

HOUSING AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Almada Street, Hamilton on 29 September 2010

Chair:

Councillor Alex McInnes

Councillors Present:

John Anderson, Maureen Devlin, Jim Docherty, Barry Douglas, Douglas Edwards, Beith Forrest, Ian Gray, Anne Higgins, Bobby Lawson, Brian McCaig, Jean McKeown, John Murray, Patrick Ross-Taylor, David Shearer, Bert Thomson, Richard Tullett

Councillors' Apologies:

David Baillie (Depute), Walter Brogan, Jackie Burns, Andy Carmichael, Graeme Horne, Edward McAvoy, Brian McKenna

Attending:**Corporate Resources**

G Cochran, Administration Assistant; C Lyon, Administration Officer

Finance and Information Technology Resources

J Burt, Accountant (Accounting and Budgeting)

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 30 June 2010 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

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

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

A joint report dated 16 August 2010 by the Executive Directors (Finance and Information Technology Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted advising of progress on the capital programme for Housing and Technical Resources (HRA) for the period 1 April to 6 August 2010.

The Committee decided: that the Housing and Technical Resources' capital programme (HRA) of £40.508 million and expenditure to date of £11.289 million be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 3)]

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

A joint report dated 16 August 2010 by the Executive Directors (Finance and Information Technology Resources) and (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 to 6 August 2010.

To reflect changes to the reporting structure, the Executive Committee at its meeting on 25 August 2010 had approved proposals to transfer responsibility for monitoring the Office Accommodation Capital Programme from Corporate Resources to Housing and Technical Resources. As a result, the Office Accommodation Capital Programme would now be monitored by this Committee.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the transfer of the Office Accommodation Capital Programme from Corporate Resources to Housing and Technical Resources be noted; and
- (2) that the Housing and Technical Resources' capital programme (excl HRA) of £8.496 million and expenditure to date of £0.929 million be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 4) and Executive Committee of 25 August 2010 (Paragraph 3)]

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

A joint report dated 16 August 2010 by the Executive Directors (Finance and Information Technology Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted comparing actual expenditure at 6 August 2010 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 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 5)]

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

A joint report dated 16 August 2010 by the Executive Directors (Finance and Information Technology Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted comparing actual expenditure at 6 August 2010 against budgeted expenditure for Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (excl HRA), together with a forecast to 31 March 2011.

Details were provided on proposed budget virements to realign budgets.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the underspend on the Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (excl HRA) of £0.018 million, 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 Appendices B, C and D to the report, be approved.

[Reference: Minutes of 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 6)]

7 Property Services Performance Review

A report dated 27 August 2010 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 £1.704 million at 8 August 2010
- ◆ personnel issues including maximising attendance
- ◆ contract/statutory performance indicators at 8 August 2010
- ◆ the Housing Investment Programme
- ◆ customer complaints and enquiries at 8 August 2010
- ◆ customer satisfaction levels

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 7)]

8 Housing and Technical Resources - Workforce Monitoring - May to July 2010

A joint report dated 2 September 2010 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 May to July 2010:-

- ◆ attendance statistics
- ◆ occupational health statistics
- ◆ accident/incident statistics
- ◆ disciplinary hearings, grievances and Dignity at Work cases
- ◆ analysis of leavers
- ◆ Joint Staffing Watch as at 12 June 2010

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 8)]

9 Housing Regeneration Action in the Fernhill Neighbourhood Management Area

A report dated 2 September 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted advising of progress on housing regeneration projects within the Fernhill Neighbourhood Management Area.

199 of the 336 flats approved for demolition had now been demolished and the first phase of 62 new homes had been built and occupied as part of the development. A summary of progress and key achievements to date, along with planned future activity, was detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

Considerable work had been undertaken by the Council and its partners to progress the next key elements of the physical regeneration. Much of this work had involved consultation with local tenants and residents who had been actively involved in the Neighbourhood Board and Housing Design Focus Group.

A key element of the Masterplan for the central area of Fernhill was to create a central focus by providing new community and recreational facilities as well as new shops and housing. To achieve this, work was due to begin on site in November 2010 to replace Fernhill Pavilion with a new community facility.

The second phase of housing development was due to commence in November 2010, subject to Scottish Government Housing Association grant funding approval, and would provide 82 new homes for rent and 15 homes for shared equity sale. The West of Scotland Housing Association had been working closely with the Council on this development to ensure all necessary consents were in place. A summary of progress and details of the order in which the various sites would be developed were provided in Appendix 1 to the report. To facilitate the development, it was proposed that the Council transfer the sites, as detailed in the location plan at Appendix 2 to the report, to the West of Scotland Housing Association in advance of the commencement of works.

In order to complete the central area of Fernhill, a successful bid had been made to the Scottish Government for £0.5 million to part fund 20 new Council homes on the site of the existing Fernhill Pavilion. To progress this element of the development, it was proposed that West of Scotland Housing Association's design team be given the responsibility for providing design services to the Council. It was also proposed that the Council enter into a legal agreement to appoint formally the West of Scotland Housing Association as the single user service provider to progress detailed designs and the necessary approvals for the development. The Council would also secure design services for 4 new shop units to be delivered in the area.

The Council would tender the work to provide the 20 houses and 4 shop units with the outcome of the tendering process reported to a future meeting of this Committee. Currently, the cost of the 20 new homes had been estimated at £2.2 million.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the progress with the Fernhill regeneration activity be noted;
- (2) that the Executive Director (Enterprise Resources), in consultation with the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) and the Head of Legal Services, be authorised to conclude relevant matters pertaining to the proposed transfer of the sites, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report, to West of Scotland Housing Association;
- (3) that the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources), in consultation with the Head of Legal Services, be authorised to enter into a legal agreement to appoint West of Scotland Housing Association as the single user supplier of design services for the 20 new build Council homes and 4 new shop units at Fernhill; and
- (4) that the outcome of the competitive tendering process to deliver the 20 new build Council homes and 4 new shop units in Fernhill be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

[Reference: Minutes of 25 November 2009 (Paragraph 13)]

10 Housing and Council Tax Benefit Fraud Strategy

A report dated 29 August 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on the outcome of a review of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Fraud Strategy.

The Council had a statutory duty to ensure that payments of Housing and Council Tax benefits were properly controlled to protect public funds from abuse. The current Strategy and associated procedures had been in operation for more than 6 years and it had been considered necessary to update the documents to reflect the high priority the Council gave to dealing with instances of fraud.

The new Strategy, which was detailed in an appendix to the report, would:-

- ◆ highlight the meaning of benefit fraud
- ◆ detail the main areas where the Council would be pro-active in protecting public funds from benefit fraud
- ◆ outline the criteria that the Council would use to decide the appropriate level of sanction to enforce, including prosecution, where fraud was determined
- ◆ define the role of the Housing and Technical Resources' Benefit Fraud Investigation Team

The new Strategy also outlined various options open to members of the public to report suspicions of Benefit Fraud.

It was proposed that the Strategy be implemented with effect from 1 December 2010 and reviewed every 3 years other than where there were changes to legislation.

The Committee recommended to the Executive Committee: that the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Fraud Strategy, attached as an appendix to the report, be approved and implemented with effect from 1 December 2010.

11 Proposal to Transfer the Management of Money Matters Advice Service (MMAS) from Housing and Technical Resources to Social Work Resources

A joint report dated 5 August 2010 by the Executive Directors (Housing and Technical Resources), (Social Work Resources) and (Corporate Resources) was submitted on proposals to transfer the management of the Money Matters Advice Service (MMAS) from Housing and Technical Resources to Social Work Resources.

Following recent discussions with Social Work Resources in relation to both the increasing links with them and MMAS and the areas of future priorities, it had been agreed to assess in detail the benefits of transferring the management of the service from Housing and Technical Resources to Social Work Resources.

The service covered Money Advice, Benefits Advice and Welfare Rights Advice. Whilst Money Matters was a valued service, the provision of "independent" money advice frequently conflicted within Housing and Technical Resources as the Resource was also responsible for collecting rents and council tax. This had been identified as a serious failing in the service and had restricted efforts to have the service externally accredited and achieve national standards.

A rising number of people being dealt with by MMAS were Social Work clients and it was considered that the involvement of 2 different Council Resources was not the most effective way of dealing with them.

The transfer of the service would result in Social Work Resources having full responsibility for the work priorities and would allow greater focus to be placed on cases of most need.

A budget of £1,347,540 would be transferred from Housing and Technical Resources and £43,753 would be funded by Fairer Scotland Funding until December 2010 totalling £1,391,293. The Fairer Scotland Funding would also meet the cost of employing 2 Benefits Advisors until 31 March 2011.

Details of 51.71 FTE (full time equivalent) posts, including the 2 Benefits Advisors funded by Fairer Scotland, which would transfer from Housing and Technical Resources to Social Work Resources were provided.

The Committee recommended to the Executive Committee: that the management of the Money Matters Advice Service be transferred from Housing and Technical Resources to Social Work Resources, along with 51.71 FTE posts, with effect from 1 January 2011.

12 Local Housing Strategy Review 2010

A report dated 1 September 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on:-

- ◆ the purpose and content of the draft Local Housing Strategy (LHS) Annual Review 2009/2010
- ◆ proposals for developing the new LHS covering the period 2012 to 2017

The LHS covering the period 2004 to 2009 had been extended to cover the period until the development of the new LHS which would cover the 5 year period from 2012 to 2017.

The LHS had been based on a detailed assessment of housing issues in South Lanarkshire and set out 12 strategic objectives and an Action Plan structured around the following 4 LHS key themes:-

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

The annual review mirrored the structure of the LHS to assess progress under each of the 4 themes. Good progress had been made in 43 of the 47 actions in the Action Plan and key areas of progress were detailed. The remaining 4 actions had made little or no progress due to changes in national policy, the need to concentrate on other priorities or resource constraints. Those actions had been taken forward into the new Action Plan for 2010/2011.

The new LHS and the key issues involved in its development were detailed. A consultative draft of the LHS would be produced in July 2011 prior to extensive consultation with key stakeholders until October 2011. It was envisaged that a final draft of the 2012 to 2017 LHS would be submitted to this Committee for approval prior to formal submission to the Scottish Government.

The Committee decided: that the Local Housing Strategy Annual Review 2010 and proposals for developing the new LHS covering the period 2012 to 2017 be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 12 November 2008 (Paragraph 12)]

13 Budget and Rent Setting 2011/2012

A report dated 30 August 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on consultation with tenants on Budget and Rent Setting for 2011/2012.

As part of discussions with tenant representatives regarding setting rents for 2010/2011, it had been agreed that there was a need to consider financial challenges faced by the Council on an ongoing basis. In order to discuss those issues, a Budget Scrutiny Group, made up of tenant representatives from the Central Liaison Group and Local Housing Forums and chaired by the Head of Support Services, Housing and Technical Resources, had been established.

The Group had agreed that the annual rent setting process, together with all deliberations on Council budgets, should be concluded by the first week in December 2010. This would enable tenants' views to be compiled and summarised for consideration at a special meeting of this Committee in February 2011 at which time a recommendation on the rent charge would be made to the Council for approval.

It had been agreed that consultation would be carried out as follows:-

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|---|-----------------------|
| ◆ Tenants' Conference | 18 September 2010 |
| ◆ extended meetings of the Local Housing Forums | October/November 2010 |
| ◆ "Question Time" event | 2 December 2010 |

The Committee decided: that progress in relation to the arrangements for consultation on Budget and Rent Setting for 2011/2012 be noted.

14 Housing and Technical Resources - Control of Resource Risks

A report dated 27 July 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on the:-

- ◆ system and controls in place within Housing and Technical Resources to control risks
- ◆ current top 10 risks faced by the Resource for 2010/2011

The Resource had followed the Council guidance in developing, monitoring and updating their Risk Control Register on an ongoing basis. The Register had been developed to ensure that the Resource was fully aware of the main risks that it had, was able to prioritise those risks and had controls in place to eliminate or minimise the impact of the risk.

The risks were scored in accordance with the Council's scoring mechanism which scored risks based on likelihood and impact of risk. This resulted in risks being scored between 1 to 9 (low to high). Risks were scored on their inherent risk (risk if nothing was done) and their residual risk (risk after applying controls).

The Risk Register had been developed and was monitored on a quarterly basis to add new risks and to review the scores of existing risks. The Register was maintained within Internal Audit's Figtree computer system and updated by designated officers within Housing and Technical Resources.

Details of all risks which scored 7 to 9 were detailed in an appendix to the report.

The Committee decided: that the system and controls in place to monitor risks within Housing and Technical Resources be noted.

15 Scottish Government Discussion Paper – “Housing: Fresh Thinking New Ideas”

A report dated 5 September 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on the Council's response to the Scottish Government's discussion paper on the future of housing policy entitled “Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas”.

Details were provided on various consultation events which had been undertaken to inform the Council's response, including:-

- ◆ a presentation to Area Services' employees on 25 August 2010
- ◆ a session on 12 August 2010 specifically for tenants arranged by the South Lanarkshire Tenant Development Support Project (SLTDSP)
- ◆ a Members' Seminar on 17 August 2010

Based on discussion at the tenants' event, the SLTDSP had developed a separate response to the paper on behalf of South Lanarkshire tenants which would be returned to the Scottish Government.

The key points made within the Council's response in relation to each of the key themes were summarised. A copy of the Council's full response, which had been submitted to the Scottish Government on 10 September 2010, was attached as an appendix to the report.

The Scottish Government had indicated that it would issue a formal consultation paper on specific housing policy proposals before the end of the year. Following publication of those proposals, a further report would be presented to this Committee detailing the proposals and setting out the arrangements for consultation and response.

The Committee decided: that the Council's response to the Scottish Government's discussion paper on the future of housing policy entitled “Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas” be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 13)]

16 Notification of Contracts Awarded – 1 June to 31 August 2010

A report dated 3 September 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on contracts awarded by Housing and Technical Resources in the period 1 June to 31 August 2010.

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 30 June 2010 (Paragraph 18)]

17 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.