

REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 6 OCTOBER 2009

SUBJECT: FLOODING IMPACT ON RESIDENTS AND HOUSING

BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the Communities Committee of the consequences of the flooding in Moray on 4 September 2009 for the Moray Council's housing stock in affected areas and for the Council's wider responsibilities in relation to housing affected. As this report has been finalised as at 23 September 2009, it is suggested that a verbal update can be provided to the Committee.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to the management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock and to its homelessness functions.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Communities Committee:-

- (i) notes the impact of the flooding on residents and housing in Moray;**
- (ii) notes the arrangements in place to provide temporary accommodation to those affected;**
- (iii) agrees that further reports as indicated in paragraphs 4.8 and 5.2 are presented to a future Committee meeting; and**
- (iii) agrees that reports are provided to each Communities Committee to appraise the Committee of progress in remedying the damage to properties.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 4 September 2009, severe flooding affected parts of Elgin, Fochabers, Rothes and other areas, causing damage to Council and private housing. As part of the emergency response, floodguards were fitted to properties in Elgin and Rothes. Tenants were evacuated to the Rest Centre from affected properties during the morning and afternoon of 4 September.
- 3.2 Bishopmill House in Elgin was commissioned by late afternoon on 4 September to provide temporary accommodation for flood affected households. Staff from Moray Housing Partnership volunteered to help in the emergency response and assisted the Council's housing staff in the commissioning work.

- 3.3 On the night of 4 September 2009, a total of 52 households were in some form of temporary accommodation provided by the Council. Of these, 22 were at Bishopmill House, with a further 23 households accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation. Two households were accommodated in Moray Women's Aid with 1 household in Cameron Park Brae and 4 households in residential care. A number of other households made their own arrangements for that night.
- 3.4 From Monday 7 September 2009, a Flood Team has been established in the Housing Service. This team comprises staff from the Elgin Area Housing Team, the Housing Needs Team, the Capital Programmes Team and the Building Services DLO. Regular meetings, chaired by the Chief Housing Officer, are held to ensure that all appropriate measures are in place to respond to the needs of tenants and residents in affected properties.

4. IMPACT ON COUNCIL HOUSING

- 4.1 Although the impact of the flooding on 4 September 2009 is much less than that experienced in Moray in 1997 and 2002, a significant number of properties have been affected as identified below –

Elgin	61 properties
Fochabers	2 properties
Roths	3 properties

- 4.2 The Council fitted flood guards to its housing stock in areas affected by the 2002 flooding. Regular exercises have been held to ensure that deployment plans worked. The last exercise was held on 29 June 2009. Although properties with floodguards were affected by water ingress, there are some indications that the extent of damage is less than that previously experienced. This will be further assessed as a more detailed assessment of damage is carried out.
- 4.3 A further requirement to evacuate upper flats in an area in South Lesmurdie arose on Sunday 6 September 2009, as a result of a statutory notice being served by Scottish and Southern Energy, who maintain the underground electric cable network. The defects were remedied by Friday 11 September 2009 and residents were able to return to their homes on that day. These properties are not included in the number of properties affected as detailed in paragraph 4.1.
- 4.4 It is too early to provide a more detailed assessment of the extent of damage to the Council's housing stock as all properties have not yet been fully assessed. A removal and storage contract was tendered and awarded on 11 September 2009. Staff are working with tenants to enable the clearance of properties with undamaged furniture etc being placed in secure storage. Teams of volunteers from Council staff and community organisations have assisted this process. For those with contents insurance, insurers require to inspect damaged goods before these can be removed.

- 4.5 As at 18 September 2009, 50 properties had been handed over to the DLO for removal of tenants' possessions to storage. This is then followed by inspection to assess the required remedial works and stripping out. The first phase of any works to flood affected properties is to dry out the property. Past experience has indicated that this can take a number of weeks. A contract to provide specialist drying was tendered in the week commencing 14 September 2009. This includes for the provision of drying equipment, antifungicidal and rot treatment, as well as regular drying status reports and the receipt of a final drying and micro organism (swab) clearance certificate per property.
- 4.6 It has been agreed that the remedial works will be carried out by the Council's Building Services DLO on rates agreed through the Housing Maintenance Partnership. Following the flooding in 2002, some measures were taken in reinstatement work that will potentially reduce the extent of work required – for instance, all gas boilers were wall hung and electric sockets were raised to 450mm above floor level. It is hoped that remedial work can be carried out without adversely affecting the Council's Housing Investment Programme for 2009/10. However, projects that are deemed to be low priority eg fencing works, environmental works etc may be delayed as a result of the requirement to direct staff resources to flood reinstatement work.
- 4.7 The Council's housing stock is not insured for the first £5m of expenditure. In view of this situation, which resulted following 2002, the Housing Revenue Account has contributed annually to the Council's Flood Reserve Fund. Although an estimate for the reinstatement costs cannot be developed in any detail as yet, it is projected that the monies held on reserve will be sufficient to cover the costs.
- 4.8 It is currently known that at least 25 Council tenants did not have house contents insurance. As the insurance status of some tenants is not yet known, it is possible that this figure will increase. Only 3 Council tenants affected were insured for household contents through the Council's Tenants Insurance Scheme.
- 4.9 As some of the tenants affected by the floods had previously suffered flooding, it is projected that some households may not wish to return to their homes, once reinstatement works are completed. This was the case in 2002 and an approach was agreed to enable flood affected households to be given priority on the Council's transfer list. A number of tenants were provided with new tenancies outwith flood affected areas. However, due to the level and nature of the vacancies that arose at that time, it was not possible to respond to all requests for alternative permanent accommodation. It is suggested that Officers prepare a more detailed report on how this might be responded to, once a more detailed picture of the number of households not wishing to return can be ascertained.

5. IMPACT ON PRIVATE HOUSING

- 5.1 The Council has statutory duties towards the private sector, primarily in relation to homelessness arising from an emergency. It is appreciated, however, that in some instances owners may have attended to their immediate and longer term accommodation requirements without recourse to the Council. As a result, the number of private sector houses affected is limited to those known to the Council's Housing staff. These are –

Elgin	27 properties
Fochabers	5 properties
Garmouth	1 property
Keith	2 properties

In addition to the above, 6 'War Veteran' properties in Elgin have been damaged. These properties are uninsured for flood damage and are to be reinstated by the Scottish War Veterans Garden City Association. Tenants from these properties are being accommodated by the Council meantime.

- 5.2 The insurance status of private sector households is unknown for the most part. If households do not have buildings insurance, the likely cost of reinstatement may be difficult to meet. Should such instances arise, the Council could seek to award Improvement Grants to assist such owners, as was done following the floods in 2002. It is suggested that this should be the subject of a more detailed report should any such instances be brought to the Council's notice.

6. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- 6.1 During the week following the flooding, following a request from the Chief Housing Officer, the Defence Housing Executive agreed to lease 12 properties to the Council. Leases were agreed and signed for an initial six month term. Langstane Housing Association offered to lease 10 properties to the Council to provide temporary accommodation in a range of locations in Moray, with leases agreed during the week following the floods. In addition, available Council properties have been identified to provide temporary accommodation. As many people have lost possessions in the flooding, these properties are fully furnished. Furniture etc was procured during the week commencing 8 September 2009, with the assistance of the Council's Procurement Team.
- 6.2 On Friday 11 September 2009, a total of 13 families were moved to temporary furnished accommodation. This achievement reflected a huge amount of work in procuring and furnishing properties. A team of volunteers from Council staff assisted in this process.
- 6.3 As at 18 September 2009, the total number of households accommodated in temporary accommodation as a result of the flooding was:-

Bishopmill House	29 households
Temporary furnished accommodation	16 households
Bed and Breakfast	12 households

In residential care

1 household

The temporary accommodation needs of residents with disabilities or other particular needs have been assessed by Community Care Officers.

- 6.4 There are 16 households who have either secured their own accommodation or are living with family and friends. Some of these may require temporary accommodation to be provided by the Council in the future. Housing staff continue to commission suitable properties for use as temporary accommodation, with 5 new properties expected to be in use by 25 September 2009.
- 6.5 The Council will inevitably incur costs in the provision of temporary accommodation. Members will be aware that this is already an area of the budget which has been under pressure for some time. It is anticipated that utilisation of the Flood Reserve Fund can minimise the impact of these additional costs on the Council's budgets.
- 6.6 The charges for Bishopmill House have been slightly increased from the 2002 charges levied. Charges for furnished temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast accommodation are set in accordance with the approach agreed by the Council's Community Services Committee on 5 April 2006 (paragraph 11 of the Minute refers). The approach to recovery of charges agreed with the Chief Finance Officer is that Council tenants should be no worse off, net of any housing benefit entitlement, in terms of accommodation charges ie they pay no more than they would have done had the flooding not occurred. For private sector residents, the charges recovered from residents should be no more than the equivalent Council house rent, net of any housing benefit entitlement. This approach will require the Council to write off some charges that would otherwise be levied. A process to deal with this has been agreed with the Chief Financial Officer.
- 6.7 The impact of temporary accommodation charges on each individual household in temporary accommodation is to be discussed with each household. It is hoped that this approach will provide some reassurance to households in temporary accommodation regarding the costs of that accommodation.

7. COMMUNICATING WITH TENANTS

- 7.1 It is recognised that communication with tenants affected by flooding is critical. Over the weekend of 5/6 September 2009, an information leaflet and a list of useful telephone numbers were produced to provide tenants and residents with helpful advice. These were circulated widely through the information buses deployed in Elgin and Fochabers, and through staff contact with individual residents and through Bishopmill House.
- 7.2 In the week following the flooding, housing staff sought to contact all tenants affected to ascertain temporary accommodation requirements and arrangements to be made to empty properties affected. Staff also visited

Bishopmill House on a regular basis during the week. An advert was placed in the Northern Scot on Friday 11 September and Friday 18 September providing details of the telephone number for tenants and residents to call and providing information on the process for clearing damaged Council houses.

- 7.3 During the week commencing 14 September 2009, a further information leaflet was provided to tenants indicating the steps the Council was taking to dry out and repair damaged houses. This has been circulated to all tenants in temporary accommodation and has also been made available through the Council's website and through the Council's Access Point and Elgin Area Housing Team. In addition, twice weekly surgeries have been established in Bishopmill House with a Housing Officer in attendance to deal with any queries that residents have. It has also been made clear that staff will visit any residents at home or in temporary accommodation upon request.
- 7.4 It is intended that further information bulletins are produced. In the interim, where any household has any query or concern, they are encouraged to visit or call the Elgin Area Housing Team to discuss this.

8. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Single Outcome Agreement/Service Improvement Plan

The Single Outcome Agreement and service Improvement Plan both have priorities regarding the condition of housing in Moray. As a result of the increased workload for the Housing service over the next few months, it is likely that some of the targets for completion of other work detailed in both the Single Outcome Agreement and the Service Improvement Plan will be adversely affected. Staff will work to ensure that this is minimised.

(b) Policy and Legal

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

The cost of responding to and dealing with the aftermath of the flooding will be borne by the Council's Flood Reserve Fund, to which the Housing Revenue Account has contributed since 2002. As stated above, it is projected that these contributions will meet the costs of temporary accommodation and reinstatement works to properties.

(d) Consultations

Consultation on this report has been carried out with the Chief Executive, the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of Community Services, the Acting Head of Community Care, the Property Services Manager and managers within the Housing Service.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 **This report outlines the impact of the flooding experienced in Moray on 4 September 2009 on residents and housing in Moray. It provides the**

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Committee with an overview of the immediate work undertaken to respond to the emergency and identifies the work to be undertaken to reinstate affected properties.

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Background Papers: Held by CHO
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