

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Housing and Property Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 31 August 2022 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin (substitute)	Mr A Jarvie
Mr B Boyd	Mrs I Mackenzie
Mr R Bremer (remotely)	Mr R MacKintosh
Mr I Brown	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms J McEwan
Mr L Fraser	Mrs M Paterson
Mr A Graham	Mr K Rosie (remotely)

Non-Members also present:

Mr J Bruce	Mr A MacKintosh
Mr A Christie	Ms K MacLean
Mrs B McAllister	Mr T MacLennan
Mr J McGillivray	Mrs T Robertson

Also in Attendance:

Mr A Dick, Tenant Representative
Ms L Richardson, Tenant Representative

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 R Campbell, Estates Strategy Manager, Housing and Property
Mrs L Dunn, Principal Administrator, Performance and Governance
Ms A Macrae, 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.**

Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Grafton, Mr B Lobban, Mr C Munro, Mr A Rhind and Mr A Sinclair.

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

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statement:-

Item 7: Mr L Fraser

**3. Recess Powers
Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 30 June 2022 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Committee.

**4. Highland Small Communities Housing Trust
Urras Taigheadais Choimhearsnachdan Beaga na Gàidhealtachd**

The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust was a registered charity set up to help rural communities secure long term solutions to their local housing needs. They represent a wide range of interests including communities, local government, landowners, crofters and housing associations, and were funded by the Scottish Government and various charitable trusts and foundations.

In this regard, nominations were received as follows:-

- Mr B Boyd
- Mrs M Paterson
- Mrs A MacLean

On a vote being taken, Mr Boyd received 9 votes, Mrs Paterson received 9 votes and Mrs MacLean received 6 votes, the votes cast having been as follows:-

Votes for Mr B Boyd

Ms S Atkin, Mr B Boyd, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr L Fraser, Mr A Graham, Mr R MacKintosh, Mr K Rosie.

Votes for Mrs M Paterson

Ms S Atkin, Mr R Bremner, Mr I Brown, Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair, Mr L Fraser, Mr R MacKintosh, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs M Paterson, Mr K Rosie.

Votes for Mrs A MacLean

Mr B Boyd, Mr A Graham, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs I Mackenzie, Mrs A MacLean, Mrs M Paterson.

The Committee **AGREED** Mr B Boyd and Mrs M Paterson be appointed to represent the Highland Council on the Highland Small Communities Trust.

5. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Non-HRA Budget: Final Outturn 2021/22 and Monitoring Statement to 30 June 2022
Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais agus Buidseat Neo-Theachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach 2021/22 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh gu 30 Ògmhios 2022

There had been circulated Report No HP/06/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the impact on the budget in cases where a property had not been looked after by the tenants and the processes in place to identify risk tenants and focus support. It was confirmed that an analysis would be brought back to Members on the volume and the costs involved;
- noting that while there had been an increase in the volume of homeless presentations, there had been a reduction in numbers in temporary accommodation due to the work of staff through the rapid rehousing transition plan and engagement with longer term tenants;
- an update was sought and provided on the impact on loan charges and levels of borrowing associated with cost of living increases and the significant investment required to meet energy efficiency standards and net zero carbon targets. Difficult decisions would be required in terms of affordability and prioritisation and in relation to rent levels for the next financial year;
- clarification was sought and provided that the Service had caught up with the backlog of day to day repairs and was making good progress with cyclical repairs; and
- concern as to why some Housing Association properties had been vacant for a significant period of time when there was such a high demand for housing. The Head of Housing & Building Maintenance confirmed that if Mrs B McAllister could provide him with details of the specific properties he would contact the Housing Associations at a senior level on this matter.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the final outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account and non-Housing Revenue Account 2021/22, including the use and movement in reserves; and
- APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account and non-Housing Revenue Account 2022/23 for the period to 30 June 2022.

6. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring: Outturn Report for 2021/22 and Quarter 1 Monitoring Report to 30 June 2022
Sgrùdadh Calpa Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Aithisg Fìor Shuidheachaidh airson 2021/22 agus Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteal 1 gu 30 Ògmhios 2022

There had been circulated Report No HP/07/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the potential to fast track works to properties without insulation in response to rising energy costs and before the onset of winter. In response, reference was made to the challenges in progressing priority insulation works due to delays in the construction industry, high tender costs and lack of tender returns;
- the challenges around growing the workforce and increasing the contractor base in the Highlands. Reference was made to the opportunities to work with UHI, other local authorities and the construction industry to achieve a better balance between having an inhouse skills base and relying on external contractors where availability was currently a significant issue;
- an update was sought and provided on the progress being made with energy efficiency works. A report would be brought to a future Committee on the volume and type of works required and costs. Different ways of procuring and delivering works and potential new technologies for heating were also being considered;
- the need for a joined up approach across the Council in response to the cost of living crisis. The Chair provided an assurance that a report was being brought to the full Council on 22 September 2022 on this issue and also referred to the work of the Council's welfare team in providing support to the public;
- the Council had been working in partnership in relation to the Opportunity Cromarty Firth bid and discussions were continuing with UHI. The Council Leader advised that he could keep Members informed regarding the outcome of those discussions;
- there should be more reference to regeneration in reports to the Committee going forward with a particular focus on tackling the voids situation in some areas. It was confirmed that the role of housing in economic regeneration and driving economic growth was a theme in the draft local housing strategy to be brought to a future meeting;
- Members be provided with more detailed information on new build developments in relation to locations, completions, spend, mix of housing, including a breakdown of the numbers of affordable housing, and clarifying the reporting arrangements between the Housing and Property Committee and the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- an assurance was sought and provided that officers would attend the next Inverness West Ward Business Meeting to discuss potential environmental improvements within HRA estates in the area;
- an assurance was provided that the Chair and Executive Chief Officer Housing & Property were in discussions with the Scottish Minister for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government on securing additional funding to support affordable housing and a report on this matter would be submitted to a future meeting; and
- the focus of Members and officers on climate change and achieving net zero carbon targets in the discussion was encouraging and housing was a priority area in this regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the final outturn figures for the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2021/22;

- ii. **APPROVED** the budget position on the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2022/23 for the period to 30 June 2022; and
- iii. **NOTED** that a report would be submitted to a future meeting on additional funding to support affordable housing and that a briefing paper would be circulated to Members providing more detailed information on new build developments in relation to locations, completions, spend, mix of housing including a breakdown of the numbers of affordable housing and clarifying the reporting arrangements between the Housing and Property Committee and the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

7. Property & Facilities Management Services Revenue Budget: Final Outturn for 2021/22 and Monitoring Statement to 30 June 2022

Buidseat Teachd-a-steach Sheirbheisean Seilbh & Ghoireasan: Fìor Shuidheachadh Deireannach airson 2021/22 agus Aithris Sgrùdaidh gu 30 Ògmhios 2022

Transparency Statement: Councillor L Fraser made a Transparency Statement in respect of this item on the agenda in that he had a connection to this item by reason of he provided minor maintenance work in the Nairn area. However, having applied the objective test he did not consider that he had an interest to declare. This is because the work only related to the Nairn area and is a minor allocation of the overall Nairn Area budget. He had requested that this Statement be recorded in the Minutes.

There had been circulated Report No HP/08/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an explanation was sought on progress with the delivery of the Corporate Landlord model in terms of there being an overarching approach to the Council's buildings and assets. It was proposed that a review be undertaken of the implementation of the Corporate Landlord model and the outcome reported to a future meeting;
- clarification was sought and provided on the potential to reduce the cost of utilities in Council buildings and drive behavioural change across the Council and High Life Highland as users in relation to energy consumption;
- in regard to the above, the Service was working with the Climate Change Energy Team on the performance of buildings and to identify the highest users and improve or replace building management systems to reduce costs for the Council;
- the Service's catering and cleaning staff be commended for their excellent work in difficult circumstances throughout the pandemic;
- clarification was sought and provided on the challenges in retaining staff within the Service, at a time when the private sector was offering higher salaries;
- the potential for the Council's investment in training to be clawed back if a member of staff left the Council for another post; and
- the need to sense check with Member input proposals to rationalise buildings and consider occupancy rates given the shift to working from home as a result of Covid and the opportunity to share buildings with public sector partners.

The Committee **NOTED**:

- i. the revenue outturn position for the 2021/22 financial year;
- ii. that based on the best available information to date, a service budget gap of £1.261m to the end of 2022/23 was presently forecast;
- iii. that the budget gap might change positively or negatively depending on the application of expenditure and recruitment controls, filling fee earning posts in an extremely challenging job market, adjusting services to meet previously agreed budget savings; in-year income recovery, identifying new income and procurement opportunities, 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.

The Committee also **AGREED** that a review be undertaken of the Corporate Landlord Model and the outcome reported to a future meeting.

8. Property Capital Monitoring Statement and Progress Update Aithris Sgrùdaidh Calpa Seilbhe agus Cunntas às Ùr air Adhartas

There had been circulated Report No HP/09/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- difficult decisions would be required on the Capital Programme in terms of investment in schools due to significant uplift in costs and associated constraints on funding. However, it was hoped the current position would improve going forward and any slippage would be recovered;
- highlighting the excellent key Education/Early Learning & Childcare projects that had been completed and the quality of work undertaken. In particular, the excellent work achieved through collaboration at Crown Primary in conjunction with Crown Church was commended;
- confirmation was sought and provided that the exercise to assess the capacity pressures facing the school estate over the coming years would be completed in September/October 2022. This would feed into any review of the Capital Programme and help establish priorities for investment in future years;
- an assurance was sought and provided that design work and stakeholder engagements was progressing in respect of major projects;
- a holistic approach was required across the Council in relation to the additional pressures new housing development placed on the Council for example on schools and infrastructure; and
- confirmation was sought and provided that the RAG system for reporting was being adopted and would be applied to all major projects once there was further clarity on the Capital Programme.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the final position for the 2021/22 financial year;

- ii. the position for the first quarter of the 2022/23 financial year, and the estimated year-end position; and
- iii. the progress made with the projects referred to in the report.

**9. Draft Directorate Service Plan 2022/23
Plana Seirbheis Taigheadais is Seilbhe 2022/23**

There had been circulated Report No HP/10/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

The ECO Housing and Property advised that if Members wished to consider the draft Plan in more detail they could submit comments and observations outwith the meeting.

In discussion, the Directorate Vision was welcomed with specific reference to the importance of protecting the vulnerable. It was hoped the key objectives could be achieved over the term of the Council.

Thereafter, the ECO advised that he would have discussions with Mrs A Maclean outwith the meeting in regard to where the '20 minute neighbourhood' concept should sit within the draft Plan.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the draft Directorate Service Plan for 2022/23; and
- ii. that the draft Plan would be subject to review following the approval of a new Council Programme and Corporate Plan and completion of development work outlined in section 5 of the report.

**10. Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator
Aithris Bharantachaidh Bhliadhnaidh gu Riaghladair Taigheadais na h-Alba**

There had been circulated Report No HP/11/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- it was disappointing that some residents were restricting access to Council properties in relation to the new legislation for the fitting of smoke and heat alarms;
- an assurance was sought and provided that provision had been made for deaf tenants in the specification for electricians fitting smoke and heat alarms; and
- an explanation was sought and provided on the arrangements for customer surveys and tenant feedback during the year, including on the presentation and format of information. Discussions would be held at tenants forums in regard to the timing of the next tenant survey and consideration was being given to the mechanisms for the annual rent consultation with tenants due to commence in November 2022.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Annual Assurance Statement for 2022 detailed at Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** that a Tenant Engagement Update would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee on 17 November 2022.

**11. Annual Monitoring Report 2021/2022: Highland Housing Register
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Bhliadhnail 2021/2022: Clàr Taigheadais na
Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No HP/12/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the report highlighted the significant pressure on housing in Badenoch and Strathspey and this validated the Council's decision to apply for the area to be designated as a Short Term Let Control Area. The application was with Scottish Ministers and if approved it would take a period of time to monitor the impacts on the Register;
- noting that the issues around private sector landlords selling properties and making their tenants homeless and the Council's policy on purchasing private sector properties would be picked up in more detail in the discussion on the Highland Housing Register Allocation Policy review at a future Committee;
- it would be helpful if unfurnished temporary accommodation could be provided so that tenants did not have to pay for storage and in light of complaints about the quality of furnishings provided by the Council. It was confirmed that the feasibility of providing unfurnished temporary accommodation would be investigated;
- the assistance provided to young people to help them secure their first tenancy given the lack of suitable properties. It was confirmed there was a focus on one bedroom properties in terms of purchases on the open market. There was also a shared tenancy initiative and additional level of support provided to young people; and
- it would be helpful to have further discussion and a briefing on the report at the City of Inverness Area Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the:-

- i. information contained in the Annual Monitoring Report on housing allocations which demonstrated that the policy was achieving its objectives;
- ii. main issues being considered as part of the Highland Housing Register Allocation Policy review which would be reported to a future Committee; and
- iii. feasibility of providing unfurnished temporary accommodation would be investigated.

12. Housing Performance Report 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022
Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais 1 Giblean 2021 – 31 Màrt 2022

There had been circulated Report No HP/13/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- information be provided on the number of pre-payment electricity meters in Council properties;
- noting that it was hoped the Tenant Grant Fund established by the Scottish Government would continue this year, although this had not yet been confirmed;
- the support being provided by the Council to some of the agencies offering energy advice and the ongoing discussions with AliEnergy who provided more specialist energy advice support to tenants;
- the potential for the sum of £80,000 to fund additional support to assist tenants directly with specialist, independent energy advice and access to financial support to be increased. It was confirmed that investigations would be undertaken to determine the feasibility of increasing this support up to the value of £160,000; and
- the impact of the cost of living crisis on rent arrears going forward. It was explained that this was difficult to predict and would also depend on the level of external funding and support available and ensuring this was targeted to the right tenants.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022; and
- ii. **AGREED** to fund additional support to assist tenants directly with specialist, independent energy advice and access to financial support as described in paragraph 7.10 of the report. The cost of £80,000 would be met from within the existing Housing Revenue Account budget however investigations would be undertaken to determine the feasibility of increasing this support up to the value of £160,000.

The meeting was closed at 1.45pm.