

MORAY COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Housing and Community Safety Committee

Tuesday, 13 February 2024

Council Chambers, Council Office, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX

PRESENT

Councillor James Allan, Councillor John Divers, Councillor Amber Dunbar, Councillor Jérémie Fernandes, Councillor Donald Gatt, Councillor David Gordon, Councillor Sandy Keith, Councillor Scott Lawrence, Councillor Marc Macrae, Councillor Paul McBain, Ms Elizabeth McKnockiter, Councillor Shona Morrison, Councillor Derek Ross, Councillor John Stuart

APOLOGIES

Ms Anna Bamforth, Ms Jane Bartecki, Councillor Neil Cameron

IN ATTENDANCE

Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), Head of Housing and Property Services, Housing Strategy and Development Manager, Housing Needs Manager, Legal Services Manager and Mrs L Rowan, Committee Services Officer as Clerk to the Committee.

1 Chair

Councillor Dunbar, being Chair of the Housing and Community Safety Committee, chaired the meeting.

2 Declaration of Group Decisions and Members Interests

In terms of Standing Order 21 and 23 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct, 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 or any declarations of Member's interests in respect of any item on the agenda.

3 Resolution

The Committee resolved that under Section 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, the public and media representatives be excluded from the meeting for the items of business detailed below, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information of the class described in the relevant Paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

Paragraph Number of Minute	Paragraph Number of Schedule 7a and Reason
11	9 - Information on terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the Authority.

4 Minute of Meeting dated 21 November 2023

The Minute of the meeting of the Housing and Community Safety Committee held on 21 November 2023 was submitted and approved.

5 Written Questions

The Committee noted that no written questions had been submitted.

6 Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2023

The Committee had before it a report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) informing of the status of the Housing Need and Demand Assessment and its findings.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously agreed to note:

- (i) the “robust and credible” status of the Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2023, and its key findings; and
- (ii) that a consultative draft Local Housing Strategy 2024-29 will be presented to Committee in winter 2024.

7 Rent Setting Policy Review Update

The Committee had before it a report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) with the results of the Rent Setting Policy review consultation. The report further presented a revised Rent Setting Policy for approval and advised Committee that a rent campaign will be undertaken to tackle high level arrears and sought approval to utilise any remaining allocation of the Service Development Budget for 2023/24 in order to administer the Tenant Sustainment Fund and any overhead costs associated with running the rent campaign.

Following consideration, the Committee joined the Chair in commending the Service for the work undertaken in the rent setting policy review and thereafter unanimously agreed:

- (i) to note the results of the public consultation on the Rent Setting Policy as set out in Section 4 and Appendix I of the report;
- (ii) to approve the revised Rent Setting Policy as set out in Appendix II of the report;

- (iii) that the revised Rent Setting Policy will be implemented on 1 April 2024;
- (iv) to note that a rent campaign will run from 1 March 2024 until 31 March 2024 which will target high level rent arrears, as set out in Section 6 of the report;
- (v) to approve the Tenancy Sustainment Fund which will operate during March 2024, as set out in Section 7 of the report; and
- (vi) to approve that any remaining allocation from the Service Development Budget for 2023/24 is used to administer and deliver the Tenancy Sustainment Fund along with any overhead costs associated with running the rent campaign.

8 Allocations Policy Review Update

The Committee had before it a report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) providing the results of the Allocations Policy review consultation and presenting a revised Allocations Policy for approval.

The Committee joined the Chair in commending the Service for the work undertaken in the review of the Allocations Policy and thereafter unanimously agreed:

- (i) to note the results of the public consultation on the Allocations Policy as set out in Section 4 and Appendix I of the report;
- (ii) to approve the revised Allocations Policy as set out in Appendix II of the report; and
- (iii) that the revised Allocations Policy will be implemented on 1 April 2024.

9 Moray Affordable Housing Investment Programme

The Committee had before it a report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) informing of progress on the Affordable Housing Investment Programme in Moray.

During her introduction, the Housing Strategy Development Manager highlighted two amendments in the report, the first at paragraph 4.5 for the site start expected during 2024/25 for Western Village, Elgin South, which should read June 2024 and not March 2025 and at paragraph 5.3 advised that there was no longer a need to seek Full Council approval to purchase the land for phase 2 at Speyview Aberlour as this would be purchased using the delegated authority of the Head of Housing and Property Services due to the purchase price of the land. This was noted.

During discussion, concern was noted that both phases of development at Speyview were being provided by Springfield Properties PLC and it was queried whether the second phase should have been made available for other developers to tender for the project.

In response, the Housing Strategy and Development Manager advised that Springfield owned the land to be developed and assured the Committee that the

Council were getting good value for money and that the decision had been taken in accordance with the Affordable Housing Programme.

Councillor Keith acknowledged the Council's Affordable Housing Strategy however noted that the Scottish Government proposed to cut the affordable housing budget by 27% which would have an impact on the Council's ability to deliver the Strategy and moved that the Committee agree an additional recommendation asking that the Chair write to the Deputy First Minister outlining the concerns being expressed by the Housing Sector at the £200 million cuts to the affordable housing budget and the impact that will have on the Council's ability to meet housing need going forward.

Councillor Gatt, having considered the further recommendation put forward by Councillor Keith, agreed with the sentiment of the motion however queried whether it would be reasonable to wait to see what the reduction in the affordable housing budget is for Moray prior to writing.

Adjournment

The Committee sought a short adjournment to consider the terms of the recommendation proposed by Councillor Keith further.

Resumption of Meeting

Following the adjournment, the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) advised that, following discussion with the Head of Housing and Property Services and the Legal Services Manager, the usual protocol when a request for a letter is made is that the draft be circulated to the Committee however as the wording of Councillor Keith's recommendation was quite clear suggested that, if the Committee are minded to agree the recommendation, the letter include that the Council acknowledge that its capital allocation has yet to be confirmed. This was agreed.

There being no-one otherwise minded, the Committee unanimously agreed:

- (i) to note progress on the Moray Affordable Housing Investment Programme;
- (ii) to note progress on the delivery of the Council's new build and acquisition programme; and
- (iii) that the Chair write to the Deputy First Minister outlining the concerns being expressed by the Housing Sector at the £200 million cuts to the affordable housing budget and the impact that will have on the Council's ability to meet housing need going forward whilst acknowledging that its capital allocation has yet to be confirmed.

10 Dampness and Condensation in Council Houses

The Committee had before it a report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) advising on the measures that the service has adopted to take a more proactive approach to deal with issues of dampness and condensation within the Council's housing stock.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously agreed:

- (i) the current range of damp control measures carried out, as highlighted in Section 4 of the report;
- (ii) the damp and mould procedure that is now in place within the service, as highlighted in Section 5 of the report;
- (iii) future damp control measures identified to deal with property types identified 'at risk', as highlighted in Section 6 of the report; and
- (iv) to note that this Committee will receive a further progress update later in 2024 to summarise the number of properties in each housing area where damp treatment work has been identified or carried out.

12 Question Time

Councillor Fernandes noted a recent news article which stated that ex-MOD houses had been reallocated to those on the affordable housing list and expressed disappointment at some of the comments on the article which inferred that affordable housing should be allocated to UK residents before refugees or those seeking asylum and sought assurance that there was no such discrimination when allocating houses.

In response, the Head of Housing and Property Services advised that the Service adhered to the Council's policies on equalities and in accordance with Council decisions to support various schemes to house those seeking asylum. The Housing Needs Manager further advised that of the 35 ex-MOD houses, 18 were allocated to those on who were homeless (8 of which were from the refugee project), 14 were on the transfer list and 3 were let to waiting list applicants. He further advised that the Council's allocation policy does not discriminate between individual's age, disability, gender reassignment, marital status/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race/religion/belief or sexual orientation.

11 Building Services Trading Operation Budget 2023-24 - Budget Monitoring [Para 9]

The Committee had before it a report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) presenting budget monitoring information for the period to 31 December 2023 for the Building Services Trading Operation.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously agreed to note the:

- i. financial information for the period to 31 December 2023, as detailed in section 5 and Appendix I of the report.
- ii. Building Services operating performance for the period to 31 December 2023, as set out in section 6 of the report; and
- iii. projected outturn to 31 March 2024, as detailed in section 7 and Appendix I of the report.