

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

SKYPE MEETING, 3 JUNE, 2021

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

Apologies: Councillors G Blackett.

Officers: Director of Infrastructure Services; Head of Service (Housing), Corporate Finance Manager; Head of Communities and Partnerships, Senior Local Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service; Business Strategy Manager; Housing Manager (Housing and Building Standards) (Andrew Mackie); Housing Manager (Housing and Building Standards) (Allan Jones); Housing Manager (Housing) (Dave Thomson); Service Manager, Live Life Aberdeenshire (John Cornfield); Service Manager, Live Life Aberdeenshire (Chris Murphy); Principal Solicitor (Governance) (Lauren Cowie), and Senior Committee Officer (N David).

In attendance: Councillors R Cassie and A McKelvie (for Items 7 and 9).

1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Councillor Allan declared an interest in Item 12 as a member of the Tenant Participation Group. Having applied the objective test she concluded that it was so remote and insignificant that she would remain and participate.

Councillor Hassan declared an interest in Item 13 as a substitute member of the Gordon Highlanders Regimental Museum Advisory Board. Having applied the objective test he concluded that it was so remote and insignificant that he would remain and participate.

Councillor Walker declared an interest in Item 15 as an NHS employee. Having applied the objective test she concluded that it was so remote and insignificant that she would remain and participate.

No other 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
16	8 and 10
17	8

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE OF 1 APRIL, 2021

The Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 1 April, 2021 had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record to be signed by the Chair at a later date.

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. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AS AT 30 APRIL 2021

There was circulated a report dated 12 May, 2021, by the Director of Business Services which provided an update on the financial performance information pertaining to the areas of service delivery for which the Communities Committee had responsibility for.

The financial information in the report included a forecast of the expected levels of expenditure and income by Type of Spend and by Budget Page for the financial year. Major variances of £100,000 or more were indicated by a red flag.

The report explained that the Revised Revenue Budget for 2021/22 for the Communities Committee amounted to £139,480,000, taking into account the service savings approved by Full Council and budget movements of £1.804 million as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The approved Revenue Budget for 2021/22 included £827,000 of service savings, of which £78,000 related to general fund Housing services and £749,000 related to Live Life Aberdeenshire. The approved Capital Budget for 2021/22 in respect of the Communities Committee amounted to £5.649 million. Full Council would receive a report to the meeting on 24 June, 2021 setting out the 2020/21 year-end position and this may, subject to approval by Full Council, result in a revision to the Capital Budget.

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

- (1) acknowledge the financial information and forecast position as at 30 April, 2021 and endorse the budget movements set out in the report; and
- (2) acknowledge the progress in achieving the agreed savings, as detailed in Appendix 3.

5A. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AS AT 30 APRIL 2021

There was circulated a report dated 19 May, 2021, by the Director of Business Services which provided the Committee with financial performance information relating to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The financial information in the report included a forecast of the expected levels of expenditure and income by Type of Spend and by Budget Page for the financial year. Major variances of £100,000 or more were indicated by a red flag. The Revised Revenue Budget for 2021/22 for HRA amounted to £66,529,000. The budget allocations were broken down by Type of Spend. The approved HRA Revenue Budget for 2021/22 had been prepared after consultation with tenants and therefore reflected the priorities resulting from this vital engagement. Housing anticipated the Capital Plan would progress as planned and would monitor it regularly during the financial year. The New Build Housing Programme had been developed and re-profiled and as a result, forecast expenditure in 2021/22 would be £6.323 million lower than expected.

Following discussion, the Committee **agreed** to acknowledge the financial and forecast position, as at 30 April, 2021.

6. CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

There was circulated a report dated 2 May, 2021, by the Director of Business Services which provided an update on the Corporate Improvement Plan.

The report explained that the Corporate Improvement Plan was presented to Audit Committee on 4 February, 2021. It was acknowledged that a number of actions,

particularly in respect of the Annual Governance Statement action plans 2019/20 and 2020/21, were duplications and that consolidation and alignment would provide clarity. The Audit Committee agreed to the removal of duplicate actions to streamline the plan and ensure resources are focused appropriately and effectively. Thereafter actions for consolidation were agreed by Audit Committee on 25 March, 2021. The Plan attached to the report to the Communities Committee was considered by Audit Committee on 20 May, 2021 and was extracted from Pentana, the Council's corporate performance and risk platform, on 30 April 2021.

The report highlighted that whilst the number of overdue items had increased from 13 to 25, the number of completed actions had also increased from 28 to 39. A number of the actions that had become overdue had due dates of 31 March and 30 April 2021. The overdue actions in the Best Value Plan had been subject to additional scrutiny by the Strategic Leadership Team and assurances provided by Officers that the majority of these would be completed by June 2021. Additional senior management scrutiny was continuing with a view to ensuring that actions were progressed and completed as quickly as possible and explanations provided where deadlines were not achieved.

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

- (1) acknowledge the Corporate Improvement Plan ("the Plan"), as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) note that the Plan was considered by the Audit Committee on 20 May, 2021;
- (3) receive quarterly updates; and
- (4) that the next quarterly update should highlight which actions had now been updated and the dates which, as of now, had not been met, were now completed.

7. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Councillor Cassie, Chair of the Audit Committee and Councillor McKelvie, Vice Chair of the Audit Committee, were present for this item and took part in the discussion.

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Audit Committee of 25 March, 2021 (Item 10), when approval had been given to the process and timetable for the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement 2020/21 and the proposed schedule of engagement and dialogue between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee and the Policy Committees, there was circulated a report dated 17 May, 2021, by the Director of Business Services Committee which asked Members to note and comment on the draft Annual Governance Statement 2020/21.

Councillor Cassie, Chair of the Audit Committee, and Councillor McKelvie, Vice Chair of the Audit Committee, were present for this item and took part in the discussion. The Committee heard from the Chair and Vice Chair of the Audit Committee on the work of the Audit Committee, including a self-evaluation exercise undertaken, the process and preparation of the Annual Governance Statement and opportunities to work together to achieve the best outcomes for the authority.

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

- (1) note the draft Annual Governance Statement (“the draft Statement”), as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) note that the draft Statement was a work in progress and further amendments would be made, as detailed in the report;
- (3) note that the draft Statement would be presented to all other Policy Committees and would be subject to change prior to presentation and sign off at the meeting of the Audit Committee on 1 July 2021;
- (4) note that the Annual Scrutiny Report formed an integral part of the review of annual effectiveness activities and would be included within the Statement;
- (5) acknowledge details of the Committee’s contribution to providing assurance that it had complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and ensured that the Code was operating effectively in practice; and
- (6) a briefing note being issued to Committee on the aligning of budgets to outcomes and providing an update on the progress and challenges in relation to this.

8. SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT

There was circulated a report dated 2 May, 2021, by the Director of Business Services which provided information on how the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was performing against key performance measures and associated targets, as set out in the Aberdeenshire Fire and Rescue Plan 2017- 20, approved at the meeting of the Communities Committee on 9 December, 2017.

The report provided an overview of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service performance in the Aberdeenshire area for the period 1st April, 2020 to 31 March, 2021. The report gave the opportunity for Members to maintain scrutiny of significant fire and rescue activities, to achieve good outcomes for the residents of Aberdeenshire. The Aberdeenshire Local Fire and Rescue Plan supported the local authority’s priorities with a key focus on the health and wellbeing of people throughout Aberdeenshire, providing early intervention and education in relation to improving community safety outcomes and protecting the environment and economy through both prevention and protection measures and operational response.

The Committee **agreed** to acknowledge the performance report relating to performance from 1 April, 2020 to 31 March, 2021 for the Aberdeenshire area of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

9. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2020-2021

Councillor Cassie, Chair of the Audit Committee and Councillor McKelvie, Vice Chair of the Audit Committee, were present for this item and took part in the discussion.

There was circulated a report dated 12 May, 2021 by the Director of Business Services, which (1) explained that the Annual Scrutiny Report was part of the monitoring process allowing the Committee to keep track of progress and ensure any agreed actions had been implemented, (2) provided an opportunity for the Committee to reflect on scrutiny undertaken and identify any future scrutiny requirements as part of an annual programme of activity, and (3) provided the Committee with an annual report outlining its scrutiny activity in the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Following discussion, the Committee **agreed** to note the activities outlined in the report and that the Communities Committee would continue to identify future scrutiny requirements.

10. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN REVIEW

There was circulated a report dated 29 April, 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which outlined the findings of an independent review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan completed in March 2021 by Arneil Johnston, Business Management Consultants.

The report explained that the Review reflected key challenges currently influencing the delivery of Housing services. The findings outlined in Appendix 1 to the report confirmed that the following factors had been considered: assessment of current rent levels and affordability; the development of a revised baseline business plan and updated assumptions; a review of investment plans for current stock and how this compared with peers; scenarios for rental options; the latest new build investment programme and capacity to extend current plans; a review of the housing debt profile to ensure debt affordability thresholds were not breached over the 30 year term; and impact assessment of potential energy efficiency measures.

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

- (1) acknowledge the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the HRA Business Plan Review, as detailed in Appendix 1;
- (2) instruct the Head of Housing and Building Standards to consider the key conclusions and recommendations of the Review within workstreams currently being developed by the Rent Strategy Member Officer Working Group;
- (3) support the recommendation to enable an annual review of HRA Business Plan assumptions and to request that the Head of Housing and Building Standards provide Committee with regular updates; and
- (4) request a full review of central recharges to ensure transparency, demonstrate value for money and to comply with HRA Guidance.

11. RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITION PLAN UPDATE

There was circulated a report dated 11 May, 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which provided an update on the progress being made by the Housing

Service on the actions identified in the Aberdeenshire Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) 2019-2024.

The report provided an update on the implementation of Year 2 of the Aberdeenshire Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2019-2024, in terms of developing a rapid rehousing approach to meeting the needs of homeless households and those at risk of homelessness. It addressed the impact of Covid 19 on the delivery of Year 2 actions and the homelessness service.

The report highlighted that in June 2021 the Council would submit the second monitoring report to the Scottish Government outlining spend of the RRTP funding and giving an update on progress made in Year 2 of the RRTP. The monitoring report was attached as Appendix 1. It provided detail on the range of activities carried out during 2020/21 and illustrated spend of the funding provided.

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

- (1) to acknowledge the activities being undertaken jointly by Aberdeenshire Council Housing Service and partners to deliver the actions identified within the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2019-24; and
- (2) that a further update on progress be submitted to the Committee in twelve months.

12. TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY UPDATE

With reference to the meeting of the Committee of 5 September, 2019 (Item 11), there was circulated a report dated 30 April, 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which provided an update on progress towards the development of a new approach to tenant participation within Aberdeenshire following the approved amended Strategy.

The report explained that the Strategy proposed an innovative approach to engagement following an extensive consultation process with support offered by the Scottish Government sponsored 'Next Steps' programme. Aberdeenshire Council had a statutory and regulatory duty to produce a Strategy that must outline how it intended to involve tenants in the decision-making process and to ensure that appropriate resources were identified to ensure that this obligation was fulfilled.

The report highlighted that the Housing Service had faced key challenges in progressing objectives set by tenants, elected members and staff who engaged in the development of the new Strategy. Challenges had been experienced because of Covid 19 restrictions that had significantly impacted on the ability to progress most of the key objectives set. It had been necessary to rely on a range of initiatives to ensure a suitable level of engagement with tenants and service users. Housing remained fully committed to developing opportunities for a wide range of tenants to scrutinize the delivery of services and had been successful in mobilising service users to engage in groups covering Communications, the Housing Revenue Account and Asset Management. Restrictions introduced as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic had severely restricted tenant engagement activities, however steps had been taken to utilise technology to ensure continuation of tenant group meetings.

Tenant consultation on the structure of strategic groups had begun in order to put a framework in place where tenants would be the primary lead of groups rather than council officers.

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

- (1) to acknowledge the progress made and challenges faced in the implementation of the Tenant Participation Strategy (2019-2029); and
- (2) that a further update be provided to Committee in six to nine months.

13. MUSEUM SERVICES POLICIES

There was circulated a report dated 29 April, 2021, by the Director of Education and Children's Services which presented six updated Aberdeenshire Council Museums Service Policies (2020-25) to the Communities Committee.

The report explained that in May 2015 Aberdeenshire Council's Education, Learning and Leisure Committee approved museum policies pertaining to Collections Development, Entry, Exit, Loss, Loans In and Loans Out of museum objects which applied to operations at Live Life Aberdeenshire facilities; the Discovery Centre / Museum HQ, Aberdeenshire Farming Museum, Arbuthnot Museum and Banchory Museum. Approval of the updated policies was essential to maintain Spectrum 5.0 museum documentation procedural standards, and ultimately fulfil national Accreditation requirements set by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS). The updated policies formed appendices to the report.

The Committee **agreed** to endorse Aberdeenshire Council's Museums Service Policies pertaining to Collections Development, Entry, Exit, Loss, Loans In and Loans Out of museum objects belonging to Aberdeenshire Council, as detailed in Section 4 of the report.

14. LIVE LIFE ABERDEENSHIRE PITCH AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

There was circulated a report dated 5 May, 2021, by the Director of Education and Children's Services on proposals for a Pitch and Open Space Strategy.

The report explained that the Culture and Sport Sub-Committee on 22 January, 2020 agreed recommendations detailing the key principles of a future Pitch and Open Space Strategy for Aberdeenshire, as well as a governance route for approval which recognised the area-wide strategic and financial implications attached to its implementation. A key aspect of the governance arrangements was engagement with the Area Committees, which took place between March and May 2020. Formal feedback from Area Committees as well as general comments had been collated and were detailed in Appendix 2. The agreed governance arrangements presumed that feedback from the Area Committees would then be reported to Policy Committees in 2020. However, this process was delayed until Spring 2021 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Full Council would determine the approval of the final Pitch and Open Spaces Strategy following consideration by the Communities Committee, the Education and Children's Services Committee and the Infrastructure Services Committee.

Following consideration, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge the comments made by the Area Committees, as detailed in Appendix 2, as part of their deliberation of the Draft Strategy;
- (2) acknowledge and endorse the key principles of the draft Pitch and Open Space Strategy as detailed in Appendix 1, and make recommendations to Full Council, including the following: endorse the approach of using network pitch plans, and the specific strategies that had been submitted to the respective area committees; endorse the approach to prioritizing enhanced capacity where it was required- using the information contained within Appendix 3 of the report as a contemporaneous means of establishing priority needs; and there would be one process for the community booking of pitches, while recognising that Education and Children's Services should control school pitch use during the delivery of the school curriculum and be able to input to processes to ensure that they are not overused out with the curriculum;
- (3) acknowledge and endorse the approach to prioritising investment according to need as laid out in Appendix 4;
- (4) acknowledge the information set out in the Network Capacity Table, as detailed in Appendix 3;
- (5) acknowledge and endorse the Area Network Plans, as detailed in Appendix 5; and
- (6) note that the draft Strategy would also be considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee and the Infrastructure Services Committee, before being submitted to Full Council for approval.

15. DEVELOPING THE NHS GRAMPIAN STRATEGIC PLAN (2022-2028).

There was circulated a report dated 9 May, 2021, by the Chief Officer of the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership on the development of the NHS Grampian Strategic Plan 2022 to 2028.

The Director of Strategy/Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Grampian, was present and gave a short presentation to the Committee which set out the timeline and approach to the development of the plan, with the aim of getting the support of Aberdeenshire Council's Communities Committee.

The report highlighted that the development of the NHS Strategic Plan offered the opportunity for a cohesive approach to population health to be developed, in partnership, across many organisations and with co-production with the population.

The Committee **agreed** to support the development of the NHS Grampian Strategic Plan (2022-28), drawing on the expertise of the Committee (and the wider Council, where appropriate) to help make the plan have an impact on the health of the Aberdeenshire and Grampian population.

16. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN (HIP) QUARTERLY UPDATE

There was circulated a joint report dated 14 May, 2021, by the Directors of Business Services and Infrastructure Services on the progress of the delivery of the Housing Improvement Programme for Year 2, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the programme and requesting that the Committee acknowledges, considers and endorses the programme.

The report provided information on the four contractors who 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 Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) endorse the current position with regards 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 coronavirus (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;

17. HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY PROCUREMENT PLAN

There was circulated a report dated 4 May, 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which sought approval for two contracts to be added to the Procurement Plan for 2021/22.

The report explained that Housing Asset Management were responsible for the repairs, maintenance and upgrade of Council Housing Assets. The two contracts proposed to be added to the Procurement Plan for were Fire and Smoke Detection Enhancement and the Housing Virtual Tour.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) approve the addition of the Housing Virtual Tour Project to the Supplementary Procurement Plan, as detailed in Appendix 1, and to acknowledge that the Housing Virtual Tour project would be added to the 'Housing Procurement Plan' that was approved by Communities Committee on 18 February 2021;
- (2) acknowledge that the Fire and Smoke Detection Enhancement was previously approved and included on the Procurement Plan;
- (3) approve the Procurement Approval Forms, as detailed in Appendices 2 and 3;
- (4) acknowledge that there was a legislative requirement to comply with the fire and smoke detection enhancement by February 2022; and
- (5) acknowledge that the Head of Housing and Building Standards has the delegation to award the final contracts.