

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 27 January 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr B Allan	Mr A Jarvie
Miss J Barclay	Mr D Mackay
Mr R Bremner	Mrs A MacLean
Miss J Campbell	Mrs L Munro
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs F Robertson
Mr C Fraser	Mr P Siggers
Mr L Fraser	Mr B Thompson
Mr R Gale (substitute)	

Non-Members also present:

Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs D Macpherson
Mr A Henderson	Mrs M Paterson
Mr B Lobban	

Officials in Attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance
Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment Manager
Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator
Ms O Bayon, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Mrs D Budge, Tenant Participation Representative

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council.
All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.**

Mr B Thompson in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Graham, Mrs B McAllister and Ms E Roddick.

Thereafter, the Chair on behalf of the Committee, extended his thoughts and consideration to those Members who were unable to attend the meeting due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their families.

**2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt**

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 3: Mr R Bremner (non-financial) and Mrs L Munro (financial).

**3. Housing Revenue Account Estimates 2021/22
Tuairmsean Teachd-a-steach HRA 2021/22**

Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds he was a Board Member of Albyn Housing Society Limited but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mrs L Munro declared a financial interest in this item as a Council house tenant but, in terms of the dispensation granted by the Standards Commission, remained to participate in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HP/01/21 dated 13 January 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an update was sought and provided on the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's ability to undertake repairs and maintenance. It was confirmed a reduced service was currently being operated and an update on the budget would be reported to the next Committee;
- the additional costs associated with upgrading and maintaining the Council's listed buildings and the need to acknowledge those higher costs in developing the housing revenue and capital programmes;
- the need to develop a future programme for the replacement of older heating systems and future cyclical maintenance and servicing costs, noting this issue would be discussed further at the rearranged Members seminar;
- comments were sought and provided on the Administration's proposals to address the fact the Council had lower rents but higher debt repayments in comparison to other local authorities given the impact on the ability to deliver more effective improvement and maintenance programmes;
- the Council was not able to write off this historic debt and had to balance this against setting rent levels to minimise hardship. The key focus going forward was on the efficient use of the available resources through an asset management based approach to HRA stock;
- concern at the increase in rent arrears and the impact this was having on rent levels. It was confirmed that a more detailed report on rent arrears would be presented to the next Committee;
- the impact of continued rent increases on tenants particularly in the current economic climate and recognition of the level of assistance and support available to those tenants who were experiencing hardship due to factors outwith the Council's control;
- the level of consultation undertaken with tenants was welcomed and demonstrated the majority recognised the benefits of a rent increase if

- this delivered more effective improvements in respect of repairs, maintenance and investment;
- the potential for a Members seminar to be arranged to consider housing issues, examples of good practice across the Council and the devolution of more housing matters to Area Committees;
 - clarification was sought and provided in relation to the resourcing and performance of the repairs service, noting it was subject to a process of continuing improvement and had been reviewed by the Redesign Board;
 - in terms of localism, the potential and the associated challenges with disaggregating the housing budget and setting of rent levels in the areas to better respond to local housing need;
 - an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the supplementary rent paid by tenants of new build properties to cover the loan charges associated with new builds;
 - a draft response to the Scottish Government consultation on New Build Heat Standard be brought back to Members for consideration;
 - an update was sought on the impact of the External Auditor's report on the undervaluation of the Council's land and properties on the Council's ability to borrow. It was reported that discussion on the implications was ongoing and further clarification would be brought back to the Committee in due course;
 - clarification was sought and provided around the increase in the number of HRA properties to be used as temporary accommodation and the support required from community planning partners to address issues that might present in communities;
 - confirmation was sought and provided that the figures for rent loss on garages would be reported within the revenue monitoring report to be presented to the next Committee;
 - a report be provided in relation to long terms voids, the underlying causes and potential solutions. It was confirmed further information would be reported to the next Committee and that Area Committees might be the best forum for more detailed reporting;
 - the Head of Housing and Building Maintenance would have discussions with local Members in Nairn with regard to improving communication around the management of the capital programme;
 - the potential to use HRA balances to invest in more new builds and maintenance, noting that ultimately it was for the Committee to take a view on this matter and for officers to investigate the pros and cons; and
 - the Members seminar to be rearranged would cover the affordability of new housing and allow for more detailed Member discussion on this issue.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the draft HRA Revenue Budget for 2021/22 (attached as Appendix 1);
- ii. a **2%** increase for council house rents for 2021/22;
- iii. that this percentage increase (**2%**) be applied to all residential HRA rents and service charges (except for sheltered housing services) and to Gypsy/Traveller site pitches;
- iv. that there should be no increase in service charges for sheltered housing tenants in 2021/22; and
- v. that non-HRA rents for leased property be increased as stipulated in existing contracts.

The meeting was closed at Noon.

