

**HOUSING AND HEALTH SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MINUTES**10 November 2004
5.30pm – 8.45pm

PRESENT: Councillors James (Chair), Adey, Armstrong, Blencowe, Downham, Herbert, Kightley, J Smith, 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), Dr D Gregson (Cambridge NHS Primary Care Trust) and Mr H Gault (Cambridgeshire Social Services).

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**04/HH/59 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings on 7 July and 8 September 2004 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to:

the amendment of the list of those members shown as present to include Cllr Adey at both meetings; and

the amendment of the list of those members shown as present on 8 September 2004 to omit Cllrs Armstrong, Downham and Stebbings;

and signed by the Chair.

04/HH/60 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

04/HH/61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Stebbings declared a personal interests as a Council Tenant in item 04/HH/71 (HRA Service Performance Review & Capital Revised Budget).

04/HH/62 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

04/HH/63 REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT OF FENCING PROGRAMME 2003-4

The officers' report set out the background to a programme of work to clear a backlog of fencing works using an estate based approach to be financed by over recovered monies, the excess profit made by City Services on Housing Revenue Account repair and maintenance work. The Executive Councillor (Housing and Health) subsequently approved this programme of works in October 2002 with the works to be completed by 31 March 2004.

The work was released to City Services in April and May 2003 at a budgeted cost of £281,000. The majority of works were completed in February and March 2004, with out-turn costs being significantly higher than the budget of £281k, resulting in an overspend of £149,000. This was some 53% in excess of the original budget. Concerns were also expressed at this time as to the quality of some of the works undertaken. As a result, the

Director of Community Services and the Director of City Services jointly requested the Internal Audit Section investigate the arrangements made for commissioning, procuring and the undertaking of the works.

The investigation by the auditors revealed a number of failings on the part of Technical Services and City Services in both the procurement and subsequent administration of the fencing project. This resulted in potential problems not being highlighted at an early stage and thereby contributed to the programme being overspent. These weaknesses were set out in detail in the audit report executive summary appended to the officers' report.

Members voiced concern about the areas where there had been a lack of control over the project and the failure to take appropriate action when the problems initially became apparent. They also queried the ability of the Committee to monitor the situation and how this could be carried out.

Officers said that the conclusions reached by the Internal Auditors had been accepted and that the action to prevent a re-occurrence was in place.

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 9 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/64 **KEY DECISION - PARTNERING AGREEMENT WITH CITY SERVICES**

The officers' report set out a request for approval for the commencement of a formal partnering agreement with City Services. The formal agreement would commence on 1st January 2005 incorporating work in respect of the following areas:

- Response maintenance
- Voids
- Aids and adaptations
- External cyclical repairs
- Replacement windows
- Provision of replacement external doors

The agreement further provides for an extension at the end of the five years of one plus one years, at the discretion of the Client.

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 9 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/65 **KEY DECISION - AMENDMENTS TO GRANT AND LOAN POLICY FOR PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL**

The officers' report set out proposed changes in policy, to try to increase the take up of private sector loans. A policy to provide Grants and Loans to owner-occupiers in Cambridge had been introduced in April 2004 under the new powers of the Regulatory Reform Order. It was accepted at that time providing loans to cover home improvements for the elderly and those on low income might have some difficulties in implementation and that the policy might need minor adjustments to help the authority meet its targets. Since implementation it had also become apparent that some minor changes were needed to the wording of the policy to clarify the position of the Council with regard to an unfit property.

The take-up of loans had been very slow. There was considerable interest in the scheme following publication but the number of clients reaching the stage where a loan was allocated had been disappointingly low. A number of strategies had been employed in an attempt to raise awareness of the scheme and to encourage take-up.

Members offered suggestions such as giving further publicity to the scheme by providing examples where the take up of a loan had been of particular benefit.

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 9 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/66 **HOME AID PREFERRED CONTRACTOR LIST**

The officers' report explained that had become increasingly difficult to obtain tenders for building work over the last few years, especially with contractors specialising in adaptation works. Home Aid had carried out a pilot scheme with the approval of Audit, Councillors and the Chief Executive to establish whether working with a smaller number of preferred contractors would help to reduce the lead-in time.

This pilot scheme had proved very successful. The cost of the work was comparable with, and in some cases was significantly less than, other projects. In most cases the lead in period was also reduced and the work carried out in a shorter time-scale. Clients had been surveyed to determine level of satisfaction with the quality of the work, politeness and helpfulness of the contractor and had rated these highly. The quality of the work had been assessed as more than satisfactory.

The report set out proposals for a procurement process and an assessment framework comparable with the Decent Homes Model. Legislation governing Disabled Facilities Grants required that 2 quotations for grant-funded work be obtained, the proposed pre-tender process would satisfy this requirement

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 9 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/67 **COUNTY-WIDE BV REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING**

The officers' report summarised the findings of the county-wide Best Value Review of Sheltered Housing, which was presented to the Cambridgeshire Joint Members Committee in July 2004. The best value review of sheltered housing services initiated in August 2003 had involved all sheltered housing providers within Cambridgeshire. The main purpose had been to establish a complete strategic overview of sheltered housing services across Cambridgeshire. This was driven by the changes to funding experienced by sheltered housing providers as a result of the implementation of the Supporting People programme in April 2003.

The results of the review highlighted a number of areas that needed further investigation within the sheltered housing services. Sheltered Housing has been relatively under-invested in by the Council over the last ten years, and a direct consequence of this was that some of the sheltered housing stock was in need of major refurbishment and repair.

The Best Value Action Plan was viewed as a realistic way of addressing the current and future need associated with providing a high quality sheltered housing service.

It was evident that the best way for Cambridge City Council to create a sustainable and strategically viable sheltered housing service was to work in partnership with the other district councils, the Supporting People Team and the Primary Care Trusts to maximise scarce resources and to build upon good practice.

The Committee agreed to note the results of the County–Wide Best Value Action Plan for Sheltered Housing Services and its recommendations, in particular the vision and proposals on shared performance indicators. It recommended that the Executive Councillor agree that the analysis and conclusions of the report inform the future planning of sheltered housing within Cambridge City by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendation.

04/HH/68 **CAMBRIDGESHIRE SUPPORTING PEOPLE STRATEGY 2005-10**

The officers' report set out the back ground to the proposals for the updated Supporting People Strategy. The Strategy had to be with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by 31 March 2005 and needed to be endorsed by all partners prior to this. ODPM guidance clearly prescribed a number of issues which were expected to be tackled by Supporting People strategies. The formal inspection by the Audit Commission would take place in Autumn 2005.

The SP Provider Forum also considered a new vision statement to replace the one that was agreed in Autumn 2001.

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 8 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/69 **HOUSING STOCK OPTION APPRAISAL - RESULT OF TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER PREFERENCE BALLOT**

The officers' report set out the results of the preference ballot which had been conducted by Electoral Reform Services on the Council's behalf following the Council's decision to seek tenants' views. On 9 September 2004 the Committee and the Executive Councillor had advised the Council to seek tenants view on three options; Retention, ALMO and Stock Transfer. Each of the options had different advantages and disadvantages and the risks associated with each were outlined in the officer's report.

In a paper circulated prior to the meeting, members received the results of the preference ballot as set out in the following table.

Option	Tenants		Leaseholders	
	Number of votes	%	Number of votes	%
Stock retention (Option A)	3,195	79.08	243	63.28
ALMO (Option B)	500	12.37	89	23.18
Stock Transfer (Option C)	345	8.55	52	13.54

As a result of the ballot, in which tenants and leaseholders had expressed a clear preference for Stock Retention, officers had amended the recommendations set out in the report to the Committee and the Executive Councillor as follows:

1. Having reviewed the financial and technical options set out in the officers' report and the preference expressed by tenants and leaseholders, the Council be recommended to retain and manage the stock directly;
2. The officers report back with programmes of work to repair and improve the stock to achieve the government's decent homes standard by 2010;
3. The officers report back with options for the future improvement of sheltered housing above the 'decent homes' standard.

Following discussion, members wished to record their appreciation of the contribution by officers, tenant and leaseholder representatives and ward councillors in carrying out in the preparation and conduct of the ballot

The Committee agreed the amended recommendations for the Executive Councillor by 8 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the amended recommendations.

04/HH/70 **KEY DECISION - ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ACT 2003 STATEMENT OF POLICY & PROCEDURES**

The officer's report set out the consequences for the Council as a Social Landlord under The Anti-Social Behaviour Act, which came into force in April 2004. A report on the various powers contained within the Act had been considered by members in April and the Executive Councillor had approved delegations to Chief Officers over the implementation of those sections for which the Local Authority had responsibility.

The Council as a Social Landlord was obliged to produce a statement of policy and procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour before 31 December 2004. To ensure that tenants knew exactly what their social landlord would do about anti-social behaviour, the Council must produce a summary of its current policy and procedures free of charge to anyone who requested it. A copy of the full policy and procedures must also be available for inspection within office hours and must be provided for a reasonable fee if requested.

Since April 2004 the Anti Social Behaviour Section, in collaboration with City Homes and other departments of the Council, had been preparing and compiling the Statement of Policy & Procedures for tackling Anti-Social Behaviour and Neighbour Nuisance. This had been a significant piece of work not only in terms of complexity but also in understanding the disciplines required for their implementation. These disciplines include, among others, greater liaison between departments, more accurate record keeping, better monitoring of the progress of cases, and the need to keep complainants informed of progress.

The report sought to bring to Elected Members the outcome of the work to date and to seek their approval over the structure and content of the documents in their current form. The documents appended to the report were submitted to members for consideration in the knowledge that they would require amendment from time to time in the light of experience, resources, consultation and changes to legislation.

Members expressed concern that the review period for the content of the ASB Policies and Procedures documents was not sufficiently frequent to allow amendment. The Executive Councillor (Housing and Health) undertook to look at the review period in the light of members' comments.

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor as amended above, by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/71 **KEY DECISION - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - SERVICE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS AND REVENUE & CAPITAL REVISED BUDGETS 2004/05**

The officers' report on the Service Performance Review set out performance within the Housing Revenue Service over 2003/04 and for the first six months of 2004/05. This information would enable the Scrutiny Committee to consider whether service priorities and resources should be refocused to enable objectives and targets for the current year to be met.

Appendix A of the report set out the overall base budget position for the Housing Revenue Account, comparing the original budget to the revised budget for the current year, 2004/05, as summarised in Table 1 in the report.

Appendix B of the report set provided a detailed analysis of the total reduction in anticipated expenditure of £319,710 for the Housing Revenue Account. This comprised net budget revisions of £423,690 that required member approval, partially offset by carry forwards from 2003/04 (approved in July 2004) and technical changes in respect of single status, pension cost adjustments and IT re-basing.

Appendix C of the report set out the latest estimated position compared to the original 2004/05 planned spend for the year on capital schemes and programmes within the housing portfolio.

Significant variances had been identified in the following areas: Repairs and Direct Revenue Funding of Capital, Rent and Service Charge Income, HRA Rent Pooling Windfall, Sheltered and Supported Housing, Interest on Balances, Single Status/Job Evaluation/National Pay Award, and Right to Buy Capitalisation.

The Committee agreed the recommendations for the Executive Councillor by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/72 **KEY DECISION - GENERAL FUND - SERVICE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS AND REVENUE & CAPITAL REVISED BUDGETS 2004/05**

The officers' report on the Service Performance Review set out performance within the Housing General Fund Service and the Environmental Health Service. The Service Performance Reviews set out performance over 2003/04 and for the first six months of 2004/05. This information will enable the Scrutiny Committee to consider whether service priorities and resources should be refocused to enable objectives and targets for the current year to be met.

Appendix A of the report set out the overall base budget position for Housing and Health General Fund services, comparing the original budget to the revised budget for the current year, 2004/05, as summarised in Table 1 of the report.

Appendix B of the report provided a detailed analysis of the total reduction in anticipated expenditure of £92,040 for General Fund services. The variance included carry forwards of £34,100 (approved in July 2004), technical changes totalling £58,380 in respect of single status, pension costs, IT re-basing, etc and forecast underspends in the revised budget of £184,520 that required approval. Of this amount, £56,870 was a transfer between committees and therefore the net contribution to reserves was £127,650.

Significant variances had been identified in the following areas: Bed and Breakfast Accommodation, Revised Employee Costs (Housing General Fund), King Street Void Under-Pinning and Environmental Services.

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor as amended above, by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/73 **DISPOSAL OF SELECTED HOUSING PROPERTIES**

The officer's report alluded to the significant shortage of affordable housing in the City, as outlined in the current Housing Strategy. The council owns a number of properties with particular defects, which were becoming increasingly expensive to maintain. In particular, there are a number of miscellaneous properties, which were not estate based, many of which have, for some years, been leased to local housing associations or other organisations. Some of these properties had developed significant structural defects, and for which repair was very costly, when set against the income from the properties.

Such properties could, with vacant possession, generate a significant receipt to the Council. Disposal of an individual property would reduce the Council stock by one unit on each occasion. The principle proposed in the report was that, where units of affordable accommodation were lost, they should be replaced, and, wherever possible, the supply should be increased further.

A receipt from selling an individual property could be expected to increase the affordable housing stock in the city by more than one unit, if the receipt was invested appropriately through RSL new build, or through purchase of land to open up otherwise inaccessible sites.

Some members expressed concern that recommendation 2.1.2 set out in the officers' report would commit the Council to grant funding approved RSL partners. The recommendation was amended by 8 votes to 0 to:

'To allocate receipts from the sale of any council assets arising from this, which result in a loss of affordable housing, to be invested in full in increasing the supply of affordable housing at least equal to the number of units lost on each occasion.'

The Committee agreed the recommendations, as amended, for the Executive Councillor as amended above, by 9 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendations.

04/HH/74 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

Resolved to exclude the press and public on the basis that if they were present there would be information disclosed which is exempt from publication under paragraph 7 and 9 of the Council's Constitution, page 154.

04/HH/75 **DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY A**

The officer's report set out the circumstances relating to a late Victorian terraced house, which currently failed the decent homes standard. As a miscellaneous property, the house was not situated close to other council stock, and was expensive to manage and maintain. The property had been leased to Granta Housing, and had been converted into a shared house. The lease having expired the property had been returned to the HRA as stock. A considerable investment was required to bring the property up to lettable standards. This included the cost of investigative work.

The Committee agreed the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 6 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendation.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm

CHAIR