

CABINET

30 July 2003

SUPPORTED HOUSING IN HIGHCLIFFE

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF HEALTH & HOUSING

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB410 – Affordable Housing Community Planning Process - 12 June 2002  
CAB386 – Proposed Capital Programme for Affordable Housing - 15 May 2002  
CAB373 – Proposed Capital Programme for Affordable Housing - 3 April 2002  
CAB485 – Affordable Housing – Community Planning (Stage 2) – 2 October 2002  
CAB521 - Affordable Housing – Community Planning (Stage 2) – 20 November 2002  
CAB600 – Disposal of HRA Land at Stanmore and Highcliffe – 5 March 2003  
CAB608 - Disposal of HRA Land at Stanmore and Highcliffe – 19 March 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The report responds to matters raised during the public participation session at Cabinet on the 30 June 2003.

The matters relate to the proposed development of supported housing at Fivefields Road, Highcliffe. The suitability of the proposals, the impact on the local community, the process undertaken were questioned and responses to the points raised are put forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1        That the responses to the matters raised at the 30 June 2003 Public Participation session be noted.

CABINET30 July 2003SUPPORTED HOUSING IN HIGHCLIFFEREPORT OF DIRECTOR OF HEALTH & HOUSINGDETAIL:1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the public participation session of the Cabinet meeting on the 30 June, issues were raised about the proposed development site in Fivefields Road, Highcliffe for a home for vulnerable people. Cabinet agreed that a report should be prepared to respond to the matters raised.
- 1.2 Mr R Cassidy, a local resident, raised a number of issues in relation to demands that would be placed on Highcliffe's services, the investigations by John Thompson and Partners (JTP) on behalf of the Council and other reviews into the needs of the community.
- 1.3 He suggested that the Council had an alternative agenda, to build an ex-offenders hostel and had known about this project for two years.
- 1.4 During the same public participation session, correspondence from Cllr Pines, a Ward Member, was read to the meeting. Cllr Pines raised a number of issues: the proposals coming from the JTP investigations were not yet known, the siting of development at Highcliffe without testing suitability of other sites in the City, the impact of development on Highcliffe's other services and the process surrounding the supported housing proposals.
- 1.5 Mr Cassidy wished for the proposals for supported housing in Highcliffe to be dropped and Cllr Pines wanted a deferment of any decision on a proposal to do with supported housing until the JTP report was published, further analysis of other sites had been carried out and members generally were more aware of the supported housing proposals.
- 1.6 Responses to the various points made by Mr Cassidy and Cllr Pines are provided below.

2 Demands on Highcliffe's Services

- 2.1 The supported housing proposals for Highcliffe are for a group home for six single people, not family accommodation. There is no reason to believe that any additional pressures will be placed on local services. Support needs will be provided for on site by voluntary sector specialists Two Saints and there is no reason to believe that the school or the church will be affected. Other general day-to-day living needs are likely to be met by city centre services, which are only a short walk or bus ride away. The idea behind the scheme is to promote and enable independent living. The client group will have limited if any access to cars and so traffic is thought unlikely to be an issue.

- 2.2 The issues of parking have been raised during public meetings in Highcliffe. The site proposed for the supported housing unit is currently occupied by ten garages. During the initial surveying of the area it was noted that only two of the garages were used for their proper purpose, the storage of cars and, as a consequence it is felt that the intended use will not have as great an impact as has been suggested. Nevertheless the issue of parking and how to resolve the pressures is being picked up in the JTP review and will be a consideration in the planning process when the application from Eastleigh Housing Association is considered by Planning Development Control Committee.

### 3 JTP Community Planning Process and Supported Housing

- 3.1 The work being undertaken by JTP, through a community planning mechanism on Stanmore and Highcliffe, has always been to evaluate the potential for land in the Council's ownership on those two estates, to be used for affordable housing. At the same time, there was a need to consider the communities' views and needs for environmental and other improvements to improve the quality of life.
- 3.2 The decision to undertake this work in this way followed the debate in Council on Treasury Management policies which led to the repayment of debt, which in turn led to the strategy to increase the delivery of affordable housing through a number of mechanisms, including building on the Council's own land.
- 3.3 The Supported Housing debate began before the Council considered the affordable housing proposals with a report to the then Health & Housing Policy Review Committee (HH50) in September 2001. This was prior to the Council achieving debt-free status and at this stage there were few prospects of funding supported housing accommodation from the capital programme. HH50 informed members of the changing legislative position on homelessness with the extension of the priority need categories, for which the Council would have a duty. The new duty would include new responsibilities for groups such as young vulnerable people, people leaving care and other vulnerable individuals leaving an institutionalised background such as ex prisoners.
- 3.4 Consideration was given to increasing the supply of temporary accommodation and recognising the difficulties that were being experienced at the Sussex Street hostel, discussions took place with the Winchester Housing Needs Forum over possible new approaches. The Forum endorsed the proposed way forward, which was to commission new supported housing units in various locations around Winchester, funded by means of a Safer Communities Fund bid.
- 3.5 A bid for £0.5M was made by our partner Eastleigh Housing Association, the proposed provider of the new units. It was successful and was supported by £0.25M from Eastleigh and £0.25M from the Council's capital fund. At the same time bids were made through the Supporting People framework for the necessary revenue costs of the specialist support staff that would be needed.
- 3.6 What followed was the suggestion in CAB373, that the supported housing units would not be developed until its own community consultation exercise had been undertaken. The report went on to suggest that the two exercises could be combined although the Safer Communities funding was time limited and would need an early start to the community planning exercise if it was to succeed.

- 3.7 Although it was intended to see if the community planning exercise could identify sites for development, it was not made clear in the reports to members, that if any site were to suggest suitability for supported housing, a separate and more discrete form of consultation would be had with the residents immediately affected by any such proposal. This was in accordance with a protocol for this type of consultation used by a number of Hampshire authorities. The community planning public sessions did not discuss the supported housing proposals, as it was never intended that they should. What was intended, in relation to supported housing if any sites were identified, was to raise the issues with the relevant individuals in the communities in this lower-key way. This was to ensure that these proposals would be addressed in rational and sensitive manner so that the future operation of these units would not be jeopardised.

#### 4 Supported Housing Site Known About for Two Years

- 4.1 As indicated in 3.5 above, when consideration was given to addressing the new duties being placed upon the Council in relation to specific homeless groups, a bid was agreed to try and obtain external funding. This bid was made to the Government's Safer Communities Fund and in order to complete the bid, sites had to be identified and costings submitted. For that to happen, sites on Stanmore and Highcliffe, within planning policy, were looked at by the Housing Association and used to make the bid. A bid submission needed to show that proposals would meet regional and local priorities in consultation with the Housing Needs Forum, be Secure by Design (one of the Safer Communities criteria) and fit Total Cost Indicators, a Housing Corporation value-for-money indicator. Inevitably some work had to be undertaken to provide this information but as has been debated in earlier Cabinet meetings, this identification of sites was for bid purposes and did not imply that these sites would necessarily be used for supported housing. As there were no implications at this stage, officers deemed that it was not necessary to report the bid details to members.
- 4.2 If following the bid and subsequent review and investigation any sites on Stanmore and Highcliffe were deemed suitable for supported housing it was planned at that stage to report on the findings and to have the more discrete consultation with the local residents immediately affected. It was not a case of the officers having over two years to reveal their plans to members and the public, as has been suggested, as the sites originally identified might not have been (and some were not) suitable. However, the fine details of Safer Communities bidding, initial site selection, final site selection and discrete local consultation was not explained in reports to members and, understandably, some confusion was caused when it was later claimed that matters had already been determined.
- 4.3 Cllr Pines went onto suggest that the putting forward of the Highcliffe site for sale to Eastleigh Housing Association was as a result of officers making a mistake and were rushing to complete a deadline for grant purposes. It is true to say that as the community planning process for affordable housing fell behind its timetable, the matter of the time restricted Safer Communities Fund bid became a concern.
- 4.4 The period that had been intended to be used for the lower key, individual consultation with individuals affected by any supported housing proposal, should any suitable sites have been identified following the community planning exercise, had gone through delays. Unless matters were able to proceed and/or the land originally identified in the bid was transferred to Eastleigh Housing Association by 31 March,

the external funding, both capital and revenue, would have been lost. At that stage not all the identified land in the bid had been assessed for its suitability. Some of the original bid land had in fact been discounted as unsuitable and as the Housing Corporation were happy to allow land to be swapped after transfer, once the further analysis and local consultation had taken place, it seemed that the 12 month time limit could be met.

- 4.5 As Cabinet is already aware, two sites identified in the community planning exercise as being suitable for housing, were also thought to be suitable for supported housing, subject to receiving planning consent. A letter was sent to those residents close to the proposed site and also to the garage tenants affected. This was not the originally intended form of local consultation but it started a dialogue, which has continued and broadened to include two opportunities for residents to meet with Two Saints most recently. The sites were sold to Eastleigh Housing Association for them to pursue the development prior to the 31 March deadline for funding drawdown.

## 5 Singling Out Highcliffe

- 5.1 When the Council first considered the problems of increasing applications from homeless people and the added issue of the new homeless categories, the need to look for suitable sites around Winchester was recognised. The earlier Urban Capacity Study had identified sites in a variety of ownerships with potential for development. It was from this, also having regard to land in the Council's ownership that Highcliffe and Stanmore were chosen for first consideration. This applies both to affordable housing as well as supported housing.
- 5.2 However, it was never intended that these would be the only communities looked at, just that in terms of sites in planning policy and in Council ownership they provided some of the best opportunities. Other sites around the district will be looked at, and in terms of supported housing, of the five schemes originally proposed the Highcliffe site is the only one currently being pursued.
- 5.3 The matter will come to Planning Development Control Committee in due course and material planning considerations will be reviewed there and consent given or not. The suitability of other sites around the district for affordable and/or supported housing will be examined in the future, but this will inevitably take a considerable time. The limited impact this development would have on the surrounding community, in the view of the provider, suggests that other sites in other communities would not necessarily provide a better solution. It would seem, therefore, to be of no benefit to delay the current process, even if that were possible.

## 6 Acceptance of the scheme by the Community

- 6.1 Discussions have taken place between the Ward Members and Eastleigh Housing Association and Two Saints, the proposed provider of the support to the residents of the supported housing. Two Saints are an experienced provider of support in schemes such as the one proposed for Highcliffe.
- 6.2 Media stories that the supported housing would be bringing paedophiles into the community have naturally caused considerable alarm. The discussions that Two Saints have had with local Members and the local residents affected by the proposal have assured them that neither potentially dangerous ex offenders nor sex offenders would be housed at the scheme. Detailed checks would be made and no one would be housed by Two Saints unless they were satisfied with the individuals history and

motivation. The potential clients need to demonstrate a willingness to change behaviour to achieve independent living. As well as supervision from Two Saints, the majority of clients would also be under Probation Service monitoring. CCTV will cover the scheme and there will be 24hr call out.

- 6.3 Two Saints have similar schemes running in similar communities in Hampshire and would not contemplate operating this proposed project if they felt it was going to be to the detriment of their clients and thus in turn to the detriment of the community.

## 7 Conclusions

- 7.1 A number of issues have been raised in relation to the proposed scheme, most of which have been covered by the presentation made by Mr Cassidy and in the correspondence from Cllr Pines to the Cabinet on the 30 June.
- 7.2 The majority and hopefully all of the points have been covered in the body of the report. It is felt that the issues were also covered to a greater or lesser extent in the Cabinet debates that led up to the decision to sell to Eastleigh Housing Association the land at Fivefields Road, Highcliffe.
- 7.3 The Council should receive the results of the JTP community planning exercise shortly. The report will consider the potential to use a variety of sites within Stanmore and Highcliffe for affordable housing as well as comment on the other issues identified by the community as being of concern to their locality. In January this year JTP presented their preliminary findings to the community, which included the development principles for the Highcliffe sites. Therefore delaying any process on supported housing in Highcliffe to await the publication of the final JTP report will not add any value to the process and indeed as the decision to sell the land to Eastleigh has already been made and the sale effected, there is arguably no 'decision' for the Cabinet to take in this matter.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

### 8 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 8.1 The proposals to commission supported housing seeks to meet the key strategy of promoting a healthier ,safer more caring community

### 9 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 9.1 None as a result of this report.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

## APPENDICES:

None