

HOUSING AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Almada Street, Hamilton on 2 March 2011

Chair:

Councillor Alex McInnes

Councillors Present:

John Anderson, David Baillie (Depute), Walter Brogan, Jackie Burns, Andy Carmichael, Maureen Devlin, Barry Douglas, Douglas Edwards, Beith Forrest, Ian Gray, Anne Higgins, Brian McKenna, Jean McKeown, John Murray, Patrick Ross-Taylor, David Shearer, Bert Thomson, Richard Tullett

Councillors' Apologies:

Jim Docherty, Graeme Horne, Bobby Lawson, Edward McAvoy, Brian McCaig

Attending:

Corporate Resources

G Cochran, Administration Assistant; C Lyon, Administration Officer

Finance and Information Technology Resources

L Crosby, Accountant

Housing and Technical Resources

L Freeland, Executive Director; A Finnan, Head of Area Services; P Murphy, Head of Support Services; S Short, Customer/Administration Manager; J Stobie, Head of Property Services

1 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Technical Resources Committee held on 8 December 2010 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Committee decided: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

3 Minutes of Special Meeting

The minutes of the special meeting of the Housing and Technical Resources Committee held on 10 February 2011 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Committee decided: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

4 Capital Budget Monitoring 2010/2011 - Housing and Technical Resources (HRA)

A joint report dated 1 February 2011 by the Chief Executive and the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted advising of progress on the capital programme for Housing and Technical Resources (HRA) for the period 1 April 2010 to 21 January 2011.

An underspend of £1.329 million was forecast due to the impact of the recent bad weather on the Kitchen and Bathroom, External Fabric and New Council House Build Programmes. Officers would continue to monitor the position and every effort would be made to reduce the level of underspend.

The Committee decided: that the Housing and Technical Resources' capital programme (HRA) of £42.033 million and expenditure to date of £27.870 million be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 8 December 2010 (Paragraph 3)]

5 Capital Budget Monitoring 2010/2011 - Housing and Technical Resources (excl HRA)

A joint report dated 1 February 2011 by the Chief Executive and the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted advising of progress on the capital programme for Housing and Technical Resources (excl HRA) for the period 1 April 2010 to 21 January 2011.

The Committee decided: that the Housing and Technical Resources' capital programme (excl HRA) of £6.941 million and expenditure to date of £2.936 million be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 8 December 2010 (Paragraph 4)]

6 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2010/2011 - Housing and Technical Resources (HRA)

A joint report dated 1 February 2011 by the Chief Executive and the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted comparing actual expenditure at 21 January 2011 against budgeted expenditure for Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (HRA), together with a forecast for the year to 31 March 2011.

Details were provided on proposed budget virements to realign budgets.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the breakeven position on the Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (HRA), as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- (2) that the forecast to 31 March 2011 of a breakeven position be noted; and
- (3) that the budget virements, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

[Reference: Minutes of 8 December 2010 (Paragraph 5)]

7 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2010/2011 - Housing and Technical Resources (excl HRA)

A joint report dated 1 February 2011 by the Chief Executive and the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted comparing actual expenditure at 21 January 2011 against budgeted expenditure for Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (excl HRA), together with a forecast for the year to 31 March 2011.

Details were provided on proposed budget virements to realign budgets.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the overspend on the Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (excl HRA) of £0.011 million, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- (2) that the forecast to 31 March 2011 of an overspend of £0.065 million be noted; and
- (3) that the budget virements, as detailed in Appendices B, C and D to the report, be approved.

[Reference: Minutes of 8 December 2010 (Paragraph 6)]

8 Property Services Performance Review

A report dated 2 February 2011 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on:-

- ◆ the trading position of the Property Services Trading Division which had achieved an operating surplus of £3.170 million at 23 January 2011
- ◆ personnel issues including maximising attendance
- ◆ contract/statutory performance indicators at 23 January 2011
- ◆ the Housing Investment Programme
- ◆ customer complaints and enquiries at 23 January 2011

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 8 December 2010 (Paragraph 8)]

9 Housing and Technical Resources - Workforce Monitoring - November and December 2010

A joint report dated 3 February 2011 by the Executive Directors (Corporate Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on the following employee information for Housing and Technical Resources for the period November and December 2010:-

- ◆ attendance statistics
- ◆ occupational health statistics
- ◆ accident/incident statistics
- ◆ disciplinary hearings, grievances and Dignity at Work cases
- ◆ analysis of leavers

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 8 December 2010 (Paragraph 9)]

10 Provision of Anti-social Investigation Services to Clyde Valley Housing Association

A report dated 12 November 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on proposals to provide the services of the Council's Anti-social Investigation Team (ASIT) to Clyde Valley Housing Association Limited.

Clyde Valley Housing Association had approached the Council to assess the possibility of purchasing the services of the Council's Anti-social Investigation Team (ASIT) to deal with some of the more difficult and complex cases of anti-social behaviour that they received.

It was proposed that the services of the Anti-social Investigation Team be provided to Clyde Valley Housing Association based on the terms and conditions contained in a Service Level Agreement which was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. The Service Level Agreement had been developed in consultation with the Council's Legal Services and provided a clear outline of the process through which cases would be referred and investigated.

The Service Level Agreement would run for a 2 year period from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2013 and would commence following the formal sign off of the Agreement by Clyde Valley Housing Association.

Initial discussions had also taken place with other Housing Associations who had indicated that they were potentially interested in establishing similar arrangements. Any progress made in developing detailed arrangements with other Housing Associations would be submitted to this Committee as appropriate.

The Committee decided: that the services of the Council's Anti-social Investigation Team (ASIT) be provided to Clyde Valley Housing Association based on the terms and conditions detailed in the Service Level Agreement.

11 Housing Repairs Service - Severe Weather Contingency Arrangements

A report dated 9 February 2011 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on:-

- ◆ an update on the impact of the severe weather experienced over December 2010 and January 2011
- ◆ proposed amendments to the Housing Repairs Policy during periods of severe weather

During the period of severe weather from 4 December 2010 onwards, significantly higher demands than normal had been placed on the Housing Repairs Service. The main issues encountered since the start of the period of severe weather and a summary of the position on repairs reported were detailed in the report.

It was anticipated that there would be a significant number of repairs which would not be completed within the required timescale prior to the year end. This meant that the Resource would be unlikely to meet its performance target for 'repairs complete within timescale'. It was forecast that there would be an underspend of approximately £1.35 million for Housing Repairs and that this would be added to the HRA surplus at the year end.

Since the beginning of December 2010, employees within the Repairs Service had prioritised repairs on an informal case by case basis and, whilst tenants had been informed of the situation, there was no scope within the current Repairs Policy to allow a decision to be taken to fully suspend non-emergency or non-urgent repairs during periods of severe weather. It was proposed, therefore, that, in situations of prolonged severe adverse weather, powers be delegated to the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) to approve the suspension of the current Repairs Policy and approve the implementation of emergency proposals to ensure that all resources were focused towards the prioritised areas of work. The requirement to implement the emergency policy, along with an estimate of the length of time that the emergency arrangements would remain in place, would be notified to all elected members by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources).

Prior to implementing this amendment to the Repairs Policy, consultation would take place with the appropriate Tenants' Groups.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the response to the severe weather and the impact on the housing stock be noted; and
- (2) that, subject to the satisfactory outcome of consultation with the relevant Tenants' Groups, the proposed contingency arrangements to cover future periods of prolonged severe weather, including the delegation of powers to the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources), as detailed in the report, be approved.

[Reference: Minutes of 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 12)]

12 Changes to Benefit System including Universal Credits

A report dated 11 February 2011 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on changes to the current Housing Benefit system, including the proposed implementation of Universal Credits.

Significant changes to the UK benefits system had recently been announced by central Government. The proposed amendments would affect the way in which Housing and Council Tax Benefit was paid and administered and also the amount which could be claimed, affecting both public and private claimants. The changes would commence in April 2011 with full implementation by 2017.

A full list of the changes and the timetable for their introduction was provided at Appendix 1 to the report.

A summary of the main changes to the benefits system and the key implications for the Council and its residents were detailed. The proposals included the introduction of the Universal Credit Scheme comprising a single benefit which would replace Welfare and Housing Benefits as well as Tax Credits for working age adults. In addition, details were provided on changes to the Local Housing Allowance and increases to the deduction of Housing Benefits paid where a non dependant was staying in a household.

It was proposed that arrangements be made for a Members' Awareness Session, with input from Enterprise Resources (Regeneration Services), to highlight in more detail the proposed changes and the implications for both the Council and specific groups of residents.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the changes to the Benefits System, including the introduction of Universal Credits, be noted; and
- (2) that a Members' Awareness Session be held to highlight the changes and implications in greater detail.

Councillor McKeown left the meeting during this item of business

Councillors Anderson, Brogan, Devlin and B Thomson left the meeting after this item of business

13 Housing (Scotland) Act 2010

A report dated 11 February 2011 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on:-

- ◆ progress in relation to the implementation of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
- ◆ the arrangements which had been put in place to prepare for changes to Right to Buy (RTB) legislation

The Scottish Government had underlined that the main policy objectives of the Act were to:-

- ◆ improve the value for money that social housing delivered for tenants and taxpayers
- ◆ safeguard the future supply of social housing for current and future tenants

To achieve the policy objectives, the Act introduced significant changes in relation to the following 3 key areas:-

- ◆ the role of the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) and regulation of social landlords
- ◆ introducing a Scottish Social Housing Charter
- ◆ reforming the Right to Buy within social housing

In addition to the main areas covered by the Act, it also introduced changes in 2 specific sections including the:-

- ◆ introduction of a duty on local authorities to assess and provide for the housing support needs of persons who were homeless
- ◆ establishment of a new duty on landlords to follow a prescribed series of actions (the pre-action requirement) before raising proceedings for recovery of possession for rent arrears

The Act was being introduced over a period of time and 2 parts of the Act had commenced, namely the new arrangements for the regulation of social housing and the changes to the Right to Buy. Details were provided on the current position in relation to each of the key aspects of the Act.

The scope of the Act, before it became law, also included reforms intended to improve conditions in the private sector. Following consultation, the Scottish Government had decided to take forward proposals to reform the private sector through separate legislation.

In summary the Act would have a significant impact on a number of key areas including:-

- ◆ Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)
- ◆ Scottish Social Housing Charter
- ◆ Reforming the Right to Buy (RTB)
- ◆ Housing Support
- ◆ Rent Arrears

Appropriate officers would continue to monitor the implementation of the Act and members would be provided with further updates as appropriate.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that progress on the implementation of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 be noted; and
- (2) that progress on the implementation of changes to the Right to Buy legislation, effective from 1 March 2011, be noted.

14 Local Housing Strategy 2012 to 2017

A report dated 4 February 2011 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on work undertaken to develop the Council's Local Housing Strategy 2012 to 2017.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 required local authorities to carry out an assessment of housing provision and housing services, and to prepare and submit a Local Housing Strategy (LHS) to the Scottish Ministers. The current LHS for South Lanarkshire covered the period 2004 to 2009. In light of new guidance provided in 2008 encouraging more collaborative work to underpin future strategies, the current LHS had been extended to 2012.

To comply with the guidance published by the Scottish Government and CoSLA in 2008, the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Housing Market Partnership (GCVHMP) had been established to develop the Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) and to agree housing supply targets for each constituent authority across the Glasgow and Clyde Valley conurbation.

The GCVHMP comprised housing and planning representatives from 8 local authorities.

The HNDA required to be submitted to the Scottish Government's Centre for Housing Market Analysis (CHMA) in April 2011 for approval as 'robust and credible'. A report summarising the key findings of the HNDA had been submitted to the Executive Committee on 23 February 2011.

The current Local Housing Strategy was based on an ongoing and detailed assessment of key housing issues and challenges. The actions put in place to tackle those issues were managed through the 4 themes in the Strategy as follows:-

- ◆ balanced housing markets
- ◆ investing in housing quality
- ◆ safe and attractive neighbourhoods
- ◆ inclusion: enabling independent living

The main focus and progress made over the first 5 years of the Strategy were detailed in the report along with an indicative timescale for completion of the LHS.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the progress in developing the Local Housing Strategy be noted; and
- (2) that the timescales for consultation and the related timetable for preparing the Local Housing Strategy for submission to the Scottish Government by Spring 2012 be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 29 September 2010 (Paragraph 12) and Executive Committee of 23 February 2011 (Paragraph 19)]

15 Award of Debt Management Contract

A report dated 31 January 2011 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on the outcome of the tendering process for the Debt Management Contract.

The Debt Management Contract had previously been tendered in the financial year 2009/2010 and the award of the contract had been approved by this Committee on 17 February 2010. However, following a legal challenge by one of the tenderers, the contract had never been awarded and the existing contract had been extended for a period of 1 year.

The current contract was due to expire on 31 March 2011. Due to the requirement to have a new contract in place by 1 April 2011, authorisation had been obtained under Standing Order No 19.2 of the Standing Orders on Contracts to award the contract to Scott & Company who were assessed as best able to deliver the Council's operational requirements.

The tender evaluation process undertaken was detailed in the report. The contract would cover the 3 year period from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2014 at a total estimated value of £2.020 million.

The Committee decided: that the outcome of the tendering process for the Debt Management Contract be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 5 May 2010 (Paragraph 9)]

16 Notification of Contracts Awarded - 1 November 2010 to 31 January 2011

A report dated 4 February 2011 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on:-

- ◆ contracts awarded by Housing and Technical Resources in the period 1 November 2010 to 31 January 2011
- ◆ contracts awarded under the Primary School Framework Agreement Phase 2
- ◆ contracts awarded by Procurement Services

Details of the individual contracts and projects were provided in the appendices to the report.

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 8 December 2010 (Paragraph 15)]

17 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

Chair's Closing Remarks – Retiral of John Stobie, Head of Property Services, Housing and Technical Resources

The Chair advised that this would be the last meeting of the Committee that John Stobie, Head of Property Services would be attending as he was retiring. The Chair, on behalf of the members of the Committee, thanked Mr Stobie for all of his hard work and contribution during his time as Head of Property Services and wished him good health and every success for the future.