

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

SKYPE MEETING, 14 OCTOBER, 2021

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

Apologies: Councillor M Buchan

Officers: Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services; Head of Service (Housing); Head of Communities and Partnerships; Head of Property and Facilities; Buchan Area Manager; Business Strategy Manager (Customer and Digital Services); Risk and Resilience Manager; Service Development Officer (Housing and Building Standards); Business Strategy Manager; Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Coordinator; Service Manager, Live Life Aberdeenshire (Tim Stephen), Business Partner (Finance) (Rebecca Meiklejohn); Principal Solicitor (Governance) (Lauren Cowie); and Senior Committee Officer (Niall David).

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 Stirling declared an interest in Item 12 as a Director of the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses and indicated that, having applied the objective test, she would leave the meeting and take no part in that Item.

Councillor Hassan declared an interest in Item 12 as an Historic Scotland member and indicated that, having applied the objective test, he would leave the meeting and take no part in that Item.

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 item 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
13	8

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE OF 2 SEPTEMBER, 2021

The Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 2 September, 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.

Item 4, the Annual Governance Statement, the Director of Infrastructure Services advised that the briefing note would be issued shortly.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to acknowledge the position with regard to the outstanding actions from previous meetings and also those which had been completed since the last meeting.

5. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AS AT 31 AUGUST, 2021

There was circulated a report dated 21 September, 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 highlighted that the Revised Revenue Budget for 2021/22 for the Communities Committee amounted to £142,116,000, taking into account the service savings approved by Full Council and budget movements of £4.440 million as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The budget allocations were

broken down by Type of Spend and Budget Page and detailed in appendices. The Service were currently forecasting to remain within budget, given that at this early stage in the financial year the year-to-date actuals were within the year-to date budget.

The report further explained that the approved Capital Budget for 2021/22 in respect of Communities Committee amounted to £5.649 million and was detailed in Appendix 5. Full Council had received a capital performance report at the meeting on 23 September 2021, including reference to carry forwards from 2020/21. This resulted in a revision to the Communities Capital Budget amounting to £5.961m and approved a disaggregation of Infrastructure Fund 1 budget allocating a sum to Education and Children's Services resulting in a 2021/22 budget of £1.26m for Live Life Aberdeenshire.

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

- (1) acknowledge the financial information and forecast position as at 31 August, 2021; and
- (2) acknowledge the progress in achieving the agreed savings, as detailed in Appendix 3.

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AS AT 31 AUGUST, 2021

There was circulated a report dated 21 September, 2021, by the Director of Business Services which provided the Committee with financial performance information relating to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The report highlighted that the Revised Revenue Budget for 2021/22 for the HRA amounted to £66,529,000. The budget allocations were broken down by Type of Spend and Budget Page in appendices. The Service was currently forecasting to remain within budget, given that at this stage in the financial year the HRA year-to-date actuals were within the year-to date budget position.

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. Any savings within the HRA Revenue Budget provided a reinvestment opportunity within the HRA.

Following discussion, the Committee **agreed** to acknowledge the financial and forecast position, as at 31 August, 2021.

7. CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

There was circulated a report by the Director of Business Services which presented the draft Risk Management Policy, following consultation with the Strategic Leadership Team.

The report explained that in 2019 Internal Audit carried out an audit of the Council's Risk Management Process. In response to the Internal Audit Report, the Best Value Audit and concerns expressed by Senior Councillors in respect of the Annual

Governance Statement prior to 2020/21, the Risk and Resilience Team carried out a Risk Management Review, which aimed to assess the existing risk management strategy and processes, build on areas of strength, identify areas of vulnerability and provide assurance to elected members. The detailed findings of the Risk Management Review were shared with Strategic Leadership Team, Directorate Management Teams, and the Corporate Risk Management Steering Group, whose comments and feedback informed the draft Risk Management Policy, which was appended to the report. A report was submitted to Audit Committee on 1 July, 2021 setting out the Risk Management Review Findings and the Audit Committee agreed to receive a report by November 2021 setting out a proposed Risk Management Strategy and Framework for comment and endorsement, following consultation with Directorate Management Teams, Area and Policy Committees, and prior to approval by the Business Services Committee.

The report concluded by explaining that it was proposed to develop the Risk Appetite Statement in consultation with Corporate Leadership Group (CLG) and elected members. The Risk Management Guidance document was operational and currently 80% complete and would be subject to consultation with the Directorate Management Teams before being finalised. The Risk Register templates were still very much a work in progress and the latest versions would be subject to consultation with the Directorate Management Teams. It was proposed that the Risk Register templates be approved by the Strategic Leadership Team prior to implementation.

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

- (1) to acknowledge the draft Risk Management Policy, which was set out in an appendix to the report;
- (2) that a workshop be organised on the process of the consideration risk appetite and how this linked into the governance process, including the involvement of Councillors; and
- (3) that Directorate Risk Registers be provided to the Committee for information.

8. TACKLING POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES – REDUCING CHILD POVERTY

There was circulated a report dated 27 September, 2021 by the Director of Business Services which requested that the Committee consider and agree the Aberdeenshire Child Poverty Action Report prior to its publication; and also outlined a proposal for the allocation of the additional £3.5 million which had been secured for the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities agenda.

The report explained that the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018 - 2022, Every Child, Every Chance, highlighted three main drivers of child poverty: Employment: Income from parents' work and earnings being insufficient to lift them from poverty; Household costs: The costs of living that households must cover being too high; Social Security: Income from Social Security had been cut back significantly, particularly for families with children. The Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Strategic Partnership Group led on the priority to reduce poverty across Aberdeenshire.

The report provided information on the numbers of children in Aberdeenshire living in poverty, detail on Progress In Dialogue - Wellbeing Fund, and an update on the Food and Finance Partnership.

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

- (1) to approve the Local Child Poverty Action Report for 2020/21;
- (2) to acknowledge and support the progress made in tackling this agenda and agree the proposed spend from Reserves;
- (3) that a workshop be arranged after the meeting of the Communities Committee on 9 December, 2021, with all Councillors invited, subject to the availability of appropriate officers;
- (4) that Area Committees be kept updated, as appropriate, in respect of their own area; and
- (5) that the report be provided to the Community Planning Partnership Board for detailed consideration and discussion.

9. HOUSING ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENTS BRIEFING 2021

There was circulated a report dated 7 September, 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services on the Annual Assurance Statement, which required to be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator every year, to provide assurance that Aberdeenshire Council was meeting obligations under the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC).

The report explained that, for local authorities, the Assurance Statement had to consider whether the authority was meeting the 16 outcomes required by the SSHC, and whether it was meeting its legal and statutory obligations (for example, that it is meeting its obligations around statutory homelessness). The format of the Assurance Statement required that the landlord formally confirmed that it considered itself to meet all of the charter outcomes and other obligations, based upon an evaluation of the evidence available. Appendix 2 to the report contained the proposed Assurance Statement for Aberdeenshire Council, confirming that Aberdeenshire Council met the required standards, or highlighting where the Council did not and providing a brief explanation of work underway to rectify this. The statement was based on the templates released by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) agree with the requirement for Aberdeenshire Council to provide a signed Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator by the end of October 2021;
- (2) acknowledge the outcomes required by the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the Scottish Housing Regulator, alongside the discussion of evidence supplied for each outcome in Appendix 3;

- (3) approve the proposed statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator (Appendix 2) as an accurate reflection of Aberdeenshire Council's compliance with these requirements; and
- (4) instruct the Director of Infrastructure Services to report to the Communities Committee any material change in circumstance that affected Aberdeenshire Council's compliance with these requirements after the submission of the Assurance Statement.

10. SCRUTINY REFERRAL FROM AUDIT COMMITTEE - INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2124

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Audit Committee of 16 September, 2021 (Item 6), there was circulated a report dated 16 September, 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which explained that the Audit Committee had identified an area for improvement, namely procurement training and contract approvals. The relevant extract of the report and the draft minute of the Audit Committee meeting were attached as appendices.

The report reminded members that the Committee Review Process (CRP) was a three-stage process. If the Committee was minded to initiate the CRP, the first stage was a report that would come back to the Communities Committee at the meeting on 9 December 2021. The report provided further information about the issue and the action being taken by the Service. In accordance with the CRP, the report should be delivered back to Committee within two months.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) consider and determine the request from the Audit Committee to conduct the Committee Review Process in respect of the area for improvement identified by the Audit Committee;
- (2) conduct the Committee Review Process, and that the Head of Housing and Building Standards report to the Committee with the Stage 1 Report at the meeting on 9 December 2021; and
- (3) instruct the Head of Housing and Building Standards to report to the Audit Committee on 4 November 2021, with the Committee's decision.

11. LIVE LIFE ABERDEENSHIRE PRICING UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 18 February, 2021 (Item 14) there was circulated a report dated 21 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which outlined progress on the Live Life Aberdeenshire (LLA) pricing strategy, updated Committee on a number of issues, and recommended a further set of pricing measures for the remainder of the current financial year.

The report reminded Members that the Committee endorsed and agreed a flexible approach to LLA pricing at the meeting on February 18 for the period up to August 31, 2021. It was emphasised that this approach, whilst exceptional, was within the scope of both the existing pricing policy and the corporate charging framework.

The report explained that Live Life Aberdeenshire had adopted an approach of a reintroduction of services in line with government guidance from April. Major sports, culture and community facilities had been opened as fast as resources permitted, albeit programmes had to comply with appropriate guidance and regulation. The current position was that services were being designed to encourage social distancing in line with national policy and were retaining a pre-booked sessional approach to programming. The impact of this approach was an ongoing reduction of capacity when compared to 2019, although this was increasing month by month and it was expected that capacity would approach 'normal' levels in early 2022.

The report went on to further explain that to assist LLA in continuing to 'build back' capacity and spearhead the delivery of activities that promoted mental health and well being, officers were proposing the continuation of the existing pricing policy. However, mindful that Education and Children's Services had implemented an inflationary facility rental rise of 2.8%, LLA proposed increasing prices by this amount as soon as possible. This rise would be specific to facility rental (not individual entry prices) and would primarily impact on groups who made regular weekly bookings. It was anticipated that all other prices would increase in April 2022, factoring in two years of inflationary price rises

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

- (1) continue to endorse the flexible approach to pricing for LLA products and services that has been taken since October 2020;
- (2) the inclusion of inflation at 2.8% into LLA facility rental prices as soon as practical;
- (3) endorse the approach of undertaking a joint pricing and letting review with the Education and Children's Services Committee, commencing from April 1, 2022 and in line with the anticipated new Corporate Pricing Policy;
- (4) the trial implementation of a new members scheme for 2022, with a further scheme to be developed in tandem with the pricing review; and
- (5) report back exceptional local trends on usage to the Communities Committee.

12. DUFF HOUSE AND THE MUSEUM OF SCOTTISH LIGHTHOUSES GRANT AWARDS

As indicated at Item 1 above, Councillors Stirling and Hassan withdrew from the meeting for this item and took no part in the discussion.

There was circulated a report dated 22 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which explained that the Council had long-established partnership arrangements with council funding supporting a range of activities that brought significant benefit to Aberdeenshire's residents and communities. The report outlined proposed support for financial year 21/22 to Historic Environment Scotland in relation to Duff House in Banff and to the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses in Fraserburgh.

The report further explained that the grants concerning Duff House and Fraserburgh Lighthouse Museum required approval by the Communities Committee and that at

the meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee on 23rd March, 2017, the Committee had agreed the £100,000 grant payment to Historic Environment Scotland for Duff House and the £90,000 grant payment to The Museum of Scottish Lighthouses in Fraserburgh for 2017/18. The Communities Committee was therefore asked to consider the following proposed grants for 2021/22: Historic and Environment Scotland - Duff House £75,000; and the Museums of Scottish Lighthouses £90,000.

The Committee agreed to approve the annual grant payments set out in paragraph 3.3, namely Historic and Environment Scotland - Duff House £75,000; and the Museums of Scottish Lighthouses £90,000.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY HOUSING AND BUILDING STANDARDS PROCUREMENT PLAN

There was circulated a report dated 16 September, 2021, by the Director of Infrastructure Services which sought approval in principle, to procure a delivery company to supply collection storage and delivery of household belongings.

The report explained that the Council had a legal duty to provide storage and removal services for homeless clients and tenants who had abandoned, or who had been evicted from, their property. In other instances, the Council could also be required to help an individual who was required to move to another property whilst major repairs were taking place or at times move furniture between temporary accommodation.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) consider the Directorate Supplementary Procurement Plan, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) approve the inclusion of the item on the Supplementary Procurement Plan and note that this item would be added to the Housing and Building Standards Procurement Plan that was approved by the meeting of the Communities Committee on 18 February, 2021; and
- (3) not to reserve approval of the Procurement Approval Form for any item on the Procurement Plan where the value of the matter was between £50,000 and £1,000,000.