

CALLED-IN DECISION: PROVISION OF HOUSING PRIMARILY FOR RENT ON THE COUNTY COUNCIL'S PORTFOLIO

To: Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 7th February 2014

From: Acting Scrutiny Officer

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: N/a **Key decision: No**

Purpose: To call in the decision of the Cabinet on 28th January 2014 regarding the provision of housing primarily for rent on the County Council's portfolio.

Decision required: The Committee is asked to consider the decision and to determine what further action should be taken.

<i>Officer contact:</i>	<i>Member contact:</i>
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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The meeting of the Cabinet held on 28th January 2014 considered a report on the provision of housing primarily for rent on the County Council's portfolio. The report is attached as Appendix 1. Cabinet agreed:

- 1) To declare surplus both the parcels of land for circa 350 homes at Newmarket Road, Burwell and 230 homes at Worts Causeway, Cambridge
- 2) To delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance in consultation with the Head of Finance to agree detailed terms with appropriate parties where needed for the taking forward of planning applications in respect of the above sites
- 3) To delegate to the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance in consultation with the Head of Finance the agreement of detailed terms for the sale of all or part of either of the above sites or dwellings constructed on them
- 4) To agree the development of a Full Business Case to be considered by Cabinet in respect of the above named sites which if attractive can be taken forward as the first large scale schemes where the County develops housing to generate long term income streams.

1.2 Following this meeting, the decision was called in by three members/substitutes of the Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillors Mason, Taylor and I Manning. Councillor Williams, not a Committee member, also expressed support for the call-in.

1.3 The following reasons were given by members for calling in the decision:

Councillor Mason

1. In respect of land at Worts Causeway, Cambridge, the proposal for development is premature in advance of the public examination and Inspector's report for the Cambridge City and South Cambs. Local Plans. The decision would appear to prejudice properly made public objections to development within the Cambridge Green Belt.
2. The provision and financing of housing development is currently regarded as a primary function of District/City authorities and not normally that of County Councils. The Council does not possess the necessary "in house skills and resources" to carry out development projects of this nature and would need to buy in expensive professional services, with inherent short and long term financial risk to public finances. This would not be consistent with existing severe financial constraints within the public sector.
3. The proposal for the County Council to act as a developer and house builder in the "speculative" private market sector would represent a major departure from existing policy, with possible diversion of scarce resources

from statutory obligations. As such, it may require due and careful consideration by full Council.

Councillor Taylor

I believe it is an unwise use of public resources to commit staff time and public funds to drawing up a business case for building housing on land that is within the Green Belt. We shall not know whether is available for building until the Inspector has reported on the Local Plan proposals.

In any event, it is unlikely planning permission could be granted in the next two years, therefore it would be highly speculative for the Council to budget on receiving any revenue.

Councillor I Manning

Cabinet's decision is premature whilst the City Council's Local Plan process is still incomplete. It is akin to deciding to commit the Council to build on land it doesn't own.

Councillor Williams

It is not required at this time and if this aspect of the Local Plan is subsequently altered as a result of its examination in public than it would have been money wasted.

2. OPTIONS

2.1 Having reviewed the Cabinet's decision and the reasons for the call-in, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may:

- (i) decide that having considered the decision and the reasons for it, that no further action is warranted, in which case the decision may proceed.
- (ii) decide not to object to the implementation of the decision, but may comment upon it. The Cabinet may take account of these observations when implementing the decision, but is under no obligation to do so.
- (iii) have unresolved concerns about the decision and may refer it back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, setting out the nature of its concerns. (Note: the more detail and/or recommendations that an Overview and Scrutiny Committee selecting this option is able to provide, the more helpful this will be for Cabinet when reconsidering the decision.)
- (iv) refer the matter to full Council if it considers that the decision is not in accordance with the agreed budget or policy framework. (Note: in this case, Cabinet is operating within the framework set for it by Council. Officers' advice therefore is that this option does not apply.)

2.2 Unless there is a clear consensus, the Committee will be asked to vote on the options (or abstain), based on the evidence presented. In the event of a tied vote, the Chairman will have the casting vote.

Source Documents	Location
Report to Cabinet on 28 th January 2014 on the provision of housing primarily for rent on the County Council's portfolio Cabinet decision summary published on 29 th January 2014	Room 114 Shire Hall Cambridge