

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 10 JUNE 2008

COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillors E. McGillivray (Chair), F. Murdoch (Deputy) J. Hogg, B. Jarvis, G. Leadbitter, M. McConnachie, J. Mackay, , I. Ogilvie, J. Russell, J. Sharp, R. Shepherd and D. Stewart.

IN ATTENDANCE

The Director of Community Services, Head of Financial Services, Chief Housing Officer, A. Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing), Community Planning and Development Manager, Housing Programmes Manager, Housing Needs Manager and C. Carswell, Committee Services Officer.

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor A. Wright

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillor J.S. Cree.

1. DECLARATION OF GROUP DECISIONS

In terms of Standing Order 20 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct the meeting noted that there were no declarations from group leaders or spokespersons in regard to any prior decisions taken on how members will vote on any item on the Agenda nor any declarations of Members Interest in respect of any Item on the Agenda.

2. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Meeting agreed, in terms of Section 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, that the public and media representatives be excluded from the Meeting during consideration of the Items of Business appearing at the relevant paragraphs of this Minute as specified below so as to avoid disclosure of exempt information of the class described in the appropriate paragraph of Part I of Schedule 7A of the Act.

Para No. of Minute

Para No. of Schedule 7A

17

8

3. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The meeting noted that no written questions had been received.

4. REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting progress in reviewing the Council's Housing Allocations Policy and proposing interim measures to address urgent issues identified during the review.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that the report related to the current policy and the tension between those who are homeless and those who do not go through the homeless route. She further stated the shortage of housing is the primary issue but a wider review was taking place going beyond the scope of what was originally anticipated last year. The proposal was to move to a three group policy. There are advantages for the Council as this would reduce costs of temporary accommodation and achieve some balance those who are homeless and other applicants.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to:-

- (i) note the progress in reviewing the Council's Housing Allocations Policy;
- (ii) the interim measures proposed;
- (iii) the proposed quotas; and
- (iv) note that a further report on the Allocations Policy Review would be presented to the Committee.

5. HOUSING (SCOTLAND) ACT 2006: CONSULTATION ON DRAFT GUIDANCE AND REGULATIONS

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services advising the Committee of the consultation on the draft Guidance and Regulations for the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 and setting out the proposed process for preparation and agreement of a Council response.

Following consideration the Committee agreed that:-

- (i) the Council consider its response at its meeting on 2 July 2008; and
- (ii) any comments on the Consultation be passed to the Chief Housing Officer by 20 June 2008.

6. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT HOUSING INVESTMENT IN MORAY 2007/08 AND 2008/09

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services

providing the Committee with details of the Scottish Government's funding of the Affordable Housing Investment Programme (AHIP) in Moray in 2007/08 and providing information on the projected level of investment in 2008/09.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that Stewart Maxwell, Minister for Communities & Sport, had announced the allocations for each Local Authority area, Moray would be allocated £6.3million. This was less than the £7million anticipated.

Following a question from Councillor Leadbitter regarding past indicative figures, the Chief Housing Officer advised that last year, RSL's in Moray were initially allocated £9.525million but achieved £14.744million, obtained through slippage from other areas.

Following consideration the Committee agreed :-

- (i) to welcome the record level of Scottish Government Investment achieved in 2007/08;
- (ii) to note the indicative level of investment for 2008/09;
- (iii) to note that the draft Strategic Housing Investment Plan for 2009-2014 would be submitted to the Communities Committee in November 2008; and
- (iv) that the Chief Housing Officer write to the Scottish Government expressing the Committee's disappointment at the low level of investment funding proposed for Moray in 2008/2009.

7. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING GRANTS BUDGET 2008/09 AND 2009/10

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services seeking approval for the Private Sector Housing Grants Budget for 2008/09 and 2009/10.

In response to a question from Councillor Stewart querying the contingencies in place should a shortage of staff occur again, the Chief Housing Officer advised that this was a unique case as the team was small and specialised. A Manager and Assistant had been appointed and she hoped that a full compliment of staff would be in place shortly.

Following consideration the Committee approved the proposed Private Sector Housing Grants Budgets for 2008/09 and 2009/10.

8. HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services asking the Committee to agree the 2008/09 budget for Hanover and Castlehill Housing Associations sheltered housing warden service and agree to the establishment of two Housing Support posts within the Housing Service.

On the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Wright queried why Hanover's budget was reduced. The Housing Programmes Manager advised that the rental costs have increased therefore the Council did not have such a shortfall to cover for housing support.

The Head of Financial Services further advised that the Budget for 2007/08 included a one-off additional payment of £65,000 towards the organisation's deficit balance in reserves, which the Committee had previously approved. Taking this into account meant there was an increase in funding.

Following consideration the Committee agreed:-

- (i) the 2008/09 budgets for Hanover and Castlehill Housing Associations sheltered housing warden services; and
- (ii) the establishment of two Housing Support posts within the Housing service.

9. SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY 2008-11

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive asking the Committee to approve the Moray Community Planning Partnership Social Inclusion Strategy 2008-11 and the draft Outcome Statement.

During discussion, Councillor Leadbitter commented that since the report had been written the issue of fuel poverty had worsened and that he was of the opinion that this should be emphasised more in the report. He further stated that access to sustainable fuel and fuel efficient systems should be looked at by the Authority and in his opinion this would help reduce fuel poverty and that the outcomes should be identified more in the strategy.

Following consideration the Committee:-

- (i) approved the Moray Community Planning Partnership Social Inclusion Strategy 2008-11 (attached to the report as Appendix 1);
- (ii) approved, in principle, the draft Outcome Statement (attached as Appendix 2); and
- (iii) agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair, to amend the Outcome Statement in the light of changes to the Single Outcome Agreement, to include the amendments on fuel poverty.

10. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND OTHER HOUSING BUDGET MONITORING 2007/08

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting budget monitoring information for the period to 31 March 2008 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Other Housing.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to note the near final outturn with regard to the Housing Investment Programme for 2007/08.

11. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2007/08

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Communities Committee of the position to 31 March 2008 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2007/08.

During discussion Councillor Hogg applauded the increase in the right to buy sales.

In response to a question from Councillor McConnachie regarding the budget spends on rainwater goods, insulation and fire safety, the Chief Housing Officer advised that in some instances it could be difficult to identify works particularly around fire safety and that this had been highlighted to Committee in the past. She further stated that some properties are difficult to insulate and would require additional and more complex works and agreed that the spend on rainwater goods was disappointing and that that this would be targeted this year to achieve full spend.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to note the near final outturn with regard to the Housing Investment Programme for 2007/08.

12. HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 4 AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2007/08

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services outlining the performance of the Housing Service for the period 1 January to 31 March 2008 and for the year 2007/08.

Following consideration the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the actions being taken to seek improvements where required;
- (ii) the targets proposed for 2008/09; and
- (iii) the proposed changes to Service Standards.

13. CARE COMMISSION INSPECTIONS – RESETTLEMENT SERVICE, 16-24 HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICE AND HOMELESS HOSTELS AND HOUSING SUPPORT

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services providing the Communities Committee with the details of the Care Commission's Inspection reports on the Council's Resettlement Service, 16-24 Housing Support Service and the Homeless Hostels & Housing Support Services.

On the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Wright commended the report and the work behind it. The Chairman advised that these comments would be passed on to staff.

Following consideration the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the Care Commission reports on the Resettlement Service, 16-24 Housing Support service and the Homeless Hostels and Housing Support service;
- (ii) to note that implementation plans have been developed to address recommendations arising from the reports;
- (iii) to note that a separate report on the Committee's agenda proposed means of addressing the requirement identified by the Care Commission to have sufficient staff in place in support projects; and
- (iv) that a further report on the Care Commission inspection process be presented to the Committee once gradings for the services inspected are available.

14. HOUSING INSPECTION

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services providing the Committee with details of the timetable for inspection of the Council's housing services to be carried out in 2008.

The Chairman advised that there would be a briefing session for the Communities Committee and the Housing Sub-Committee on the 22nd August at 2pm in the Council Chambers and that due to operational reasons the Housing Sub-Committee meeting would now be on the 8th September 2008.

Following consideration the Committee agreed :-

- (i) to note the revised timetable for the housing inspection;
- (ii) that a briefing on the key points contained in the Pre-Inspection Submission would be made on the 22 August 2008 at 2pm and that the Housing Sub Committee would be held on 8 September 2008 at 9.30am; and
- (iii) that further reports would be presented to the Committee as the inspection progresses.

15. VISIT FROM THE EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive asking the Committee to consider an invitation from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to visit the Council.

Following consideration the Committee agreed that the Equalities and Human Rights Commission give a presentation at the Communities Committee meeting on 19 August 2008.

16. QUESTION TIME

In response to a question from Councillor Jarvis regarding what effect the abolition of Communities Scotland was having on Housing, the Chief Housing Officer advised that at present she could not identify any issues but that it was still early days. She further stated that the Housing Regulator would be carrying out the inspection rather than Communities Scotland. To date there have been no noticeable effects.

Councillor Russell stated that he was disappointed that at the meeting of the new Committee there was little reference to community safety, anti-social behaviour or community liaison and asked whether at the next meeting these would be covered in more depth.

The Chairman advised that the Community Safety Partnership has had its first meeting but was very much in its infancy but would hope to have a lot more reports in the future.

17. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATION BUDGET 2007/08 – BUDGET MONITORING (PARA 8)

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting budget monitoring information for the period to 31 March 2008 for the Building Services Trading Operation.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to:

- (i) note the financial information reported; and
- (ii) join the Chairman in congratulating staff on the work achieved.