

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held Remotely on Thursday 30 September 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mr B Allan	Mr A Jarvie
Mrs J Barclay	Mr D Louden (substitute)
Mr R Bremner	Mrs B McAllister
Miss J Campbell	Mr D Mackay
Mr M Finlayson	Mrs A MacLean
Mr L Fraser	Mr P Saggars
Mr A Graham	Mr B Thompson
Mr A Henderson (substitute)	Ms J Tilt

Non-Members also present:

Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs L Macdonald
Mr J Finlayson	

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Housing and Property
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property and Facilities Management, Housing and Property
Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment Manager, Housing and Property
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration, Housing and Property
Mr R Campbell, Estates Strategy Manager, Housing and Property
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms O Bayon, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Ms L Shaw, Research Resource

**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 Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr C Fraser, Mrs F Robertson and Ms E Roddick

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

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

Item 7: Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 8: Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thomson (non-financial)

Item 9: Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thomson (non-financial)

Declarations of Interest: Mr R Bremner declared a non-financial interest relating to all items on the agenda as a Board Member of Albyn Housing Society Ltd 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 him from taking part in the discussion.

Declarations of Interest: Mr L Fraser declared a non-financial interest relating to all items on the agenda on the grounds he undertook work for the Housing Service in Nairn 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 him from taking part in the discussion on the basis this work was so remote and minor it would not impinge on his work on the Committee.

3. **Good News** **Naidheachdan Matha**

Members were advised that two members of staff had successfully gained new skills and qualifications. Ms K Maclean had completed a BSc in Construction and the Built Environment and Ms L Fraser had completed a distance learning BSc (Hons) in Quantity Surveying. Details were provided of the challenges and work put in to achieve the results and the benefits for the Service.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, congratulated both members of staff on achieving their qualifications.

The Committee **NOTED** the good news.

4. **Tenant Participation and Engagement Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Chom-pàirteachas is Ceangal Luchd-màil**

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

Ms L Shaw, Research Resource, gave a presentation on the results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2021.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- this was a positive report which highlighted the improvements in satisfaction levels from the previous tenant survey, despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, and all staff involved be congratulated on the results;

- how more face to face meetings with tenants could be facilitated going forward and how to improve tenant participation particularly in respect of younger tenants;
- the potential to direct more resources into areas which required attention such as anti-social behaviour or pockets of dissatisfaction in Highland;
- the need to continue to work with tenants to ensure their priorities were reflected in the Council's decisions on the priorities for spend balanced against Scottish Government's directions on housing standards, and to ensure there was transparency in respect of the decision making process;
- the opportunities to improve communication between contractors and tenants on the scheduling of works and ensure tenant feedback on the quality of works;
- the opportunities to build on the good work being undertaken with tenants in terms of providing a customer friendly approach in dealing with their complaints;
- the approach taken to communal works in mixed tenure estates, noting that local Members were provided with as much information as possible to make a decision as to whether it was good value for tenants and the community as a whole to progress works;
- confirmation was sought and provided that officers would have further discussions in relation to the dissatisfaction levels with kitchens and bathrooms;
- many of the complaints received related to the infrastructure within Council housing estates and the need to clarify responsibility for this matter within the Council. It was confirmed that discussions were to be held with Roads colleagues as to how most effectively maintain these assets within the constraints of the available capital spend;
- in response to tenant satisfaction levels with the quality of their home, the opportunities to be more proactive in improving the Council's older properties in terms of future capital investment; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that a Member survey had been circulated seeking feedback on proposed changes to the Highland Housing Register's allocation policy.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. continuous improvement in tenant participation in Highland and the recognition of this by the Scottish Housing Regulator; and
- ii. results of the latest comprehensive tenant survey detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

5. Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator Aithris Bharantais Bhliadhnaid gu Riaghladair Taigheadais na h-Alba

There had been circulated Report No HP/14/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members commended the Service on the high level of compliance with the annual gas servicing requirements specified in the Framework for 2020-21.

Thereafter, it was confirmed that Mrs B McAllister would be provided with the information produced by Environmental Health in terms of the oversight of the new legislation concerning the standards of fire and smoke alarms. Clarification would also be sought from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service as to whether direct financial support was available for owner occupiers.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Annual Assurance Statement for 2021 detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.

6. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget Monitoring Statement to 30 June 2021
Aithris Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais agus Neo-thaigheadais gu 30 an t-Og Mhios

There had been circulated Report No HP/15/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- confirmation was sought and provided that the repairs and maintenance budget as presented did not include the expenditure available from reserves as a result of the underspend from the previous year being rolled forward to the current year;
- an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the Capital from Current Revenue (CFCR) budget and confirmation that Members at a future meeting would be asked to consider the future strategy for CFCR;
- clarification was sought and provided that loan charges were increasing and this was a significant issue for HRA and was reflected in the variance on the 'other costs' budget;
- the maintenance of open spaces in the Council's housing estates had fallen behind in some areas and was a poor reflection on the Council, and whether budget for the day to day maintenance of open spaces available to the Amenities Service was sufficient;
- an amenities review was being progressed by the Redesign Board and this would include service level agreements and the impact of the pandemic on some open spaces. The Rate your Estate reports undertaken by the Housing Service would also be shared with the Amenities Service to review feedback and identify areas for improvement;
- the need for more planned cyclical painting of doors, windows, etc be carried out to Council houses with the target of works being undertaken every five years. It was confirmed that an update on this matter would be provided to a Ward 13 (Inverness West) Business Meeting and an analysis of planned maintenance undertaken and shared with Members. In the meantime any other specific issues could be picked up at a local level; and
- the potential to undertake more regular external maintenance in respect of homeless accommodation. It was requested that Members advise the Head of Housing and Building Maintenance of any specific concerns in this regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the final outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account and non-Housing Revenue Account 2020/21;
- ii. **APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account and non-Housing Revenue Account 2021/22 for the period to June 2021;
- iii. **AGREED** that £2.8m of HRA balances be earmarked for additional expenditure on repairs and environmental works delayed due to Covid-19; and
- iv. **NOTED** that an update would be provided to a Ward 13 Business Meeting in relation to cyclical painting and an analysis of planned maintenance would be undertaken and shared with Members.

**7. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report to 30 June 2021
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais gu 30 an t-Og Mhios**

Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie as a Director of High Life Highland declared a non-financial interest in this item 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 him from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HP/16/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

As an update to the report, it was clarified that an updated Strategic Housing Investment Programme would be the subject of a report to the Committee later in the calendar year and that the slippage highlighted at paragraph 5.1 of the report related to the HRA mainstream programme rather than the total programme. Thereafter, an explanation was sought and provided in relation to the projected underspend on the HRA Capital Programme 2019/22.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the final outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2020/21; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2021/22 for the period to 30 June 2021.

**8. Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Monitoring Report to 30 June 2021
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Teachd-a-steach Sheirbheisean Rianachd Cuid-seilbh & Ghoireasan gu 30 an t-Og Mhios**

Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thomson as Directors of High Life Highland declared a non-financial interest in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HP/17/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the need for the Council as a whole to acknowledge the challenges and pressures in relation to the budget in the current year due to the ongoing impact of covid on construction materials and costs, contractor capacity and tender costs and that it would be a significant achievement if the forecasted year end position was realised; and
- an explanation was sought and provided on the impact of the roll out of the extended free school meals provision on the budget. It was confirmed that further information would be provided to Members at the next meeting on the costs involved, any additional external funding being provided to support the roll out, and in relation to capital works.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the revenue outturn position for the 2020/21 financial year;
- ii. that based on the best available information to date, a service budget gap of £1.345m to the end of 2021/22 was presently forecast;
- iii. that the budget gap might change positively or negatively depending on the application of expenditure and recruitment controls, adjusting services to meet previously agreed budget savings; in-year income recovery, identifying new income and procurement opportunities, drawing down any further Government grant support and any new Covid related recovery costs;
- iv. the progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery; and
- v. that further adjustments would be made in future quarterly reporting to reflect the updated apportionment of costs across the new Service structure.

9. Capital Programme – Outturn for 2020/21 and Q1 2021/22 and Progress Update
Prògram Calpa – Fìor Shuidheachadh airson 2020/21 agus C1 2021/22 agus Cunntas às Ùr air Adhartas

Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thomson as Directors of High Life Highland declared a non-financial interest in this item but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No HP/18/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the content of the report had and would continue to evolve from meeting to meeting taking into account Members comments on the information they wished included and thanks were expressed to officers for the improvements made to date;
- noting that budgets had been reprofiled and concern that details of the original budget be provided in reports to allow Members to monitor where over/underspends were occurring; and

- confirmation was sought and provided that it was proposed to report on variances on individual project budgets in future reports to the Committee baselined against the revised capital programme that was due to be reported to the full Council meeting in October 2021.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- capital outturn position for the 2020/21 financial year;
- financial position for the 2021/22 financial year as of 30 June 2021 and the estimated year end forecast; and
- progress made with the Education and Strategic Asset Management projects in the Council's capital programme.

10. **Housing Performance Report** **Aithisg Coileanaidh Taigheadais**

There had been circulated Report No HP/19/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the potential for the performance indicators targets to be reviewed, specific reference being made to reducing the current target for completion of emergency repairs;
- in relation to complaints and enquires performance, the potential for information in relation to complaints received by Councillors to be included in the report on the basis this would show trends and potentially result in fewer complaints to MSPs; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that officers would respond directly to Mrs A Maclean in relation to how savings on High Life Highland's energy costs would be achieved.

The Committee

- NOTED** the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021; and
- AGREED**:- (a) that the target levels for the performance indicators be reviewed, and (b) to investigate the potential for performance information in relation to complaints received by Councillors to be included in the report.

The meeting was closed at 12.55pm.