

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held remotely on Thursday 20 January 2021 at 10.30am.

Present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mr A Graham
Mr R Bremner (left at 10.57am)	Mr A Jarvie
Miss J Campbell	Mrs B McAllister
Mr M Finlayson	Mr D Mackay
Mr C Fraser	Mrs A MacLean
Mr L Fraser	Ms J Tilt

Non-Members also present:

Mrs H Carmichael	Mr K Gowans
Mr A Christie	Mr A Henderson
Ms S Fanet	Mr D Louden
Mr J Finlayson	

Officials in Attendance:

Mr M Rodgers, Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
Ms E Denovan, Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance
Mr D Goldie, Head of Housing and Building Maintenance, Housing and Property
Mr B Cameron, Housing Policy and Investment 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

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

Mr L Fraser in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr B Allan, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr C Macleod, Mrs F Robertson, Ms E Roddick and Mr P Siggers.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Declarations of Interest: Mr L Fraser declared an interest relating to all items on the agenda on the grounds he undertook work for the Housing Service in Nairn. Having declared an interest and in accordance with paragraph 5.6 of the revised Code of Conduct, Mr Fraser left for the remainder of the online meeting and was not present for any of the discussion or determination of Item 3 below.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.35am and reconvened at 10.45am.

The Vice Chair, Mr M Finlayson, took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

**3. Housing Revenue Account Estimates 2022/23
Tuairmsean Teachd-a-steach HRA 2022/23**

There had been circulated Report No HP/01/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern at the impact of rising energy costs and inflation on tenant incomes and ability to pay their rent and the need to ensure tenants were provided with the details of the relevant organisations and helplines offering advice and assistance. It was confirmed that officers would ensure that this information was provided to tenants;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the level of increase in rents for non-HRA leased property would be similar to that for Council house rents with the exception of nine older leases which made provision for annual rent increase on a different basis. Officers would have discussions with any tenants experiencing affordability issues;
- an assurance was sought and provided that the HRA Revenue Budget had been set at a level which would maintain the current level of service provision in respect of day to day repairs and would have no adverse impact on the delivery of the Council house new build programme;
- an assurance was sought that the budget for maintenance of open spaces and the environment in Council housing estates would be increased in line with the repairs and maintenance budget, concern being expressed in relation to the condition of some estates in the area. It was confirmed that clarification would be sought as to whether there was any uplift in the recharges payable by the Service to the Amenities Team and an update provided to the next meeting;
- the need to move forward at pace in terms of achieving net zero carbon before 2045 and a just transition for all Council tenants in terms of their heating systems and other issues arising;
- concern at the impact cost of living increases and the relaxation of Covid emergency powers might have on tenants in private accommodation and the additional pressure this might place on the Council's homeless services. It was confirmed that a report on the issues around preventing and alleviating homelessness was to be brought to a future meeting of the Committee;
- clarification was sought on the current provision for homeless accommodation, concern being expressed that if the level of uptake was increasing this would reduce the available stock for letting to other applicants on the Council's housing register. It was confirmed that a briefing note would be circulated to Members on the current provision for temporary accommodation and there would be an opportunity for more detailed discussions as part of the future report on homelessness to the Committee;
- concern at the impact of the proposed increase in the Council house rents combined with cost of living increases on tenants on low income and on the level of rent arrears;

- whether the low level of rent increase proposed was prudent for the Council given rising inflation, the potential impact on Council tax levels, the fact Council house rents were significantly lower than open market rents, the significant number of applicants on the Council house waiting list and the potential implications and the new build programme. It was confirmed the recommendation on rent levels had no implications for Council tax or the current new build programme. The proposal sought to achieve a balance in terms of ensuring service provision was sustainable while recognising the cost of living pressures and the Council's overarching duty to protect vulnerable tenants and those experiencing relative or absolute poverty; and
- while the Council house rents in Highland were relatively low compared to other areas in Scotland, the higher cost of living in the Highlands, particularly fuel and energy costs had to be taken into account. There had been wide consultation with tenants and the majority had supported the proposed rent increase.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. the draft HRA Revenue Budget for 2022/23 (attached as Appendix 1 to the report);
- ii. a **1%** increase for council house rents for 2022/23;
- iii. that this percentage increase (**1%**) be applied to all residential HRA rents and service charges and to Gypsy/Traveller site pitches;
- iv. that non-HRA rents for leased property be increased as stipulated in existing contracts;
- v. that a report on the issues around preventing and alleviating homelessness be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee

The meeting was closed at 11.25am.