

**HOUSING AND HEALTH COMMITTEE**23 January 2002  
(5.30 – 8.05pm)

**PRESENT:** Councillors Nimmo-Smith (Chair), Bagnall, Griffiths, Howell, James, Liddle, Smart and Currie (alternate member for Councillor Stebbings)

Co-opted Members: Ms W Forster (Federation of Housing Associations), Mrs K Harris (tenant representative), Mr B Haywood (tenant representative)

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**02/g/01 **MINUTES****(i) Stanton House/Ditchburn Place (Minute Number 01/g/66(i))**

In answer to a question from Councillor Smart, the Head of City Homes advised that the partnership agreement between Social Services and City Homes for the provision of rehabilitation facilities in sheltered schemes had now been signed.

**(ii) Meeting with Social Housing Providers (Minute Number 01/g/77(ii))**

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Community Services said that he would shortly be organising the inaugural liaison meeting between councillors and representatives of the city's other social housing providers; this meeting would take place before the end of March.

**(iii) Adoption**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2001 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

02/g/02 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gilchrist, Overhill and Stebbings, Mr H Gault, Mr M Jones and Mr T Sweeney.

02/g/03 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

02/g/04 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No members of the public wished to address the Committee. The question listed on the agenda from Mr Phil Sheppard regarding the Hanover Court/Princess Court launderette had been withdrawn.

02/g/05      **GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGETS 2001/02 (REVISED), 2002/03  
BUDGET AND CAPITAL BIDS**

The Head of Accounting Services presented a report which summarised the latest position for the Committee's General Fund budgets.

The Chair reported that he had received a letter from Mr M Jones which highlighted the outcome of the budget consultation exercise. The Chair agreed that the exercise had been useful; it had shown that Housing Needs was considered to be a high priority by the public.

The Chair commended the Committee's two bids to the Priority Policy Fund (PPF) (FO1 – "Housing Needs Survey" – and FO2 – "Housing Aid"). He said that both should be given a high priority for submission to City Board, although the Housing Aid bid was required as a result of new legislation, and so this should be funded by the Government. Councillor Bagnall responded that there was provision within the local government settlement for accommodation costs resulting from the new housing legislation.

In answer to a question from Councillor Howell, the Chair said that the fitness and energy survey would enable the Council to secure Government funding. The Director of Community Services and the Head of Environmental Health and Waste Strategy added that the survey would help officers to prioritise work.

**Resolved that**

- 1) (by 6 votes to 0) The changes to the budgets (shown in Table 1 of the report) and to the Cash Limit Position (shown in Appendix A to the report) be noted, and the final budget figures be confirmed for submission to City Board.
- 2) (with no votes against) The Head of Street Services' Ditching Maintenance and Sewer Maps budgets be transferred to Environment Committee, and this be reported to City Board.
- 3) (with no votes against) The PPF bids at Appendix B to the report be given the following priorities for submission to City Board, taking account of the results from the second stage of the budget consultation (attached at Appendix C to the report):  
  
Housing Needs Survey (FO1) – High  
Housing Aid (FO2) – High
- 4) (with no votes against) The Project Appraisal for the fitness and energy survey (attached at Appendix D to the report) be approved.

02/g/06      **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT REVISED BUDGET 2001/02 AND ORIGINAL BUDGET 2002/03**

The Head of Accounting Services presented a report which described the latest position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget, and incorporated the estimated effects of rent restructuring, the final subsidy determination for 2002/03 and proposals in relation to spending under the Supporting People initiative.

The Chair said that, whilst the HRA budget had stabilised to an extent, the Government was reducing its subsidy to Cambridge's Council housing by £450,000 per year. Reserves could be used for three to four years, but decisions on the long-term future would need to be made; a report on the options for the future management of the stock would be brought to the next meeting. It would also be helpful if the Government would reveal its plans for the future of Housing Benefit, as these were likely to have a major effect on the HRA.

The Chair stated that the Government's rent restructuring proposals would result in disproportionate rent increases for Council tenants in Cambridge. The extra revenue from the rent increases would have to be paid to the Government and not used to benefit the tenants. The proposals would also have the effect of compressing the range of rents between the smallest and the largest properties; he asked that the officers work towards retaining the differential.

Councillor Bagnall responded that the rent restructuring proposals made sense when taking into account the country as a whole, but would have an adverse impact on tenants in areas of high housing prices such as Cambridge. She had raised this with the local Member of Parliament and relevant ministers and would continue to do so.

In answer to a question from Councillor Bagnall, the Director of Community Services said that rent restructuring would have the greatest impact on tenants who were on low incomes but not receiving benefits. People living in sheltered accommodation but not receiving benefits would also have to pay new charges under the Supporting People initiative, to be introduced in April 2003; he would be presenting a report to a future meeting on the impact of Supporting People on individuals. Councillor Bagnall proposed that take-up of benefits be encouraged, to ensure that all those entitled to them received them.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that

- 1) A rent increase be approved with effect from 1 April 2002 up to the maximum of inflation plus 0.5% plus £2 for individual properties if the software is available to do this. If this software is not available, an average rent increase of 5.68% be approved and applied to all properties.
- 2) An increase in garage rents of 2.25% plus 50p per week be approved.
- 3) The Director of Community Services in consultation with the Chair and Spokespersons of the Committee be given delegated authority to apply the 5%

local authority discretion in setting rent levels of individual properties to restore/maintain differential rent levels where appropriate, noting the strong wish of the Committee that the reduction of the differential between small and large properties as a result of rent restructuring be addressed.

- 4) The phasing of rent increases over the 10-year rent restructuring period in line with the subsidy formula for rent increases be approved.
- 5) Property rents be not immediately increased to target rent when a property is relet.
- 6) Service charges for utilities, caretaking and scheme premises all continue to be recovered at full cost.
- 7) The warden service charge or other Supporting People charge be frozen at the 2001/02 level.
- 8) The budgets be approved for submission to City Board.
- 9) Benefit take-up be encouraged by various means.

02/g/07      **SHARED OWNERSHIP (EQUITY SHARE) RESERVE**

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that the Housing Revenue Account general reserves available for shared ownership properties be transferred into the Shared Ownership (Equity Share) Reserve and maintained at the current level of £300,000.

02/g/08      **HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2002/03**

The Head of Accountancy Services presented a report which sought to obtain the Committee's approval for the proposed Housing Capital Programme for 2002/03, including the work to be funded from the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA). She added that, since the report had been written, the Government had confirmed the figure for Disabled Facility Grant provision as £318,000; this was the same as the assumed figure given in the report.

The Chair suggested that the word "programme" in recommendation 2.1a in the report should be replaced by "allocation of resources", as this was a more appropriate term.

The Chair said that external support was not meeting the level of demand for affordable housing in Cambridge. The Council was still waiting for Government recognition of the lack of affordable housing in the city; he would be meeting with a relevant Government minister in March to discuss the problem.

Councillor Griffiths stated that the Government's award of funding for 220 affordable homes in Cambridge under the Key Worker initiative was far too low to make any real difference to the problem. The City Council had not put in its own bid under the Key Worker initiative as its needs did not match the DLTR's criteria. However, she proposed that the officers be asked to investigate ways in which the Council's low cost equity

share schemes could be developed so as to include an allocation for key workers.

Councillors Bagnall and Howell said that the City Council would, in fact, have been eligible to put in a bid under the Key Worker initiative. In not doing so, it had missed out on an opportunity for further affordable housing funding for Cambridge.

In answer to a point made by Councillor Bagnall, the Director of Community Services said that he would write to the residents of Brackyn Road to inform them of forthcoming repair work and would investigate the possibility of painting doors at Brackyn Road houses.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that

- 1) The allocation of resources set out in Appendix A to the report be approved.
- 2) The programme of works funded by the MRA, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.
- 3) Officers investigate and report back on ways in which the Council's low cost equity share schemes could be developed so as to include an allocation for key workers.

02/g/09      **AUDIT OF THE FOOD SAFETY ENFORCEMENT FUNCTION**

The Head of Environmental Health and Waste Strategy presented a report which included the findings of the Food Standards Agency audit of the food safety enforcement function within the Environmental Health and Waste Strategy Service.

The Chair said that the audit had demonstrated the high level of excellence within the food safety enforcement function, and asked that his congratulations be passed on to the staff involved.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that the findings of the report attached as Appendix A to the officer report be accepted.

02/g/10      **HEALTH AND SAFETY ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

The Head of Environmental Health and Waste Strategy presented a report which included the revised Health and Safety Enforcement Policy.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that the revised Health and Safety Enforcement Policy, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

02/g/11      **BEST VALUE – HOUSING REPAIRS FUNDAMENTAL SERVICE REVIEW PROJECT DEFINITION**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which sought approval for the Project Definition relating to the Housing Repairs Best Value Fundamental Service Review. He tabled a revised version of the Project Definition that included changes

(shown in italics) made as a result of comments from the Best Value Steering Group and the Fundamental Service Review and Audit Working Party.

Councillor Howell said that he was concerned at the amount of time and bureaucracy that was being taken up by Best Value across the Council. The Chair stated that he shared this concern and that efforts should be taken to minimise the amount of time and bureaucracy taken up by this Review, for instance by targeting problem areas and not concentrating on areas that were known to be performing well. Councillor Bagnall suggested that, once the Review had been completed, the officers should analyse and report back on the benefits of the Review as compared to the cost.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that

- 1) The revised Project Definition (tabled at the meeting) for the Housing Repairs Fundamental Service Review be approved.
- 2) At the end of the Review, the officers analyse and report back on the benefits of the Review as compared to the cost.

02/g/12      **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND TARGETS AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT**

The Head of Housing Services presented a report which set out performance monitoring and Continuous Improvement Plan monitoring information for Housing and Related Services.

On BVPI 69 – percentage of rent lost through local authority dwelling becoming vacant – the Head of Housing Services agreed, in response to a request from the Chair, to investigate the possibility of producing two new local performance indicators, as follows:

- a) to give a breakdown of BVPI 69 into management and standard voids; and
- b) to show the percentage time taken to turn around voids.

In answer to a question from the Chair, the Head of Environmental Health and Waste Strategy said that he would present a report to the next meeting on the areas of priority for the Housing Standards Team in 2002/03.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that

- 1) The Best Value Performance Indicators and Local Performance Indicators be confirmed for inclusion in the 2002 Best Value Performance Plan as set out in the report.
- 2) The draft targets set against indicators for the year 2002/03 be agreed.
- 3) The progress of the continuous improvements to service achieved in 2001/02 be noted.
- 4) The Continuous Improvement Plan proposals and their resource implications for

2002/03 be approved.

02/g/13      **FLOATING SUPPORT SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND THE SUPPORTING PEOPLE BUDGET**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which outlined proposals for maximising the provision of support services to vulnerable Council tenants in a way that would ensure the long-term costs would be picked up by the Supporting People budget from 2003 onwards.

The Committee was pleased to support the proposals. Members stressed the need for further partnership working with other agencies in relation to the Supporting People initiative and, in particular, for encouraging financial contributions from other agencies.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that

- 1) Two posts be retained within the CareCall budget of the Housing Revenue Account to provide floating support to elderly and disabled customers of CareCall.
- 2) Three staff be appointed to provide floating support services to vulnerable tenants in general needs housing, funded from charges to the tenants receiving the service.
- 3) £10,000 of reserves be spent to facilitate the setting up of this scheme.
- 4) Officers report back on the success of the scheme and the involvement of partners, such as the Health Authority and Social Services.

02/g/14      **DITCHBURN PLACE/STANTON HOUSE**

The Head of City Homes presented a report which described proposals for a change of use of 101 Ditchburn Place and a change of use of 20 Stanton House.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that

- 1) The conversion and change of use of 101 Ditchburn Place from a resident staff house to one Very Sheltered and one Supported flat for vulnerable people be agreed.
- 2) A change of use of 20 Stanton House from sheltered housing to laundry facilities and a day/meeting room be agreed.

02/g/15      **PARTNERING THE GAS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which set out proposals for partnering the gas maintenance contract.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that

- 1) Officers proceed with work towards a partnership for the gas maintenance contract as set out in the report.
- 2) Officers report back to members in late summer/early autumn on the progress achieved.

02/g/16      **APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES: FREE NURSING CARE IMPLEMENTATION COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE/CONTINUING HEALTH CARE REVIEW PANEL**

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that Councillor Nimmo-Smith and a member to be nominated by the Labour Group be appointed as the Council's representatives on the newly-created Free Nursing Implementation Complaints Procedure/Continuing Health Care Review Panel.

02/g/17      **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that the public be excluded from the meeting for the next items on the grounds that if they were present there would be disclosure to them of information defined as exempt from publication by paragraphs 7 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972.

02/g/18      **SALE OF FREEHOLD OF 38 WINDSOR ROAD**

The Head of Housing Services presented a report which described a request for the Council to sell its freehold interest in 38 Windsor Road. He explained that this report was actually being presented to the Committee for information, as the decision on this matter lay within the remit of the Property and Administration Sub-Committee. He confirmed that the Sub-Committee had supported the officer recommendations when it had considered the report at its meeting on 22 January 2002.

The Committee noted the report.

02/g/19      **FORMER TENANT ARREARS – WRITING OFF BAD DEBT**

The Committee noted a report which detailed four cases of former tenant arrears together with a summary of the action taken to try to recover the debt. The Property and Administration Sub-Committee had agreed to write off the arrears at its meeting on 22 January 2002.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.

**CHAIR**