

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

SKYPE MEETING, 1 APRIL, 2021

Present: Councillors A Stirling (Chair), A Allan, D Beagrie (as substitute for Councillor J Whyte) G Blackett, M Buchan, P Gibb, V Harper, A Hassan, D Mair, C Pike, G Reynolds, A Ross, M Roy, I Walker and S Wallace.

Apologies: Councillor J Whyte.

Officers: Director of Infrastructure Services, Head of Service (Housing), Corporate Finance Manager, Area Manager (Garioch), Chief Superintendent G Macdonald, Police Scotland, Local Area Manager, Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Coordinator, Strategic Development Officer (Strategy and Business Services), Team Leader (Housing and Building Standards), Principal Solicitor (Governance) (Lauren Cowie), and Senior Committee Officer (N David).

INTRODUCTION

The Committee concurred with the Chair in expressing condolences to Councillor Whyte and her family for their recent bereavement.

1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked members if they had any interests to declare in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No interests were declared.

2. RESOLUTIONS

A. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- (2) to consider, where an equality impact assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

B. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the items specified below so as to avoid disclosure of exempt information of the classes described in the undernoted paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

Item No	Paragraph No of Schedule 7A
11	8 and 10

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE OF 18 FEBRUARY 2021

The Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 18 February 2021 had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

4. PROGRESS WITH ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETINGS

There was circulated a report which updated members on the progress made against outstanding actions agreed at previous meetings of the Communities Committee.

The Committee **agreed** to acknowledge the position with regard to there being no outstanding actions from previous meetings and also those which had been completed since the last meeting.

5. TACKLING POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES – PROGRESS REPORT

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 5 September 2019 (Item 6), there was circulated a report dated 3 March 2021, by the Director of Business Services which provided an update on progress made covering the work of the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Strategic Partnership Group, including the actions within the revised Child Poverty Action Plan which also supported the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priority 'Reducing Poverty'.

The report explained that the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Strategic Partnership Group led on the priority to reduce poverty across Aberdeenshire. The Partnership Group had recently requested that a review of the actions and outcomes within the Child Poverty Action Plan be reviewed in light of Covid 19. There was a recognition that the full extent of the pandemic had not been realised. However carrying out a review on the plan at this time would ensure the emerging needs were addressed. A short life working group was established to carry out this review and the partners agreed that a holistic approach to tackling poverty and inequalities was required, without losing the focus of reducing child poverty. The presentation of the information was key to ensure the plan reflected the complex nature of this agenda and how collectively the partners improved outcomes through reducing poverty and inequalities. The existing Action Plan was also recently considered by Area Committees and the Education and Children's Services Committee. Their comments, attached as Appendix 2, were integrated into the refreshed action plan, attached as

Appendix 3. The updated format highlighted progress made and those areas that required further development, which would inform service plans, the Community Planning Poverty Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) and partners' recovery plans.

Following discussion, the Committee **agreed**:-

- (1) to acknowledge and support the progress made in tackling this agenda and the feedback from the Area Committees and Education and Children Services Committee;
- (2) to the new format and actions within the revised Child Poverty Action Plan;
- (3) that specific concerns which the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Group should consider as part of the development of future plans should include remote rural living - social isolation and financial impact; and
- (4) that a briefing note be issued to all Councillors on the economic development impact, particularly focussing on the increase in unemployment.

6. TACKLING POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES – ALLOCATION OF BUDGET

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 5 September 2019 (Item 6) there was circulated a report dated 3 March 2021, by the Director of Business Services, which explained that the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Group had identified areas of investment which met the Council's priorities. The report outlined the proposed budget spend for 2021/ 22.

The report explained that the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Strategic Partnership annually undertook a review of priorities and outcomes and identified improvement areas. The impact of Covid-19 had resulted in the priorities being reviewed and areas of development had been informed by the work highlighted in the report Towards a Fairer Aberdeenshire 2020, which had previously been presented to the Committee. The proposed budget and projects which would deliver on the priorities and outcomes were outlined in Appendix 2.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) confirm the budget allocation for 2021 / 2022; and
- (2) approve the grants to be awarded, as summarised at paragraph 5.4 in the report.

7. POLICY REGISTER ANNUAL REPORTING

There was circulated a report dated 17 February 2021, by the Director of Business Services which detailed the current position of policies that were delegated to the Communities Committee.

The Committee **agreed**:-

- (1) to acknowledge the policies delegated to Communities Committee that had been reviewed during 2020;
- (2) to the proposed plans for reviewing those policies that had expired, as well as those that were approaching their review date, to be considered at future meetings of the Committee; and
- (3) that there were no gaps or review requirements to be identified as part of the agreed annual overview of the Council's Policy Framework, as per section 3.5 of the Policy Development and Review Framework in Part 4B of the Scheme of Governance.

8. POLICE SCOTLAND – THEMATIC REPORT – FRAUD

There was circulated a report dated 5 March 2021, by the Director of Business Services regarding the current threat presented in respect of fraud, particularly non-contact and cyber-enabled, to those most vulnerable within the community.

The report reminded Members that following a verbal update by Police Scotland on fraud at the meeting of the Committee on 5 November 2020, it was agreed a thematic report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to advise on the current forms of online and cyber-enabled fraud and how they impacted on the elderly or vulnerable within the Aberdeenshire. The report also highlighted the ongoing work by Police Scotland and partners across Aberdeenshire Council to prevent this crime type through education in the community and the targeting and disruption of perpetrators.

During the discussion it was highlighted that there has been a steady and consistent increase in reported non-contact fraud across all areas of Scotland, including Aberdeenshire. A portion of this may have been as a direct result of increased internet usage and online investment activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, prior to the pandemic this had already been assessed as an escalating crime trend.

The Committee **agreed** to acknowledge the detail within the report which outlined the current fraud types and threat, how this impacted on the most vulnerable (particularly the elderly and dementia sufferers), and the ongoing activity to prevent and disrupt fraud and support those targeted.

9. HOUSING RENEWAL AREA POLICY

There was circulated a report dated 15 January 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which explained that the Housing Renewal Area Policy had been reviewed to take account of relevant Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023 outcomes and sought approval of the policy.

The report outlined that a local authority could designate a Housing Renewal Area when it considered that a significant number of houses in a locality were substandard; and/or the appearance or the state of repair of any house in the locality was adversely affecting the area; and where officers believed it to be the most appropriate action to take to address these issues. Aberdeenshire Council's criteria

for identification of a potential Housing Renewal Area were detailed in the policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge the comments received from Area Committees; and
- (2) approve the reviewed Housing Renewal Area Policy.

10. BELOW TOLERABLE STANDARD POLICY

There was circulated a report dated 1 March 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which explained that the Below Tolerable Standard Policy had been reviewed to take account of the impending legislation changes and the relevant Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023 outcome and that the purpose of the report was to approve the policy.

The report explained that the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 required local authorities to include a Below Tolerable Standard policy within their Local Housing Strategies. This policy had been reviewed to take account of Aberdeenshire Council's current Local Housing Strategy and impending legislation changes. The Tolerable Standard was a basic level of repair that a property must meet to make it fit to live in. Anything short of this could be defined as "Below Tolerable Standard". The definition of the Tolerable Standard was detailed within the Below Tolerable Standard Policy which was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge the comments received from Area Committees; and
- (2) approve the reviewed Below Tolerable Standard Policy.

11. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (HIP) 2017-2021

There was circulated a joint report dated 4 March 2021, by the Directors of Business Services and Infrastructure Services which provided an update on the progress of the delivery of the Housing Improvement Programme for Year 2 and the impact of the Covid-19 on the programme.

The report confirmed that four contractors were on site undertaking the four year Housing Improvement Programme of works which consisted of multiple upgrades to be undertaken at a property, in one programme. The report also outlined, in detail, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge the current position with regard to progress on the delivery of the Housing Improvement Programme for Year 2;
- (2) acknowledge the forecast expenditure for the Financial Year 2020/2021 on the Housing Improvement Programme; and

- (3) endorse the current position with regard to the current impact the Covid-19 pandemic, and the subsequent UK and Scottish Government shutdown of non-essential construction work, had and would have on the future progress of the Housing Improvement Programme.

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