

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2009

COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors M. McConachie and F. Murdoch,

IN ATTENDANCE

Chief Housing Officer, Mrs A Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing), Housing Programmes Manager, Capital Programmes Manager, Mrs D Bosworth, Principal Accountant, Home Improvements Services Manager (in respect of Item 6), General Manager Building Services, Contracts and Commissioning Manager, Corporate Policy Unit Manager, Community Planning & Development Manager, Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator, Fairer Scotland Manager, Community Support Manager 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.

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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. CONSULTATIVE DRAFT INTERIM LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2010 - 2013

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services seeking agreement on the interim Local Housing Strategy 2010 - 2013 Main Issues Report.

Following concerns raised by Members, the Chief Housing Officer advised that Officers would investigate the issue regarding fewer houses being for sale as this may no longer be the case. She emphasised that the key point was that mortgages were more difficult to obtain. She also advised that Officers would investigate the paragraph relating to racial incidents between Scottish and English residents and look at the context of the statement.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to approve the Interim Local Housing Strategy Main Issues Report for public consultation
- (ii) to note that Officers and partners would continue to develop a strategic response to the main issues throughout the public consultation period; and
- (iii) that the Interim Local Housing Strategy 2010-13 would be presented to Communities Committee in April 2010.

5. DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the draft of the Homelessness Strategy 2010-2013 for approval.

In response to a question from Councillor Hogg as to whether the Council were looking at expanding hostels with regard to the number of homeless single people there are, the Chief Housing Officer advised that from earlier analysis there was an awareness of a significant number of single young people who present themselves as homeless and this has identified the need to diversify and expand the range of temporary accommodation for instance replacement of the Cluny Hostel Annexe in Buckie by provision through Langstane Housing Association which provides double the number of places for single people. The Council would continue to look at various options for single homeless people and this would form part of the focus for strategy work due to be carried out with partners over the next few years. Hostel beds were not the only response which the Council may look at as the younger homeless have different support needs compared to those in the older range.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- (i) agreed the draft Homelessness Strategy for consultation as detailed in Appendix I;
- (ii) noted that the consultation period would end on 31 January 2010; and
- (iii) agreed that the final strategy would be presented to the Communities Committee in April 2010.

6. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING SCHEME OF ASSISTANCE

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services seeking approval for the "Private Sector Housing Scheme of Assistance" (SofA) for implementation on 1st April 2010 and this would replace the existing Private Sector Housing Grant scheme.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- (i) approved the "Scheme of Assistance" as detailed in Appendix I;
- (ii) noted comments received during consultation as detailed in Appendix II
- (iii) noted changes to the scheme following public consultation; (additions were shown in bold print and removals shown in italics)
- (iv) noted that the "Scheme of Assistance" meets the Council's obligations under Section 72 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006; and
- (v) noted that further reports proposing supporting policy for the Scheme of Assistance would be presented to Communities Committee at a future meeting.

7. ACCOMMODATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF GYPSIES / TRAVELLERS IN GRAMPIAN

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services summarising research carried out by Craigforth on behalf of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, and Moray Councils' into the accommodation needs of Gypsies/Travellers.

In response to a question from Councillor Leadbitter as to whether there were any timescales for transit sites, Councillor McGillivray advised that they were currently looking at three sites and it would be hoped to report back to committee in either February or April 2010.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- (i) agreed the recommendations in the report in relation to Grampian wide issues considered by the Grampian Gypsies / Travellers Inter Agency Group;
- (ii) agreed that the Moray Gypsies / Travellers Multi Agency Group considers the recommendations from the report that are primarily related to Moray;
- (iii) agreed that Officers continue to seek appropriate transit sites; and
- (iv) agreed that recommendations in implementation of report action plan be brought to a future Communities Committee.

8. MEETING WITH HOUSING MINISTER

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services providing feedback to the Communities Committee following the recent meeting with the Housing Minister, Alex Neil MSP

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

- a) the discussion with the Housing Minister was not specifically on supported accommodation but the Minister did draw attention to the national project and also discussed potential financial initiatives. There was discussion around the need for specific types of supported accommodation but the Minister recognised that this would vary in each Local Authority and it was for each Local Authority to look at their own profile of homelessness;
- b) the national housing trust was aimed towards mid-market rent of properties and speculative building on the part of the private sector where there may be unsold properties but this would be looked at cautiously in terms of its relevance to Moray; and
- c) the Council was not a Registered Social Landlord but the Housing Minister was investigating a number of initiatives and how to provide finance for the provision of housing to RSLs.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) welcomed the discussion held with the Housing Minister;
- (ii) agreed that Officers progress investigations on the issues raised during the meeting; and
- (iii) noted that a follow-up meeting in February/March 2010 was suggested by the Minister.

9. DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME & RACE EQUALITY SCHEME ANNUAL REPORTS

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive asking Committee to review and approve publication of the Disability Equality Scheme and Race Equality Scheme annual reports.

In response to a question from Councillor Leadbitter with regards to equalities being difficult to measure in Moray as there was small diversity, the Corporate Policy Unit Manager advised that the reports are part of legislation and are a requirement therefore these need to be published in December. At the moment there are three schemes but it was proposed to incorporate them into a single equality scheme and once this had been done, it would be clearer what the strategic approach to equalities should be. The Council were currently working with the Equality Forum who are helping provide meaningful recommendations and actions to inform the scheme.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to approve the publication of the Disability Equality Scheme and Race Equality Scheme annual reports.

10. FLOODING IMPACT ON RESIDENTS AND HOUSING

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services updating the Committee of the consequences of the recent flooding in Moray for the Council's housing stock in affected areas and for the Council's wider responsibilities in relation to housing affected.

The Chief Housing Officer gave a verbal update to the Committee as to what stage the Council were at with regard to repairs to properties. She advised that thirty one of the council houses were scheduled to be completed by Christmas, which was almost half, and the remainder by the end of February. She further advised that almost half of the tenants who had indicated that they did not wish to return to their homes and been allocated properties outwith the flood area and this was a significant achievement. The report also highlighted that there would be difficulties encountered in rehousing households who require three bedroom ground floor properties as those are not widely available in Elgin or indeed Moray as a whole and a report would be brought back in February to consider the implications regarding this issue more fully.

The Chief Housing Officer also expressed her astonishment at the allegations made in the press regarding the temporary accommodation provided to flood affected households. She reassured the Committee that the temporary accommodation for flood victims or any other homeless personnel was not flea ridden as suggested and that she took exception to the allegation. In the past three years there have been two reports of flea problems in temporary accommodation and both were dealt with appropriately and with no recurrence. She further advised that the housing services staff have been involved in equipping the properties and she had personally visited the temporary accommodation case highlighted and felt that the house and its furnishings were of an acceptable standard. There have been very few complaints

by those housed due to flooding and any complaints have been minor. In some instances there are some tenants who were unable to return to their homes immediately and a reasonable flexible approach was being taken in these instances.

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

- a) information could be provided to officers preparing reports for committee with regard to the housing impact which resulted in the flooding at Newmill, although these properties are owner occupiers and as such the Council did not have the same issue with mopping up; and
- b) Bishopmill House has limitations due to the nature of accommodation provided but there would have been difficult situations if the property had not been available in particular for the elderly. It may not be a long term approach to temporary accommodation but it would be worth looking at what the future for Bishopmill House would be.

Councillor McGillivray congratulated staff in making Bishopmill House habitable. Councillor Russell congratulated staff for their level of communication which was excellent as the recent newsletter was clear, concise and informative and should be used as a template for public communication.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- (i) welcomed the progress achieved in remedial works and the projected completion dates for remedial works;
- (ii) agreed that the position of tenants seeking transfers would be reviewed at the next meeting, in light of progress achieved; and
- (iii) agreed that a further report would be presented to the next Communities Committee.

11. 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 30 September 2009.

Following concerns from Members regarding burst pipes, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the next issue of the newsletter had a prominent advert regarding frost prevention and at present the service is trying to raise awareness that the Council has a free drain down service for those going away.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to note:-

- (i) the budget monitoring report for the period to 30 September 2009; and
- (ii) the projected outturn for 2009/10.

12. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2009 / 10

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Committee of the position to 30 September 2009 for the Housing Investment Programme for 2009/10.

13. HOUSING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2009/10 - QUARTER 2 PROGRESS

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

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to:-

- (i) note the report; and
- (ii) the revised timetables as indicated in the report.

14. CARE COMMISSION INSPECTIONS - HOMELESS HOSTELS

There was submitted and noted a report by the Director of Community Services providing Committee with details of the Care Commission's Inspection report on the Council's Homeless Hostels Housing Support Service.

The Committee joined Councillor McGillivray in thanking staff for their hard work and involvement in achieving the improvements to the support service.

15. HOUSING INSPECTION - IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the first six monthly progress report on the Improvement Plan agreed by the Council in response to issues raised following the Scottish Housing Regulator's Inspection of the Council's housing services in 2008 and publication of the inspection report in January 2009.

In response to a question from Councillor Hogg regarding an indication of officer time spent on the housing inspection, the Chief Housing Officer advised that there has been considerable work and staff time involved in responding to the improvement plan particularly with regard to homelessness. The inspection relating to housing management and asset management was very favourable with no long list of improvements however as Committee heard in January the inspection report on homelessness indicated that there were more areas requiring improvements. For staff working on these areas, concentration on these issues were leading to

improvements and thereby reducing costs to the Council in dealing with homelessness.

Councillor McGillivray congratulated staff on work being done and advised that the plan attempts to redress the issues which the Council have regarding homelessness.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the progress report;
- (ii) that timescales within the Homelessness Improvement Plan are reviewed and that discussion would be initiated with the Scottish Housing Regulator on proposed changes;
- (iii) to note that the report would be considered by the Housing Sub Committee and Audit and Performance Review Committee in December 2009; and
- (iv) to note that a further progress report would be presented to this Committee in June 2010.

16. HOUSING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - 2ND QUARTER 2009 / 10

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services outlining the performance of the Housing Service for the period 1 July to 30 September 2009.

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

- a) during craft workers negotiations absence was raised during the negotiations for if an employer removes an attendance based bonus there would be an effect on short term absence but it had not been as dramatic as envisaged and cases were being managed in line with the absence management policy;
- b) overtime payments were highlighted during negotiations and the impact was now being seen as tradesmen were not getting reduced stand by allowance but receiving call out bands of payment and enhanced overtime payments because of their new encompassing rates and this has had an impact on overtime costs, although the reporting period included the flooding period; and
- c) the planned maintenance tenants satisfaction information was not available as the tenants survey had only recently been introduced and investigations were underway as to how to report on this but the Committee were assured that the information would be included in the February report.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) noted the performance outlined in the report;

- (ii) noted the actions being taken to seek improvements where required; and
- (iii) accepted the new format and content of the report.

17. MORAY CITIZENS PANEL - SAFER COMMUNITIES SURVEY 2009

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive asking Committee to consider the findings from the Safer Communities Survey 2009.

In response to concerns raised by Members, the Corporate Policy Unit Manager advised that the Council were working with all partners by devolving information to them regarding areas of concern. The Citizens Panel were representatives from all areas of age, gender, etc and that the panel could be used by individuals as well as any organisations.

Following consideration the Committee noted the findings of the Moray Citizens Panel Safer Communities Survey 2009 and the changes in perceptions and improvements in statistics since the previous survey in 2006.

18. BETTER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DEMONSTRATION PILOT

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive updating members on the current development of the Better Community Engagement Demonstration Project.

In response to a question from Councillor Hogg as to what the financial implications were, the Community Support Manager advised that the only Officer involved in the project was himself and he was working alongside a consultant employed by the Scottish Government, whose time up to March 2011 would equate to around 40 days. The steering group consisted of members of area forums, community councils, village hall committees, MVSO and the volunteer centre. The action plan would be taken forward next year and this would look at developing local pilot projects to evaluate community planning through partnership with community planning partners and any costs would be incurred through individual partnerships. Councillor McGillivray advised that the aim was to assist community groups in taking their projects forward and once the project has finished there should be no more costs incurred.

Following consideration the Committee noted and supported the continuing development of the Better Community Engagement Pilot project.

19. SCOTTISH INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION 2009

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive inviting Committee to note the main findings of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2009.

Following concerns raised by Members as to what was being done to tackle the problems of those areas in deprivation and how it could be reported to the

Community Planning Board, the Community Planning and Development Manager that they would be using the figures to look at where to target the Fairer Scotland Funding but there was an overall need to look at how services and resources were being targeted into the areas of concern. He also advised that a report could go to the Community Planning Board asking them to investigate how to target areas and the resources for this. The committee agreed to this being an additional recommendation.

Following consideration, the Committee:-

- (i) noted the main findings of the SIMD 2009
- (ii) noted the proposed use of the SIMD 2009 findings; and
- (iii) agreed that a report would go to the Community Planning Board in order for them to investigate the areas of deprivation, how these should be targeted and resources required.

20. FAIRER SCOTLAND FUND

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive inviting Committee to note the progress of the Fairer Scotland Fund towards the agreed performance indicators and its overall performance in meeting the fund priorities.

In response to a request from Councillor Hogg that there should be further reports on specific actions, planned outcomes to show how well the projects are performing, the Fairer Scotland Fund Manager advised that each project and services commissioned are subject to quarterly monitoring, evaluation and service level agreements with agreed outcomes and this would be reported on a quarterly basis.

Following consideration the Committee noted the progress of the Fairer Scotland Fund in meeting the agreed performance indicators and overall performance of the fund in tackling social exclusion and meeting of the fund priorities.

21. QUESTION TIME

In response to a question from Councillor Jarvis regarding what stage the Council were at regarding the Scottish Housing Quality Standards, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the figure was included in the report regarding performance but that her recollection was that it was 69% which was in excess of the milestone for the start of the year but she would direct Councillor Jarvis to the section within the report.

22. CURRENT STATUS OF HOUSING SUPPORT CONTRACTS [Para 9]

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services informing the Communities Committee of the current contracting status of Housing Support providers for 2009/2010.

Following consideration the Committee approved the contracts and their funding levels that have been negotiated and detailed in Appendix I of this report

23. BUILDING SERVICES TRADING OPERATION BUDGET 2009/10 - BUDGET MONITORING [Para 9]

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting budget monitoring information for the period to 30 September 2009 for the Building Services Trading Operation.

Following consideration the Committee noted the financial information reported