

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 26 APRIL 2011

COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were intimated by Councillor J. Hogg.

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor A. Wright (ex-officio).

IN ATTENDANCE

Head of Housing and Property, Housing Needs Manager, Housing Strategy & Development Manager, Mrs L Paisey, Principal Accountant, Home Improvements Services Manager, Housing Support Manager, Senior Policy Officer, Mrs A Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing) and Mr D Westmacott, 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

14

Para No. of Schedule 7A

9

3. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The meeting noted the following written question submitted by Councillor Jarvis and the Council's response thereto:

To ask what investigations have been carried out into the situation regarding washing/drying facilities at Larch Court, Elgin and if so how the findings will be used in future to try and prevent such a situation arising again?

COUNCIL RESPONSE

The industrial dryer in Larch Court broke down on 26 October 2010. At that time, residents in Larch Court had two industrial dryers and two domestic washing machines in working order in the laundry room and one domestic washing machine and one drier in the hobbies room. Some delays occurred in the Council's contractor being able to source replacement ceramic parts for the dryer as these had to be obtained from the USA. Unfortunately, when the replacement parts arrived in November 2010, they were broken. When further replacement parts had not arrived by January 2011, a further domestic tumble dryer was installed.

On 6 March 2011, a washing machine broke down. It was inspected on the following day, when the contractor advised that repairs would be uneconomical. It was decided that it should be replaced with a industrial washing machine. Pending this replacement, a temporary replacement washing machine was fitted. A new industrial washing machine and tumble dryer was fitted on 25 March 2011. This replaced the dryer which broke down in October 2010 and the washing machine which broke down in March 2011.

It is accepted that the breakdowns caused inconvenience to residents. The Sheltered Housing Warden in Larch Court was not made aware that any tenant was unable to do their washing during the period when some machines were not operational.

While it is impossible to avoid future breakdowns, steps have been taken to seek to minimise any inconvenience to residents arising from such breakdowns.

The Council now has a procurement contract in place with a supplier to replace washing/dryer machines within 5 days, where replacement is required. It has also been agreed that an additional washer/dryer is purchased to be used in the event of future breakdowns. The extension of warranties on existing machines is also being considered.

4. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING GRANTS

There was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property seeking approval for the proposed Private Sector Housing Grants (PSHG) Budget for 2011/12.

Following a request, it was agreed that any figures in future reports will be presented as thousands and not as decimal of millions.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- (i) approved the proposed Private Sector Housing Grants Budget for 2011/2012 as detailed in Appendix I of the report;
- (ii) agreed that figures in future reports will be presented as thousands and not as decimals of millions; and
- (iii) agreed that a further report proposing changes to the Private Sector Housing Scheme of Assistance (SofA) will be presented to Communities Committee at a later date, to reflect the agreed budget.

5. REVIEW OF THE MORAY RURAL HOUSING ENABLER PROJECT

Under reference to paragraph 4 of Minute of this Committee dated 16 February 2010, there was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property providing details of the review of the Moray Rural Housing Enabler Project.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- (i) noted the outcome of the review of the Moray Rural Housing Enabler project; and
- (ii) agreed that an assessment of the future need for a rural service in Moray be carried out once the impact of impending national policy and funding changes are known and their implications for housing in rural Moray can be fully appraised.

6. DRAFT HOUSING NEED AND DEMAND ASSESSMENT

There was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property advising the Committee of the content and interim findings of the Housing Need and Demand Assessment.

Following a number of queries, the Housing Strategy & Development Manager agreed to provide members with a note advising of the national statistics and where the data is sourced from in regards to loft insulation within owner-occupied properties.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:

- (i) the interim findings of the draft Housing Need and Demand Assessment;
- (ii) that the draft Housing Need and Demand Assessment is submitted to the Scottish Government for its comments, and noted that the final version would include a caveat in regard to the RAF bases and the outcome of the Census; and

- (iii) that the Housing Strategy & Development Manager provide members with a note advising the national statistics and where the data is sourced from in regards to loft insulation within owner-occupied properties.

7. INTERIM LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2010 - 2013

There was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property advising the Committee of progress made on implementation of the actions identified in the Interim Local Housing Strategy 2010 – 2013.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- (i) noted the progress made on the implementation of the actions identified in the Interim Local Housing Strategy 2010-2013; and
- (ii) agreed the revised Interim LHS Action Plan for 2011/12

8. HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRESS UPDATE

There was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property informing the Committee of the progress towards implementing the new housing support service and providing detail on the work of the homeless prevention team.

The Committee joined the Chair in congratulating staff in reducing the use of B&Bs.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- (i) noted the progress achieved in the implementation of homeless prevention measures;
- (ii) noted the impact that these measures are having on reducing homelessness;
- (iii) noted that further development of this service will progress in 2011/12;
- (iv) noted the position regarding the ending of the Action for Children outreach project and the TUPE arrangements arising from this; and
- (v) agreed that further reports on the new housing support service will be provided annually to this Committee.

9. COUNCIL HOUSE NEW BUILD PROGRESS

There was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property Services providing Committee with details of progress in developing the Council's bid to the Scottish Government for funding for a further phase of the Council's new build programme.

Following a query in reference to paragraph 4.2 of the report, the Housing Strategy & Development Manager agree to keep Ward Members informed about bids for sites in the Speyside Area.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to:

- (i) note the progress made on the Council's bid to the Scottish Government's Innovation & Investment Fund for funding for Phase 3 of new build programme.
- (ii) delegate authority to the Head of Housing & Property in consultation with the Chair of the Communities Committee and Chair of Policy and Resources Committee to submit a bid for funding to the Scottish Government in respect of Phase 3;
- (iii) note that Ward Members would be kept informed about bids for sites in the Speyside area referred to in Para 4.2 of the report; and
- (iv) note that further reports on progress will be presented to the Committee.

10. HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICES – BUDGET MONITORING 2010/11

There was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property Services presenting the budget monitoring of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Services Other Housing Budget for the period to 28 February 2011.

Following consideration, the Committee noted:

- (i) the budget monitoring report for the period to 28 February 2011; and
- (ii) the project outturn for 2010/11.

11. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2010/11

There was submitted and noted a report by the Head of Housing and Property Services informing Committee of the position to 28 February 2011 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2010/11.

12. SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR – SUBMISSION OF PROGRESS REPORT ON IMPROVEMENT PLAN

There was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property informing Committee of the progress report to be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- (i) agreed the progress report to be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator; and
- (ii) noted that feedback from the Regulator will be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

13. QUESTION TIME

Councillor Stewart enquired if, given the current financial climate in Moray, the income from Council house rents was affected and if there was any increase in rent arrears over recent months.

The Head of Housing and Property advised that a target of 3.2% had been set for rent arrears; however, the outturn was 3.5% and there could be a number of reasons for this. It was noted that the matter would be covered in a detailed report to the Housing Sub Committee in June 2011.

14. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATION BUDGET 2010/11 – BUDGET MONITORING [Para 9]

There was submitted a report by the Head of Housing and Property presenting the budget monitoring information for the period to 28 February 2011 for the Building Services Trading Operation.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to note:

- (i) the financial information as at 28 February 2011; and
- (ii) the projected outturn to 31 March 2011.