

Written Questions – Council 24 April 2008

1. Cllr Dryden to Cllr Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing

Please provide details of the total number of bungalows in City Council ownership, the numbers at each site, and how many of the sites have been identified as candidates for redevelopment in the next 5 years.

Answer from Councillor Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing

The City Council has approximately 250 in its ownership on a number of sites. A full breakdown of location cannot be provided in the time available.

Only the sites in Augers Road/Colville Road and Rackham Close have been assessed and actively considered for redevelopment.

As well as vacant sites, to-date sites with existing homes that are becoming harder to let often coupled with a perceived less acceptable standard are brought forward for consideration of how more, better quality housing could be provided. Officers are currently reviewing procedures for bringing forward potential sites for development and a report will be presented to the June/July Committee cycle. It has been recognised that in light of the concerns about how the consideration of the redevelopment issues surrounding Colville Road and Augurs Road were presented to those directly affected and in the anticipation of inevitable difficult future decisions as the pressure grows on the City's affordable housing there should be an early review of:

- The criteria and decision-making process to prioritise development projects.
- The process to ensure thorough provision of information and consultation for those directly affected prior to any decision on development.
- A review of the procedure to better inform and involve members and tenant representatives about specific projects.

The review will aim at producing an Affordable Housing Investment Framework to cover the strategic use of the Council's Capital programme for affordable housing.

Rackham Close has full committee approval to demolish as part of the Simons House redevelopment which, in turn, is a major scheme in the Council's Sheltered Housing Modernisation programme. The new Simons House scheme will consist of a 40 flat extra care scheme for older people and will provide higher quality housing delivered to Sustainable Homes Code Level 5.

2. Cllr Dryden to Cllr Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing

What additional development opportunity around the Colville and Augers Road bungalows has been considered by the City Council over and above plans already communicated to existing residents? If development extension has been considered, what is the extent of contact with landowners, development partners and other organisations?

Answer from Councillor Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing

No additional development opportunity around the Colville Road/Augers Road has been considered by the City Council over and above plans already communicated to existing residents.

As part of any feasibility work around site redevelopment, opportunities to parcel nearby land is always considered in order to maximise the benefit of a proposal. In this case the only adjacent site that came under consideration as part of initial work was the Fishers Lane site owned by the British Legion. Council housing development staff were aware that the British Legion were at one time considering an opportunity to provide a new hall to replace the current Nissen hut, but negotiations did not, and have not subsequently been pursued.

3. Cllr Newbold to Cllr Smith, Executive Councillor for Arts and Recreation

Please provide a detailed list of all ticketing allocations for this year's Folk Festival compared to ticketing last year, including the number for each day and the types of tickets available for a resident discount. Please indicate the number and prices for tickets allocated in 2008 for each category of festival ticket (resident/non-resident) compared to prices charged and the number of tickets allocated in 2007.

Answer from Councillor Smith, Executive Councillor for Arts & Entertainments

	Allocation		Price	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
Weekend	6400	6100	£92	£100
Weekend resident disc*	1700	2000	£75	£89
Weekend Young/concess	700	700**	£57-£67	£65-£74
	8800	8800		
Thursday resident	450	450	£15	£16
Friday resident	350	350	£25	£28
Friday	650	650	£31	£33
Saturday	1000	1000	£42	£44
Sunday	1000	1000	£42	£44

*If there is demand prior to the whole festival selling out from residents we will make more available to them this year (up to 2000 available) at the discounted price.

** Whilst not limited the concession no longer applies to non residents on income grounds (but does to disabled customers). In former years the Council subsidised some non residents tickets (by £25 each in 2007) and it was considered inappropriate for Council tax payers to subsidise such attendances. We therefore anticipate fewer than 700 attendances with more being sold at full price.

Also note that there are further concessions available to city residents on disability living allowance (day tickets £19-£31).

4. Cllr Dryden to Cllr C Rosenstiel, Executive Councillor for Environmental & Waste Services

The introduction of a 20p charge has resulted in considerable access problems to Cherry Hinton public toilets as the pay boxes have proved an attractive target for thieves. One or two cubicles are boarded up on a regular basis, and in the last month all three cubicles have been boarded up. What solution is envisaged rectify this situation in Cherry Hinton and at other locations where the problem exists? If proposed measures cannot be sure of solving this problem will the City Council cease to charge residents for use of public conveniences?

Answer from Councillor C Rosenstiel, Executive Councillor for Environmental & Waste Services

Council policy introduced access charging for modernised toilets outside the City centre as one of a number of measures, used for the first time at Mill Road toilets in 2002. The policy aimed to control access as one of a number of measures to tackle vandalism and anti social behaviour.

Seven toilets have now been modernised incorporating coin access controls and officers are aware that several other local authorities have since adopted this approach as an example of best practice. The policy is supported by partner organisations, including the police and the British Toilet Association. Management performance data shows improving standards for residents at the modernised local toilet facilities.

At Cherry Hinton High Street, the 2006 design & build contract provided a different coin box, which has proved in retrospect to have been a false economy. The delay in reinstating access control following theft of the coin boxes is solely due to technical issues required to replace the original manufacturer's units with a type that has proved to be more durable at other Cambridge locations.

The Council believes that the policy remains the most effective way of providing high quality public toilets, that the public feel safe and confident to use. I would like to apologise to members of the public who have been inconvenienced by the loss of service due to delays in overcoming the effects of criminal activity.

5. Cllr Walker to Cllr Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing:

Regarding the Cambridge City Council Home Aid Budget -

Can you let me know what % of the Home Aid budget was spent in the financial year 2007/8?

And, given the amendments to the grant and loan policy agreed in November 2007,

1. What progress has been made on improving the take-up of the Home Aid budget?
2. What proportion has been spent on home insulation and how does this compare with 2006/7?
3. How many homes were insulated in 2007/8 and how many do you plan to insulate in 2008/9?
4. What measures have been taken to target poorer households, and have they been successful?

Answer from Councillor Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing

The original budget for grants and loans in the year 2007-8 was £470,000. During the autumn budget round £100,000 was identified as not needed. The entire remaining £370,000 was spent.

Given the amendments to the grant and loan policy agreed in November 2007,

- 1 What progress has been made in improving the take up of the Home Aid budget?

The over all take up of Grants has improved during 2007/08. It is hard to say how much of this is due to the changes in the policy as it is early days. Following the decision in November work has gone on to publicise both the new and revised grants available. Completions for the last 2 years is as follows:

06/07	07/08
Repair Grant – 29	Repair Grants – 36
Repair Loans – 19	Repair Loans – 25
Top – up Grants –3	Top Up Grants – 5
Top up Loans – 0	Top Up Loans – 1
Quick Hit Grants – 15	Decorating Grant – 2
NB Decorating & Energy Grant not Available during 06/07	Energy Grant – 4
	Quick Hit Grant - 14

2. What proportion has been spent on home insulation and how does this compare with 2006/07

We do not have figures relating to 06/07 available at present. This information was not kept separately from other works as it was generally carried out as part of larger works eg, roof replacement etc. Now that the Home Energy Grant is available we are able to collate figures accordingly.

From November 07 four Home Energy Grants have resulted in a spend of £1,750. There are already another 4 applications in the pipeline for 08/09.

Two of these were Warm Front top up amounts and the other 2 clients could not obtain assistance through Warm Front and so our contractors carried out the work. The above applications represent contribution to boiler replacements and warm front top ups which includes insulation works.

The annual budget in a full year for this grant activity is £20,000.

3. How many homes were insulated in 2007/08 and how many do you plan to insulate in 2008/09?

Again some of the insulation work for 07/08 would have been carried out as part of larger works and so is not readily available. Post November 07 please refer to above figures.

For 08/09 we are hoping to spend the full £20,000, however the changes to the funding available for over 70's to have free insulation will have a knock on effect to our projected outturn. We do not currently have a target number of grants for 08/09

but will work with the new Private Sector Home Energy Officer once they are in post to ensure we maximise our potential.

4. What measures have been taken to target poorer households, and have they been successful?
- New leaflets have been produced.
 - Aran & WA have been targeting neighbouring properties to those they are working in.
 - Target Action Area identified by Sam Griggs was jointly targeted by Home Aid.
 - Cambridge Evening News carried an article to promote the changes to the policy and encourage residents to come forward.
 - Publicity space has been purchased on a Plasma Screen in Parkside Pools to promote the grants/loans and the agency. This will go live in the next month.
 - Presentations have been made to Age Concern, Neighbourhood watch groups, Trumpington Elderly Action Group, Parkinsons Awareness Event
 - Home Aid also hosted a Healthy Homes – Healthy Living event at the Meadows Centre,

Notes:

Poorer households - External financial support already exists for certain qualifying groups from Warm Front Including

Income support (must include disability premium)

Disability living allowance

Attendance allowance

Council Tax benefit (must include a disability premium)

Over 60 or have a child under 16, and in receipt of one or more of the following:

Pension credit

Council Tax benefit

Income based Jobseeker's allowance

Any homeowner or private tenant over 70 may have free loft and cavity wall insulation via The Government's Carbon Emission Reduction Target Scheme (CERT). This was introduced after the Home Energy Grant was approved by Council. This will affect the number of clients coming forward for assistance from Cambridge City Council.

Home Energy Strategy

The Home energy strategy set out annual targets of a 2 point improvement of the SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) energy rating for all homes within the city and aims to have no home with a SAP energy rating of less than 30 by 2011.

6. Cllr Herbert to Cllr Smart the Exec Cllr for Housing

What percentage of housing completed in Cambridge in 2006/7 and 2007/8 was affordable housing?

Answer from Councillor Reid, Executive Councillor for Climate Change & Growth

2006/7 – 25.6% (302 units) were affordable housing units.

This includes all housing completed regardless of the size of site. Under PPS3 only sites above the threshold of 15 units or 0.5 hectares have an affordable housing requirement. Most of the planning consents that led to completions in 2006/7 were based on the previous 30% affordable housing requirement policy, not the current 40% requirement. It will take some years for all the consents granted at the 30% requirement to filter through the system as planning permissions have a 5 year life.

2007/8 – 259 completed units were affordable housing.

The percentage of units completed that were affordable housing is not yet available as the total number of other housing completions is not yet fully compiled.

7 Cllr Herbert to Cllr Reid, Executive Councillor for Climate Change & Growth

How many staff are working on the growth agenda,

i) full time,

and

ii) at least 50%

at the offices of

a) City Council

b) South Cambs DC

c) County Council

and

d) Cambridgeshire Horizons

Answer from Councillor Reid, Executive Councillor for Climate Change & Growth

The growth agenda is increasingly becoming a major area of work across all departments and it is integral to achieving the City Council's objectives for the whole city. The amount of time spent on growth by each member of staff within the City Council is not specifically collected and it would be difficult and time consuming to collect this information given the complexities in defining what constitutes growth. It is understood that the two other local authorities have not collected detailed information either for similar reasons, albeit that South Cambridgeshire has provided a broad estimate that it has 12 full-time posts working on Northstowe.

It is, however, possible to advise on the number of staff working on growth for the four organisations using money partly or completely funded through Horizons. The information on the current position is as follows:

Cambridge City Council	15 posts (4 currently vacant and subject to recruitment)
South Cambridgeshire DC	11 posts
Cambridgeshire County Council	6 posts
Cambridgeshire Horizons	14 posts

The Horizons funding that supports these posts is based on Government grants that are made on a year by year basis and yet the delivery of growth is a long term commitment. This means that financial planning for growth is far more difficult and the City Council has had to underwrite the funding of many of these posts. It is also harder to recruit key staff working on growth when there is uncertainty about Government funding support in the medium to long term.

8 Cllr Blencowe to Cllr Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing

Could you please provide a detailed breakdown of where capital receipts from the City Council's Right to Buy sales have been spent in the last 3 years.

Answer from Councillor Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing

The actual and projected levels of Right-to-Buy (RTB) receipts are reported as part of the consideration of the funding available for capital expenditure in the Medium Term Strategy (MTS) each year – e.g. Table 27 of the September 2007 MTS. The MTS also confirms the Council's long-standing policy of earmarking RTB receipts for housing purposes (HRA or General Fund housing) – para 12.22 refers.

The MTS shows the use of the receipts in funding the Housing Capital Programme (in Appendix S). The final Budget-Setting Report (BSR) also shows an update on these figures (e.g. in Appendix P of the February 2008 edition), highlighting RTB receipts from other capital receipts.

Spending decisions are normally taken by the Council based on the overall total funding available, rather than identifying the specific sources for each item of expenditure.

At the end of each financial year, all capital expenditure in the Housing Capital Programme is financed using the available capital resources. This exercise is undertaken as part of the final accounting entries performed in closing the accounts for the authority, and seeks to ensure the most effective use of the funding available in the context of the total final spend.

In the first instance capital resources awarded for specific purposes are allocated to the relevant expenditure, ie Disabled Facilities Grant Funding is used to finance DFG expenditure, government grants awarded for specific projects are used to offset the costs incurred in these areas (e.g. LA Housing Capital Grant, Homelessness and Hostels Grants, Energy Grants).

The annual approval for MRA (Major Repairs Allowance) received via the subsidy system is then applied to relevant expenditure and Housing Revenue Account Direct Revenue Financing of Capital (DRF) is used up to the level budgeted for within the HRA, ensuring that both are used only to finance expenditure incurred in relation to our own stock.

Any residual expenditure after all of the above resources have been exhausted, is financed using in year right to buy and land sale receipts and, if necessary, capital balances from prior years.

Over the last three years, the residual spend requiring the use of right to buy receipts is detailed as follows:

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	3 Year Total
Decent Homes	(310,652)	(615,012)	(1,222,792)	(2,148,456)
Other HRA	(13,915)	(28,350)	(2,168)	(44,434)
Other Own Stock	(2,185,265)	(1,043,799)	(1,066,297)	(4,295,361)
Total HRA	(2,509,832)	(1,687,161)	(2,291,258)	(6,488,250)
Non-HRA	(937,975)	(904,066)	(711,892)	(2,553,933)
Total Housing General Fund	(937,975)	(904,066)	(711,892)	(2,553,933)
Total	(3,447,807)	(2,591,227)	(3,003,150)	(9,042,183)

Examples of the types of expenditure financed within each of these categories is :

Decent Homes	Central Heating, Kitchens, Bathrooms, Major Voids, PVCU, External Facia Works, Re-Wiring.
Other HRA	Energy Improvements, Road Improvements, Area Office Improvements.
Other Own Stock	Disabled Adaptations, CareCall, Tenants Incentive Schemes, Health & Safety Works, Garages, Asbestos Removal, Paving, Door Entry, Damp Works.
Non-HRA	Disabled Facilities Grants, Private Sector Housing Grants and Loans, Grants to External Agencies, Grants to RSL's for Affordable Housing Investment.