

**HOUSING AND HEALTH SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE MINUTES (SPECIAL)**8 September 2004  
5.30pm – 7.20pm

**PRESENT:** Councillors James (Chair), Adey, Blencowe, Churchill, Herbert, Kightley, Stebbings.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Smart (Executive Councillor for Housing and Health); Non-voting, co-opted members Mr B Haywood, Mrs K Harris, Mrs Vine-Lott (Cambridge Tenant Federation representatives), and Mr H Gault (Cambridgeshire Social Services).

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL****04/HH/59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Armstrong, Downham and J Smith.

**04/HH/60 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Herbert declared a personal interest as his partner worked for the Infrastructure Partnership, though not on housing issues.

**04/HH/61 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from members of the public.

**04/HH/62 CAMBRIDGE SUB-REGION HOUSING STRATEGY**

The officers' report explained that the Cambridge sub-region comprised the seven local authorities of Cambridge City, South Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury working together on housing issues. Each sub-region had been asked to develop a housing strategy to inform the Regional Housing strategy.

The sub-regional housing strategy set out the key factors influencing the housing market operating in and around Cambridge. All local authorities had a responsibility to anticipate changes in housing markets, and to respond to existing and emerging housing needs. The strategy sought to provide this analysis and planning across a wider housing market, and to influence the investment decisions of the Regional Housing Board.

Labour group members felt that the proposed sub-regional strategy was not compatible with the current Structure Plan, in particular in respect of the Northern fringe proposals and that the strategy was lacking in detail.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor as follows:  
1 (by 4 votes to 2) to approve the Cambridge Sub-region Housing Strategy 2004 – 2008.  
2 (by 4 votes to 0) to endorse the recommendations and actions set out in the strategy and summarised at 3.14, 3.15 and 3.16 in the officers' report.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

## HOUSING STOCK OPTION APPRAISAL – FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL APPRAISAL

The Director of Community Services said that in 2000 the Government had adopted a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to ensure that all social housing met set standards of decency by 2010 (the Decent Homes target). The achievement of this target was seen as a key driver behind local authorities decisions in relation to the future management/ownership of their housing stock.

Since the stock transfer vote in 1999, when the tenants had voted for retention, the government had issued the Communities Plan (*Sustainable communities - building for the future*" ODPM Feb 2003), which looked at the standard of existing social housing alongside the need to maintain and build new sustainable communities. The Sustainable Communities Plan required all councils that still owned housing stocks to complete a Stock Option Appraisal by July 2005. The government had made it clear that authorities that did not pursue either a stock transfer; an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) or a PFI (Private Finance Initiative) scheme could not expect to receive increased funding in order to ensure that the decent homes target was met.

Although the council had been confident from the information it had that it could meet the Decent Homes target within the timetable, it decided that it ought to verify the accuracy of the data it held by undertaking a new independently conducted Stock Condition Survey. The Council therefore commissioned FPD Savilles to undertake a stock condition survey as part of the Stock Option Appraisal. In the report Savilles identified three levels of investment, which need to be considered by the Council; the amount needed to meet the government's Decent Homes standard; the minimum level of investment to be made by the council as a good landlord in order to maintain its properties; and finally a higher 'aspirational' level of investment.

The report outlined the options and risks related to each option. Supplementary information provided by HQN had been circulated setting out alternative scenarios illustrating the effects of different levels of expenditure if retention was selected as the option. It was emphasised that, if retention was selected, the level of day-to-day and void repairs spending would need careful control and tenants expectations for the future of the repairs service would have to be revised.

Councillor Blencowe proposal to amend the following recommendations as shown below was lost by 5 votes to 2 in each case:

In existing recommendation 2.3 delete the words 'in October 2004' and replace by the words 'which should be held only after a real assessment of the 3 viable options can be shared with tenants in such a way as to enable them to make an informed choice'

In existing recommendation 2.4 add: 'and that the problems which sheltered housing will face should be addressed as part of a whole package not shunted into a siding to be dealt with at a later stage.'

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 5 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations which were to be made to the Council.

The meeting ended at 7.20pm

**CHAIR**

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