

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2008
COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor J.S. Cree

IN ATTENDANCE

Chief Housing Officer, A. Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing), Mrs L. Paisey, Principal Accountance, Corporate Policy Unit Manager, Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinator, Partnership Development Officer, Housing Needs Manager, and Mrs C. Carswell, Committee Services Officer.

1. DECLARATION OF GROUP DECISIONS

In terms of Standing Order 20 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.

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**

18
19

8 & 9
8

3. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Committee were advised that no written questions had been received.

4, HOMELESSNESS IN MORAY

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services in response to a request from the Committee for a report providing a profile of homelessness in Moray and presenting details of homelessness, where possible providing a comparison to national trends.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the analysis of homelessness detailed in the report; and
- (ii) that a further report on the expansion of priority need be presented to the Committee before April 2009.

5. COUNCIL HOUSE NEW BUILD

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services providing a summary of the further financial feasibility work carried out on the potential for Council new build, recommending a level of investment and seeking the agreement of the Committee to prepare an appropriate bid for resources.

Following a question from Councillor Jarvis regarding Right to Buy, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the Scottish Government are currently carrying out a review of Right to Buy and that any new build would be exempt from Right to Buy.

In response to questions the Chief Housing Officer advised that the biggest issue is that there was a difficulty in obtaining land and that there would not be sufficient land as there is not sufficient land in Council ownership to sustain a programme for 80/90 houses and that would be the challenge for January. She further advised that there would have to be a judgement call to decide whether there was a robust case for putting in a bid in January.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the conclusions of the financial feasibility work;
- (ii) to support the submission of a bid for financial resources to assist a Council new build programme;
- (iii) to authorise the Chief Housing Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Communities Committee, to submit a bid for resources within any timescales set by the Scottish Government; and
- (iv) that reports on progress would be submitted to each future Committee.

6. STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2009 – 14 for approval, prior to submission to the Scottish Government.

Councillor McConnachie stated that he found it hard to support the proposals as there were few houses proposed in Speyside with the two largest towns, Dufftown and Aberlour having none which was an issue considering that the 3 biggest employers, Walkers Shortbread, Forsyth Group and Glenfiddich Distillery are based in the Speyside Ward. He stated these companies would like to reduce their carbon footprint by having employees live within the area. He further advised that the Strategic Housing Investment Plan does nothing for Speyside & Glenlivet, rural development, little to support the greener theme or the safer strategy. He proposed that 50 units be included in the core spending group and 20 units included in the slippage for Rothes, Aberlour and Dufftown in proportion to the size of their population.

The Chief Housing Officer advised the the proposed expenditure covered the next five years and that the latter years of the programme were not as robust as the earlier years. The basis and direction reflects known housing needs and housing pressure areas. There was a Rural Housing Enabler Project currently taking place in Speyside and that would be reported to Committee in the next few months which will give useful insight to housing needs in rural areas.

The Chief Housing Officer also advised that the strategic document would be reviewed annually, with year one being most definite and year five being reviewed three times over the next few years and the one message which comes out to the Government is that the requirement for affordable housing far exceeds the likely resources which are known to be available in the immediate future.

Councillor McConnachie advised that he was happy to withdraw his motion provided that a report was forthcoming from the Rural Housing Enabler project as soon as possible.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed that:-

- (i) the Strategic Housing Investment Plan be submitted to the Scottish Government;
- (ii) a report would come back to the Committee on the Rural Housing Enabler Pilot Project before the end of the financial year and that the report would also cover the issue of housing need in rural areas; and
- (iii) further reports be presented to the Communities Committee on the Strategic Housing Investment Plan, as required.

7. SAFER STRATEGY 2008 – 2011 (DRAFT)

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive inviting the Committee to comment and approve the draft Safer Strategy 2008 – 11.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to approve the Safer Strategy 2008-2011 to ensure a comprehensive strategy for the next three year period.

8. GRAFFITI POLICY – REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive asking the Committee to note the allocation of additional funding to continue the free graffiti removal service currently offered by The Moray Council as part of its Graffiti Policy.

In response to questions, the Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinator advised that he would bring back a report to Committee with an approximate amount spent on removing graffiti from council buildings. He advised that the usage of graffiti removal kits had been investigated but due to health and safety and training reasons these had not been used as the DLO had protective equipment already in place.

Following consideration the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note that the Graffiti Removal Budget had been exhausted and that an additional £3,000 had been identified within the Safer budget to continue the free graffiti removal service currently offered by The Moray Council under its graffiti policy; and
- (ii) that an information report come to a future committee regarding the breakdown in costs for buildings and usage of graffiti removal kits including health and safety and cost implications

9. SAFER & STRONGER GROUP – SAFER STREETS, ADDITIONAL FUNDING

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive asking the Committee to note that additional funding had been allocated to the Safer Co-ordinating Group under the 'Safer Streets' initiative and to confirm continued elected member involvement in the development of the proposals within Moray.

Councillor Jarvis welcomed the initiative and questioned the reason for buses not being used this year and whether this initiative could be used at other times of the year. Councillor McGillivray advised that since the funding allocated to the Council had been cut it was not feasible to provide buses but that taxi marshalls had been doubled. The Partnership Development Officer advised that funding had only been issued for the festive period.

Following consideration, the Committee noted that additional funding had been allocated to the Safer & Stronger Group under the "Safer Streets" initiative and noted that details of the spend would be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

10. RACE EQUALITY SCHEME REVIEW

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Policy Unit Manager asking the Committee to review and approve public of the revised Race Equality Scheme.

The Corporate Policy Unit Manager advised that the Authority are having schemes produced and procedures put in place but there was a lot more work to be done in services, in consultation with ethnic groups, to improve services to them and the scheme had to be revised by the 30th November.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to approve the publication of the revised Race Equality Scheme.

11. DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME ANNUAL REPORT

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Policy Unit Manager asking the Committee to review and approve publication of the Disability Equality Scheme annual progress report.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to approve the publication of the Disability Equality Scheme progress report.

12. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND OTHER HOUSING BUDGET MONITORING 2008 / 09

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting budget monitoring information for the period to 30 September 2008 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Other Housing.

Further to a question from Councillor Stewart regarding disability adaptations, the Chief Housing Officer advised that there had been an agreement for a 2 year budget for the private sector housing grants and contained within the housing investment report there are proposals for viring, from other parts of the private sector housing grant budget, monies to the disabled adaptations in response to the demand. She further advised that she was hopeful to reach the target spend but that it could be carried forward to the following year.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to note the report.

13. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2008 / 09

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Committee of the position to 30 September 2008 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2008 / 09.

14. HOUSING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT – 2ND QUARTER 2008 / 09

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services outlining the performance of the Housing Service for the period 1 July to 30 September 2008.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to:-

- (i) note the performance outlined in the report; and
- (ii) note the actions being taken to seek improvements where required.

15. HOUSING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS IN QUARTER 2 2008 / 09

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting progress on the achievement of priorities identified within the Community Services Improvement Plan as it relates to the Council's Housing Service.

16. GYPSY / TRAVELLER AWARENESS RAISING SESSIONS

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive asking the Committee to consider the offer of Gypsy / Traveller awareness raising sessions for elected members and community councillors by Gypsy / Traveller Information Project.

Following consideration the Committee agreed:-

- (i) that a proforma would be set up in the Members Support Office for elected members to sign up for Gypsy / Traveller awareness raising sessions run by the Gypsy Traveller Education Information Project; and
- (ii) that an invitation be sent to community councillors.

17. QUESTION TIME

There were no questions raised during question time.

18. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION (PARA 8 &9)

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Committee of an opportunity that has arisen to lease Defence Housing Executive (DHE) Housing property in Elgin and seeking approval to conclude agreement with the DHE to lease these properties for temporary accommodation purposes.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the oral update from the Chief Housing Officer;
- (ii) that officers negotiate leases for the properties identified in this report; and
- (iii) that officers present a further report on the arrangements agreed.

19. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATION BUDGET 2008 / 09 (PARA 8)

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting budget monitoring information for the period to 30 September 2008 for the Building Services Trading Operation.