

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE HOUSING SUB COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 19 MARCH 2008
COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillor E McGillivray, (Chairman), G Coull, S Cree, B Jarvis, G Leadbitter, A McDonald, I Young, Mr S Christie, Mr C French, Mrs A Murray and Mr D Wood (Tenant Representatives).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors J MacKay, R Shepherd and Ms H Anderson and Ms M Ettles, (Tenant Representatives).

IN ATTENDANCE

The Chief Housing Officer, the Principal Solicitor (Commercial and Conveyancing), the Senior Area Housing Manager, Mr S Fairclough, Area Housing Manager, the Housing Programmes Manager, the Capital Programmes Manager, Catriona Campbell, Research & Information Officer and Mrs S Kennedy as Clerk to the meeting.

1. DECLARATION OF GROUP DECISIONS AND MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

2. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

There were no written questions.

3. WELCOME

The Chair on behalf of the Sub-Committee extended a welcome to Mr David Wood, Tenant Representative for the Buckie Area who was attending his first meeting of the Housing Sub-Committee.

4. TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services, inviting the Sub-Committee to approve the final Tenant Participation Strategy 2008 – 2012.

On the invitation of the Chairman, the Housing Programmes Manager gave a presentation to the Sub-Committee on the background to the Tenant Participation Strategy and outlined the key actions that had influenced the revised strategy. He referred members to two new proposed objectives firstly, to encourage more Tenant Participation and to pursue other methods of engaging with tenants and secondly, to encourage younger tenants to become more involved. One of the actions identified in the strategy was to hold an informal evening event for younger tenants.

Thereafter, the Housing Sub-Committee agreed the Tenant Participation Strategy 2008-2012.

5. MANAGING TENANCY CHANGES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services updating the Sub Committee on the progress of the review of the Council's current policy for managing tenancy changes and also

inviting the Sub-Committee to consider the draft 'Letting Standard' as detailed in Appendix II of the report.

A replacement Appendix I was circulated to the meeting.

The Chief Housing Officer briefed the Sub-Committee on the outcome of the review of the Council's current policy for managing tenancy changes. She commented that the new tenant survey results highlighted some positive areas, however there were other areas, which could be improved and that a mixed picture of results had emerged from tenants. She suggested that a re-letting standard could be sent out to tenants when they are being offered a property and that changes had been made to void categories. Also it was proposed that a level of cleaning to kitchens and bathrooms should be introduced, together with provision for a welcome pack for tenants.

During discussion, Councillor Leadbitter referred members to page 18 of the report in regard to the length of the website address.

In response, to concerns expressed by Councillor Jarvis regarding the percentage of questionnaires returned, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the level of returns were not regarded as low, but that opportunities to increase response rates were being taken. The issues raised in responses had been taken into consideration for example, in relation to heating instructions. She also advised that Housing officers carry out a settling in visit so that any issues raised by new tenants can be acted upon.

Thereafter, the Housing Sub-Committee agreed to approve the draft Letting Standard, subject to consultation with the Council's IT department about the length of the website address and other recommendations.

6. DECORATION ALLOWANCE POLICY

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services inviting the Housing Sub Committee to approve the revised Decoration Allowance Policy.

The Chief Housing Officer briefed the Sub-Committee on the changes to the Decoration Allowance Policy.

In response to a concern expressed by Mr French, regarding an issue that had arisen at the Tenant Core Group Meeting when a tenant had been unable to purchase a pasting table with their vouchers the Chief Housing Officer agreed to investigate the matter.

Thereafter the Housing Sub-Committee agreed:

- (i) to approve the revised Decoration Allowance Policy for implementation; and
- (ii) that the implementation date for the revised policy will be 1st April 2008, dependent upon detailed procedures being put in place for staff.

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND OTHER HOUSING BUDGET MONITORING 2007/08

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services updating the Housing Sub-Committee on the budget monitoring position for the period to 31 December 2007 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Other Housing.

8. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2007/2008

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Housing Sub Committee of the position to 31 December 2007 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2007/2008.

9. TENANT SURVEY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting to the Sub-Committee a finalised version of the Tenant Survey Improvement Plan to be implemented to address the results of the Tenant Survey 2007.

In response, to a request from Councillor Leadbitter that the 'Who Does What' guide for staff and members is issued earlier, the Chief Housing Officer advised that she would do her best to issue it earlier but due to the inspection of Housing Services later in the year, this may not be possible.

Thereafter the Housing Sub-Committee agreed to

- (i) approve the Tenant Survey Improvement Plan as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- (ii) that a progress report on its implementation be presented to the Housing Sub-Committee in November 2008.

10. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2008/09

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Housing Sub-Committee of the Council's recent decisions regarding the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2008/09.

The Chair advised the meeting that the average rent increase in Moray was £1.33 and he took the opportunity to thank all staff for their prudent financial management.

Thereafter the Housing Sub-Committee agreed to note:

- (i) the agreed Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2008/09; and
- (ii) that a copy of the budget monitoring reports submitted to the Policy Committee will be submitted to the Housing Sub-Committee for its interest in 2008/09

11. HOUSING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT – 3RD QUARTER 2007/8

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services outlining the performance of the Housing Service for the period 1 October – 31 December 2007.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee agreed to note:

- (i) the performance outlined in the report;
- (ii) the actions being taken to seek improvements where required; and
- (iii) that a further report on the review of Service Standards will be presented to the Sub-Committee in May 2008.

12. HOUSING REGULATION – INSPECTION

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services, informing the Housing Sub-Committee with details of inspection of the Council's Housing Services which is to be carried out during 2008.

The Chief Housing Officer advised the Sub-Committee that the Scottish Housing Regulator would carry out an inspection of the Council's Housing Service with the date provisionally set for September 2008. In the run up to the inspection it was her intention to keep this item on the agenda and any progress/outcomes will be reported to future meetings of the Sub-Committee.

Thereafter the Housing Sub-Committee agreed:

- (i) to note the report;

- (ii) that briefing sessions will be arranged prior to the onsite stage of inspection for the Sub-Committee, other services involved in the provision of housing services and tenant Group;
- (iii) that the Pre-Inspection Submission will be considered at either the May or June Housing Sub-Committee meeting, dependent on the confirmed inspection date; and
- (iv) that further reports be presented to the Housing Sub-Committee as inspection progresses.

13. HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICE DELIVERY REVIEW

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services inviting the Housing Sub-Committee to consider and comment on the Review of Housing Management Service Delivery Arrangements which has been ongoing for some time.

In response to a staffing issue raised by Councillor Cree, the Chief Housing Officer advised that it was a Council decision to make the post of Area Housing Manager temporary until the review was completed. She would now enter into discussions with Personnel Services with a view to the post being made permanent.

Thereafter the Committee noted the review and agreed that no further work be carried out at this time.

14. HOUSING SUB COMMITTEE MEETING DATES 2008

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services inviting the Housing Sub-Committee to consider the amendments to the current schedule of meeting dates for the Housing Sub Committee in 2008.

Following consideration the Housing Sub-Committee agreed:

- (i) the proposed amendments to its meeting schedule for 2008 as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- (ii) that a review of the operation of the Housing Sub-Committee will be considered at the November Sub-Committee meeting.

15. COUNCIL TENANTS GARDEN COMPETITION

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services inviting the Housing Sub-Committee to consider a proposal to discontinue the annual garden competition for Council house tenants.

Thereafter, the Housing Sub-Committee agreed to discontinue the annual tenant's garden competition and to note that the Housing Service will support tenant's groups that choose to organise their own competition.

16. COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT – BRACO PLACE, ELGIN

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services seeking approval from the Housing Sub-Committee to enable the Volunteer Centre Moray to use a piece of land at Braco Place Elgin as a Community Garden Project.

Although Members were in support of the proposals they expressed some concern about parking issues and prior to commencement of the project sought evidence that consultation had been carried out with neighbours and the neighbourhood forums.

Thereafter the Housing Sub-Committee agreed:

- (i) in principle the request to utilise the land as a Community Garden project;
- (ii) in principle that grant funding equivalent to the cost of the lease for land be provided to the Volunteer Centre Moray;

- (iii) to note that the terms of the lease will require to be agreed by the Policy Committee; and
- (iv) that the Council's Housing Service is represented on the Community Garden project Management Board.

17. TENANT CORE GROUP FUNDING

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services inviting the Housing Sub-Committee to consider funding for the Tenant Core Group.

Following consideration the Housing Sub-Committee agreed to increase the Tenants Core Group Grant funding to £1,500.

18. QUESTION TIME

In response, to a question from Mrs Murray, Tenant Representative asking if money could be saved on decoration of council properties, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the Council only give decoration allowance in certain cases and a property is judged on its own merit. She also advised that she was satisfied that the Council work within the guidelines of the policy which reflects the current state of decoration.