

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 6 OCTOBER 2009
COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillors E. McGillivray (Chair), J.S. Cree, J. Hogg, B. Jarvis, G. Leadbitter, M. McConachie, J. Mackay, F. Murdoch, I. Ogilvie, J. Russell, J. Sharp and R. Shepherd.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor D. Stewart, G McIntyre (ex-officio) and A. Wright (ex-officio).

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor J. Divers

IN ATTENDANCE

Chief Housing Officer, Mrs A Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing), Housing Needs Manager, Capital Programmes Manager, Mrs D Bosworth, Principal Accountant, Senior Area Housing Manager, Home Improvements Services Manager (in respect of Item 6), General Manager Building Services, Supported Accommodation Manager, Ms C McGowan, Senior Housing Officer and Mrs C Carswell, 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.

3. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Committee noted that there were no written questions submitted.

4. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE RENT SETTING POLICY

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services proposing changes to the rent setting policy, in the light of the Council's new build programme and the decisions to offer tenants the opportunity to pay for shower installations as part of the rental payments. The report indicates that consultation on these proposals should be carried out with tenants and other interested parties.

The meeting noted the following answers from the Capital Programmes Manager and Chief Housing Officer, in response to members questions:-

- a) the new build would be built to current building regulations and the Council would expect there to be substantial savings in the heating costs and approximate figures would be built into the consultation;
- b) the new stock would be built specifically for heat source pump heating systems and Property Services were currently looking at the heating controls in Rothes to make them more manageable but that tenants in Rothes were currently seeing savings in their heating bills;
- c) the rent levels would not pay for the entire cost of borrowing which the Council would have to incur to build the additional properties but would close the deficit in the level of borrowing and income achieved; and
- d) it was not proposed to raise rents by 30% or 40%. The percentages in Appendix 2 of the report relate to the premium that was applied to the points level in the complex structure of setting rents that the Council have and this would be expressed differently when comparing the two figures if the Council wished to go out to consultation. The benchmark regarding rent levels have been based on local Registered Social Landlord's rents already in existence in Moray for new build properties. At no time would Council rents exceed Registered Social Landlord rents in Moray.

Following discussion, Councillor Cree, seconded by Councillor McGillivray moved that consultation be undertaken on an amendment to the rent setting policy having regard to all the improvements which will be in the new properties and propose the second figure set out in Appendix 2 which was based on the 40% premium on the points system.

As an amendment, Councillor Jarvis, seconded by Councillor Murdoch moved that the Council consult on the first figure set out in Appendix 2 of the report which was based on the 30% premium of the points system and also include an indication of likely energy savings.

As a second amendment, Councillor Leadbitter, seconded by Councillor McConachie moved that both figures be consulted upon as tenants would take a balanced view.

In terms of Standing Order 50(b) a vote was taken between the First and Second Amendments.

On a division as between the first amendment and the second amendment there voted:-

For the First Amendment (6)	Councillors Cree, Jarvis, J Mackay, Murdoch, Russell and Shepherd
-----------------------------	---

For the Second Amendment (5)	Councillors Leadbitter, McConachie, McGillivray, Ogilvie and Sharp
------------------------------	--

Abstentions (1)	Councillor Hogg
-----------------	-----------------

Accordingly the first Amendment became the finding of the meeting and a vote was then taken between the Motion and Amendment.

On a division between the motion and the amendment, there voted:-

For the Motion (4)	Councillors Cree, Hogg, McGillivray and Russell
--------------------	---

For the Amendment (5)	Councillors Jarvis, J Mackay, McConachie, Murdoch and Shepherd
-----------------------	--

Absentions (3)	Councillors Leadbitter, Ogilvie and Sharp
----------------	---

Accordingly the amendment became the finding and it was agreed to consult on the first figure as set out in Appendix 2 which was based on the 30% premium of the points system and also include an indication of likely energy savings.

The meeting also agreed:-

- a) that a consultation take place regarding a rent increase of £2.55 for any new showers fitted with a payback period of 12 –15 years;
- b) to consider a further report on the proposed changes to the rent setting policy, following consultation, in February 2010 including comparisons with other Council on rent they are charging for new build properties.

5. FLOODING IMPACT ON RESIDENTS AND HOUSING

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services providing an update to the Communities Committee of the consequences of the flooding in Moray on 4 September 2009 for the Moray Council's housing stock in affected areas and for the Council's wider responsibilities in relation to housing affected.

The Chief Housing Officer updated the meeting on the work which was currently taking place and advised that the majority of the properties had been inspected and would be stripped out in the next two weeks and thereafter dehumidifiers would then be placed in the properties. She also advised that the reinstatement costs were estimated to be in the region of £900,000 but this would be refined as work progressed. She further advised that a further report would be taken to this Committee regarding those tenants who did not wish to return to their properties as it was unlikely that all requests could be met.

The Chair commended staff for the work which had already been done and was still being carried out.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the impact of the flooding on residents and housing in Moray;
- (ii) to note the arrangements in place to provide temporary accommodation to those affected;
- (iii) that further reports as indicated in paragraphs 4.8 and 5.2 of the report would be presented to a future Committee meeting; and
- (iv) that reports would be provided to each Communities Committee to appraise the Committee of progress in remedying the damage to properties.

6. HOUSING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2009 / 10

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting a progress report on the achievement of priorities identified in the Community Services Improvement Plan as it relates to the Council's Housing Service.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to note that the recent floods would have an impact on the future achievement of some of the targets agreed in the Improvement Plan.

7. HOUSING BUDGET MONITORING - 2009 / 10

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting budget monitoring for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Services Other Housing Budget for the period to 31 August 2009.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the budget monitoring report for the period to 31 August 2009;
- (ii) the approach to consultation with tenants on any rental increases for 2010/2011; and
- (iii) that the report be discussed by the Housing Sub-Committee at its meeting on 16 October 2009.

8. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2009 / 10

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Communities Committee of the position to 31 August 2009 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2009 / 10.

The meeting noted the following answers from the Chief Housing Officer, in response to members questions:-

- a) there was no projection of underspend and commitment levels are healthy for this part of the financial year. There are a small number of budgets where commitment levels would be expected to increase over the next few months;
- b) given the increase in air heat source pumps being installed, the draft investment strategy which would be presented to Committee in December would have a new budget for this maintenance in respect of these;
- c) the higher priorities within the investment programme, such as kitchens and heating, would continue despite the recent flooding. The cost of the reinstatement was estimated at around £900,000 which had not been anticipated however the Council had contributed annually to a flood reserve fund and therefore there would be no impact on the revenue account or the investment strategy. There may be lower priority programmes, such as fencing, which would suffer, not in terms of budget but in terms of priority in relation to flood reinstatement works; and
- d) the commitment for rainwater goods was at the budget levels but the 3% indicated was monies spent.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed to note the position as at 31 August 2009 with regards to the Investment Programme for 2009/10.

9. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING REVISED GRANTS BUDGET 2009 / 10

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services seeking approval for a revised Private Sector Housing Grant Budget for 2009 / 10 and approval to forward commit expenditure to this budget into 2010 / 11.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) approved the revised Private Sector Housing Grants Budget as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- (ii) agreed to refer the proposal on forward commitments for the budget into 2010/11 as detailed in the report to the Policy and Resources Committee.

10. COUNCIL HOUSE NEW BUILD - PHASE 2 BID

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting details of the bid submitted to the Scottish Government for financial assistance to enable a second phase of Council new build.

The meeting noted the following answers from the Chief Housing Officer and Mrs Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing), in response to members questions:-

- a) the tender was advertised on the website dealing with procurement and bids would be from a variety of sources and would be analysed at the appropriate stage;
- b) there had been an advert in the press in the past which had not had a lot of response, therefore in this instance it had been advertised in line with the Council's agreed procurement procedures which set out the process whereby certain types of tender would follow and the Council was confident that this would attract the appropriate attention from various parties; and
- c) the additional borrowing for Phase 1 was in the region of £2-3 million but that an exact figure would be given to Councillor Jarvis following the meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the bid submitted to the Scottish Government; and
- (ii) that a further report on the outcome of the bid would be presented to a future meeting.

11. QUESTION TIME

The Chair stated that the Committee had a large portfolio which covered social inclusion, equalities, community safety, anti-social behaviour and community liaison and as a Committee it was their role to scrutinise the services and be kept abreast of what was happening. As there had been a dearth of reports recently, he asked that the relevant Officers prepare reports and arrange action plans to be submitted to the next Committee on each of the issues highlighted. This was agreed.

**12. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATIONS BUDGET 2009 / 10 -
BUDGET MONITORING (para 9)**

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the budget monitoring information for the period to 31 August 2009 for the Building Services Trading Operation.