



REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 1 DECEMBER 2009

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH HOUSING MINISTER

BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides feedback to the Communities Committee following the recent meeting with the Housing Minister, Alex Neil MSP.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to homelessness.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (i) **welcomes the discussion held with the Housing Minister;**
- (ii) **agrees that Officers progress investigations on the issues raised during the meeting; and**
- (iii) **notes that a follow-up meeting in February/March 2010 was suggested by the Minister.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At its meeting on 11 August 2009, the Communities agreed that a meeting should be sought with the Housing Minister to discuss the real difficulties facing the Council in meeting the homelessness 2012 target (paragraph 11 of the Minute refers).
- 3.2 The meeting was arranged for 11 November 2009. Councillors Wright and McGillivray, with the Chief Officer, attended this meeting.

4. AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- 4.1 The meeting was extremely positive and constructive with discussion centring on five key areas –

i) Supported accommodation

The Minister referred to a developing national project on supported accommodation. A working group within CoSLA has been established to develop a national strategy. He also referred to potential funding opportunities through the Lottery Fund, the European Investment Bank and Registered Social Landlords. Council representatives agreed to explore these initiatives.

ii) Mediation projects

The Minister indicated that he had been impressed with mediation projects in operation in North Ayrshire and urged us to make contact with that Council for more details. That Council had found that the most prevalent reason for homelessness was young people being asked to leave the family home. Again, Council representatives indicated that they would further explore such projects, although mediation already did play a role in tackling homelessness in Moray.

iii) Private Rented Sector

The Minister made reference to the role of the private rented sector and private sector leasing schemes. Council representatives confirmed that the Council did operate such a scheme and that there may be potential to expand its operation in Moray. The Minister also said that he was seeking a new regulation that would allow Councils to use private sector accommodation more creatively to discharge their homelessness duties. The intention would be that homeless applicants could be placed in a short assured tenancy for six months, during which time the duty would continue. If after this period, the tenant was offered a minimum of a one year extension to the contract, this would discharge the homelessness duty falling on the local authority.

iv) New housing

The Minister indicated that he would be asked to consider recommendations from the Shared Services Board in December regarding assistance for further Council new build.

v) New financial initiatives

The Minister outlined a number of potential initiatives to bring in finance to support new housing development. He suggested that a meeting be held, to involve finance staff, to go over such initiatives in more detail, to enable the Council to consider the potential for such initiatives in Moray. He suggested initiatives such as the proposed National Housing Trust as a single private sector vehicle to provide private housing to rent. The Minister also indicated that he was encouraging Registered Social Landlords to access alternative sources of funding. Council delegates agreed these ideas deserved further exploration.

- 4.2 The Minister emphasised his desire to assist Moray Council in tackling homelessness. All present recognised that there was not simply one solution to homelessness. Council representatives confirmed their willingness to explore any avenues that would assist the Council in reaching the 2012 target. The Minister suggested that a follow up meeting could usefully be held

in February/March 2010. Council representatives agreed that this would be extremely helpful.

5. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) **Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan**

Tackling homelessness is a priority identified within the Single Outcome Agreement, Service Improvement Plan, the Homelessness Improvement Plan and the Homelessness Strategy.

(b) **Policy and Legal**

There are no direct policy or legal implications arising from this report.

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

There are no direct resource implications arising from the content of this report. However, there may be financial implications that would arise from future developments or initiatives. It is not considered that any additional staffing resources would be required to carry out investigation of the issues discussed.

(d) **Consultations**

Consultation on this report has taken place with the Cllr Wright, Vice Convenor and Cllr McGillivray, Chairman of Communities Committee, the Chief Executive, the Director of Community Services, the Chief Finance Officer and the Housing Needs Manager.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 **This report has provided feedback from the positive and constructive meeting held with the Housing Minister to discuss the Council's progress towards 2012.**

Author of Report: Jill Stewart, Chief Housing Officer
Background Papers: None
Ref: CC/JS/TS – Ministerial meeting – 1 December 2009

Signature: 

Date : 18 November 2009

Designation: Chief Housing Officer

Name: Jill Stewart