

THE MORAY COUNCIL

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 6 MARCH 2012

COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillors E. McGillivray (Chair), 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.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were intimated by Councillors G. McIntyre and A. Wright (ex-officio).

IN ATTENDANCE

The Head of Housing and Property, the Housing Services Manager, the Housing Needs Manager, the Housing Strategy & Development Manager, the Asset Manager, Building Services Manager, the Housing Strategy Officer, Mrs D. O'Shea, Principal Accountant, Mrs A. Scott, Legal Services Manager (Property & Contracts) and Mr D. Westmacott, Committee Services Manager 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 there were no written questions submitted.

4. PRIVATE LANDLORD REGISTRATION

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing details of the legislative changes to the private rented sector in Scotland and presenting a draft Private Landlord Registration Enforcement Policy, attached as Appendix B to the report, for approval by this Committee.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) noted the changes to Landlord Registration from 31 August 2011;
- (ii) approved the draft Private Landlord Registration Enforcement Policy, as set out in Appendix B to the report;
- (iii) agreed that private landlords and lettings agents will be consulted on the draft;
- (iv) noted that a further report will be presented to the Committee in August 2012 following the consultation period.

5. OUTLINE DRAFT LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2013-2018

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) advising Committee on the progress made in the development of the Council's next Local Housing Strategy (LHS) covering the period 2013-2018.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) noted the outline draft LHS, as attached as Appendix I to the report;
- (ii) agreed the revised timescales for development of the LHS, as detailed in Section 6 of the report;
- (iii) agreed that a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the LHS is not required following consultation through SEA Gateway; and
- (iv) noted that further reports on progress with the preparation of the LHS will be presented to the Committee.

6. MANAGEMENT OF VOID PROPERTIES

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing details of the progress that has been achieved during 2011/12 in the management of void (empty) houses. The report provided details of void activity for Quarters 1 to 3 of 2011/12 and of the void improvement actions that have been implemented during this period. The report identifies further improvement actions that are proposed for 2012/13.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) welcomed the progress that has been achieved in management of void properties in 2011/12;

- (ii) noted the current issues and agreed the further void improvement actions proposed for 2012/13, as detailed in Section 6 of the report; and
- (iii) noted that progress will be reported to Committee during 2012/13.

7. PRESSURED AREA STATUS

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) advising Committee of the results of research carried out into the potential for pressured area status designation in Moray, arising from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, and associated Scottish Government Guidance. The report also advises the Committee of the results of consultation carried out with Moray Council tenants, the Tenants Core Group and the local Registered Social Landlords (RSL) with tenants who have the Right To Buy.

During discussion, Councillor Hogg moved that no action be taken on the recommendations of the report. However, failing to find a seconder, the motion fell.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the results of the research, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- (ii) the Pressured Area Status designation as detailed in Section 5 of the report;
- (iii) that the new Pressured Area Status designation will last for 10 years;
- (iv) that officers take the necessary steps to implement the designation(s); and
- (v) the proposed further actions on Pressured Area Status, as set out in Sections 8 and 9 of the report.

8. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW – PROGRESS REPORT

Under reference to paragraph 4 of the Minute of this Committee dated 21 June 2011, there was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing the Committee with an update on progress relating to Larch Court, Elgin and extra care housing. The report provided feedback from the consultation that took place with Larch Court tenants in September 2011 and also identifies that a range of planned maintenance and upgrading works for sheltered housing is programmed to take place from 2012/13 onwards.

The Committee joined the Chair in commending the work of officers in progress made with Larch Court.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to:-

- (i) commend the work of officers in progress made with Larch Court;
- (ii) note that residents have no objections to “extra care” being further developed within Larch Court, Elgin; and
- (iii) note that a range of planned maintenance and upgrading works will commence from 2012/13 onwards.

9. STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN (SHIP) 2012-16

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) advising Committee on progress with the preparation of the Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) for the period 2012-16. The report asked the Committee to delegate authority to the Head of Housing and Property, in consultation with the Chair of Communities Committee, to submit the SHIP to the Scottish Government by 31 March 2012.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note progress on the preparation of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan;
- (ii) that delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing and Property, in consultation with the Chair of the Communities Committee, to submit the SHIP by 31 March 2012;
- (iii) that details of the SHIP be submitted to the next meeting of the Communities Committee; and
- (iv) to note that, when available, details of the Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Investment Programme (AHSP) allocation to Moray for 2012/13 will be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

10. CONSULTATION PAPER – AFFORDABLE RENTED HOUSING

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing details of a consultation paper launched by the Scottish Government on 6 February 2012, relating to the way in which social housing is allocated and managed. This report considers the key issues raised in the consultation document and proposes how the Council's response might be addressed.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) noted that Members are to pass any comments on this consultation paper to the Head of Housing and Property by 20 March 2012;
- (ii) noted that the Housing Sub Committee will consider a more detailed report on a proposed Council response, taking into account any Members' comments received by the Head of Housing and Property; and
- (iii) agreed to delegate authority to the Head of Housing and Property to submit a response to the Scottish Government, following consultation with the Chairman of the Communities Committee.

11. OPERATION OF LETTINGS PLAN – COUNCIL NEW BUILD

Under reference to paragraph 12 of the Minute of this Committee dated 25 October 2011, there was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) presenting information regarding new build allocations which had been carried out and completed in December 2011.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) noted the contents of the report; and
- (ii) agreed that future reports are presented quarterly.

12. SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing the Communities Committee with details of revisions to the proposed Scottish Social Housing Charter issued by the Scottish Government in January 2012.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) noted the revisions to the proposed Scottish Social Housing Charter; and
- (ii) agreed that further reports are presented to the Committee during 2012 on the implementation of the Charter.

13. HOUSING AND PROPERTY BUDGET MONITORING TO 31 DECEMBER 2011

Under reference to paragraph 11 of the Minute of this Committee dated 21 June 2011, there was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) presenting budget monitoring for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Services Other Housing Budget for the period to 31 December 2011.

Following consideration, the Committee noted the budget monitoring report for the period to 31 December 2011.

14. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2011/12

There was submitted and noted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) of the position to 31 December 2011 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2011/12.

15. HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 3 – 2011/12

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) outlining the performance of the Housing Service for the period 1 October to 31 December 2011.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) welcomed the good performance outlined in this report;
- (ii) noted performance outlined in this report; and
- (iii) noted the actions being taken to seek improvements where required.

16. CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH

The Chair took the opportunity as it was the last meeting of this Committee before the forthcoming local government elections, to personally thank the Committee Members for their input and support for the previous five years.

He went onto thank all officers and staff of the housing service, in particular Mrs Stewart. He also thanked the finance officer, clerk and legal officer for their assistance.

He stated that he was extremely proud of the achievements of this Committee in five years. He further stated some of the highlights included addressing the unmet need for affordable housing, new build programme for 202 new Council houses, pressured area status designations for over half of the Council's housing stock, continued low rent levels and an extremely positive inspection report from the Housing Regulator on housing services that placed the Council in the top handful of local authorities.

The Chair concluded by wishing the Committee Members every success for the future, whether standing again as a Councillor or moving onto new horizons.

17. QUESTION TIME

Councillor Ogilvie requested an update on the recruitment of community wardens. Councillor McGillivray confirmed that a note would be circulated to all Members on the progress.

Councillor McConachie requested that a list of abbreviations be compiled for new Councillors to help ease their introduction to the Committee. The Head of Housing and Property confirmed that a list would be compiled for the new Council but noted that Officers do try to clarify abbreviations in any reports to Committee.

18. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATION BUDGET 2011/12 – BUDGET MONITORING [Para 9]

Under reference to paragraph 19 of the Minute of this Committee dated 1 March 2011, there was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) presenting the budget monitoring information for the period to 31 December 2011 for the Building Services Trading Operation.

Following consideration, the Committee noted:-

- (i) the financial information as at 31 December 2011; and
- (ii) the revised year end forecast to 31 March 2012.

19. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATION BUDGET 2012/13 [Para 9]

Under reference to paragraph 19 of the Minute of this Committee dated 1 March 2011, there was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) presenting the Building Services Trading operation Budget for 2012/13 to the Communities Committee for approval.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) agreed the proposed Building Services Trading Operation Budget for 2012/13; and
- (ii) noted that further information regarding Designing Better Services savings will be presented to this Committee as part of future budget monitoring reports.

20. POST DBS STRUCTURE REVIEW – HOUSING AND PROPERTY [Para 1]

There was submitted a report by the Corporate Director (Environmental Services) presenting a review of the revised Housing and Property Services structure, following the implementation of the Council's Designing Better Services (DBS) Programme in the Housing and Property Service, as trace 2 of the programme's implementation.

Following consideration the Committee:-

- (i) commended the significant efforts that Housing and Property staff have made to enable the implementation of new ways of working;
- (ii) noted the contents of the review;
- (iii) agreed the actions, as set out in Section 6 of this report; and
- (iv) agreed that a further review will be reported to this Committee in October 2012.