

**HOUSING AND HEALTH COMMITTEE**20 March 2002  
(5.30 – 10.20pm)

**PRESENT:** Councillors Nimmo-Smith (Chair), Bagnall, Gilchrist, Griffiths, Howell, James, Liddle, Overhill, Smart and Stebbings

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Dryden (for minute number 02/g/26)

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

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**02/g/20      **PRESENTATION BY CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY CARE TRUST**

The Committee received a presentation from Chris Humphries, the Chief Executive of the Cambridge Primary Care Trust, on the role of the Trust and its potential interface with the Council.

Mr Humphries answered a number of questions from members. Councillors Griffiths and Howell expressed concern at the lack of detoxification provision in the city for substance abusers.

The Chair thanked Mr Humphries for the presentation, and said that he would welcome regular feedback sessions from the Trust for councillors.

02/g/21      **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS****(i) Final Meeting**

The Chair said that, as the Council would be adopting new political structures in May 2002, this was the last ever meeting of the Committee. He paid tribute to the elected and co-opted members and officers who had been involved with the Committee, and thanked them for their hard work.

**(ii) Jonathan Rayner**

The Chair reported that Jonathan Rayner, formerly one of the tenant representatives on the Committee, had died recently. He paid tribute to Mr Rayner's hard work on behalf of Council tenants as a member of a number of different bodies over many years. He asked that a letter of condolence be written to Mr Rayner's next of kin on behalf of the Committee.

02/g/22      **MINUTES****(i) Appointments to Outside Bodies (Minute Number 02/g/16)**

In answer to a question from Councillor Smart, Councillor Bagnall reported that

Councillor Dryden had been nominated by the Labour Group as one of the Council's representatives on the Free Nursing Care Implementation Complaints Procedure/Continuing Health Care Review Panel.

## **(ii) Adoption**

Councillor Griffiths asked that the final sentence of the fourth paragraph of minute number 02/g/08 – "Housing Capital Programme 2002/03" – be amended to read as follows: "However, she proposed that the officers be asked to investigate ways in which the eligibility criteria for the Council's low cost equity share schemes could be adapted to include the Council's own employees", and that resolution 3 of that minute be amended accordingly.

Subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2002 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **02/g/23 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr H Gault, Mr B Haywood and Mr M Jones.

### **02/g/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Griffiths declared a Code of Conduct (non-financial) interest in minute number 02/g/39 – "Single Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy Statement and Local Connection Criteria" – as she was a Board member of Jimmy's Night Shelter; she remained in the room and took part in the decision.

Councillor Overhill declared a Code of Conduct (non-financial) interest in minute number 02/g/39 – "Single Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy Statement and Local Connection Criteria" – as he was a volunteer at Jimmy's Night Shelter; he remained in the room and took part in the decision.

Ms Forster declared a Code of Conduct (non-financial) interest in minute number 02/g/39 – "Single Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy Statement and Local Connection Criteria" – as she was an officer of English Churches Housing Group, one of the agencies involved; she remained in the room and took part in the discussion.

### **02/g/25 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

See minute number 02/g/39.

### **02/g/26 PETITIONS**

Councillor Dryden presented a petition that was written in the following terms:

*We, the undersigned residents of the Colville Road estate, which comprises some of the oldest housing stock owned by Cambridge City Council, petition the Council to take account of the age of these properties, and to place them on the priority list for*

*installation of plastic windows in the light of that.*

The Committee also noted a petition which had been received, but which did not have the required number of signatures to enable it to be formally presented. The petition was written in the following terms:

*We the undersigned call upon the City Council to fit double glazing to houses that still have metal framed windows in Ross Street.*

The Director of Community Services reported that the condition rating of the homes in Colville Road had now been adjudged to be Borderline, rather than Adequate as stated on the agenda. The petitions would be taken into account during the business planning process, which would begin in June.

Councillor Howell said that more transparency was needed in the way money was allocated. Councillor Bagnall stated that the criteria for allocating money should be credible and robust. The Chair responded that the decisions on the allocation of funds, to be taken as part of the business planning process, would be made by an open and understandable process in consultation with tenants. He was sympathetic to the petitioners, but stressed that funding was limited.

#### 02/g/27      **PHONE MASTS IN CAMBRIDGE – DRAFT PLAN OF ACTION**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which requested members' comments on the draft action plan for the siting of mobile phone masts in Cambridge.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that City Board be informed that the Committee accepts the recommendations in the report, subject to the following comment:

- the 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/g/28      **HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD AND ELECTED TENANTS**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which described proposals for setting up a body, to be known as the Housing Management Board, to act as a consultative forum with tenants and leaseholders, particularly with regard to Executive decisions. Tenants, leaseholders and councillors would be able to meet on terms of equality with equal voting rights; the tenants and leaseholders would be directly elected to the Board. He tabled a two-page amendment to the report.

Mr Sweeney expressed concern at the proposal that the tenants and leaseholders should be elected to the Board by the Single Transferable Vote system, as recommended in the tabled amendment: he felt that this system would be confusing. The Chair responded that the system was much fairer than "first-past-the-post", and had been used successfully in many other elections, including an earlier city-wide election of tenant representatives.

Councillor Gilchrist proposed that the tenant and leaseholder elections take place every four years, rather than every three years as suggested in the report, as this would save money and fit in with councillors' terms of office, which were every four years. Councillor Smart pointed out, however, that, should a vacancy occur, it would be filled by an unelected co-optee until the next round of elections. It would therefore be preferable to have a shorter period between each round of elections. On being put to the vote, Councillor Gilchrist's proposal was lost by 2 votes to 6.

The Director of Community Services said that the report proposed that everyone over 18 years old living in a Council house in the city should be entitled to vote in the tenant/leaseholder elections. However, he felt that it would be very difficult to ensure that this was run fairly, and so he suggested that voting rights be limited to those named on rent cards. In answer to a question from Councillor Gilchrist, he stated that basing the right to vote on the electoral role would significantly increase the cost of the elections. It might be possible make exceptions for special cases, such as carers, who were not named on rent cards.

Councillors Griffiths and Smart asked why tenant/leaseholder representatives would not necessarily have to live in the area (north or south) that they were representing (paragraph 6.3 of the constitution). Mr Sweeney said that it was sensible to include this provision, as it was not yet clear whether there would be enough candidates to represent each of the areas.

Councillor Gilchrist suggested that there should be a higher proportion of tenants/leaseholders on the Board than councillors. The Chair responded that it would be best to start with equal numbers. The Director of Community Services added that Government guidelines advised equal numbers.

Councillor Smart proposed that the scheme be reviewed after two years.

**Resolved** that, subject to the approval of City Board,

- 1) (with no votes against) The setting up of the Housing Management Board be approved on the principles and timetable contained within the report, subject to the amendments to the report tabled at the meeting, and in accordance with the constitution and terms of reference attached as Appendix 1 to the report, subject to the following amendments:

(with no votes against) *3.3 amend to:*

The Executive Councillor for Housing and Health shall also, where possible, attend and participate in meetings of the Housing Management Board but shall not have a vote.

(unanimously) *5.3 amend to:*

Those eligible to vote shall be:

- Any tenant or joint tenant of the City Council's local authority housing stock.
- Any leaseholder of a residential property in the City Council's local

authority housing stock.

(by 6 votes to 1) *5.5 amend to:*

The tenants and leaseholders shall elect their representatives by the Single Transferable Vote, following the current edition of the rules laid down in the publication "How to Conduct an Election by the Single Transferable Vote", published by the Electoral Reform Society. There shall be a minimum of four tenants elected to the Housing Management Board by this method.

(with no votes against) *5.6 amend to:*

Officers shall draw up a scheme for the election which will ensure both separate north and south city representation and a maximum of two leaseholders to be elected. This scheme will respect the principles in paragraph 6.3 of this document.

(with no votes against) *8.1 amend to:*

Tenant and leaseholder members of the Housing Management Board shall be members of the Tenant Forum, and shall be invited to every meeting of the Tenant Forum. By this method, they will maintain links with Residents' Associations, the Cambridge Federation of Tenants Leaseholders and Residents, and other bodies involved in representing tenants and leaseholders of the City Council.

(with no votes against) *10.1 amend to:*

Tenant and leaseholder representatives and co-opted members shall subscribe to the Code of Conduct for Councillors adopted by the City Council, including any amendments.

(with no votes against) *add as paragraph 12.5:*

The scheme be reviewed after two years.

- 2) (with no votes against) It be agreed in principle that allowances be paid to members of the Board and that a scheme be worked up and submitted for the approval of the Executive Councillor for Housing and Health.

## 02/g/29      **FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN**

The Head of Environmental Health and Waste Strategy presented a report which sought approval for the Council's new Food Safety Service Plan.

The Chair welcomed the Plan and commended the success of the previous Plan.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that the Food Safety Service Plan attached at Appendix A to the report be approved.

## 02/g/30      **WORK PRIORITIES FOR THE HOUSING STANDARDS TEAM**

The Head of Environmental Health and Waste Strategy presented a report which reviewed the work priorities of the Housing Standards Team following the reduction in

resources available for renovation grant work and the restructuring of the Team.

The Chair said that the Housing Standards Team had a significant role to play in the provision of safe and adequate housing in the private sector. It was important for the Council to be proactive in tackling deficiencies in private sector housing, although opportunities to do this were more limited now than in the past owing to less capital funding being available for grants, as a result of a change in Government priorities.

In answer to a question from Councillor Gilchrist, the Head of Environmental Health and Waste Strategy stated that the Council was continuing to communicate with landlords, by means of a newsletter and consultation meetings.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that the work priorities identified in section 5 of the report be approved.

02/g/31      **GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS, CARRY FORWARDS AND SIGNIFICANT VARIANCES**

The Head of Accounting Services presented a report which set out the position regarding the Committee's General Fund budgets.

In answer to a point made by Councillor Bagnall, the Director of Community Services said that further work required with rough sleepers and single homeless people would need to be taken into account during the budget-setting process for 2003/04.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that City Board be asked for its approval to carry forward an estimated total of £66,560 budgets, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, from 2001/02 into 2002/03, subject to the final outturn position.

02/g/32      **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGETS, CARRY FORWARDS AND SIGNIFICANT VARIANCES**

The Head of Accounting Services presented a report which set out the position regarding the Housing Revenue Account budgets.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that the carry forward of an estimated total of £75,000 budgets, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, from 2001/02 into 2002/03, subject to the final outturn position, be approved.

02/g/33      **HOUSING CAPITAL OVERVIEW REPORT 2001/02**

The Head of Accounting Services presented a report which set out the current position of the Housing Capital Programme for 2001/02.

**Resolved** (with no votes against) that City Board be asked for its approval to carry forward any balance of the £1million use of reserves approved for the Housing Capital Programme in 2001/02 to fund Housing General Fund activities in the 2002/03 programme.

**02/g/34 HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2002/03**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which sought the Committee's approval for the Housing Association Grants and Renovation/Disabled Facility Grant commitments in the Capital Programme for 2002/03.

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

- 1) The priority list of 2002/03 bid round projects for funding either through Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme or Local Authority Social Housing Grant, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.
- 2) Local Authority Social Housing Grant funding of Phase 2 Cambourne schemes, as shown in Appendix B to the report, be approved.

**02/g/35 STOCK OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which considered the assessment of stock options for the Council produced by the Housing Quality Network (HQN).

The Chair stressed the importance of carrying on the Council's improvements in the provision of housing management, so as to achieve an "excellence" rating from the Housing Inspectorate; this would enable the Council to apply to set up an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO). He added that staff and tenants would be fully consulted on the stock options being considered.

Councillor Bagnall stated that the setting up of an ALMO appeared to be a way of accessing extra resources. When the tenants were consulted, the advantages and disadvantages of the stock options available would need to be fully explained; it would need to be made clear that full stock transfer was not being revisited.

Councillor Howell said that the HQN report should have considered full stock transfer, including the possibility of undertaking this in stages.

The Chair and Councillor Howell expressed concern at the Government's proposal to restrict the powers of debt-free authorities to spend 100% of the capital receipts from the sale of Council houses, as this would have a detrimental impact on Cambridge. Councillor Bagnall responded that this was a sensible proposal when viewed from the national perspective, but the Council should make its concerns regarding the effect on Cambridge known to the Government.

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

- 1) The importance of achieving an "excellence" rating from the Housing Inspectorate (ie 3\* improving) for all Housing Revenue Account services be agreed.
- 2) Officers consult fully with staff and tenants on the stock options identified in

the HQN report, taking into account the views expressed by the Committee.

- 3) No decision be taken on stock options until the cost of achieving "Decent Homes Standards" within set Government timescales, together with any other stock investment requirements, have been assessed more accurately.
- 4) Officers report further to the Housing and Health Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in July in conjunction with the review of the Housing Business Plan for 2003/04.
- 5) Officers write to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions expressing the Council's concerns at the proposal to restrict the powers of debt-free authorities to spend 100% of their capital receipts from the sale of Council houses.

#### 02/g/36      **FEEDBACK OF TENANT SURVEY OF SHELTERED HOUSING**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which provided feedback on a survey of users of the new CareCall service.

Councillors Smart and Gilchrist paid tribute to the staff for the largely positive feedback received and for the smooth transition to the new service.

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

- 1) The overall positive feedback on the new CareCall service be welcomed.
- 2) Responses be made to all the sheltered tenants' complaints and suggestions highlighted in the survey.
- 3) An action plan of common areas of concern within the CareCall service highlighted in the survey be produced, to include measurable outcomes and realistic time targets.
- 4) An outside consultant be commissioned to conduct a postal survey to all sheltered scheme tenants, with the exception of Ditchburn Place and Stanton House, by 31 December 2002 to monitor continuous improvement within the CareCall service.

#### 02/g/37      **KEY WORKER AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN CAMBRIDGE**

The Directors of Community Services and of Environment and Planning presented a report which introduced the findings of a study into key worker housing in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire and provided an update on the Starter Home Initiative.

The Chair welcomed the study. He said that it was important to work with South Cambridgeshire in developing low cost housing options in the city and its surrounding area. He expressed regret that the lack of affordable housing had not been tackled at

an earlier stage.

Councillor Bagnall stated that the Council should lobby for more funding of the kind made available by the Starter Home Initiative. She suggested that a copy of the findings be sent to the East of England Development Agency, which might support Cambridge in future lobbying. She pointed out that the study had been approved by a resolution of the Council in December 2000, but it had taken until this meeting for it to come before members.

Councillor Griffiths welcomed the study and, in particular, the possibility of the Council being able to insist that developers provided more than 30% affordable housing when giving planning permission for new schemes.

Councillor Howell expressed misgivings about the study's recommendations. He was concerned that there was no clear definition of key worker, and so the allocation of key worker housing would be arbitrary and inequitable. It would also take away people's choice of area. The recommendations would not address the fact that there was insufficient housing in Cambridge to meet demand: a better solution would be to build housing outside the city close to transport links.

**Resolved** (by 7 votes to 0) that

- 1) The findings of the study be endorsed, and used to support future bids under the Starter Home Initiative, to influence the next City Council Housing Strategy and to lobby for further resources.
- 2) This research be used in developing future policies for low cost home ownership.
- 3) Applicants for posts at the City Council be informed that, subject to the availability of suitable finance, they would be eligible to join the Housing Needs Register and to take up shared ownership housing through the City Council's own scheme, if properties are available.

02/g/38      **DRAFT SUPPORTING PEOPLE STRATEGY 2002-2007**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which considered the draft Supporting People Strategy 2002-2007 and the key issues and implications arising from it. A letter, including a comment relating to this item, from Mike Jones, a co-opted member of the Committee representing the Cambridge Housing Partnership, was tabled.

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

- 1) The draft Supporting People Strategy 2002-2007 be approved in principle.
- 2) Officers be instructed to present the final Strategy at the Housing and Health Scrutiny Committee meeting in July for recommendation to the Executive Councillor for Housing and Health for approval.

02/g/39      **SINGLE HOMELESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY  
STATEMENT AND LOCAL CONNECTION CRITERIA**

The Director of Community Services presented a report which sought approval for the draft revised Single Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy Statement. A letter, including comments relating to this item, from Mike Jones, a co-opted member of the Committee representing the Cambridge Housing Partnership, was tabled.

Mieke Hinchcliffe-Wood of Wintercomfort addressed the Committee under the Public Speaking Rights procedure. She stressed that Wintercomfort was not taking a position on the contents of the draft Strategy at this stage, but wished to make the following points:

- In February, she had attended, along with staff from other agencies, a summit organised by the Council to discuss the Strategy. The Local Connection concept had been mentioned at the summit, but had not been considered in detail, nor had it been made clear that Local Connection would be the main focus of the Strategy. She therefore urged the Committee to defer approving the Strategy until there had been further consultation with agencies, particularly as there was a threat to withdraw funding from any agency that did not sign up to it.
- It would be sensible to wait for some feedback from Brighton and Oxford, where Local Connection was already being used, before introducing it in Cambridge.
- If people were refused access to services but would not leave the city, this could lead to an increase in rough sleepers.

The Director of Community Services responded that the Local Connection criteria had not been considered in detail at the summit, as they had not been published at that time.

However, he would be arranging a meeting with the relevant agencies to look at the criteria in detail.

Councillor Gilchrist expressed concern that it would be difficult to enforce the Local Connection criteria: much would depend on cooperation from other local authorities and agencies around the country in ascertaining an individual's area of origin. Councillor Griffiths responded that she was confident that the criteria could be applied. She stressed that the Council and other agencies in Cambridge were already making a great deal of progress in tackling the problems of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Councillor Howell said that he supported the Local Connection concept. There was a finite amount of housing and support available in the city, and these should be provided to people with a genuine Cambridge connection. He expressed concern at the lack of detoxification facilities for drug and alcohol addiction.

The Chair stated that the Council would build on its successes in dealing with homelessness, and would work with other agencies towards improving detoxification provision. It was important to be equitable when allocating scarce housing, and Local Connection would form an important part of that judgement. He also welcomed, in

particular, the proposals for outreach to young people contained in the Strategy.

In answer to a question from Councillor Smart, the Director of Community Services said that the Supporting People scheme could be a useful source of funding for some of the initiatives proposed in the Strategy.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Community Services stated that it was important for a bid to be made for capital funds for the projects listed on page 200 of the agenda. Once the details of the projects had been finalised, they would need to be evaluated and approved. He stressed that, although many other agencies were involved, the Rough Sleepers Unit viewed the Council as being ultimately responsible for the success of the Strategy. The Chair stated that if the bids for funding the proposed projects were successful they would still need proper appraisal and full consultation before agreeing to implement them.

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

- 1) The Strategy Statement (attached at Appendix 1 to the report) and the funding submission to the Homelessness Directorate be agreed, in particular a new, robust approach to "Local Connection", encouraging people who come to Cambridge to seek homelessness services to return home.
- 2) The creation of three new posts be agreed, two at the Council and one at an agency to be advised, as outlined in the Strategy. These posts to focus on:
  - i) implementing Local Connection rules;
  - ii) developing and co-ordinating a strategic approach to homeless young people;
  - iii) providing support and advice to young people.
- 3) The Rough Sleepers Officer consult with provider agencies and neighbouring district councils to produce a "process document", to accompany the Local Connection criteria.

02/g/40      **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

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

02/g/41      **FORMER TENANT ARREARS – WRITING OFF BAD DEBT**

The Committee noted a report which detailed 15 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, totalling £41,912.04, at its meeting on 19 March 2002.

The meeting closed at 10.20pm.

**CHAIR**