



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Housing and Communities Committee Minutes

Meeting: Monday 21 June 2021

Venue: Main Hall, Burgess Hall Events and Conference Centre, One Leisure, Westwood Road, St Ives PE27 6WU

Time: 2pm – 3.55pm

Present:

Councillor Lewis Herbert – Chair and Member for Cambridge City Council
Councillor Alison Whelan – Cambridgeshire County Council
Councillor David Ambrose- Smith – East Cambridgeshire District Council
Councillor Ryan Fuller – Huntingdonshire District Council
Councillor Steve Allen – Peterborough City Council
Councillor John Batchelor – South Cambridgeshire District Council
Councillor Chris Boden – Fenland District Council

Apologies:

Councillor Dee Laws – Fenland District Council

Part 1 - Governance Items

1. Appointment of the Chair

Councillor Lewis Herbert was appointed as the Chair of the Housing and Communities Committee at the Annual Combined Authority Board Meeting on the 2nd June 2021.

2. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest and Announcements

Apologies received from Councillor Dee Laws, Councillor Chris Boden attended as substitute.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Minutes of the Housing and Communities Committee meeting on 15 March 2021 and Actions

The minutes of the meeting on 15 March 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

The action log was noted.

4. Public Questions

No public questions were received.

5. Housing and Communities Committee Agenda Plan

It was resolved to note the agenda plan.

6. Combined Authority Forward Plan

It was resolved to note the Forward Plan.

Part 2 - Programme Delivery

7. Connecting Cambridgeshire Update

The Committee received a report that updated the Committee on the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme over the last year and informed the Committee a refreshed strategy that would be presented in November 2021.

During the last year there had been significant COVID challenges to ensure digital infrastructure was there for those who needed it.

During discussion of the report:

- Attention was drawn to areas such as Huntingdonshire and market towns where their distance from urban conurbations resulted in poor fibre optic broadband coverage. The presenting officer informed the Committee that internet providers had been approached to better understand their roll out plan and identify providers that were entering the marketplace. A list of providers would be made available to the Committee once it had been collated.
- A request was made for maps to be included within the report that was scheduled to be presented to the November Committee that provided information on areas that had poor commercial coverage, together with full fibre mapping and delivery programme.

- The rural communities surrounding Peterborough were noted and information sought for what provision there would be for farmsteads and remote properties. The presenting officer commented that there were a number of rural communities that suffered from poor coverage and it would be addressed through the strategy refresh in November.
- Mobile phone and 5g coverage was highlighted as a particular issue in St Ives and market towns and questioned whether there was a proactive plan for improving coverage in such areas. The presenting officer explained that there were limitations through what could be achieved in terms of market intervention. Work was being undertaken regarding 5g and how it could be rolled out further and faster in such areas as it was understood that market towns were not a priority for providers. Existing blackspots were known and had been addressed with Ofcom. Members noted that 4g and 5g used the same infrastructure and therefore coverage would be automatically improved for both.

It was proposed by Councillor Fuller seconded by Councillor Boden that the recommendation be put to the vote.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the progress of the Connecting Cambridgeshire Digital Infrastructure Programme during 2020-2021 and the plans to November 2021
- b) Note and endorse the proposal to bring forward a refreshed Digital Infrastructure Strategy for 2021-2025 for approval to the Committee in November 2021

8. Implementation of the revised £100m Affordable Housing Programme

The Committee considered a report relating to the implementation of the £100m Affordable Housing Programme. The Programme was intended to run for 5 years, concluding in 2022. However, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had determined that the programme would end as of March 31st, 2021 and a new scheme would be brought forward for the 2021/22 financial year. The response to the conditions of the new scheme were contained within the report the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) has confirmed it will invest all returning capital by recycling it into the scheme.

The Committee noted that the Cambridge City programme had also ceased and funds held by the CPCA had been transferred to Cambridge City Council.

Members noted the update provided in the report regarding programme delivery and the risks attached to the programme, the primary of which being funding and reputational damage.

During discussion Members:

- Noted that the CPCA had submitted funding requests prior to being informed that the MHCLG was not in favour of 'rent-plus' schemes. The CPCA had sought decisions on quick wins for more detailed discussions to take place at a later date.
- Drew attention to the overall funding that had been drawn on and questioned whether it reflected the slowness of developers. Members noted that £21.6m had been committed so far, however, not all the money was paid upfront. Payments were made in three parts and the payment structure had been highlighted to MHCLG as the programme would contain lag from approval to construction.
- Noted that that the CPCA still had a pipeline of potential development opportunities that it was seeking to add to. This illustrated to MHCLG that there were opportunities not identified by Homes England.
- Drew attention to the risks contained within the report and questioned whether paragraph 2.17 suggested that providers may have capacity issues. Members noted that there was a risk attached to both and that so long funding was supplied, whether that funding was provided by the CPCA or Homes England was not important.
- Noted that the existing schemes were of good quality, however, there was an intention to present a fresh set of proposals for discussion with MHCLG. There was a focus on approved schemes to ensure that they were expedited. New schemes were important as occasionally approved schemes were unable to be progressed. Every scheme that had been approved by the Committee should be fought for as there were many good schemes. The role of local MPs in lobbying the Government was emphasised. The Committee noted that a request had been made to MHCLG to add a provision to substitute a scheme if one fell through which would not require the approval of MHCLG providing it was still within the agreed parameters.

It was proposed by Councillor Boden and seconded by Councillor Ambrose – Smith to put the recommendation to the vote.

It was resolved unanimously to recommend that the CPCA Board:

Approve the proposals for the Affordable Housing Programme being discussed with MHCLG.

9. £100m Affordable Housing Programme Scheme Approvals – June 2021 - Fairbarn Way, Chatteris (Fenland)

The Committee received a report that sought the committal of grant funding for 50 affordable homes at Fairbarn Way, Chatteris. The presenting officer informed the Committee that it was anticipated that the planning application was likely to be determined within the next few weeks with work commencing on site by January 2022.

During discussion:

- A Member commented the development was much needed in the Chatteris area and highlighted how the housing market differed in the area to the rest of the county. Officers echoed the varying market across the county and undertook to repeat an information session that was provided to Members in January 2020. **ACTION**
- A Member expressed disappointment regarding the size of the properties would only be 88% of the recommended national space standards. Members noted that national space standards were not mandatory, and they varied between local authorities. It was confirmed that the size was compliant with Fenland District Council policy.
- The Committee noted that the scheme would provide additionality of 50 affordable homes that would go towards the overall target.

It was proposed by Councillor Boden and seconded by Councillor Ambrose Smith to put the recommendation to the vote.

It was resolved unanimously to:

To commit grant funding of £2,082,000 from the current Housing programme to enable delivery of 50 affordable homes, with a range of affordable rented and shared ownership homes at Fairbarn Way, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire. Subject to confirmation of the release of monies for the 2021/22 affordable housing programme from MHCLG.

10. £100m Affordable Housing Programme Scheme Approvals – June 2021 - Dovehouse Court, 14-16 High Street, Girton (South Cambs)

The Committee received a report that sought grant funding for 15 affordable almshouses at High Street, Girton. The proposed scheme consisted of 15 affordable rented units for ages 55 and over. Planning permission had been granted and it was anticipated that work would commence on site in late July 2021.

During discussion Members:

- Noted that the charity had approached Homes England regarding funding and had been directed to the CPCA as funding was required.
- Noted that the charity was looking to assist people aged 55 and over in the local area with downsizing and that tenancies were restricted to local people.

It was proposed by Councillor Batchelor seconded by Cllr Ambrose Smith that the recommendation be put to the vote

It was resolved unanimously to:

To Commit grant funding of £675,000 from the current Housing programme to enable delivery of 15 affordable almshouses, at Dovehouse Court, 14-22 High Street, Girton, South Cambridgeshire. Subject to confirmation of the release of monies for the 2021/22 affordable housing programme from MHCLG.

11. £100m Affordable Housing Programme Scheme Approvals – June 2021
- Northminster, Peterborough. (Peterborough)

The Committee considered a report that sought grant funding from the current housing programme to enable the delivery of 353 homes. The rents would be affordable private rents, ideal for key workers and young professionals.

During discussion of the report:

- A Member drew attention to the installation of gas boilers in each flat and questioned why they were being installed given they were being phased out. The presenting officer confirmed that she understood the development to be energy efficient and would confirm whether gas boilers were being installed. **ACTION**
- A Member commented that the site would have a significant positive affect on Peterborough city centre and recognised the complexity of the housing market.
- Commenting on the report, a Member questioned why the CPCA would be supporting people that could afford commercial rents.
- A Member queried the additionality the development would bring. Officers confirmed that additionality was the full 353 units. Officers explained that the development was seeking to address market-led demands.
- Commenting on the report, a Member highlighted that people on the housing list are not necessarily unable to afford accommodation. It would be expected that people on the housing list would be contacted to achieve security of tenancy.
- Members noted that project milestones were being reviewed in order for a planning application to be made by 9th July 2021.

It was proposed by Councillor Boden and seconded by Councillor Fuller that the recommendation be put to the vote.

It was resolved by majority to [6 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention]:

To commit grant funding of £14,031,750 from the current Housing programme to enable delivery of 353 affordable private rented homes at Northminster, Peterborough. Subject to confirmation of the release of monies for the 2021/22 Affordable Housing programme from MHCLG.

12. Rebel Acres Cooperative Start-up Grant

The Committee received a report that sought the approval of the award of a start-up grant to Rebel Acres Cooperative.

During discussion Members:

- Questioned whether there was a requirement that any funding provided must be spent within the Peterborough City Council area. Officers explained that the cooperative consisted of Peterborough residents or people that had a strong connection through work. It would be dependent on finding appropriate land for development.
- Welcomed the aspiration of the cooperative, however, there had to be a caveat regarding the location should be within the CPCA area.

It was proposed with the agreement of the Committee to add the following wording to the recommendation – “subject to a location within the Combined Authority Area being sought”

It was proposed by Councillor Boden and seconded by Councillor Whelan that the recommendation be put to the vote.

It was resolved by majority [6 in favour 0 against 1 abstention] to:

Approve the award of £5,000 to Rebel Acres Cooperative **subject to a location within the Combined Authority area being sought** under the Community Housing Start-up Grant Fund.

Part 3 – Date of the next meeting

13. It was resolved to:

Note the date of the next meeting as Monday 6th September 2021.