes and tenure as outlined in the officer's report.
- iii. Authorised the Strategic Director in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing to adopt option b; to deliver a minimum of 44 (approx. 47%) affordable homes for Council rent and the balance as market homes for private sale, should grant not be available once the scheme is at a deliverable point, subject to continued financial viability.
- iv. Approved that delegated authority be given to the Executive Councillor 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.

- v. Delegated authority 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.
- vii. Delegated Authority to the Head of Housing to amend the local lettings plan for Cromwell Road to allow for the proposed decant from Fanshawe Road to be accommodated.

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.

The Senior Development Manager, Director of Enterprise and Sustainable Development and Head of the Housing Development Agency said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. If the redevelopment went ahead residents would be offered alternative housing at the Cromwell Road development but acknowledged that this may not be appropriate for everyone and that there was also alternative housing stock elsewhere in the ward which could be explored. Pre-application advice had been sought from the Planning Department some homes would be 2 storeys others estimate 3-4 storeys in the middle of the development.
- ii. All properties would need to be compliant with M42 standards and 5% of the properties (approximately 4-5 properties) would need to be fully adapted for wheelchair users. The ability to deliver passivhaus properties had been explored however the orientation of properties was crucial as they would need to be south facing and the early indication of the development layout was that the properties would be east/west facing. The scheme would include Passivhaus principles. Acknowledged that there would be a trade-off between competing interests. The important factor is the output achieved in terms of carbon emissions, fuel bills for residents and low maintenance costs and not just the passivhaus badge.

- The Council is involved with including passivhaus pilots with learning to be fed back.
- iii. The amount of bike storage proposed would accommodate the number of bedrooms/occupants who would be on the site.
 - iv. Officers regularly checked the housing register to see how many people needed a fully accessible home.
 - v. Advised that the council sought to build mixed and balanced communities when sites were redeveloped. The inclusion of market homes within a development meant that more affordable housing could be built. The council had to be careful when selling properties not to act or apply a policy which was discriminatory.

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

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

22/32/HSC Update on New Build Council Housing Delivery

This item was chaired by Councillor Thittala Varkey (Chair)

Matter for Decision

The report provided an update on the housing development programme.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the continued progress on the delivery of the approved housing programme.
- ii. Noted forthcoming work on consultation with residents.
- iii. Agreed the adoption of a blended rent policy (to include more social rent but some higher rents at 80% of median market rents inclusive of Service Charge) across the new 1,000 homes programme, as required, when delivering homes with grant above the minimum planning requirement of 40% of units on any site.
- iv. Delegated authority to the Strategic Director to update the HRA Rent Setting Policy in accordance with recommendation iii above.
- v. Approved the start on site of currently approved schemes that have planning permission at risk in relation to grant, to mitigate the risk of build cost increase.
- vi. Approved the rent level changes to the specific schemes outlined in this report, including the addition of 45 homes at L2, with 30 homes to be let at Social Rent and 45 homes to be let at 80% of market rent.

- vii. Approved a budget of £11,520,000.00 for the purchase as a package deal of the private sale units at L2 Orchard Park into the Council's HRA stock, to be let at 80% of median market rent.
- viii. Approved changes to the Budgets for Fen Road, Ditton Walk and Borrowdale as outlined in part 8.5.3, with the revised budgets to be incorporated as part of the HRA MTFs in September 2022.
- ix. Authorised the Section 151 Officer to enter into a Grant Agreement with Homes England for the 21-26 Homes England Affordable Homes Programme for Continuous Market Engagement.
- x. Approved the principle that units to be let at 80% of market rent be targeted at key workers OR the intermediate rental market, (ie those who are assessed as being on incomes sufficient to be able to afford 80% of market rent), and governed by local lettings plans.
- xi. Approved that as part of our Housing Strategy development work the Head of Housing has delegated authority to agree (subject to consultation with the Executive Councillor) a definition of key worker.
- xii. Agreed that the Council works with South Cambridgeshire DC to try and jointly agree the definition of key worker.

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 the Housing Development Agency. An updated table to that detailed in paragraph 8.2.4 of the report had been circulated to members at the meeting, a copy was also published on the meeting webpage after the meeting.

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

- i. Welcomed a 'key worker' definition in relation to housing policies.
- ii. Expressed disappointment with a loose commitment regarding passivhaus development.

The Executive Councillor welcomed homes for key workers.

The Head of Housing said that City Council Officers would work with colleagues from South Cambridgeshire District Council to try and agree a definition of 'key worker'.

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.

22/33/HSC Community Alarms Service Review

This item was chaired by Councillor Thittala Varkey (Chair)

Matter for Decision

Cambridge City Council's Community Alarms service has been in operation in the City for over 20 years and currently serves around 440 customers. It has built a solid reputation and provided a valuable service over this time. However, for the last 5 years the service has been experiencing a decline in customer numbers and has, therefore, not achieved its income targets, resulting in the service no longer recovering its full cost inclusive of all overheads.

A review of the options for the service has been conducted and the report recommends the termination of the service by the City Council and the transfer of customers to the equivalent service by Cambridgeshire County Council.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Agreed the termination of the Community Alarm Service.

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 Service Manager (Supported Housing).

The Housing Services Manager (Supported Housing) said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Advised that the officer whose job was affected by the proposals had been involved with the drafting of the report and developing the recommendation.
- ii. Noted in relation to concerns expressed regarding paragraph 1.3 of the officer's report that discussions which had taken place with the County Council in 2019 were before the County Council had set up their own independent service.
- iii. Agreed to share information regarding pricing with members and would report back on discussions with the County Council.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendation.

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.

22/34/HSC To Note Decision Taken by the Executive Councillor for Housing

13a Funding for the Demolition of East Road Garages
The decision was noted.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

CHAIR