

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

22 July 2005  
2.30pm – 6.08pm

**PRESENT:** Councillors J Smith (Chair), Blencowe (L sp for Strategic Housing), Boyce (alternate for Councillor Slatter), Bradnack (L sp for Community Development & Leisure), Hughes, Hymans, James and Kightley.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor J Rosenstiel (Executive Councillor for Community Development & Leisure);  
Councillor Smart (Executive Councillor for Housing and Health);  
Non-voting, co-opted members nominated by the Housing Management Board: Mr Stan Best, Mr Brian Haywood and Mr Lance Routledge

### **FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**

#### 05/CS/01 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Housing & Health Scrutiny Committee held on 16 March 2005 and those of Community Development & Leisure Scrutiny Committee held on 24 March 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 05/CS/02 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ellis-Miller and Slatter.

#### 05/CS/03 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were not declarations of interest.

#### 05/CS/04 **PETITION**

A petition with 412 signatures had been submitted on the following matter:

*"We, the undersigned, present this petition to request the City Council to help the elderly of the City of Cambridge by taking steps to ensure the continuation of the Meeting Place for the Elderly at 3a Parsons Court, Cambridge, following the decision of Age Concern Cambridgeshire to surrender its lease to the City Council. The closure of this amenity will be a great loss to the many elderly people who value and need it."*

Mr Brightman spoke to the petition. A summary of the main points he made is given below:

- Ensure the continuation of the Meeting Place for the Elderly at 3a Parsons Court, Cambridge, following the decision of Age Concern Cambridgeshire to surrender its lease to the City Council in September.
- Accessibility: the above premises are in a very good location for elderly people who come to the shops, library and so on. It is also close to bus stops and taxis. In addition, the Meeting Place is on the ground floor and therefore, accessible for people with limited mobility.
- Loneliness: elderly people find in the Meeting Place companionship and support. They all share similar experiences and feel comforted by each other.

- He understood that the City Council was offering a grant so that the premises could remain open until April 2006 while plans were developed for the future of the facility.

Members of the Committee then asked Mr Brightman questions.

Councillor J Rosenstiel said that she had met twice with the Chief Executive of Age Concern and had attended meetings with those who used the Meeting Place for the Elderly. Age Concern (England) had contributed £30,000 to the Cambridge Branch each year for the past 3 years but were withdrawing this funding as from September this year. The project deficit would be £16,000 for the rest of the financial year to 31 March 2006. She had decided to ask Age Concern (Cambridge Branch) to apply for a grant which would give time to see how the service could continue to be provided in the future.

The Labour members of the Scrutiny Committee asked that this be brought as an agenda item to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in November.

#### 05/CS/05 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

##### 05/CS/05a

Councillor Downham asked why the paddling pool in King's Hedges was not available for use and why there were problems with the drainage of it.

The Executive Councillor for Community Development & Leisure and the Active Communities Manager replied. The paddling pool was normally filled by the Land Pool which was currently being refurbished. While it would be possible to fill the paddling pool from an external source, it had to be emptied via the Land Pool. This would not be possible until the refurbishment was complete in October.

Councillor Downham was concerned that ward councillors had not been informed of the refurbishment and the impact this would have on the paddling pool facility.

The Executive Councillor for Community Development & Leisure said she regretted that omission and suggested that members of the public could use the paddling pool at the Abbey Pool or one in other locations in the city.

##### 05/CS/05b

The Chair read out a question from Mr Kevin Francis who was unable to attend in person due to unforeseen circumstances:

“What is the Executive Councillor for Housing & Health going to do about individuals who have been allocated a council house and subsequently either buy another property or move away from Cambridge and sublet the Council house to someone else and collect rent on it. This prevents others in need from obtaining a Council house. I personally know of 5 such cases over the past year.”

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health requested details of any properties where such sub-letting was thought to be occurring and said that such issues would immediately be dealt with.

The Director of Community Services further explained that the City Council would investigate all claims that a tenant had sublet their property or no longer occupied it.

Where the evidence indicated that this had happened then the Council would seek legal advice and where appropriate would seek possession of the property. The tenancy conditions for tenants clearly stated that "you must not sublet your home without our written permission" and "if you sublet all of your home, your tenancy can no longer be a secure tenancy."

Mr Haywood asked that this issue be brought to the next meeting of the Housing Management Board in November.

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health agreed and said that it was a matter that was more appropriate for the Housing Management Board.

Mr Tyes also asked a question which is noted at minute number 05/CS/08 as it related to that item on the agenda.

05/CS/06     **INVESTING IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

*(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/01)*

The Head of Community Services Strategy presented the report as the proposed policy framework for investment in affordable housing which would form part of the housing investment strategy to be considered at the November meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Bradnack said he wondered whether affordability was any longer a meaningful term.

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health said she had some sympathy with this view as affordable housing included provision from Registered Social Landlords, the equity share scheme, key worker housing, council housing and low cost home ownership.

In response to a request from the Chair, the Head of Community Services Strategy said that affordable housing was a technical term used in planning regulations, and that the local definition used in Cambridge was for housing which did not cost more than 30% of the occupier's income.

Councillor Blencowe said he preferred to use the term Social Housing. He supported any increase in such provision by the City Council especially given the fact that South Cambridgeshire District Council's budget had been capped by the government and they might have to make cuts to services including provision of Social Housing.

In response to questions from several members of the committee, the Head of Community Services Strategy explained that Section 106 obligations were the mechanism through which new developments contributed to the infrastructure requirements of the community including the provision of affordable housing, schools, community facilities, roads etc. Cambridgeshire Horizons had a co-ordinating role across developments in the county with regard to the provision of infrastructure.

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

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health approved the recommendations.

05/CS/07     **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY**

*(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/02)*

The Head of Community Services Strategy introduced the draft strategy. Members were invited to comment on it before the draft went out to public consultation in September. A further draft would be presented to the November meeting of the Scrutiny Committee including any changes to be built into the budget process.

Councillors Bradnack and Blencowe welcomed many aspects of the strategy.

Councillor Blencowe said in relation to recommendation 2 that migrant European workers were particularly vulnerable to poor provision by landlords and that a whistle blowing policy on such landlords might be required.

Councillor Bradnack raised the following points:

1. In relation to section 3.2.2.2 what were the management issues that required to be resolved re the Safer Homes Scheme?

The Head of Environmental Services explained that they related to the level of customer service provided by the sub contractor engaged by Cambridge City Primary Care Trust (PCT). The contractor's performance was being monitored by the PCT and Environmental Services and action would be taken if necessary.

2. In relation to 3.4, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO), he proposed that a scheme be trialled with 3 or 4 landlords as part of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme to help the improvement of the management of HMOs.

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health said that it could be possible to look at a sector of landlords with lots of tenants.

3. In relation to 3.9.2 he asked that proposals to address the fact that a considerable proportion of private sector residents did not know about the services provided by the Council be brought to the November meeting.

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health said that these were new government objectives and they were probably going to be very difficult to implement.

Councillor Hymans pointed out that care was required when implementing energy conservation measures to ensure that insulation did not take precedence over ventilation leading to unhealthy living conditions.

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health agreed that a proper balance was required in that regard.

In response to questions from the tenant representatives, the Head of Community Services Strategy explained that the Decent Homes Standard in the private sector applied only to Vulnerable People unlike in Council housing where it applied to all Council tenants.

The Committee approved the recommendations for the Executive Councillor by 5 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health approved the recommendations.

05/CS/07    **HOUSING LAND AUDIT** *(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/03)*

Several councillors commented on the importance of ward councillors being alerted immediately a site was chosen for further exploration and committee members were also concerned about the potential loss of green space and playground areas. Committee members also requested that hard to reach groups and residents associations be informed at the consultation stage.

Councillor Blencowe emphasised the importance of early preliminary consultation with residents associations to avoid unnecessary extended consultation on sites that were clearly not favoured at this early stage. He also asked that the report to the November committee indicate which sites were likely to be explored in the coming year.

The Committee approved the recommendations for the Executive Councillor by 6 votes to 0:

- To endorse the findings of the land audit, and agree the policy for development of Council Housing land.
- To request officers to include sites identified by the land audit in an annual development programme, with information on site specific issues and possible investment requirements.

05/CS/08    **ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW – CHOICE BASED LETTINGS**  
*(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/04)*

Mr Tyes stated that a father's application under the existing allocations policy could be rejected if he were not the parent with primary child care responsibility. A father was also unlikely to be given primary child care responsibility by the courts if he could not demonstrate that he had suitable accommodation such as a two bedroom flat. He asked that this be taken into account in the Choice Based Lettings policy.

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health said that the policy would be required to comply with the Council's access and equality strategy. The Council wished to be fair but had to offer accommodation to the parent with primary child care responsibility.

Mr Tyes said he was concerned when application for accommodation was being made prior to the court hearing in relation to the children. If that was not taken into account, then fathers were put in a catch 22 situation.

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health accepted that people were in different positions before and after a court hearing and the Council would need to frame the policy to be as fair as possible.

Councillors asked questions of clarification about the policy.

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

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health approved the recommendations:

05/CS/09     **REVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY**  
*(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/05)*

Councillor Downham welcomed many aspects of the revised policy including the proposed review of the Council's tenancy agreement to ensure that the conditions gave the widest appropriate powers for taking action against perpetrators of domestic violence. However there were still several gaps. The Council's adoption of the revised policy was planned to assist the Council to meet Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 225. The gaps she perceived related to this indicator, namely no local authority directory of services and sources of support, the absence of a representative on the Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire Domestic Violence Forum (the Forum), the need to have a wider remit to include men as well as women as victims and perpetrators respectively and the importance of staff training. The Council's housing management procedures to deal with incidents of domestic violence could take up to 2 weeks and this needed to be done more quickly and to involve other agencies. It was vital to make people feel safer.

The Homeless & Housing Needs Manager said that he was the officer representing the Council on the Forum and the policy had been considered at one of the Forum meetings. He affirmed that plans were in place for training staff and acknowledged the concerns about housing management procedures but said that due process had to be followed.

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

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health approved the recommendations.

05/CS/10     **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

The Committee noted that Economic Development & Tourism were to be added to the list of Service Plans for consideration.

Councillor Bradnack said that all services were failing some targets or that there was inadequate evidence about targets which meant that the Labour Group were minded to ask to consider all six service plans in November. If it were possible to see all service plans at an early stage before the November meeting, they might be better able to choose.

The Committee agreed that all members would see the service plans in draft form and would decide at that stage which to focus on.

05/CS/11     **MEDIUM TERM STRATEGY** *(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/06)*

Members raised questions of clarification about a number of items but had no additional areas of uncertainty to suggest.

The Executive Councillors agreed the recommendation:

To refer to the Leader items for consideration in the construction of the September 2005 Medium Term Strategy; as detailed in Appendices C & D of the officer report.

05/CS/12     **DAY AND TIME OF MEETINGS**

The Committee resolved to keep the dates and times of the meetings for 2005/06 as published.

05/CS/13     **FUNDING FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTOR  
2006/07** *(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/07)*

Councillor Bradnack welcomed several aspects of the report including Service Level Agreements and asked whether the City Council needed to respond to the problems posed by the capping of South Cambridgeshire District Council's budget in relation to jointly funded projects.

The Executive Councillor for Community Development & Leisure and the Grants Manager agreed that this situation was serious for the 30 groups concerned. The proportion funded by the City and by South Cambs was £800,000 to £250,000. There would need to be clarity for those groups about whether they could ask for additional funding from the City Council.

Councillor Blencowe expressed his concern about this in relation to Housing grants. He thought it was vital not to say the City Council could not be approached and that each request should be looked at on a case by case basis. He thought the Scrutiny Committee ought to have some input but he was unclear how this could be done.

The Grants Manager said that the move to full cost recovery would help along with using the criterion of where people lived who were to benefit from a service in order to make a decision.

The Executive Councillor for Community Development & Leisure said that revised grant priorities might have to be set in January 2006 as there was no additional money in the budget.

Councillor Bradnack asked the Executive Councillor about the statement on page 151 of the report "Area Committee grants were seen as a problem area where a desire for transparency and public accountability has resulted in an expensive and bureaucratic system."

The Executive Councillor for Community Development & Leisure said that there were challenges in dealing with area committees and there was the possibility of emailing area committee councillors for earlier decisions on some grants.

In response to a question from Mr Haywood, the Grants Manager affirmed that Camfed would continue to receive a grant.

The Committee approved the recommendations for the Executive Councillor by 5 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor for Community Development & Leisure approved the recommendations.

**05/CS/14 TO AGREE A CONTRIBUTION OF £350,000 FROM S106 FUNDS FOR THE REFURBISHMENT OF THE ROMSEY MILL CENTRE TO PROVIDE SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE COMMUNITY** *(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/08)*

Councillor Bradnack raised a related issue by requesting that the Council took a more long-term planned approach to S106 projects rather than an opportunity one. This would be very pertinent for developments to the south of the city.

The Head of Community Development said that there was provision within the Council's Planning Obligation Strategy for appropriate ad hoc requests for use of S106 monies. He agreed that a strategic approach was important and informed the committee that there was a new officer group addressing this issue called Cambridge Urban Growth Group.

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

The Executive Councillor for Housing & Health approved the recommendations.

**05/CS/15 APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODY (THE JUNCTION)**  
*(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/09)*

Councillor Bradnack was of the view that those members who actually attended Board Meetings should be nominated and proposed keeping three Labour Group nominees. Should the Executive Councillor agree to this their nominees were Councillors Bradnack, Herbert and Stafford. Should there only be places for two nominees he proposed Councillors Herbert and Stafford to join the three Liberal Democrat nominees.

**05/CS/16 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP – DISTRICT COUNCIL LEAD MEMBER APPOINTMENT**

The Committee noted the decision Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership-District Council Lead Member Appointment taken by the Executive Councillor outside the committee cycle.

**05/CS/17 CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SPONSORSHIP SUPPORT FROM CAMBRIDGE PRINTING (CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS)** *(see also Record of Decision 05/CS/10)*

The Committee agreed the decision the Executive Councillor was minded to make concerning Contractual Arrangements for Sponsorship Support from Cambridge Printing (Cambridge University Press).

**05/CS/18 CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2005 FOLK FESTIVAL**

The Committee noted the decision Contractual Arrangements for 2005 Folk Festival taken by the Executive Councillor outside the committee cycle.

The meeting closed at 6.08pm.

**CHAIR**