

**HOUSING AND HEALTH SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MINUTES**5 November 2003
5.30pm – 7.30pm

PRESENT: Councillors Adey (Chair), Councillors Bagnall, Bell, James, Pinnington, J Smith, Stebbings, Todd-Jones

ALSO PRESENT : Councillor Smart (Executive Councillor for Housing and Health); Non-voting, co-opted members Cambridge Tenant Federation representatives, Mr B Haywood, Mrs K Harris, Miss J Tipple. (Cambridgeshire Social Services), Dr D Gregson (Cambridge Primary Care Trust)

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

03/HH/60 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th July 2003 were confirmed as a correct record.

03/HH/61 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Downham and Hugh Gault (non-voting co-opted member representing Cambridgeshire Social Services).

03/HH/62 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Pinnington and Stebbings declared personal interests as Council tenants. They remained in the room and took part in the meeting.

03/HH/63 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public

**03/HH/64 SERVICE PLANS AND GENERAL FUND AND HRA REVISED
& CAPITAL BUDGETS 2003/4 (See also Record of Decision
43)**

The Committee considered Directors' report setting out service performance against objectives and targets for 2002/3 and the first half of 2003/4, together with changes to items of expenditure in the Capital and Revenue budgets for the 2003/4 financial year.

The report gave details of a number of significant variances to items in the

General Fund which had caused an increase of £101, 820 on the original budget. These items were: an estimated under achievement of Agency fee income (due to changes in legislation, increased staff turnover, and the need to use external surveyors) and a possible unrecoverable amount of subsidy relating to the high number of placements to bed and breakfast accommodation. Steps were being taken by officers to reduce the use of external surveyors for the Home Aid Agency service.

In the light of impending legislation limiting numbers of placements to bed and breakfast accommodation, and concerns expressed by committee members about the Council's high number of such placements, particularly of families with children, Councillor Smart undertook to have a report brought back to Scrutiny Committee before Spring 2004. Councillor Stebbings asked for mitigation costs to be included.

The £112, 800 variation currently shown for the Housing Revenue Account was due to an underachievement of rent income and service charges related to an unexpected increase in Right To Buy (RTB) sales; refurbishment costs for Rawlyn Court and Whitlocks; an expected reduction in the number of clients on benefits; unrequited revenue funding for the Capital Programme; and a reduction in Housing Subsidy.

Revisions to the Housing Capital Programme included slippage of £435,000 relating to Compulsory Purchase Orders; additional expenditure on grants to King Street Housing Society; an anticipated under spend of the renovation grant budget; possible additional RTB receipts; required funding to complete refurbishment work at East Road flats; and recommended spending on structural repairs to properties at Hobart Road and Door and flats at Fison Road.

The Committee agreed the recommendations (by 6 votes to 0) for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

03/HH/65 **PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT 2002**

Dr Gregson gave a ten minute presentation to the committee focusing on a number of issues this report and how they linked to the committee's services, chiefly, the problem of health inequalities in the city and the importance of preventative measures. She saw the role for the Council in response to these issues as strengthening community development, continued provision of smoke free environments, and a reduction in the number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation and homeless with associated chronic illnesses. While the number of elderly was decreasing, there was, currently, a growth increase in the city's population and 'men' were mentioned as a sometimes forgotten health group. An area that Dr Gregson wished to see clarified was where the responsibility lay for adult health education, a service on which

there were pressures and where there were gaps. Overall emphasis was given to joint working on the issues raised.

The Committee agreed that the Council should continue to address health priorities in its policies and budgets next year, focusing in particular on homeless conditions, physical and mental health problems, black and minority ethnic groups, especially integration of information about different communities, unemployment, and education about sexual health. Suzanne McBride added that the latest Census information would be pulled in as more accurate figures emerged over the next 6 months.

Mr Haywood suggested that copies of the Annual Report be distributed to local GP practices.

03/HH/66 **REGULATORY REFORM ORDER: ADOPTION OF NEW POLICY TO PROVIDE GRANTS AND LOANS FOR PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL** *(See also Record of Decision 44)*

The Director of Community Services brought before the Committee a report seeking budget approval to fund a revised policy for providing private sector housing grants and loans in line with new wider powers given to the Council by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.

Following introduction of the legislation, the Committee had previously adopted a policy aimed specifically at providing help for the disabled, elderly and those on low income, and had agreed to review this annually. In view of high demand and after some consultation, amendments to the policy were being recommended to help target resources where they were most needed. The main changes were to introduce some means testing, increase the capping level and the provision of loans at a lower interest rate. The costs, to be met from Capital Receipts, and the Revenue requirements, would be set out in the next budget report to Scrutiny Committee. A request was made that the costs be built into the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and reported to Committee as such prior to implementation of the revised policy.

In supporting the recommendations, the Executive Councillor stressed the importance of having a robust scheme targeted particularly at the elderly that was affordable and accessible. The scheme would need to be launched with appropriate publicity.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report. (by 6 votes to 0).

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

03/HH/67 **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SINGLE HOMELESS & ROUGH SLEEPERS STRATEGY: RECONFIGURATION OF THE HOSTEL AT 222 VICTORIA ROAD** *(See also Record of Decision 45)*

The Committee considered the Director's report proposing partnership working with English Churches to fund and oversee the reconfiguration of the Victoria Road Hostel in a way which would better meet the needs of clients and workers alike. The total cost of the refurbishment was currently estimated at £128, 464, the funds to be released in April next year. The proposal was based on a similar scheme run successfully in London, the ethos of which had been given backing by the Homelessness Directorate division of the Deputy Prime Minister's Office.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report (by 6 votes to 0).

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

03/HH/68 **PROGRESSING THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY AND SINGLE HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY** *(See also Record of Decision 46)*

The Committee considered and approved a number of proposals submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for funding in 2004/5 and 2005/6. The proposals, detailed in Appendix One to the Director of Community Services' report, had been subject to consultation with representatives of Social Services, Police, Probation services, voluntary sector agencies, Cambridge City Primary Care Trust and other organisations involved in caring for the homeless and rough sleepers. The funding from the ODPM would provide additional finance for some of the initiatives to allow them to continue. The proposals covered provision of street outreach work to resolve housing problems for the homeless, help towards reducing anti-social behaviour, directing clients towards training and employment, work focusing on young homeless people and a homeless research database. Feedback from the ODPM on homeless services was that Cambridge was currently under funded.

The Committee agreed the recommendations (by 6 votes to 0) for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

03/HH/69 **HOUSING STRATEGY FOR 2004 – 2007** *(See also Record of Decision 47)*

After giving the draft Strategy its annual consideration, the 2003 to 2008 document approved by Committee in July had been sent to Eastern Government Office for comment. Some administrative revisions had been suggested and were considered by the Committee for further comment prior to inclusion in the version to be adopted by Council as the 'Housing Strategy 2004 – 2007'. Priority in the Strategy would be given to the private sector loan scheme, increasing enabling activity and minority ethnic groups. Councillor Bagnall commented that the Strategy currently gave an impression that the Council had been inactive with respect to these groups under previous administrations, although the council had complied with Government requirements. She also referred to the issue of the provision and cost of fire safety for accommodation, particularly for Houses in Multiple Occupation, shared rented properties and student accommodation, and how this was a responsibility that also fell across other committees.

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The Committee agreed the recommendations (by 6 votes to 0) for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

03/HH/70 **CAMBRIDGESHIRE SUPPORTING PEOPLE STRATEGY
2003** *(See also Record of Decision 48)*

The Director of Community Services' report set out housing support priorities for 2004/05 to form part of the updated Supporting People Strategy. Having been approved, the proposals would be discussed further with partner agencies so that they could be agreed and submitted to the Housing Corporation for capital schemes and to the ODPM for additional revenue grant. Elements of the Strategy had been updated and schemes prioritised because of pressure on budget for the Supporting People service. The ODPM had given a 'good' rating to the service. In a discussion about available finance for the Strategy and any future service review, Members expressed concern that about possible cutbacks to this service area, following a previous 5% arbitrary cut across all authorities countrywide. Councillor Smart agreed, as an amendment to the report's recommendations, to write a letter to the ODPM opposing any future savings to this service, a copy to be sent to the Local Government Association.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report and amended.

The Executive Councillor agreed the same recommendations.

03/HH/71 **KEYWORKER HOUSING RESEARCH 2003 AND DRAFT
PROTOCOL** *(See also Record of Decision 49)*

The Committee considered a report seeking endorsement of the findings of the research report 'Cambridge Sub-Region Key Worker Housing Research 2003' and agreement to develop a programme to meet Key Worker housing need, jointly with neighbouring districts. The proposed policy, to form part of the Housing Strategy, was to develop key worker housing within a programme for intermediate housing, such that intermediate housing did not comprise more than 25 per cent of the affordable housing programme, until such time as Planning Policies increased the percentage of affordable housing on PPG3 sites to above 30per cent ,when intermediate tenures would be increased without detriment to social housing provision. The report also included a draft protocol for sub-regional allocation of Key Worker housing by the Cambridgeshire Key Workers Employers' Consortium (CKWEC). The Director of Community Services sought delegated authority to finalise details of the protocol. The cost of the Council joining the CKWEC and accessing housing for its own employees would be agent fees of less than £5,000 annually. Adopting the policy would increase the probability of bids attracting Regional Housing Board investment in to Cambridge.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

03/HH/72 **HOUSING FIVE -YEAR ACTION PLAN FOR REPAIRS AND
MAJOR WORKS** *(See also Record of Decision 50)*

The Committee considered a report setting out a proposed five year action plan for housing repairs and major works to be formally adopted as departmental policy and subject to an annual review.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

03/HH/73 **PREPARING A STOCK OPTION APPRAISAL FOR THE
CITY'S COUNCIL HOUSING** *(See also Record of Decision 51)*

Further to the Committee's consideration in July of a draft report on stock options, Members were asked to consider the process for carrying out a full

Stock Option Appraisal in line with guidelines set by the Community Housing Task Force, specifically a number of key actions that needed to be undertaken – a consultation strategy, work to achieve a “Cambridge Standard” for housing, appointment of an executive steering group comprising councillors and tenant representatives to have an overview of the Stock Option Appraisal, appointment of an independent Tenant Advisor and an indicative timetable for completing the Appraisal. The proposal was that an independent Tenant Advisor be appointed directly by the Tenant Federation in accordance with a brief to be jointly agreed by the Council and the Federation. This would be subject to a further report back to the Housing and Health Scrutiny Committee. The executive tenant/councillor steering group would comprise three tenants and three councillors (two Liberal Democrats, one Labour) with councillor nominations to be made by the end of the month. Administrative support for the steering group was requested by the tenant representatives. Some decisions taken by this group would be reported back to this Committee. Councillor Bagnall commented that it was important for the council to work with tenants in providing financial priorities and being informed of the stock options and their costs. It would be important to keep tenants informed and ensure as wide a consultation exercise as possible. Councillor James commented that there should be a vote by tenants on any final decision about the housing stock options.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

03/HH/74 **RECORDS OF DECISION**

In accordance with the Constitution, two housing decisions were reported and **noted** by the Committee, one, taken by the Executive Councillor for Housing and Health approving a grant towards repairing two properties which King Street Housing Society would, in turn, rent out as social affordable lets, and the other, taken by the Leader of the Council to agree to the provision of a financial contribution towards a joint post with South Cambridgeshire District Council to enable joint housing development on new strategic sites.

03/HH/75 **WRITE-OFF OF FORMER TENANT ARREARS** *(See also Record of Decision 52)*

The Committee considered the Director’s report recommending a figure of £4,405.40 in unrecoverable former tenant rent arrears be written off as all attempts to recover the amount had been exhausted to date. The arrears would be pursued should the former tenants represent to the Housing service.

The Committee agreed the recommendations (by 6 votes to 0) for the Executive Councillor as stated in the report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

CHAIR

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