

THE MORAY COUNCIL
MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE HOUSING SUB- COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 15 JANUARY 2008
COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillors E McGillivray (Chairman), G Coull, S Cree, B Jarvis, G Leadbitter, A McDonald, R Shepherd and I Young
Tenant Representatives: Miss H Anderson, Mr S Christie, Mr C French and Mrs A Murray

APOLOGIES:

Apologies were received from Councillor J Mackay, Miss M Ettles and Miss E Martin (Tenant Representative)

IN ATTENDANCE:

The Chief Housing Officer, Senior Solicitor (Commercial and Conveyancing), Senior Area Housing Manager, Mr A McQuaker, Area Housing Manager, Housing Programmes Manager, Capital Programmes Manager, Mrs D Brands Principal Accountant, Housing Strategy and Policy Manager and Mrs C Carswell Committee Services Officer 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. ORDER OF BUSINESS

In terms of Standing Order 25 the meeting agreed to note that under item 9 pages 32 - 36 had been attached in error.

3. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The meeting noted that there were no written questions submitted. The Chair explained the protocol for written questions.

4. 'FIRM FOUNDATIONS – THE FUTURE FOR HOUSING IN SCOTLAND' DISCUSSION PAPER

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services summarising the main points detailed in the Scottish Government's Discussion Paper on housing and setting out the proposed process for responding to the paper.

The Chair advised that an extension to the Scottish Government's deadline of 25 January 2008 had been obtained to enable the draft Council response to be considered by the Full Council on 30 January 2008.

Councillor Coull welcomed the discussion document and felt it was very comprehensive and would change the face of housing in Scotland. He felt that the target of 35,000 properties a year was challenging but welcomed it and he agreed with the response regarding ending the Right to Buy as it would be an incentive for Councils' to build houses.

Councillor Young agreed that it was an interesting document and advised that he can see that there may be problems when houses are bought but he would be cautious about ending the Right to Buy as

it would be preventing people from having property. Mr Christie advised that he welcomed the idea of new houses and that there had been a range of responses from tenant representatives regarding the Right to Buy which varied from a blanket ban, a ban on new Right to Buy and that Right to Buy could not be done unless the debt on the house had been covered.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that there may be subsidies available to assist with any Council new build but as yet there had been no details available from the Scottish Government. The subsidies would be obtainable in open competition with other Councils' but the draft response suggested that this should be driven by housing needs as laid out in housing strategies.

In response to questions from Councillor Leadbitter, the Chief Housing Officer advised that there are cross boundary discussions regarding regional cross-cutting issues. She indicated that she had recently attended a meeting involving local authorities, Registered Social Landlords and other interested bodies to discuss the Discussion Paper and to identify whether any specifically Grampian issues could be highlighted in the individual bodies' responses to the Paper. In response to a question from Councillor Leadbitter, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the draft response regarding housing mix and that planning guidance issued around open space would be re-visited.

Mr French questioned whether the Scottish Government was pushing ALMO's. The Chief Housing Officer advised that to date, these have operated in England but there are substantial differences between the English housing finance system and the system in Scotland. She advised that there had been interest in the housing profession to examine whether it was a satisfactory solution and this may well be looked at in Scotland. She further advised that the Moray Council is able to bring its housing stock to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the Moray Standard and there is a viable business scheme in place. In such circumstances, it is unclear as to what benefit ALMO can bring.

In response to a question from Councillor Leadbitter, the Chief Housing Officer advised that there have been comments included with regard to pressure of affordable housing and the move to 2012 on priorities for the homeless but that a general statement could be included before going into the more detailed response to the questions. She advised that issues have been highlighted in the past regarding increases in the number of lets, increase in waiting lists, homelessness etc and the whole process is being looked at over the next few months and a report would be going to the Policy Committee in March regarding the continuing shortage of affordable houses.

Following consideration the Housing Sub committee agreed to note that the Council meeting on 30 January 2008 would consider the Council's response to the Housing Discussion Paper.

5. STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan for the Sub Committee's interest.

The Chief Housing Office advised that a meeting had been arranged with Communities Scotland in February to receive its feedback on the plan and this would be a learning process for both parties.

Following consideration the Housing Sub-Committee agreed to :-

- (i) note the strategic housing investment plan submitted to Community Scotland; and
- (ii) note that further reports would be presented to the Policy Committee on the Strategic Housing Investment Plan, as required.

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

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting the budget monitoring information for the period to 31 October 2007 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Other Housing.

Further to a question from Councillor Cree, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the phasing of expenditure was pretty near budget as estimated and any slippage would hopefully be carried forward so as not to lose the investment.

In response to a question from Mrs Murray, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the provision noted is a contingency fund in the event of a flood as the Council do not have insurance for properties in flood areas and that funds are put in the contingency fund which would alleviate remedial work and that this is a year end transfer.

7. HOUSING INVESTMENT 2007/2008

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

In response to a question from Councillor Coull, the Chief Housing Officer advised that every year there is a financial target for the Council house sales but there does appear to be a continuing lesser amount of Council houses sold and this would have an impact on the financing of the Capital Programme although this is counteracted by a higher level of rental income. The Chief Housing Officer advised that the Council were near the target mark in 2006 at the end of the financial year as valuations were higher therefore there was more revenue obtained for those Council houses sold and she would need to look at more up to date figures before flagging up any impact it may have on the Capital Programme.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to note the current position with regards to the Housing Investment Programme for 2007/2008.

8. TENANT SURVEY – IMPROVEMENT PLAN

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services setting out initial thoughts on the content of an Improvement Plan to address the issues identified in the Tenant Survey 2007 and seeking the views from the Sub Committee.

Following a question from Mr French, the Chief Housing Officer advised that the priorities as listed on page 2 of the report are not in order and the Improvement Plan had been drawn together from the main findings of the tenant survey.

Following a question from Councillor Young, the Chief Housing Officer advised that craftsmen are not included in the discussions purely for logistical reasons but it may be useful for her to discuss with the General Manager of the DLO how information is disseminated throughout the DLO.

Councillor Leadbitter had concerns with the practicalities of the Estate Caretakers roles being confused with the roles of the Community Wardens and that he was keen to see Housing Officers have more time to spend in communities.

Ms Anderson advised the Housing Committee that she discovered on Saturday from the TIGRA News sheet that there would be monies available for tenants groups from Community Scotland.

Following consideration the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to consider the suggestions in the report;
- (ii) to consider any further actions that they would wish included in an improvement plan; and
- (iii) that the Improvement Plan be presented to the next committee of Sub Committee for agreement.

The Housing Sub Committee agreed that the tenant representatives would go back to their forums and feed back to the Chief Housing Officer by 25 February 2008.

9. HRA BUDGET PROCESS PROGRESS AND HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2008/09

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services presenting an overview of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget process to date to the Sub Committee and also provide details of the investment proposed for 2008/09 for the Sub Committee's comments.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that an investment strategy is produced every year. At present, the Council is performing ahead of the targets originally set out and would envisage maintaining this performance. Within the document there are figures for 2007/2008 and it had been noted in text where budget may no longer be required or where an increase in the budget is needed – for instance, the door and windows contract has now been completed with funding being moved towards the kitchen/bathroom improvement programme.

Following consideration the Housing Sub-Committee:

- (i) noted the progress achieved to date in the HRA budget progress for 2008/2009;
- (ii) commented on the draft housing investment programme; and
- (iii) noted that the Council would determine the HRA budget in mid-February 2008.

10. COMMUNITIES SCOTLAND – THEMATIC STUDY ON OPENNESS AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SOCIAL LANDLORDS

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services providing the Sub Committee with information on Communities Scotland's recent Thematic Inspection report which examined how social landlords share information about performance and governance.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that this was a national piece of work with a separate report on the Moray Council as one of the case study authorities. Communities Scotland had used two examples of good practice within the Moray Council in the national report. There are a small number of recommendations and the Chief Housing Officer advised that the improvement actions identified would be incorporated into the Tenant Survey Improvement Plan.

Councillor Cree asked that the issue regarding Sub Committees being webcast should be re-examined in order that tenants could view the same. The Chair asked that a report be brought forward to the next Policy Committee asking for the Housing Sub Committee to be webcast.

Following consideration the Housing Sub Committee agreed to:

- (i) note the Communities Scotland reports;
- (ii) the approach outlined to develop improvement actions and;
- (iii) a progress report be presented to the Sub Committee mid year 2008.

11. REVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICE STANDARDS

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services proposing that the Housing Sub Committee review the Council's Housing Service Standards during 2008.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that the service standards were intended to specify the standard of service which the Council would deliver and the Sub Committee should be looking at what they want to get from the service standards eg. whether there were too many. There are some service standards which are more difficult to quantify as they are more in regard to the strategic side. Service standards should be measurable and this should be kept in mind when looking at the document. She also advised that the strategic role had not been delegated to this Committee but that the Housing Sub Committee can make comments.

The tenant representatives felt that the service standard with regard to training was not being met and this had been brought up at various core groups. The Housing Programmes Manager advised that training events in the past had been cancelled due to lack of attendance and they are currently looking at the training events for the next financial year and would consider joint training between staff and tenants.

Further to a question from Councillor Coull, the Chief Housing Officer advised that in some cases it is not possible to adhere to the service standard in respect of bed and breakfast accommodation. If this is the case then it must be reported to the Scottish Government. The Housing Service would prefer not to use bed and breakfast but given the number of homeless figures it is inevitable that in some instances there is a need to use this form of temporary accommodation.

Further to a question from Councillor Cree, the Chief Housing Officer advised that every repair is allocated to a specific priority category. As timescales vary over the priorities, it is important to look at the different categories and Audit Scotland also require details on the different priorities.

Further to a question from Mr French regarding follow-up interviews once tenants are given keys, the Senior Area Housing Manager advised that the Housing Department have started doing follow-up interviews as of October 2007 and that Housing Officers were picking up useful information whilst doing this.

Following consideration the Committee agreed:

- (i) the proposed approach to review the Housing service standards; and
- (ii) to note that a further report would be presented to the Housing Sub Committee in March 2008.

12. RENEWABLE HEATING INSTALLATIONS

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services to providing information on the energy savings attributable to the renewable heating system installed at 6 The Sidings, Garmouth, and advising of the details of installations recently completed within four properties in Mulben, Rothes, Cullen and Keith. The report also confirmed an earlier committee agreement to install a number of renewable heating systems in Rothes.

The Capital Programmes Manager gave a short presentation on the air source heat pumps with regard to design features and layout, costings and advantages/disadvantages on the systems.

The Committee took the opportunity to question the Capital Programmes Manager regarding the air source heat pump system.

Following consideration the Housing Sub Committee noted the progress with current renewable heating installations and proposals for further installations in energy use monitoring.

13. TENANT PARTICIPATION – QUARTERLY UPDATE

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services updating the Housing Sub Committee on tenant participation activity in Moray from 1 October 2007 to 31 December 2007.

Mr Christie advised that over the past period he found that the biggest issue for them was trying to get new members to join the forums. The Core Group is to go to Keith to see if a forum can be re-started in that area.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that the revised tenant participation strategy would be presented to the next Housing Sub Committee and this would consider how to widen out forms of participation. It could possibly help engagement with tenants who do not wish to go to forum meetings but want to participate in issues.

14. QUESTION TIME

Following a question from Mr French regarding timetabling of works the Capital Programmes Manager advised that there has now been a rolling programme put in place therefore there should be no lulls in the year and that they are currently working on the next financial year. He confirmed that when writing out to advise tenants of work going to be carried out, tenants are advised that it is in the financial year and not the calendar year that works would be carried out. The Chief Housing Officer advised that it is difficult to know how far in advance to programme works and publish the timing of the works. If there are delays then tenants should be kept informed and there are some areas where the service could make improvements.

Ms Murray raised an issue where at Spey Drive tenants had not been forewarned of works being carried out at their property. The Capital Programmes Manager advised that the tenants should get a letter 7 to 10 days in advance of the works being carried out and he would look into this.

Further to a question from Councillor Leadbitter, the Chair advised that a copy of the Councillors Code of Conduct would be held at the core group and that the tenant representatives would be given information on the timetables for submitting written questions.