

REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 16 FEBRUARY 2010

SUBJECT: RURAL HOUSING ENABLER PROJECT

BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks agreement to extend funding for the Rural Housing Enabler Project for a further year.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to the provision of affordable housing.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Committee agrees:-

- (i) the continuation of funding for the Rural Housing Enabler Project for a further year; and**
- (ii) that recommendations for future delivery of this type of service to rural areas are presented to a future Communities Committee.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A report was presented to Policy Committee on 19 December 2007 on Affordable Housing in Rural Areas (paragraph 39 of the Minute refers). This report proposed piloting a Rural Housing Enabler Service in Speyside for the financial year 2008/09. Following agreement on funding, the project commenced in April 2008.
- 3.2 A further report was presented to Communities Committee on 24 March 2009 (paragraph 7 of the Minute refers). Committee agreed to continue funding the project for a year and to expand it to include the Forres Rural Area and the coastal villages near Buckie. Committee also agreed on a presentation being given on the project to the Housing Sub-Committee with the Communities Committee members also being invited. This took place on 29 May 2009.
- 3.3 The main aims of the Rural Housing Enabler Service are to identify housing needs and to provide solutions to meet them in rural areas. Needs in rural areas cannot be accurately assessed by the normal methodologies of large housing needs surveys, or referring to housing waiting lists. Needs primarily have to be met in different ways from urban areas, where most new affordable housing is either in relatively large-scale affordable housing developments, or part of large-scale general housing developments.

- 3.4 The Service is provided by the Rural Housing Service, which is a Scottish-based Charity and is basically a part-time worker, management support and associated on-costs.

4. WORK UPDATE

- 4.1 The project continues to be overseen by an Advisory Committee, which comprises the Director of the Rural Housing Service, the Moray Rural Housing Enabler, Councillor Murdoch, the Council's Housing Strategy Officer, the Cairngorms National Park Housing Strategy Officer and representatives of Highland and Island Enterprise, Langstane and Cairn Housing Associations. The Committee meets quarterly and sets the priority areas for the project to work within.
- 4.2 Since the start of the financial year, the Rural Housing Enabler has carried out Housing Needs Surveys in Aberlour, Dufftown, the rural area around Forres, Altyre, Brodie, Dallas, Dunphail, Dyke, and Darnaway. Surveys are planned for the rural areas around Buckie and Cullen.
- 4.3 During the first nine months of the year, the Rural Housing Enabler has continued to be extremely busy and has attended 12 Community meetings, contacted 11 private landowners and 6 Housing Associations. Leaflets, flyers and posters have been distributed widely and there have been 11 newspaper articles.
- 4.4 The Advisory Committee are pleased with the outcomes of the Project to date. As of December 2009, the specific outcomes for the current financial year have been:
- A Rural Homes for Rent project for 4 units in Drummuir, the funding for which has been approved. The project is at planning stage.
 - 6 units for rent by a Housing Association in Drummuir are included in the Strategic Housing Investment Plan for 2011/2012.
 - Possible developments for rent by a Housing Association in Dallas, Logie and Findhorn are being investigated.
 - 3 households were being supported through the Rural Home Ownership Grant application process.
 - A LIFT application in Forres is being supported.
 - Early discussions were underway on Rural Empty Property Grants in Logie and Cabrach.
 - A sweat equity scheme was being considered in Cabrach.

5. FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

- 5.1 During year two of the project, tangible results are being delivered. Housing Needs Studies are still being undertaken in some rural areas in the Buckie Coastal Area. After needs are assessed, follow up action is required to appraise options to meet needs and potential solutions implemented. There are also current pieces of work in progress, particularly in relation to housing

projects underway. Resultantly, there is a need for the project to continue for 2010/11.

- 5.2 After 2010/11 the needs assessment work will be complete. This will necessitate a review of how a rural housing service should be delivered in Moray to adjust to a changed workload. The project has demonstrated that there are considerable benefits in providing a housing service designed to assess and meet housing need in rural communities. Future planning will need to ensure that the benefits to these communities are not lost. Without the project, most of the small-scale projects would not have occurred.
- 5.3 Officers will be appraising options for the future delivery of a rural housing service in consultation with strategic housing partners. A report on delivering a longer-term housing enabler service for rural communities will be brought to a future Committee for consideration.

6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Single outcome Agreement

This report fits in with the priority within the Single Outcome Agreement of providing more affordable housing.

(b) Policy and Legal

The provision of a Rural Housing Enabler in Moray helps formulate future Strategic Housing Investment Plans by identifying rural housing needs and solutions. The Rural Housing Needs Surveys undertaken will help inform the Local Plan and the Local Housing Strategy.

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

The costs of continuing the project for one year will be in the region of £20,000 which can be met from the Housing Revenue Account Enabling Budget in 2010/11.

(d) Consultations

Consultation has taken place with the Director of Community Services, the Director of Environmental Services, the Chief Housing Officer, Deborah Bosworth Principal Accountant, the Housing Strategy and Policy Manager and the Housing Strategy Officer.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 **The Rural Housing Enabler Service has been running for two years and is enabling affordable housing in rural areas. It is recommended that the service be continued for a further year to finish off the work that has been started. It is recognised that there is the need for service in relation to rural affordable housing, but that there is a need to review the method of delivery after March 2011. Officers and strategic housing partners will consider options for future service delivery. A report will be provided for a future Committee.**

ITEM:

PAGE: 4

Author of Report: Iain Terry, Housing Programmes Manager.
Background Papers: with author
Ref: rhes 9