

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE HOUSING SUB- COMMITTEE

FRIDAY 20 JUNE 2008

COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT: Councillors E McGillivray (Chairman), F. Murdoch (Deputy), G. Leadbitter, J. Mackay and D. Stewart.
Ms H. Anderson, Mr S. Christie, Mr C. French and Mr R. Taylor (Tenant Representatives).

APOLOGIES

Councillors J.S. Cree, B. Jarvis, M. McConachie, R. Shepherd and Ms M. Ettles and Mr D. Wood (Tenant Representatives).

IN ATTENDANCE

The Chief Housing Officer, Senior Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing), Senior Area Housing Manager, Area Housing Manager (Elgin), Area Housing Manager (Forres), Capital Programmes Manager, Housing Programmes Manager, Housing Strategy Officer, Catriona Campbell, Research & Information Officer and Mrs C. Carswell as Clerk to the Committee.

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. WELCOME

The Chair extended a welcome to Councillor F. Murdoch as deputy to the Housing Sub-Committee.

3. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Committee noted that there were no written questions submitted.

4. MANAGING TENANCY CHANGES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the Sub-Committee with a revised draft Void Manager Policy for comment.

Following consideration the Committee approved the revised draft Voids Management Policy.

5. CARE COMMISSION INSPECTIONS – SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services providing the Sub-Committee with the details of the Care Commission's Inspection report on the Council's sheltered housing stock.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to:-

- (i) note the Care Commission report on the sheltered housing service;
- (ii) note the improvement plan developed to address recommendations arising from the report;
- (iii) note the changes to the Care Commission inspection process from April 2008; and
- (iv) a further progress report on the outcome of the new grading process being presented to a future Housing Sub-Committee.

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

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting budget monitoring information for the period to 31 March 2008 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the Sub-Committee's interest.

Further to a question from Councillor Leadbitter regarding the projected position for increased expenditure for hostels in future years, the Chief Housing Officer advised that hostel support grant is given to local authorities to meet deficits in provision of hostels. The level of grant reflects the financial position in previous years.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee agreed to note the report.

7. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2007/08

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Sub-Committee of the position to 31 March 2008 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2007/08 for its interest.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that at the Communities Committee there had been a question regarding the level of investment regarding gutter replacements and she had discovered that this was due to bat infestation in Rothes. The Capital Programmes Manager advised that they were in the process of carrying out a survey regarding the bats and hoped to continue with the work as soon as possible. Following consideration the Sub-Committee agreed to note the near final outturn with regards to the Housing Investment Programme for 2007/08.

8. HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 4 AND ANNUAL – 2007/08

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services to the Sub-Committee outlining the performance of the Housing Service for the period 1 January to 31 March 2008 and over the financial year 2007/08.

Further to a question from Councillor Stewart as to whether Housing had any indications if the closure of the cash collection points would cause an increase in arrears. The Senior Area Housing Manager advised that they were keeping a close eye on the situation and adjustments may be required to allow for payments being made through a bank. He also advised that they were encouraging tenants to make their payments earlier and that they are looking at the increase in evictions and the reasons behind it and where housing practice may be improved.

Councillor Leadbitter commented that he was pleased to see the performance indicators were on the website and would like to see all departments doing the same to help improve the accountability.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee:-

- (i) noted the actions being taken to seek improvements where required;
- (ii) agreed the targets for 2008/09; and
- (iii) agreed the revised Service Standards.

9. HOUSING INSPECTION

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services providing the Sub-Committee with details of the timetable for inspection of the Council's Housing service to be carried out in 2008.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that this was a major piece of work to be submitted to the Housing Regulator by 8 August 2008. She also advised that there would be a briefing session on the housing submission, to which all members of the Communities Committee and Housing Sub-Committee were invited to on the 22 August 2008 at 2.00pm.

The Chief Housing Officer further advised that the Housing Regulator had set a provisional date of 22 September to begin the inspection and it would last four weeks in which time they may wish to speak to members of the Housing Sub-Committee.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the revised timetable for the housing inspection;
- (ii) that a briefing on the key points contained in the Pre-Inspection Submission would be made on 22 August 2008; and

- (iii) that further reports would be presented to the Committee as the inspection progresses.

10. TENANT PARTICIPATION – QUARTERLY UPDATE

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services updating the Sub-Committee on tenant participation activity in Moray from 1 January 2008 to 31 March 2008.

Further to a question from Councillor McGillivray enquiring as to the position of the website, Mr French advised that they are feeding information such as minutes into the website and that they should have full control in about a months time.

Mr Christie advised that they have 3 board members on TIGRA with the conference and AGM taking place in September and they also have their own conference in September. He further advised that the Rothes Chair had stepped down and that Rothes have joined with Bilbohall Forum.

Mrs Anderson advised that they have 3 core group members on the Northern Light group. They have recently lost one person but hope to get another person on board shortly.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee noted the contents of the report.

11. MEETING DATES 2008

There was submitted a report by the Chief Legal Officer advising the Sub-Committee and seeking approval to amend the schedule of meeting dates.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee agreed to note that:-

- (i) a presentation would take place on the 22nd August 2008 at 2pm in the Council Chambers to which all members of the Housing Sub-Committee and Communities Committee are invited; and
- (ii) the Housing Sub-Committee meeting would take place on the 8th September 2008 at 9.30am.

12. GARAGE SITE AND PARKING UPGRADES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services updating the Sub-Committee on the position of the previously agreed garage site and parking facility upgrades and to agree the criteria for considering future garage site and parking issues.

Mr French advised that in Lossiemouth some tenants are parking commercial vehicles, including lorries, on housing estates and wondered if there was anything which could be done. The Senior Area Housing Manager advised that commercial vehicles are not entitled to park on housing estates and the issue could be brought

up directly with the firms. Mr Christie advised that they could write to the Traffic Commissioner who would contact the companies direct.

Councillor Leadbitter advised that at Castlehill Street, parking is a significant problem if a tenant has more than one car then this takes up a lot more space than the frontage of the property. The Housing Programmes Manager advised that they had investigated extending the car park at Castlehill but servicing costs are an issue in particular with rainwater drainage. They have investigated building soakaways but there was no space for these.

Councillor Stewart advised that in the Hythehill area there are problems with cars being parked in front of garages and the Housing Programmes Manager endeavoured to investigate the same and report back to Councillor Stewart.

Councillor Murdoch advised that the old ward numbers had been used in the report and asked that this be noted for future reports.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee agreed to:-

- (i) note the position with the previous programme; and
- (ii) approve the criteria for considering the deferred projects and future garage site and parking projects.

13. SAFETY OF DOMESTIC HOT WATER SYSTEMS

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services advising the Sub-Committee on measures being put in place to ensure the safety of hot water systems installed within the housing stock, following the issue of a Safety Alert from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Councillor McGillivray advised that there was not an immediate danger to tenants but that this was done as a precautionary measure and staff should be congratulated for their prompt action.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee noted the current situation with regards to the proposed survey of existing systems within the housing stock, proposals for remedial works and proposed information to be provided to tenants.

14. COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT – BRACO PLACE, ELGIN

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services updating the Sub-Committee on the progress of the consultations made with local residents, the Policy and the Roads Department on proposals to develop a Community Garden Project.

A replacement Appendix II was circulated to the meeting and Councillor McGillivray advised that he had received an email from a co-ordinator of the Elgin North Area Action Group on Parking giving their concerns.

Councillor McGillivray, seconded by Councillor Leadbitter moved that recommendation 2.1 (ii) should be amended to read “approves the request to use the land as a Community Garden Project subject to agreement with regard to parking between the Volunteer Centre Moray and Elgin North Area Action Group on Parking”.

Mr French queried why the Tenant Forum Budget should fund the lease as the land did not belong to housing and there were few tenants in the area. The Chief Housing Officer advised that the land was held by the Housing Revenue Account and Tenant Forum Budget monies are used in areas without Tenant Forums to carry out works that will benefit tenants. She indicated that the total Tenant Forum Budget amounted to £180,000 and that £400 was therefore a very small percentage of that budget. The lease would be subject to agreement by the Communities Committee. Councillor Leadbitter indicated that he had concerns on the principle of the funding proposal.

Following consideration the Sub-Committee agreed to:-

- (i) note the results of the consultation and the comments from the Roads Department and the Police over the matter of parking;
- (ii) approve the request to use the land as a Community Garden Project subject to agreement with regard to parking between the Volunteer Centre Moray and Elgin North Area Action Group on parking and with consultation of Local Members;
- (iii) grant funding equivalent to the cost of the lease of land provided to the Volunteer Centre Moray through the Tenants Forum Budget;
- (iv) instruct the Head of Estates Services to negotiate terms of a lease with Volunteer Centre Moray for consideration by the Policy & Resources Committee; and
- (v) note that the Housing Service was now represented on the Project Management Board by the Senior Housing Officer, Elgin Area Housing Team.

15. REPAIRS BOOKLET

Councillor McGillivray asked that any comments with regard to the repairs booklet which had been issued to Tenant Representatives be directed to the Capital Programmes Manager within two weeks.