

**PROPERTY AND ADMINISTRATION
SUB-COMMITTEE**19 March 2002
(4.30 – 5.50pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Taylor (Chair), Bradnack, Currie, Dryden, Lakin, Liddle, C Rosenstiel and Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor White (for minute number 02/b/25)

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**02/b/18 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Chair said that, as the Council would be adopting new political structures in May 2002, this was the last ever meeting of the Sub-Committee. She thanked the members of the Sub-Committee and the Committee Manager for their hard work.

02/b/19 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2002 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

02/b/20 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Douglas.

02/b/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor White declared a Code of Conduct (non-financial) interest in minute number 02/b/25 – "Abbey House" – as he was a City Council representative on and a Trustee of the Cambridge and County Folk Museum. He remained in the room and took part in the discussion.

Councillor Taylor declared a Code of Conduct (non-financial) interest in minute number 02/b/30 – "Former Tenant Arrears – Writing Off Bad Debt" – as she was acquainted to one of the former tenants listed in the report. She remained in the room and took part in the decision.

02/b/22 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public wished to address the Sub-Committee.

02/b/23 PHONE MASTS IN CAMBRIDGE – DRAFT PLAN OF ACTION

The Head of Strategy and Partnerships presented a report which requested members' comments on the draft action plan for the siting of mobile phone masts in Cambridge.

The Head of Property and Building Services tabled a confidential briefing note setting out the income the Council received as a result of mast installations on its properties. Councillor C Rosenstiel expressed concern at the potential loss of income that could occur if the Council adopted the suggested precautionary approach to mast installations on its properties.

Councillor Bradnack said that it was still not clear whether phone masts presented a substantial risk to health, and so it was too early to recommend a way forward. The proposed Liaison Officer would be in a position to look into this more closely. Councillor C Rosenstiel responded that masts were relatively safe; people were in more danger from using mobile phone handsets.

Resolved (by 5 votes to 0) that City Board be informed that the Sub-Committee accepts the recommendations in the report, so far as they relate to the functions of the Sub-Committee, subject to the following comments:

- the Sub-Committee is concerned at the potential loss of income that could result if the Council adopts the precautionary approach to the installation of masts on its non-residential buildings;
- the Sub-Committee supports the view of the Cambridge Federation of Tenants, Leaseholders and Residents that income from masts on Council-owned residential buildings should not be spent on a Liaison Officer at the expense of services for residents of the buildings affected.

02/b/24 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS, CARRY FORWARDS AND SIGNIFICANT VARIANCES**

The Director of Finance presented a report which set out the position regarding the Sub-Committee's budgets.

Councillor Bradnack stated that the Labour Group would not support the virement of £40,000 from the underspend on CCTV to the Administrative Buildings Repair and Renewals Fund, as there was likely to be a heavy demand on the CCTV budget in the coming year and it would be better to spend money on CCTV than on works at the Guildhall. The Head of Property and Building Services responded that the CCTV service would not suffer as a result of this virement; adequate funds would remain in the CCTV budget. The money was, however, required for electrical works at the Guildhall, which were necessary largely as a result of a huge increase in the use of computers by Council staff over recent years.

In answer to a point raised by Councillor Smith, the Chair stated that the Council would be consulting with shopkeepers and residents regarding security in shopping areas.

Resolved that

- 1) (unanimously) An estimated total of £60,500 budgets, detailed in Appendix A to the report, be carried forward from 2001/02 into 2002/03, subject to the final outturn position.

- 2) (by 5 votes to 3) Virement of £40,000 in 2001/02 from the underspend on CCTV to the Administrative Buildings Repair and Renewals Fund as a contribution towards urgent electrical works at the Guildhall (as mentioned in paragraph 4.2 of the report) be approved.

02/b/25 **ABBEY HOUSE**

The Head of Property and Building Services presented a report which described discussions between officers and representatives of conservation organisations about the future of Abbey House and sought authority to dispose of the property on the open market. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services tabled a briefing note on the history of the property.

Councillor White addressed the Sub-Committee, with the Chair's permission, as a City Council representative on and a Trustee of the Cambridge and County Folk Museum. He said that, in 1973, the Museum had conveyed Abbey House to the City Council, as it was unable to maintain it properly. The Mayor at the time had expressed the hope that the House could be used at some future date for the benefit of the people of Cambridge, and the Museum hoped that this would be possible now. The Museum would like the property to be leased on a long-term basis to an organisation that would allow public access. The Museum felt that, if the freehold of the property was sold, the Council would lose its influence over the use; however, if the freehold was sold, the Council should insist on some limited public access. The Museum also felt that it should receive a large share of the proceeds of a freehold sale; in this way it could benefit from the sale of the property it had once owned. Some of the Museum's share could form part of the City Council's contribution to the development of the Museum, whilst the rest could be placed in an endowment fund for the long-term use of the Museum.

The Chair stated that the Council was keen to find an appropriate use for the House and to ensure public access as far as possible. She suggested that any proceeds from the freehold sale of the House could be dedicated to the upkeep of historic buildings.

Councillor C Rosenstiel pointed out that public access to the House would have health and safety implications. He felt that various options should be explored before a final decision on the disposal of the property was made, including dealing with parts of the site in different ways. He therefore proposed the following amendment to the recommendation:

- 1) The Head of Property and Building Services be instructed, in liaison with the Advisory Group, to put Abbey House on the market and invite offers for the property, to include proposals for its appropriate use and conservation and provision for some public access.
- 2) Offers be considered at a future meeting of this Sub-Committee or its successor, including whether to recommend the City Board or its successor to accept a particular or any offer.

Councillors Bradnack, Smith and White welcomed the amendment. Councillor Bradnack expressed disappointment that the various options had not been explored

more fully over the past year.

Councillor C Rosenstiel and the Chair asked the Head of Property and Building Services to invite a representative of the Folk Museum to join the Advisory Group.

Resolved (unanimously) that

- 1) The Head of Property and Building Services be instructed, in liaison with the Advisory Group, to put Abbey House on the market and invite offers for the property, to include proposals for its appropriate use and conservation and provision for some public access.
- 2) Offers be considered at a future meeting of this Sub-Committee or its successor, including whether to recommend the City Board or its successor to accept a particular or any offer.

02/b/26 **PETITIONS**

(a) E-mail Petitions

The Director of Central Services presented an agenda item which recommended a scheme whereby the Council could accept petitions which people had put their names to by e-mail.

Councillor C Rosenstiel said that the scheme was a sound one, which would increase accessibility for the public.

Resolved (unanimously) that the officers include in the Council's new Constitution, which would take effect in May 2002, the following procedure for accepting e-mail petitions:

1. An e-mail petition must consist of individual e-mails, showing the sender's e-mail address.
2. An e-mail petition must include the sender's postal address.
3. The e-mails must be addressed to the organiser (rather than the Council) who must then let the Council have print-outs of the requisite number of supporting e-mails.
4. Random checks will be carried out on petitioners that have used the e-mail procedure.

(b) Petitions Procedure

The Sub-Committee noted that work to revise the Council's petitions procedure, as discussed at the previous meeting (minute number 02/b/11(a) refers), was in hand but had not yet been completed.

02/b/27 **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 3, 7 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972.

02/b/28 **129 HOBART ROAD**

The Director of Community Services presented an agenda item which proposed terms for a new lease for 129 Hobart Road.

Resolved (unanimously) that a new lease be granted to Cambridge Mencap for 129 Hobart Road on the terms set out in the item.

02/b/29 **NON-DOMESTIC RATES AND COUNCIL TAX – BAD DEBTS FOR WRITE-OFF**

The Head of Revenue Services presented a report which described Non-Domestic (Business) Rate and Council Tax debts that were deemed no longer collectable and sought approval to write off the debts.

Resolved (with no votes against) that the debts as listed in the report totalling £53,353.24 in respect of Business Rates be written off.

02/b/30 **FORMER TENANT ARREARS – WRITING OFF BAD DEBT**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which set out details of 15 cases of former tenant arrears, together with a summary of the action taken to try to recover the debt, and sought approval to write off the arrears.

The Chair said that it would be helpful for members to receive a presentation on the work of the Council's debt collectors, including a comparison between collection of housing tenant arrears and of commercial tenant arrears.

Resolved (unanimously) that the 15 cases of former tenant arrears totalling £41,912.04 as detailed in the report be written off.

The meeting ended at 5.50pm

CHAIR