CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES

Date: Monday, 13 June 2022

Time: 11:00

Location: Pathfinder House, Huntingdon

Members:

Cllr D Dew	Huntingdonshire District Council
Cllr M Hassall	Huntingdonshire District Council
Cllr L Dupre	East Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr A Sharp	East Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr M Atkins	Cambridgeshire County Council
Cllr D Baigent	Cambridge City Council
Cllr S Smith	Cambridge City Council
Cllr A Coles	Peterborough City Council
Cllr A Miscandlon	Fenland District Council
Cllr A Hay	Fenland District Council
Cllr G Harvey	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr A Van de Weyer	South Cambridgeshire District Council

Officers:

Roger Thompson	Director of Housing and Development
Jodie Townsend	Interim Head of Democratic Services
Reena Roojam	Lawyer, Combined Authority
Anne Gardiner	Governance Manager (Statutory Scrutiny Officer) Combined Authority
Joanna Morley	Interim Governance Officer, Combined Authority

Item 10 only:

10. Housing Update

10.1 Roger Thompson, Director of Housing presented a housing update to the Committee, speaking to the Board paper – Future Combined Authority Housing Purpose and Function.

10.2 During his introduction, Mr Thompson highlighted that the paper had been prepared through a collaborative process and workshops had been held with delivery partners, and the officers and leaders of the constituent councils.

10.3 Under the Affordable Housing Programme, an additional 1449 affordable units, had been started on site by 31 March 2022. The work associated with the programme however had not come to an end as the CPCA needed to continue to monitor the building out of these units, the monitoring of grant monies and the return of loan monies. The paper posed the question as to what the housing purpose and function aspired to be beyond that, bearing in mind that there was no capital revenue support outside of the CPCA's existing resources.

10.4 The suggested recommendations in the paper were; to retain existing housing officer skills and capability to enable a response to future government housing initiatives and opportunities, recognising the CPCA collaborative and convening powers with the constituent councils' housing teams and Homes England, and also, to continue to support community led housing throughout the CPCA area in line with the policy approved by the Housing Committee at its meeting in January 2022.

During the subsequent discussion the following points were noted:

10.5 Cllr Van de Weyer commented that whilst it was important that the CPCA was ready to take on opportunities as they arose, any retained skills and capacity should be fully exploited and not underutilised for any length of time. Mr Thompson clarified that retaining capability did not mean retaining a whole directorate but that the capacity would perhaps form part of a different directorate, for example, Place, where there would be integration with transport and the business communities. This integration could also offer possibilities for the CA to provide strategic support for example, to major employers in the area who had pressure around housing for their staff and were considering their own intervention.

10.6 In response to questions from Cllr Coles and Cllr Miscandlon on available skills, Mr Thompson acknowledged the pressures in the construction industry and that there were linkages to be enhanced within the area of skills and economic growth, including supporting modern methods of construction, which were key to evolving the Even Better Transformation programme.

10.7 Cllr Atkins queried whether the cap on the grant rate that DHLUC had applied and the subsequent restriction on the geographical area in which the CPCA could effectively function, meant that the programme had not operated in the areas where there had been the greatest need for affordable housing. Mr Thompson agreed that they had been severely restricted by the conditions applied by DHLUC between March 2021 and March 2022 and that schemes had operated largely in the north and centre of the area as that was where they had the ability to intervene. Considering that there had only been 6 months from DHLUC approval to getting started on site, the Team had done a remarkable job with these schemes.

10.8 The recommendation to support community led housing was challenged by Cllr Dupre who felt that this should not be a principle that the CPCA adopted as Community Land Trusts (CLTs) were primarily an East Cambridgeshire pre-occupation and there had been little enthusiasm for them from the other constituent authorities expressed in Appendix 6 of the report to the Board. Cllr Dupre also felt that CLTs were not always 'community led' and that the East Cambs CLT, having the leader of the Council as trustee and claiming to cover the whole of the district council area, did not look like 'community led' development.

10.9 Mr Thompson responded that the issue of CLTs had been debated at the Housing Committee and members, not just those from East Cambs, had been supportive of the principle. East Cambridgeshire had their own dedicated CLT and the CPCA was not directly engaging with them in terms of their delivery processes. An outside supplier called Eastern Community Homes had been appointed to supply expertise to nurture smaller CLTs appearing outside of East Cambs.

10.10 Cllr Dupre suggested that the report should refer to the CA welcoming expressions of interest in CLTs, which was rather different to the proposition that the CA, as a body, focus on supporting community led housing.

10.11 Cllr Smith's observation was that an insufficiently strong business case had been made to justify the recommendations; he was in agreement with Cllr Dupre with regard to the CLTs and also felt that retaining capacity could be a duplication of effort because all of the constituent councils were housing authorities in their own right.

10.12 In conclusion, Members discussed how best to present Scrutiny's views and comments on this issue to the CA Board.

RESOLVED:

That the draft minutes for the Housing Update item be sent to the CA Board for consideration at the next CA Board meeting when the report, Future Combined Authority Housing Purpose and Function, would be discussed.