

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 19 MAY 2009

COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

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

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Wright (ex-officio)

IN ATTENDANCE

Chief Housing Officer, Mrs A Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing), Mr G Templeton, Principal Planning Officer, Corporate Policy Unit Manager (in respect of Item 10), Housing Needs Manager, Housing Strategy & Policy Manager, Mrs D Bosworth, Principal Accountant and Mrs C Carswell, Committee Services Officer as Clerk to the meeting.

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

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3. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Committee noted that no written questions had been submitted.

4. AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting, for consideration and approval, the results of the stakeholder consultation on the Draft Revised Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing. The report sought Committee approval for the proposed responses / amendments arising from consultee comments.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) the proposed responses to stakeholder comments and resultant amendments to the the Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing;
- (ii) that no Hearing need be convened to resolve the remaining differences of opinion;
- (iii) that the finalised version of the Supplementary Planning Guidance is sent to the Scottish Government with a statement on the consultation exercise; and
- (iv) the adoption of the amended Supplementary Planning Guidance be used as part of the Development Plan in the determination of planning applications.

5. LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE 2008-09

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services summarising the 2009 Local Housing Strategy (LHS) update and will be the last annual update of the LHS 2004 - 2009. The report reviewed the actions for 2008/9 and set out the actions for 2009/10.

In response to a question from Councillor Leadbitter as to which actions were not achieved, the Chief Housing Officer advised that she would provide the relevant information to him.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to note the report.

6. DRAFT HOUSING (SCOTLAND) BILL: A CONSULTATION

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services advising Committee of the Draft Housing Scotland Bill and seek agreement to the method of response. The meeting noted that the consultation responses were required to be with the Scottish Government on the 14 August 2009 not 24 August as stated in the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Jarvis as to whether it would be appropriate to comment on the Housing Regulator, the Chief Housing Officer advised that she would be happy to take comments on the Housing Regulator as it impacts on the Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Wright as to whether the views of tenants and those who had exercised their right to buy would be taken into account, the Chief Housing Officer advised that tenant groups were going to respond separately and that a report would be going to the Housing Sub-Committee.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) that Elected Members pass comments on the draft Housing Bill to the Chief Housing Officer by 15 June 2009; and
- (ii) that Officers would draft a response to the consultation for consideration by the Communities Committee on 11 August 2009.

7. FLATS ABOVE SHOPS

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services considering the potential for an incentive scheme for conversion of town centre properties above shops into suitable accommodation for rent in Elgin.

In response to questions from Councillors regarding whether the surveys would be carried out by someone internal or external and if successful whether it could be rolled out to other towns, Councillor McGillivray advised that the business improvement group would carry out the survey in Elgin but that someone may well be employed to look at the situation in other towns if the survey was successful.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that it would be extremely useful to gather information as to costs of adapting these properties, whether businesses were happy to lease their premises for this purpose, etc. She also advised that investigations were taking place as to whether the Town Centre Regeneration Scheme could be used for covering costs of refurbishment and they were working closely with Economic Development.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note this interim report;
- (ii) to allocate £2,000 from the Private Sector Housing Grant budget, if required, to fund a survey of property above shops in Elgin; and
- (iii) that a further report is submitted to Committee when further information was available.
- (iv) that if the scheme were successful consider action be given to rolling it out to other town centres.

8. AFFORDABLE HOUSING - SITE AT BUCKIE

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting details of progress in the development of the Council's affordable housing site at Barhill Road in Buckie. The report provided details of the site servicing and infrastructure costs to be incurred by the Council in the development of the site.

Following consideration, the committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the reasons for the site development costs at Barhill Road; and
- (ii) to approve the arrangements for meeting these costs, subject to Scottish Government agreement.

9. COUNCIL HOUSE NEW BUILD

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting progress on the development of a Council new build programme and proposing priorities to be addressed in Phase 2 of the proposed programme.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that Phase 2 would only be 40 houses and the group taking forward procurement would take all considerations into account, such as demand when developing tender arrangements for Phase 2.

In response to a question from Councillor Jarvis as to whether there would be alternatives for funding if monies were not received from the Scottish Government, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the Council would have to put forward 100% of the monies and at present there were financial constraints on the Council and this would require investigation.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to welcome the financial assistance from the Scottish Government;
- (ii) to note the progress achieved to date;
- (iii) the proposals for Phase 2, subject to further funding being sought from the Scottish Government; and
- (iv) to note that the tender evaluation and detailed financial implications for Phase 1 will be presented to the Policy & Resources Committee meeting on 2 June 2009 for consideration.

10. GENDER EQUALITY ANNUAL REPORT

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive asking Committee to comment on and approve the Gender Equality Annual Report prior to publication.

In response to a comment from Councillor Cree advising that bulky uplift was also a problem for the elderly, the Corporate Policy Unit Manager advised that it would not be limited and would be open to anyone who required it.

Councillor Jarvis advised that, in his opinion, the apprentices should be referred to as male and female not boys and girls, the Chair took his comments on board.

In response to a question from Councillor Murdoch as to whether a breakdown in senior management figures could be included, the Corporate Policy Unit Manager advised that this would be included in the report.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to approve the Gender Equality Annual Report prior to publication subject to amending the bulky uplift to have no gender barriers, the apprentices being referred to as male and female and including the senior management breakdown figures.

11. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2008 / 09

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Committee of the position to 28 February 2009 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2008 / 09.

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

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting budget monitoring information for the period to 28 February 2009 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Other Housing Budget.

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

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

In response to concerns raised by Councillors regarding hostel residents/service users having an input in the recruitment process of staff, the Housing Needs Manager advised that the Care Commission advise that those using the services

should be consulted on service deliveries and that Personnel were also consulted regarding this issue. The hostel residents get to meet the candidates prior to the interview process but they were not involved in the formal interview. The Chief Housing Officer advised that the decision regarding appointment of candidates remains the responsibility of Officers. She also advised that there were challenges for the Council in relation to homelessness and she was mindful of appropriate management and support. There would also be a report coming to Committee regarding the first six months of the Homelessness Improvement Plan and this would look at pressure points.

Mrs Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing) advised that Member's concerns were noted and the Officers would discuss the same with Personnel and the Care Commission and this could be addressed in a future report to Committee.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to:-

- (i) note the Care Commission reports on the Homeless Hostels and Housing Support Service, the 16-24 Housing Support Service and the Resettlement Service; and
- (ii) note that improvements plans have been developed and accepted by the Care Commission to address the recommendations arising from the reports.
- (iii) to bring a report back following discussion with Head of Personnel Services in regard to the involvement of service users in recruitment processes.

Councillor Hogg wished it minuted that he could not accept the first action planned as noted on Page 6 which related to the involvement of service users in the recruitment process.

Councillor J McKay, left the meeting at this juncture.

14. HOUSING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS IN QUARTER 4 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.

15. HOUSING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - 4TH QUARTER AND ANNUAL 2008 / 09

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 2009 and for the year 2008 / 09.

In response to a question from Councillor Cree as to whether the Council has a criteria for homelessness, the Chief Housing Officer advised that there would a report on the profile of homelessness going to the August Committee and the criteria would be included in this report.

In response to a question from Councillor Leadbitter as to whether the target of 100% was achievable with regard to giving an interview to homeless applicants since if an applicant decided not to attend this would be outwith the Council's control, the Chief Housing Officer advised that they could change the explanation to read "offer" rather than give therefore if an appointment was made and the applicant did not turn up this would not impact on the Council's statistics. She also advised that Housing would be doing more work on the reasons behind refusing properties and this would be included in a report on allocations going to Committee in August.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the actions being taken to seek improvements where required; and
- (ii) the targets proposed for 2009/10.

16. HOMELESSNESS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the final Improvement Plan for the Council's homelessness services, agreed with the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to:-

- (i) note the agreed Improvement Plan; and
- (ii) note that six monthly progress reports will be presented to the Communities Committee and the Audit and Performance Review Committee.

17. QUESTION TIME

In response to a question from Councillor Jarvis as to whether Bishopmill House could be used for the homeless, the Chief Housing Officer advised that it had been the Council's decision to retain the building for the purpose of flooding and it would require further discussion across the Council if it were to be used for any other purpose. There would also have to be an investigation as to whether Bishopmill House were appropriate for homeless and may not be the best building for long term usage.

In response to a question from Councillor Russell as to the dearth of papers regarding anti-social behaviour, community safety, etc to this Committee, Mrs Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing) advised that this would be raised with the Chief Executive to make him aware of Members comments.

In response to a question from Councillor Cree as to whether there was any information on serial homelessness, the Chief Housing Officer advised that there would be reference to this issue in the report coming to Committee in August.

18. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATION BUDGET 2008 / 09 - BUDGET MONITORING (Para 8)

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the budget monitoring information for the period to 28 February 2009 for the Building Services Trading Operation.