

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 29 APRIL 2014
COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

Present

Councillors E McGillivray (Chairman), R Shepherd (Deputy Chairman), G Alexander, J Allan, G Coull, G Cowie, P Gowans, M Howe, B Jarvis, J MacKay, M McConachie and A Wright (ex-officio).

Mr S Christie, Ms K Holmes and Mr H Torry, Tenant Representatives.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors S Cree and S Morton.

In Attendance

The Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services), the Acting Head of Housing and Property, the Acting Housing Needs Manager, the Housing Strategy and Development Manager, the Housing Services Manager, the Building Services Manager, the Asset Manager and Mrs L Rowan, Committee Services Officer as Clerk to the meeting.

1. WELCOME

The Committee joined the Chairman in welcoming Ms K Holmes and Mr H Torry to this their first meeting of the Communities Committee following their appointment as Tenant Representatives.

2. DECLARATION OF GROUP DECISIONS

In terms of Standing Order 20 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct 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, nor any declarations of Members interest in respect of any item on the Agenda.

3. 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.

<u>Para No. of Minute</u>	<u>Para No. of Schedule 7A</u>
18	9

4. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Meeting noted that no written questions had been submitted.

5. TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY 2013-16

Under reference to paragraph 8 of the Minute of this Committee dated 22 October 2013, there was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing Committee with details of the progress achieved on implementing the Tenant Participation Strategy 2013-16.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:

- i) to note the progress achieved primarily around the restructure of tenant participation as set out in Section 4 of the report; and
- ii) that progress on the tenant participation strategy would be presented annually to Committee.

6. HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICE PLAN 2014/15

There was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) asking the Committee to approve the draft Housing and Property Service Plan for 2014/15 which is heavily influenced by the Moray 2023 plan and sets out the key housing strategies that will contribute towards the achievement of the 5 top priorities of the Moray 2020 plan.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed the Housing and Property Service Plan for 2014/15 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

7. REVISED HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

Under reference to paragraph 6 of the Minute of this Committee dated 17 December 2013, there was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) advising the Committee that the revised Housing Allocation Policy went live on 7 April 2014 and asking the Committee to note that the Allocation Policy Working Group will monitor the revised policy during 2014/15 and to agree the proposal that the first annual report on the operation of the revised Policy will be presented to this Committee in May 2015.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:

- i) to note that the revised Housing Allocation Policy went live on 7 April 2014;
- ii) to note that the Allocation Policy Working Group will monitor the revised policy during 2014/15; and
- iii) that the first annual report on the operation of the revised Allocations Policy will be presented to this Committee in May 2015.

8. MORAY HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME

Under reference to paragraph 8 of the Minute of this Committee dated 4 March 2014, there was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) updating the Committee with progress on the Moray Energy Efficiency Programme which is funded through a grant from the Scottish Government initiative 'The Home Energy Efficiency Programme for Scotland' (HEEPS) to improve the energy efficiency of Scotland's existing homes and tackle fuel poverty. The report further stated that the Scottish Government had confirmed that the Council's HEEPS allocation for 2014/15 would be £992k to deliver the 2014/15 HEEPS programme in Moray, the proposals for which were as detailed in Section 5 of the report.

Following consideration, the Committee welcomed the Scottish Government's 2014/15 funding allocation for the Moray HEEPS programme and agreed:

- i) to note the progress made on the delivery on the Moray Home Energy Efficiency Programme during 2013/14 as set out in Section 4 of the report;
- iii) the Council's proposals for the Moray Home Energy Efficiency Programme for 2014/15, as set out in Section 5 of the report; and
- iv) that a further report on programme progress will be presented to this Committee in September 2014.

9. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2010 – 2015

Under reference to paragraph 6 of the Minute of this Committee dated 23 April 2013, there was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing the Committee with details of the progress made in implementing the Homelessness Strategy during 2013/14 and asking the Committee to agree the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan for 2014/15 as detailed in Appendix II of the report.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:

- i) to note the progress achieved in 2013/14 as set out in Section 4 of the report; and
- ii) the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan for 2014/15 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

10. HOUSING AND PROPERTY BUDGET MONITORING – 28 FEBRUARY 2014

There was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing the Committee with details of the budget monitoring for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Services Other Housing Budget for the period 28 February 2014 and the revised projected outturns for the financial year 2013/14.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to note:

- i) the Budget Monitoring Report for the period to 28 February 2014; and
- ii) that the unaudited final outturn position on Housing and Property budgets will be presented to Committee on 24 June 2014.

11. HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICE PLAN 2013/14

Under reference to paragraph 4 of the Minute of this Committee dated 18 June 2013, there was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing Committee with details of the progress achieved in implementing the actions agreed within the Housing and Property Service Plan 2013/14 as presented under the four priorities within the Service Plan, to increase the supply of affordable housing, tackle homelessness, manage our assets effectively and improve our service quality.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to note the progress that had been achieved with regard to the Housing and Property Service Plan 2013/14, as set out in Section 4 of the report.

12. SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER COMPLIANCE

Under reference to paragraph 11 of the Minute of this Committee dated 4 March 2014, there was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing Committee with details of a progress update on the actions taken by officers to ensure compliance with the Scottish Social Housing Charter and asking the Committee to agree that a final version of the Annual Charter performance Report be presented to this Committee in September 2014 and to approve the draft Landlord Scrutiny Framework as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

During discussion, clarification was sought as to whether Elected Members as well as Housing staff and members of the tenants/customers scrutiny groups could attend the national training and learning programme entitled "Stepping Up to Scrutiny" which had been developed by the Scottish Government.

In response, the Acting Head of Housing and Property agreed that Elected Members would benefit from the Stepping Up to Scrutiny training and advised that he would arrange for any Elected Member who wished to participate in the training to be included on the training programme.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed:

- i) to note the information that will be provided to tenants and other customers in the first Annual Charter Performance Report as set out in Section 4 of the report;
- ii) that a final version of the Annual Charter Performance Report will be presented to Committee in September 2014;
- iii) to approve the draft Landlord Scrutiny Framework as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- (iv) that Elected Members on the Communities Committee, as well as Housing staff and members of the tenants/customers scrutiny groups, participate in the national training and learning programme called "Stepping Up to Scrutiny" scheduled for 2015/16.

13. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2013/14

There was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing Committee with details of the position to 28 February 2014 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2013/14.

During discussion clarification was sought as to whether the increase in council house sales from 12 last year to 25 this year was related to the impending end of the Right to Buy scheme.

In response, the Acting Head of Housing and Property advised that further analysis would be undertaken with regard to the increase in council house sales from 12 last year to 25 this year and the findings reported back to Members of the Committee. This was agreed.

During further discussion, concern was raised with regard to tenants not being advised of the cancellation of planned maintenance on their property and officers were asked to ensure that tenants are given adequate notice of any planned maintenance on their property as well as being notified of any cancellation of previously scheduled maintenance.

In response, the Acting Head of Housing and Property advised that he would ensure that this is carried out.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the position as at 28 February 2014 with regards to the Housing Investment Programme for 2013/14;
- (ii) that further analysis would be undertaken with regard to the increase in council house sales from 12 last year to 25 this year and the findings reported back to Members of the Committee; and
- (iii) that officers would ensure that tenants are given adequate notice of any planned maintenance on their property as well as being notified of any cancellation of previously scheduled maintenance.

14. INSPECTION OF SHELTERED HOUSING BY THE CARE INSPECTORATE

There was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing Committee with details of the inspection of the Council's Sheltered Housing Warden Service by the Care Inspectorate which was carried out on 31 January 2014. The report also asked the Committee to agree that an action plan be prepared by the service setting out actions it will take in response to the areas recommended for improvement.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:

- (i) to note the Care Inspectorate Report which can be found on the Care Inspectorate Website at www.careinspectorate.com;
- (ii) to note the sustained grades the Council has achieved in relation to the quality of it's care and support; and
- (iii) that an action plan is written by the service to set out actions it will take in response to the recommended areas for improvement.

15. SCOTTISH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD PROGRESS REPORT BY THE SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR

There was submitted and noted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing the Committee with details on the content of the Scottish Housing Regulator's Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) Progress Report for 2012/13, which was published on 21 March 2014. The report detailed that The Moray Council is still making good progress towards the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and, with continued investment in the Council's housing stock through the Housing Investment Strategy, at this stage, it is envisaged that the Council will be able to achieve the standard by 2015, as required by the Scottish Government.

16. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

Under reference to paragraph 7 of the Minute of this Committee dated 29 April 2014, there was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing the Committee with details on the impact of the under occupancy charges. The report further explained the steps the Council, along with the Department of Work and Pensions, are taking to prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit in the future.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:

- (i) to commend all Staff for their continued efforts with regard to managing the implications of welfare reform;
- (ii) to note the welfare reform progress report; and
- (iii) to note that future reports on welfare reform will be provided to Committee.

17. QUESTION TIME

Councillor Jarvis raised an issue with regard to excessive noise levels that can be heard between various properties and sought clarification as to whether the Council could identify the houses where poor sound proofing is an issue and consider making them more sound proof.

In response, the Asset Manager advised that if a particular property is identified as having poor sound proofing then the case is investigated and a solution is actively sought. He further advised that, in the past, some houses have been treated by lining walls and by carrying out sound deadening between floors which, although effective, was an expensive and invasive solution.

The Chair stated that, when a tenant signs their tenancy contract, they are agreeing to keep noise levels to a minimum and that, if anyone is experiencing excessive noise from neighbours, this can be reported to the Environmental Health Department who can monitor the noise and take further action if required.

Councillor Jarvis further asked whether or not tenants could be advised against the use of laminate flooring as oppose to carpet as laminate flooring was a common cause of noise issue.

In response, the Acting Head of Housing and Property advised that when allocating properties, sensitivities such as noise are taken into consideration however ultimately some properties are not as sound proofed as others.

Councillor Alexander, in referring to the new affordable housing estate in Forres, sought clarification as to who determines the density of new build developments as the new build in Forres appeared to be very spacious in comparison to the private new build opposite.

In response the Housing Strategy and Development Manager advised that the Planning Department advises with regard to density however with regard to the affordable housing development in Forres, as there are a variety of different houses being built, this gives the impression of a more spacious development. He further advised that the new build development at Forres has been designed using the Designing Streets guidance which stipulates a particular sized amenity space at the front and rear of the property which in turn gives a less dense appearance.

18. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATION BUDGET 2013/14 – BUDGET MONITORING (PARA 9)

There was submitted a report by the Acting Corporate Director (Environmental Services) providing Committee with details of the budget monitoring information for the period to 28 February 2014 for the Building Services Trading Operation.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to note:

- i) the financial information as at 28 February 2014;

- ii) the revised year end forecast to 31 March 2014; and
- iii) that a further report on the reasons for the reduction in surplus will be presented to Committee on 24 June 2014.