

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 11 January, 2010. - minute of meeting of the HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Malone, Convener; Councillor McDonald, Vice Convener; and Councillors Allan (as a substitute for Councillor Collie), Collie, Cooney, Corall, Dunbar, Hunter, Leslie (as a substitute for Councillor Fletcher), Milne, Noble, Robertson, Kevin Stewart, Young and Yuill.

From article 17 onwards Councillor Crockett joined the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Young.

HOMELESSNESS ACCOMMODATION – INFORMATION BULLETIN REPORT

1. The Committee heard from Councillor Hunter who sought clarity as to whether the report on the findings of the feasibility study undertaken by RLF referred to in Item 3 (Homelessness Accommodation) on the Information Bulletin was actually to be considered on today's agenda, rather than at the Committee's meeting on 16 February, 2010, as detailed in the information report. The Convener clarified that the report entitled "Homelessness Service Performance and Developments Towards the 2012 Target" on today's agenda, did not include the findings of the feasibility study, and confirmed that a report on that matter would be submitted for the Committee's consideration at its meeting on 16 February, 2010.

Thereafter, Councillor Young advised that he had asked officers to provide information on the costs of the feasibility study and enquired whether those figures were available today. Officers advised that they did not have the figures available at today's meeting, but would circulate this information, by email, to Councillor Young.

FAREWELL – HEAD OF SERVICE

2. The Committee heard from Councillor Hunter who wished the Head of Service – Housing Asset Management, Mr. Allan Whyte all the best for his future in his new post at Aberdeenshire Council, and thanked him for all of his advice and guidance.

The Convener then explained that this would be Mr. Whyte's last meeting of the Housing and Environment Committee prior to taking up his new post at Aberdeenshire Council. The Convener thanked Mr Whyte for all of his advice and work throughout his tenure at the Council and wished him well for the future.

The Committee resolved:-

to concur with the remarks of the Convener.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3. The Committee had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 19 November, 2009.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) with reference to article 29 (Trade Waste Charging Mechanism) to amend the date of 1 April, 2010 to 1 April, 2011 throughout the article; and
- (ii) to otherwise approve the minute as an accurate record.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF HOUSING CASES REVIEW SUB COMMITTEE OF 2 NOVEMBER, 2009

4. The Committee had before it the minute of Housing Cases Review Sub Committee meeting of 2 November, 2009 for noting.

The Committee heard from Councillor Hunter, who sought clarity regarding a housing case which Councillor Graham had requested be referred to the Sub Committee for consideration, but had been refused by officers. In response, the Director of Housing and Environment advised that a newly appointed officer had made an error on this case, and explained that he would contact Councillor Graham directly to clarify the position with the case in question.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the minute; and
- (ii) to note that the Director of Housing and Environment would contact Councillor Graham directly to clarify the position regarding the housing case which he had requested be referred to the Housing Cases Review Sub Committee.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS STATEMENT

5. The Committee had before it a statement of pending and outstanding committee business, which had been prepared by the Acting Head of Democratic Services.

In relation to item 16 (Shared Services Agenda –Trading Standards), the Committee heard from the Head of Environmental Services, Mr. Steed, who advised that a draft report and business case on this matter had been prepared and consider by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council's Corporate management Teams, however Aberdeenshire Council's Corporate Management Team had advised that there were a number of issues they wanted to discuss further prior to progressing this. Members expressed concern at the delay and requested that officers advise Aberdeenshire Council of the Council's expectations and that this matter be progressed as a matter of urgency.

In response to questions by members regarding the current status with item 8 (Modernising Public Space CCTV), the Director of Housing and Environment advised that he had had a meeting with Chief Superintendent Adrian Watson to

discuss this matter, and clarified that Grampian Police had not caused the delay in progressing this matter.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to remove items 5 (Lift Refurbishment Contract), 11 (Property Sales Investigation – Follow Up Report), 18 (Proposed Tendering of Local House Conditions Survey), and 19 (Performance Report);
- (ii) in relation to item 8 (Modernising Public Space CCTV) to request officers to ensure that the wording in future updates on the business statement provided an accurate reflection of the position, and to urge officers to progress this matter;
- (iii) in relation to item 16 (Shared Services Agenda –Trading Standards) to note the oral updated provided by the Head of Environment Services, and to request that an update report on this matter be submitted to the next meeting of the Housing and Environment Committee on 16 February 2010;
- (iv) in relation to item 21 (Birdproofing/Gulls in the City Centre) to note that a report on this item would be submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 28 September 2010;
- (v) in relation to item 23 (Update report on the progress of the ‘Growing Our Own’ pilot for Environmental Health Advisors and Trading Standard Officers) to note that a report on this item would be submitted to the Committee at the end of 2010; and
- (vi) to otherwise note the updates contained within the Business Statement.

MOTIONS LIST

6. The Committee had before it a list of outstanding motions which had been prepared by the Acting Head of Democratic Services.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) in relation to motion 1 (Councillor Allan – Repairs and Maintenance Work) to note that a report on this motion would be considered later in today’s agenda; and
- (ii) to remove motion 2 (Joint Motion by Councillors Kevin Stewart and John Stewart – Doorstep Collections of Household Batteries).

PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICE

7. The Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which presented the key management information and performance indicators for the Housing and Environment Service which consisted of the two sections, namely:- (1) a progress report from the Director; and (2) a summary in the format of a performance indicator balance scorecard and detailed information supporting those indicators be considered this cycle.

With regards the positive news regarding the Safer Aberdeen scheme detailed within the Director’s progress report, Councillor Hunter sought assurances that the reduction in funding for taxi marshalls etc, would not have a negative impact on the public’s safety. In response the Director advised that the funding reduction was in

line with the current taxi rank operation, i.e. the number of taxi ranks had reduced since moving on to Union Street and therefore the number of taxi marshalls required had also reduced.

Thereafter, the Committee heard from the Convener who expressed disappointment that the performance figures before members reflected the position to the end of October, 2009. She highlighted that as it was now January 2010, the figures were considerably out of date; in light of this position she proposed that consideration of the report be deferred until the next meeting of the Committee on 16 February, 2010, at which point officers should ensure that the most up to date figures were presented.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request officers to provide Councillor Cooney with details of previous improvements and upgrades undertaken at the Clintery site;
- (ii) to concur with the Convener's remarks regarding the performance figures before them, and therefore to defer consideration of the report to the next meeting of the Committee on 16 February, 2010, when officers should ensure that up to date figures were presented;
- (iii) in relation to indicators HOUSPIHS1b (Response repairs completed in target) and HOUKPIR1a (Response repairs completed in target –priority 1) to request that the figures for the actual number of calls for repairs received, as well as comparator monthly figures, be reported to the Committee in future.

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

8. The Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which presented an update on the key improvement work which was taking place within the Housing and Environment Service.

By the way of background the report advised that the Housing and Environment Improvement Plan incorporated the key improvement work to take place across the service between April, 2009 and March, 2012, and was a key outcome for the approved service plans, which aimed to contribute to the Council's wider Corporate Plan.

A progress summary of the major projects within the Improvement Plan was appended to the report. The progress summary provided a project description, as well as detailing key dates, progress and latest status updates for each project. In addition further project documentation had been or was being produced for each project in the plan; this required lead officers to complete a project proposal, project plan and identify any risks. In conjunction with introducing a Housing and Environment service plan, work was also ongoing to update and add to the environment projects within the Plan.

In terms of overall progress, it was advised that to date the plan has shown a steady and consistent increase month on month, and that given the short time the plan had been in progression, the percentage was encouraging and the Service was well on course to achieve the improvement works set out in the Plan.

The Committee heard from the Convener who advised that as with the performance report (article 7 refers), the figures and information within the Improvement Plan reflected the position as at the end of October, 2009, and therefore requested that consideration of the report be deferred also be deferred until the next meeting of the Committee on 16 February, 2010.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to express disappointment that the performance figures before them, for consideration were for the period ending 31 October, 2009, and therefore to defer consideration of the report to the next meeting of the Committee on 16 February 2010, at which point officers should ensure that all aspects of the report were as up to date as possible; and
- (ii) to request that the Director review the current format of the report for the next meeting of the Committee on 16 February, 2010, to ensure that it was more user friendly.

MOTION BY COUNCILLOR IRONSIDE

9. Reference was made to article 18 of the minute of Council of 16 December, 2009, wherein the undernoted motion by Councillor Ironside had been referred to this Committee for consideration:-

“That this Council expedites its plan to demolish the old Greenfern School site which was currently a haven for vandalism and anti social behaviour causing the residents of the area great concern”.

The Committee heard from the Convener who explained that when the motion had initially been considered at the Council meeting, officers had advised that the Old Greenfern School site was located within the Housing Revenue Account and accordingly members had agreed to refer the motion to this Committee for consideration. However following the meeting, officers had advised that the site was not located in this account and was instead held by the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Service, and therefore recommended that the motion be referred to the Enterprise, Planning and infrastructure Committee for consideration.

Members expressed concern at the dubiety and misinformation to date regarding which Service was responsible for this site. In light of this position, members requested that officers identify as soon as possible which service was responsible for the site, as well as the other terms within the motion. Once this had been clarified, the motion, along with a full report on the matter, should be referred to the next meeting of the appropriate Committee.

Thereafter the Committee heard from Councillor Cooney who advised, and expressed his grievance that Councillor Ironside had not been advised that his motion was to be considered today, and requested that officers keep Councillor Ironside informed of the movements of his motion. Members concurred with Councillor Cooney’s grievance.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request officers to identify as soon as possible, which Service was responsible for the site, as well as the other terms within the motion, and that

- once this had been clarified, that the motion, along with a report on the matter, be referred to the next meeting of the appropriate Committee;
- (ii) to request officers to clarify which Service was responsible for the terms of the motion; and
 - (iii) to express disappointment that Councillor Ironside had not been informed that his motion was to be considered on today's agenda, and to request that officers keep Councillor Ironside informed of all decisions in relation to his motion.

CAPITAL BUDGET PROGRESS REPORT – H&E/09/141

10. With reference to article 10 of the minute of the meeting of the Housing and Environment Committee of 19 November, 2009, the Committee had before it a joint report by the City Chamberlain and the Director of Housing and Environment, which provided an update on the progress which had been made on the various projects within the Non Housing Capital Programme which were now aligned to the Housing and Environment Service.

Appendix A to the report outlined the Non Housing Capital Programme Projects aligned to the Housing and Environment Services and provided for each the budget for 2009/2010; spend to the end of November, 2009; and forecast outturn. Comments on particular projects, where appropriate, were included in the narrative.

The report advised that the spend to the end of November, 2009 only reflected payments made and processed, and therefore excluded any commitment that had been made and were due to be paid by the end of the year.

In relation to project 720 (Gully Waste Recycling – Reed Bed at Ness), the Committee heard from the Vice Convener who requested that an explanation for the project forecast variance of £26,000 be provided.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request officers to provide an update by email, to all members of the Committee on the forecast variance of £26,000 on the Gully Waste recycling reed bed at Ness; and
- (ii) to note the content of the report in relation to the projects outlined at appendix A.

2009/2010 HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME – H&E/09/142

11. With reference to article 9 of the minute of the meeting of the Housing and Environment Committee of 19 November, 2009, the Committee had before it a joint report by the City Chamberlain and the Director of Housing and Environment, advising on the status of the Housing Capital Programme for the financial year 2009/2010 as at 30 November, 2009, including information on both income and expenditure.

Appended to the report as appendix 1 was a financial monitoring statement which outlined the original budget for the current year and the expenditure and income as at 30 November, 2009, which advised that as at 30 November, 2009, £31,731,000

of the approved budget had been spent to date. However, of the initial approved programme, £46.9 million of the available funds was committed through accepted tenders or tenders which were in the process of being accepted. It was currently anticipated that the forecast outturn would be in line with the funded programme of £51.747 million.

Appendix 2 to the report detailed the categories of spend in the Housing Capital Programme and spend to date against each category.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the financial information contained within the report; and
- (ii) to instruct the City Chamberlain to continue to update the Committee in consultation with the Director of Housing and Environment on the forecast and actual outturn position for 2009/2010.

2009/2010 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING – H&E/09/140

12. With reference to article 11 of the minute of the meeting of the Housing and Environment Committee of 19 November, 2009, the Committee had before it a joint report by the City Chamberlain and the Director of Housing and Environment, which advised of the current year Revenue Budget performance to date for the services which related to this Committee.

Appendix A to the report provided the service report and associated notes, and advised that the position reflected that there would be an anticipated overspend of £140,000 on the total Housing and Environment budget (excluding the Housing Revenue Account); which reflected an unfavourable increase of £35,000 since the last report to the Committee. The Housing Revenue Account was still anticipated to have a balanced budget, with a potential increase of the capital fund current revenue due to the overall favourable position principally the result of reduced capital financing costs.

The report concluded that there were no significant areas of risk that members should be aware of, however the budget was being constantly refined based on the trends of expenditure and income.

With regards the recorded and projected budget variance for Mr. Norrie Steed, Head of Environment Services and Mr. Craig Stirrat, Head of Housing and Community Safety, Councillor Hunter sought assurances that the variance would be corrected by the end of the financial year. In response Mr. Steed explained that the figures before members presented a snapshot in time, and that he had viewed the most up to date figures which showed that the variance was reducing. Thereafter, Mr Stirrat explained that the variance recorded was a recent anomaly which had risen as a result of the procurement of furniture for temporary homeless flats.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the report and the information on the management action and risks that was contained therein; and
- (ii) to instruct that officers continue to review budget performance and report on service strategies as required to ensure a balanced budget.

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME, REVIEW OF OUTCOMES – UPDATE – H&E/09/127

13. With reference to article 8 of the minute of the meeting of the Housing and Environment Committee of 6 October, 2009, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which:- (a) provided an update on the review of the incomes for the 2009/2010 Housing Capital Programme; (b) detailed the scope of the review, programme and interim findings; (c) reviewed the performance of the existing framework contracts; and (d) presented recommendations regarding the future installation of showers in the Housing Programme.

The report provided an overview of the current Housing Capital Programme for 2009/2010 (the full programme and list of tasks being undertaken was appended to the report), and advised that as part of the preparation for the 2010/2011 budget, a review of the programme for the current year was being undertaken to identify how future spend would link to the Housing Business Plan, the New Build Programme, regeneration, outstanding works to comply with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, and how the costs were benchmarked with other local authorities on different areas of expenditure across the various elements of the programme, for example, spend on kitchens, bathrooms, windows, etc. This exercise would also benchmark the total amount of expenditure. In addition there was a requirement to demonstrate clarity with regard to long term planned and cyclical maintenance and how this would link to areas of both capital and revenue spend. The interim realignment of services had freed up resources to undertake this task.

The report advised that the review which was being undertaken by the Framework Quantity Surveying Consultants, Robinson Low Francis, under the direction of the Head of Service Housing Asset Management had commenced. The review had concentrated around the costs of service delivery, quality of the work, tenants' satisfaction and contract programmes. The outcome of these findings would be reported along with the wider Housing Capital Programme review in October, 2010.

With regard to the provision of showers under the Housing Capital Framework Modernisation Programme, the report reminded members that the former Resources Management Committee at its meeting on 30 September, 2008 (article 17 refers) had approved the amendment of choices available under the programme, to include the installation of over bath showers or the replacement of baths with shower cubicles. Level access showers would still only be installed if deemed necessary by the Occupational Therapy service. The following table detailing:- (a) the cost for each bathing option as reported on 30 September, 2008; (b) the current cost for these options in standard property types; and (c) the current cost for installing showers in multi storey flats was presented.

Options	Cost at 30/9/08	Current Cost	Multi Storey Cost
Bath with over bath shower	£1250	£890	£2260
Shower and cubicle	£2300	£2020	£3390
Level access shower	£2900	£2530	£3900

Details of the reasons for the increase in the cost for the installation of all shower types in multi storey flats had risen since September, 2008 were outlined.

The report then advised that since the amendment only 536 households from the 3500 properties modernised under the framework agreements had selected a shower cubicle. Therefore, in light of the increased costs and limited uptake, it was proposed that shower cubicles should no longer be offered as a choice under the programme and that tenants in general need housing should only be offered a bath with over bath shower. In addition to this, it was proposed that consideration should be given to only installing level access showers in sheltered accommodation. Consultation on the latter proposal had been undertaken with the Occupational Therapist service and the Extra Care Network, and both groups had agreed that only fitting level access showers in sheltered housing accommodation would be beneficial. Furthermore, the proposal would greatly limit the need for Occupational Therapists to assess sheltered tenants through the modernisation programme, as the Council would have already introduced the fitting of lever taps as standard in all types of accommodation.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee:-

- (a) note the information contained within the report;
- (b) instruct the Head of Service, Housing Asset Management to provide a further report on this matter to the Committee at its meeting on 13 April, 2010;
- (c) instruct officers to cease with the installation of a shower cubicle for mainstream housing but install over bath showers; and
- (d) instruct officers to install level access wet floor shower provision to all Extra Care Housing.

The Convener, seconded by the Vice Convener, moved:-
that the above recommendations be approved.

Councillor Hunter moved as an amendment, seconded by Councillor Young:-
that recommendations (a), (b) and (d) be approved.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (11) – the Convener, Vice Convener; and Councillors Clark, Corall, Dunbar, Leslie, Milne, Noble, Robertson, Kevin Stewart and Yuill; for the amendment (4) – Councillors Allan, Cooney, and Young.

The Committee resolved:-

to adopt the motion.

LIFT REFURBISHMENT CONTRACT – H&E/09/059

14. With reference to article 51 of the minute of the meeting of the former Resources Management Committee of 5 February, 2009, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which provided details of the current approach to lift refurbishment contracts in Council multi-storey blocks/Extra Care housing complexes in the city.

By way of background the report advised that it had been recognised that there had been difficulties with lift replacement contracts recently. Difficulties had included

problems with workmanship, adherence to the programme and responding on time to defects.

The report provided an overview of the lift repair work carried out to date this financial year wherein it was advised that the work at the two completed complexes had been completed on time and that the principal engineer had received no complaints. In summary, in this financial year, there had been considerable improvement to the lift refurbishment programme and the objective for this level of service to continually improve as the programme continued.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the progress being made with the revised approach to lift refurbishment contracts for housing complexes; and
- (ii) to request officers to submit a further update report, including the lift replacement programme to the Committee in due course.

PROCUREMENT METHOD FOR PHASE 2 OF HOUSING NEW BUILD PROGRAMME – H&E/09/132

15. The Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which provided an overview and evaluation of three possible procurement routes for Phase 2 of the New Build Housing Programme; and recommended a preferred option to be progressed.

By way of background the report outlined lessons which had been learned from the first phase of the New Build Programme, and provided an overview of the key principles which should be included in the procurement strategy for phase 2.

The report presented three procurement options for phase two, namely:-

- Option 1 – Traditional Procurement
- Option 2 – Design and Build to RIBA Stage
- Option 3 – Design and Build to RIBA Stage E

An overview of each of the options, including the plan of work, (appended to the report) the issues to be considered and the estimated start dates for each were provided.

In summary, it was advised that Option 1 would ensure that copyright of designs would rest with the Council and therefore could be used for future phases. Whilst the design and build Options 2 and 3 would not be submitted by the in-house design team; this instead would be undertaken by the appointed Design & Build contractor. The Housing and Environment design resources would be required up until appointment of the Design and Build contractor, and a client liaison service would also still be required up to completion. In addition Option 2 allowed for more innovation and potentially more economic solutions than the other options. Under Option 3 the Council would only have copyright of designs up to stage E – copyright of the contractor's designs could in theory be obtained post stage E but this would be at a premium. Under Design and Build (RIBA stage c) procurement, the Council would have no copyright of contractors developed designs. Also compiling the brief for this option could be more onerous (detailed clients

requirements were required to be prepared and issued to selected contractors) but would provide more control over design specification.

Finally, it was advised that whilst the first phase of the New Build Council House Programme, undertaken by option 3, was on track to deliver the build on time and within budget, there were advantages of assessing the success of other methods of procurement. Therefore, as information regarding traditional procurement projects was available, it was recommended that Option 2 (RIBA Stage B/C) be selected.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee:-

- (a) note and consider the procurement options and approve Option 2 i.e. Design & Build (RIBA stage B/C) as the way forward for Phase 2 of the New Build Council House Programme; and
- (b) instruct officers to report back to a future meeting of the Housing & Environment Committee providing an update of the Phase 2 New Build Programme.

The Convener, seconded by the Vice Convener, moved:-
that the above recommendations be approved.

Councillor Hunter moved as an amendment, seconded by Councillor Young:-
that Option 1 (Traditional Procurement) be approved as the way forward for Phase 2 of the New Build Council House Programme.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (10) – the Convener, the Vice Convener; and Councillors Clark, Corall, Dunbar, Leslie, Noble, Robertson, Kevin Stewart and Yuill; for the amendment (4) – Councillors Allan, Cooney, Hunter and Young; declined to vote (1) Councillor Milne.

The Committee resolved:-

to adopt the motion.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Prior to consideration of the following item Councillor Allan declared an interest in the following article by virtue of being an owner of an ex Council house. Councillor Allan did not feel it necessary to withdraw from the meeting.

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT – PROGRESS REPORT – H&E/09/129

16. With reference to article 16 of the minute of the meeting of the former Policy and Strategy Committee of 28 April, 2009, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which advised on the progress towards the implementation of a Property Management Service for owners in ex Council owned housing and how this would link to the Council's Improvement Plan which aimed to assist owners by advising them in advance of all impending communal repairs required to their property; and addressed the issues raised in a motion by

Councillor Allan regarding property maintenance and differentiating between repairs and improvement.

By way of background the report provided an overview of the difficulties experienced by the Council in relation to property management within tenement properties, wherein it was advised that it had been identified as being one of the main contributing factors for disrepair within the private sector housing stock. It was also having an increasing impact on the Council's ability to maintain its own housing stock as more and more properties left its ownership thus making future planning and day to day maintenance less predictable. In addition, the report reminded members that Councillor Allan had submitted a motion regarding the issue of property management and outlined the Committee decision and actions taken to date to address the issues identified in the motion.

The report explained that the Council's objective was to establish a property management service in all mixed tenure properties; to ensure the long term maintenance of the property; to assist in the day to day upkeep and repair of the property by engaging with its co-owners; and to achieve co-operation of all owners by gaining their respect through the quality of service that it provided. An overview of the outcomes to be achieved by the scheme and the areas which it proposed to cover was provided.

In terms of the introduction of the service, it was advised that it was intended that the scheme would be gradually rolled out across the city in predetermined localities. These locations had as yet to be agreed as officers would require considering where the most immediate need was, but the proposal was to begin in the Mastrick letting area. The timescale for introducing the scheme city wide would be largely dependant on the outcomes of a trial area. It was highlighted that this was a new concept for both the Council and its citizens, and although guided by what had happened in other regions, each location had its own differing circumstances that would greatly influence the uptake and eventually viability of such a scheme. Officers would continually monitor the take up and measure the income against the outgoings in order to ensure that the scheme was cost neutral to the Council, however It might be that some letting areas would prove more viable than others and alternative options for the non viable areas would then be explored in order to reduce the risk to the Council but still meet its obligations to better manage the stock and involve all owners. Finally, it was explained that the scheme could only work if the owners in the areas where the service was marketed were prepared to opt in to the scheme. In areas were the Council did not retain the majority ownership the Council was unable to enforce the scheme without serving a Maintenance Order under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006. In order to use the enforcement powers the Council would be required to identify a suitable funding source; otherwise the enforcement powers would have no effect.

The report explained that at present in order to deliver the service the Council was currently endeavouring to identify as accurately as possible the potential client base by location and property styles. A suitable location within the new service structure had still to be identified along with available resources to deliver the service, although the full resource requirements would not be known until it began to introduce the service, officers would continually monitor and assess the situation as it is rolled out in stages across the city and the resources matched to the requirements with uptake for the service. If the Mastrick letting area was chosen as a starting point it would be capable in the initial stages of running a property

management service in that area with no additional staffing resources required. In the longer term it would also be capable of liaising with private property management companies, however, if the Council were running property management schemes citywide, resources would require to be reviewed.

The report recommended:-

- (i) to instruct officers to consult with owners of former Council houses in order to roll out the property management service in incremental stages across the city; and
- (ii) to request officers to present a further update report to the Housing and Environment Committee at its meeting on 25 May, 2010 on the progress of the service.

Members discussed extensively the scheme and the properties which would be included and the potential difficulties that could be experienced. In particular they discussed and sought clarity on the responsibility for maintenance on both the Council and owners of ex Council houses, the legislative impediments regarding maintenance placed on local authorities, and the possibility of altering the title deeds of new owners of ex Council houses to include responsibility for maintenance.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request officers to provide all members with a briefing note on the legislative impediments regarding property maintenance;
- (ii) to request officers to submit a report to the Committee at its meeting on 25 May 2010, outlining the options as well as the legal and other implications for changing the current policy to include maintenance responsibility within the title deeds of all future new owners; and
- (iii) that officers commence informal discussions with Council tenants and owners of former Council houses prior to May, 2010, and that the outcome of this be included in the report back to the Committee on 25 May, 2010.

PROPERTIES OFF CHARGE – H&E/09/143

17. With reference to article 13 of the minute of the meeting of the Housing and Environment Committee of 26 August, 2009, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which provided an update on all properties held as either unable to be relet (UTBR) or not to be relet (NTBR) Off Charge. Appended to the report was the most up to date list of UTBR/NTBR Off Charge properties (an updated list was tabled at the meeting). The list made available information on details on the reasons why a void property had been removed from charge, date of approval, target date for returning as void and lead officer, etc.

The report explained that a void was identified as a property held on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) with no tenant and for a period of time. To remove a property from charge the following criteria must be met in conjunction with the necessary level of approval:-

- Empty properties subject to a Housing Committee decision that they were not to be let because they were surplus to long term requirements, or to be transferred, disposed of or demolished.

- Empty properties where an insurance claim was raised due to fire or flood damage.
- Empty properties awaiting or undergoing major structural works (e.g. modernisation) during which period it would be unsafe for them to be occupied.
- Houses held for decanting tenants.
- Lock-ups and garages.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to express concern at the number of properties that remained as void;
- (ii) to request officers to provide a detailed report, including firm completion dates, on all of the properties which have been off charge for six months or longer to the Committee at its meeting on 16 February 2010; and
- (iii) to note the current position within both the UTBR and the NTBR Off Charge list and requested officers to provide a further update to the Committee at its next meeting on 16 February, 2010.

HOMELESSNESS SERVICE PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENTS TOWARDS THE 2010 TARGET – H&E/09/139

18. The Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which (1) requested approval for the use of Aberdon House as a temporary accommodation unit; (2) requested approval to increase the lets to persons or families being assisted under Part (ii) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (and amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and Housing (Scotland) Act 2003); (3) provided an update on the performance of the Homelessness Service; and (4) provided an update on future developments of the Service, following the appointment of a Homelessness Manager.

The report advised that there was currently insufficient temporary accommodation available in the city, and therefore proposed that the former Aberdon House residential home in Tillydrone be utilised for an initial period of two years as temporary accommodation. The report further advised that this would provide 35 single rooms, one single bedroom flat and one 2 bedroom flat. It was suggested that this accommodation could be utilised if the Crown Street Temporary Accommodation Unit was closed, or to provide additional capacity until a more permanent solution was found. The report continued that it was anticipated that Aberdon House could be brought into use by June, 2010, as it would not require a great deal of work to be brought up to standard. This was also subject to a Housing in Multiple Occupation Licence being granted timeously,

By way of background the report advised that Croft House, Spring Gardens and Victoria House were being considered as part of a longer term solution to the provision of temporary accommodation which would incorporate a Housing Access Centre and managed accommodation. Alongside this, other planned initiatives were outlined as being:- (a) a rise in the 148 temporary flats currently in use for homeless households to 200 by June, 2010; (b) the introduction of a private sector leasing scheme, which would have a potential capacity in 2010/2011 of 150 units with a further 150 in 2011/2012, and another 100 in 2012/2013 (400 in total); (c) the

commissioning of a winter care shelter to provide 15 places from January through to March, 2010; and (d) the planned commissioning in relation to the furniture grant scheme and the provision of advice and information.

The report presented statistical information on homeless presentations to the Service; progress towards the 2012 target to abolish priority need; and the provision of temporary accommodation, together with comparisons of other local authority areas, and outlined the Council's situation regarding the allocation of Council housing to homeless households, and provided further statistical information in this regard.

On the subject of the allocations to homeless persons and families, the report advised that there was a major problem in Aberdeen in relation to the lack of temporary accommodation, blockages in temporary accommodation, and with the availability of permanent accommodation, and proposed that in order to address this in the short term, that allocations to homeless households be increased to either 75% or 100% (from 50%) of all relets from April to June, 2010. It was hoped that this action could go some way to clearing the backlog of homeless persons and families awaiting accommodation.

The report outlined the projected impact of the increase of relets for the options of 50% to 75% and 50% to 100%, and advised that if relets were increased to 75% that this could bring the number of households waiting for a tenancy down to 145 by June, 2010; and that if the percentage of tenancies allocated to homeless households was increased to 100%, that the number of homeless households awaiting a tenancy could be brought down to 82 by June, 2010.

The report concluded by advising of the developments taking place within the Homelessness Service, namely:- (1) the posts of Homelessness Manager and Private Sector Leasing and Temporary Accommodation Senior Officer having been filled in November, 2009; (2) the Service being relocated to the first floor at Upperkirkgate in early 2010; (3) the reception for the Service being made accessible for disabled people; (4) the prevention of homelessness being established as a top priority for the Service; (5) a wider engagement with other Services and the community being encouraged; and (6) a move to encourage more collaboration between Services in the Council on homelessness issues.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee

- (a) approve the use of Aberdon House as a temporary accommodation unit for persons who have experienced the loss of accommodation, for an initial period of two years, subject to a more detailed report on the financial implications, the necessary statutory permissions being secured (HMO licence) and community consultation being undertaken;
- (b) approve the increase of relets to those households being assisted under Part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (and amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and Housing (Scotland) Act 2003) from April, 2010 to June, 2010, of either 50% to 75% or 50% to 100%;
- (c) to note the performance of the Service towards the target of ending priority need by 2012; and
- (d) note the update on future developments of the Service.

The Committee enquired as to whether the properties of Aberdon House, Spring Gardens, Croft House and Culter House would all be likely to be required in order to adequately deal with the homelessness problems within the city. The Homelessness Manager advised that in his opinion, Aberdon House, and the addition of one other establishment for a period of around two years would be adequate in order to deal with the current problems, and that his team were now looking at preventative measures as a priority so he would hope that the numbers of persons and families presenting as homeless would be reduced by the end of the two year period. At this point the Head of Service (Community Safety) further advised that the properties referred to were not currently held on the Housing Revenue Account so a future decision would be required to be taken as to whether the Service wished to utilise these properties or not, and an options appraisal would be undertaken thereafter, before any movement could be made in this regard.

Further to discussions regarding the recent decision by the Licensing Committee to not approve the Housing in Multiple Occupation Licence for the Crown Street temporary accommodation premises, officers were asked whether they anticipated any antisocial behaviour problems occurring in Aberdon House, should this proposal be approved. The Homelessness Manager advised that the Service was now promoting different styles of management, and that staff would be encouraged to actively intervene if any such behaviour occurred in Aberdon House.

The Committee also enquired as to whether this project would link in any way to the Families Project, and officers advised that whilst these projects had slightly different objectives there would be linkages, particularly with regard to the prevention of breakdown of relationships, as this was the primary source of homelessness.

Regarding recommendation (a) as contained within the report, the Convener moved, seconded by Councillor Noble:-
that this recommendation be approved.

Councillor Robertson, seconded by Councillor Hunter, moved as an amendment:-
that the Committee recognises the difficulties the Tillydrone community would face by placing a homeless centre next to a complex of OAP cottages; note that the people of Tillydrone have the greatest sympathy for the plight of the homeless, but consider their installation in Aberdon Court would be a retrograde step; and to therefore not approve recommendation (a) as contained within the report.

On a division there voted:- for the motion (9) – the Convener; the Vice Convener; and Councillors Clark, Corral, Dunbar, Leslie, Milne, Noble and Kevin Stewart; for the amendment (5) – Councillor Allan, Cooney, Crockett, Hunter, and Robertson; absent from the division (1) – Councillor Yuill.

The Committee resolved:-
to adopt the terms of the motion.

In terms of Standing Order 36(3), Councillor Robertson intimated that he wished this matter to be referred to Council for its consideration. Councillors Allan, Cooney, Crockett and Hunter supported Councillor Robertson in this regard.

The Committee further resolved:-

- (i) to refer recommendation (b) as contained within the report to Council for its further consideration; and
- (ii) to approve recommendations (c) and (d) as contained within the report.

FINAL ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL NATURE CONSERVATION STRATEGY (2010-2015) – EPI/10/002

19. With reference to article 11 of the minute of meeting of the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee of 1 September, 2009, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which presented the Final Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy (2010-2015), further to this having been subject to formal public consultation.

By way of background the report advised that with the assistance of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and other groups, the Council had developed and adopted a Nature Conservation Strategy in 1994 in a bid to preserve and enhance the quality of the environment; to protect plants and animals and their habitats; and to provide opportunities, where possible, for greater public access to sites. The report continued that whilst the current Nature Conservation Strategy had been an important tool in a Land Use Planning context, changes in legislation, the development of new policies and strategies, increased development within Aberdeen, as well as a shift in the dynamics of the natural environment had brought about the need to update the current strategy.

The report advised that the new strategy would enable the Council to (a) comply with the requirements of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) 1992, which committed the UK to help protect and restore the functioning of natural systems and to halt the loss of biodiversity in the European Union; (b) to comply with the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, which imposed a duty on every public body to further the conservation of the natural environment of the country; and (c) to assist the Council in delivering the requirements of the North East Local Biodiversity Action Plans which had been developed to meet the commitment of the CBD, by taking action to conserve locally important species and habitats; and (d) to support all Council functions, and inform other future Council plans, policies and strategies, such as the forthcoming Open Space Strategy and new Local Development Plan.

The report further advised that a plan would be required to implement the strategy, further to its adoption, and a Monitoring Group would be required to assess progress in the implementation of the strategy.

Appended to the report was the Final Nature Conservation Strategy (2010-2015).

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the Final Nature Conservation Strategy (2010-2015) and to refer this strategy to the Corporate Policy and Performance Committee for adoption.

A TREE FOR EVERY CITIZEN

20. With reference to article 17 of the minute of meeting of the former Policy and Strategy Committee of 10 June, 2008, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which advised on the progress being made with regard to the Council's commitment in the 'Vibrant Dynamic and Forward Looking' document to plant a tree for every citizen of Aberdeen.

The report advised that this large scale tree planning programme, which aimed to plant around £180,000 in two phases in the next two to three years, was to start this year.

The proposed planting sites for the period up to December, 2010 were outlined as follows:-

- Danestone (4,700 trees)
- Balgownie Drive (5,470 trees)
- Greenfern Woodland (16,500 trees)
- Seaton (19,000 trees)
- Howes Road (2,350 trees)
- Inverdee pitches, (adjacent to the existing riverside woodland, not encroaching on to the pitches - 4,000 trees)
- Lochinch Farm (7,150 trees)
- Abbotswells open space (12,000 trees)
- St Fitticks Park (13,250 trees)
- Westfield Park (12,150 trees)

Appended to the report was the draft document "Granite City Woodlands, Woodland Creation Programme Phase 1 Proposals", which contained further details of the Phase 1 project.

Further to a question in relation to page 266 of the report (paragraph 5.9) by the Committee, officers confirmed that if a decision had to be taken regarding the cull of any animal, that a report would have to be submitted to this Committee to obtain approval for such a course of action to be undertaken.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the report;
- (ii) to approve the proposed planning sites;
- (iii) to note the scale of funding leverage available from the external funding sources;
- (iv) to instruct that a final report be presented to this Committee, which would provide a detailed planning project plan; and
- (v) to agree that the Convener in the first instance, and the Vice Convener thereafter, would assist officers in helping to support and promote the programme.

COUNTRYSIDE RANGER SERVICE FIVE YEAR PLAN 2010-2015

21. The Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which presented the proposed Countryside Ranger Service five year plan for the period 2010-2015.

The plan (a) advised of links to local and national legislation and policies; (b) highlighted the role of the Council's Countryside Ranger Service; (c) provided a review of the previous Countryside Ranger Service management strategy; (d) advised on partnership working; (e) detailed income generation of the service; (f) advised on work being undertaken to raise awareness of the service; (g) outlined the priority issues for the service; and (h) had appended to it a draft implementation plan, which would be revised by officers following further consultation with the Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission Scotland, Aberdeen Greenspace and other relevant organisations. The plan would be delivered through annual work programmes developed for each year to reflect available resources.

The draft Countryside Ranger Service Five Year Plan 2010-2015 had been made available to members prior to the meeting.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to approve the Countryside Ranger Service Five Year Plan 2010-2015;
- (ii) to instruct officers to implement this plan; and
- (iii) to instruct officers to report back to Committee on an annual basis regarding progress.

PROGRESS WITH APPROVED SAVINGS FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE RANGER SERVICE AND HAZLEHEAD GOLF COURSE FOR 2009-10 – H&E/09/083

22. With reference to article 12 of the minute of its previous meeting, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which provided an update on progress towards making the approved budget savings for 2009/10 in respect of the Ranger Service and the Hazlehead golf transfer.

The report advised that the current savings made for the Ranger Service stood at £85,695. This was £3,695 in excess of the required savings for 2009/10, which further to the decision taken at a previous meeting of this Committee, would be used to help fund the unforeseen savings required for Hazlehead Golf Course.

The report continued that the required savings for 2009/10 for the Hazlehead Golf Course were £268,000 and that to date a total of £168,000 had been identified, £100,000 of which would be generated by the recently agreed contract for Roundabout Sponsorship, and £68,000 from the continued vacancy for an Interim Lead Environment Manager. The report continued that a further £25,000 had been allocated from the cleansing budget, and that together with the savings generated by the Ranger Service and the staff vacancy within the current structure that would not be filled, this would amount to a further £40,000 savings.

The report indicated that the remaining saving of £35,000 would be achieved through continued careful weekly monitoring of the grounds maintenance and street

sweeping labour costs. The report further advised that officers anticipated that the Council would have to make this savings balance from continued careful weekly monitoring of labour, fuel and other resources costs. These latter elements were £90,000 within budget up until the middle of September, 2009, but moved to a £10,000 deficit position by the end of October, 2009, as a result of payment of lump sums to ease the transfer of weekly paid staff to monthly salaries. The report confirmed that this payment has now been covered corporately.

The report concluded by advising that the overall labour costs were well within budget and that it would be possible to manage staff numbers and vacancies so as to allow a saving against budget; and that the non filling of staff vacancies for a four week period would allow for the remaining saving to be met.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to approve the steps being taken to achieve the required savings;
- (ii) to note that the required savings for the Ranger Service had been achieved; and
- (iii) to instruct the Director for Housing and Environment to report back with a further progress report on achieving the savings for Hazlehead golf course at the next meeting of this Committee.

UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAND AUDIT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LAMS) PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR GROUNDS MAINTENANCE – H&E/09/138

23. With reference to article 22 of the minute of its previous meeting, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which provided an update on the progress and the implementation of the Land Audit Management System (LAMS) Performance Management System for grounds maintenance.

The report advised that the Environmental Services staff were still familiarising themselves with the methodology and were training staff in its use. Early results indicated that the pilot exercise in the city had gone well, with the Area Supervisor for the Duthie Park and City Centre monitoring, recording and analysing the data. The report continued that system of having Area Supervisors monitor, record and analyse the data from a colleague's area was intended to enhance objectivity. The report further advised that the data from this pilot, which had been transferred to the scoring system, was included as part of the performance report presented at today's meeting.

The report continued that the pilot would be rolled out to all areas of the city, commencing on 18 January, 2010 and, although Supervisors would be the primary collators of the information, it was envisaged that the information gathering would be cascaded to Charge Hand level, as was the practice in other Local Authorities within Scotland.

The report outlined that informal discussions had now taken place with the Environment Manager for Aberdeenshire Council with regard to this Council providing staff to act as authority inspectors, to carry out any test samples on LAMS required, and for Aberdeenshire Council to provide a similar service for this Council.

He had indicated that Landscape Services within Aberdeenshire Council would be willing to participate in an inter authority cooperation in relation to LAMS, and would welcome a presentation from Aberdeen City Council officers in order to progress the Audit Management System within the Authority. This method would show complete transparency and was recommended by the founders of the LAMS system.

The report concluded that LAMS would be reported on a four weekly cycle, and to this Committee along the same current reporting frequencies as PAC and the Local Environmental Audit Management System (LEAMS), and based on the same city wide score and individual neighbourhood breakdown.

Appended to the report was a sample of the LAMS methodology.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the progress made to date on the implementation of LAMS;
- (ii) to authorise the Director of Housing and Environment to approach Aberdeenshire Council with a view to setting up an inter authority auditing agreement for the purpose of the LAM system; and
- (iii) to instruct the Director of Housing and Environment to report back with a further progress report at the next meeting of the Committee.

REPLACEMENT CREMATORS – PROGRESS REPORT – H&E/09/124

24. With reference to article 19 of the minute of its previous meeting the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which provided an update on progress with regard to the replacement of the cremators at Hazlehead Crematorium.

The report advised that despite very challenging weather conditions during the month of November, 2009, works were progressing well to date and that waterproof membrane to the roof and the stonework to the walls of the main extension were virtually complete. The copper cladding to the roof was about to commence and building works to the link were progressing well. The gas main and meter would be installed on site early this month, and the cremators were due to be delivered on 9 and 10 January, 2010.

The Head of Service (Interim Lead for Environment) advised the Committee that due to the recent weather, equipment deliveries had been delayed by one week, but that the project was now back on schedule.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the progress made to date on replacing the out of date and unreliable cremators at Hazlehead Crematorium; and
- (ii) to instruct the Director of Housing and Environment to report back on progress at the next meeting of the Committee.

EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Committee resolved in terms of Section 50(A)(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business so as to avoid disclosure of exempt information of the class described in the following paragraphs of Schedule 7(A) to the Act:- article 25 (paragraphs 1 and 2); article 26 (paragraph 8); article 27 (paragraph 6); and article 28 (paragraph 1).

TIED TENANCIES – HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - H&E/09/123

25. With reference to article 5 of the minute of meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee of 8 September, 2009, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which advised of the current number of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) tied tenancies still in existence, where they were located, and their current status.

The report advised that further to an audit undertaken in October and November, 2009, it had been determined that there were currently thirty four HRA tied tenancies across the city, comprising 9 flats occupied by caretakers or former caretakers, and 25 flats occupied by former wardens or wardens who transferred to the Social Care and Wellbeing Service as senior carers.

The report reminded the Committee that the caretaking service was currently undergoing a review, and that this service was to be outsourced, and as a direct result of this, the caretakers currently employed by the Council had been involved in a consultation process regarding their employment being transferred to an external contractor. If their employment was transferred, there would be no requirement for them to live within the blocks where they currently reside. The report continued that due to a change in the terms and conditions of employment for senior caretakers, there was also no longer a requirement for staff in these posts to be residential.

The report advised that of the thirty four remaining tied tenancies within the HRA, there were currently a total of nineteen where the tenants did not meet the criteria set out in the Council's Tied Tenancy Policy to receive priority housing, and therefore the timing of rehousing former tied tenants was determined by the availability of suitable alternative accommodation. These nineteen cases would be dealt with by the Housing Cases Review Sub Committee.

The remaining fifteen cases that did not meet the criteria were currently being managed on a case by case basis, and those tenants would either be granted Scottish Secure Tenancies on their current flats upon retirement or transferred to the employment of contractors; or alternatively they would be placed on the priority housing list and offered suitable alternative accommodation.

The Committee enquired as to how many offers of alternative housing tenants would receive in circumstances such as those described above. The Head of

Service (Community Safety) undertook to circulate an answer to members at an early date.

The report concluded by detailing (1) the addresses and current status of the tied tenancies within multi storey blocks that were currently occupied by caretaking staff; and (2) the address and current status of tied tenancies within sheltered developments that were currently occupied by former wardens and senior carers.

The Committee further queried as to why there appeared to be no live applications for those tenants on the priority list. The Head of Service (Community Safety) again undertook to circulate the relevant information to members.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that there were currently thirty four Housing Revenue Account tied tenancies in existence; to note their current status; and to request that the Finance and Resources Committee take a corporate overview by producing a corporate register for submission to the Audit and Risk Committee;
- (ii) to note the Head of Service (Community Safety) would circulate information detailing the number of offers tenants would receive of alternative housing;
- (iii) to request that the Head of Service (Housing Management) speak to Councillor Crockett regarding the conflicting information discussed during the meeting regarding a particular housing case; and
- (ii) to request a report back at the next meeting on the background and current details associated with caretakers who have not yet moved and have no live application in this regard.

COUNCIL HOUSE GARDEN MAINTENANCE SCHEME – H&E/09/055

26. With reference to article 24 of the minute of meeting of Council of 25 March, 2009, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment, which outlined the proposals that would enable the Council to protect the garden maintenance service for the elderly and vulnerable.

By way of background the report advised that at the previously mentioned meeting of Council, Members agreed to continue the garden maintenance service for Council tenants, on the proviso that there was a strict adherence to the eligibility criteria. Officers were also instructed to report back with proposals that would enable the Council to protect the garden maintenance service for elderly and vulnerable tenants ensuring minimum effect on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The report further advised that although there was no statutory requirement to provide garden maintenance to Council tenants, the Council had for many years used enabling powers of the Civic Government legislation to deliver this service to citizens aged 75 or over, or those that were unable to maintain their garden through medical grounds, for a minimal charge.

The report reminded members that the garden maintenance service had been decommissioned in December, 2008 (article 21 of the minute of meeting of Council of 17 December, 2008 refers), and that approximately 1200 citizens had been adversely affected by this decision. The garden maintenance service was subsequently recommenced on 1 May, 2009, and was provided in house by a team of seven members of staff at a cost of approximately £126,000. The service was

restricted to Council tenants who met the eligibility criteria and the annual charge was increased from £40 to £60 per annum which was payable in advance. 571 tenants had participated in the scheme this year, realising a total income of £34,260.

The report continued to outline (1) the provisions of the current scheme; (2) details of the recently undertaken garden maintenance survey; and (3) options for current and alternative approaches to service delivery.

Appended to the report were the results of the garden maintenance survey, which had been undertaken from May to October, 2009; and options for the Committee to consider with regard to the services to be included in the garden maintenance scheme.

The Committee raised its concern in relation to former tenants who were elderly and unable to properly maintain their properties. Councillor Cooney suggested that the Council consider options including a voluntary gardening group or possibilities around using community service participants to undertake the gardening for these citizens.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to approve that the service provided in 2009 by the environmental team, continue through 2010 with strict adherence to the criteria;
- (ii) to approve option (c) of the environmental team's specifications; and to therefore offer the service of:-
 - cutting grass on 14 occasions per annum and uplifting the grass thereafter
 - one hedge cut
 - two garden sprays; and
 - strimming of edges three times per annum,
 subject to the approval by the Council in February of a budget within the HRA;
- (iii) to note that a funding commitment of £200,000 was included within the draft HRA budget for 2010/11;
- (iv) to request that the Finance and Resources Committee approve a 5% increase on the existing garden maintenance charge of £60, raising this to £63;
- (v) to authorise officers to carry out a tender exercise to execute the garden maintenance service for the 2011 season;
- (vi) to grant delegated powers to the Director of Housing and Environment, to be exercised in consultation with the City Solicitor, City Chamberlain, Housing and Environment Convener and Finance and Resources Convener, to accept the tender and appoint a contractor thereafter; and
- (vii) to request a report back addressing Councillor Cooney's suggestions.

PROGRESS IN FINDING SAVINGS PROJECTED FOR THE CESSATION OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE OF THE AUCHMILL GOLF COURSE IN FINANCIAL YEAR 2009-10 – H&E/09/099

27. With reference to article 34 of the minute of its previous meeting the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which provided a further update on current progress with correcting the deficit against projected savings on grounds maintenance of the Auchmill Golf Course in the current financial year.

The report provided a detailed background wherein it outlined all previous committee decisions in relation to this matter, and advised that the transfer of the licence to occupy and maintain the Auchmill Golf Course by the management committee of Auchmill Golf Club, had not taken place until 1 September, 2009, five months later than anticipated. As a consequence, the savings projected to be made from the start of April, 2009 to the end of August, 2009 had not been realised. The reasons for the delay were outlined within the report.

With regard to identifying alternative savings to make up for the deficit, the report advised that sufficient efficiencies had been generated as a result of reorganising the way in which the service operated the “In Bloom” work and proposed to set £30,000 from that fund against the saving, leaving a total of £36,000 to find in the rest of the financial year. In terms of the remaining savings required, it was anticipated that the Service would have to make the savings balance from continued careful weekly monitoring of labour, fuel and other resources costs. The report continued that these elements had been £90,000 within budget until the middle of September, 2009, but moved to a £10,000 deficit position by the end of October, 2009, as a result of payment of lump sums to ease the transfer of weekly paid staff to monthly salaries. However, this payment had now been covered corporately, and as a result this area of cost would be within budget before the end of the financial year and the Service will be able to meet the remaining £36,000 grounds maintenance costs.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request officers to provide a briefing on the current position regarding Auchmill Golf Course to all local members;
- (ii) to note the progress being made to cover the deficit against projected savings for the current financial year;
- (iii) to approve the steps being taken to achieve that deficit; and
- (iv) to instruct the Director of Housing and Environment to report back with a further update on progress at the next meeting of the Committee.

MODERNISATION OF THE HOUSING SERVICE – H&E/09/122

28. With reference to article 17 of the minute of meeting of its meeting of 6 October, 2009, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Housing and Environment which provided an overview of the Housing Improvement Plan and detailed a proposed approach to redesigning existing traditional housing assistant roles and third tier management in order to deliver a more customer focused generic housing officer style of working.

By way of background the report advised that the Housing Service Improvement Plan incorporated the key improvement work which would take place across the Housing Service between the period April, 2009 and March, 2012. The plan was a key outcome from the approved Service Plan and aimed to contribute to the Council's wider Improvement Plan, which itself was due to be replaced by the Corporate Plan.

The report advised that there were currently fifty three projects in the overall Improvement Plan and that 38% of these had been completed, or particular milestones within them had been completed; and a number of other projects were progressing well since the Improvement Plan commenced.

The report outlined the key projects within the Improvement Plan namely:- (1) redesign of the housing management service; (2) removal of priority need by 2012; (3) implementation of the Council Housing New Build Programme; (4) implementation of the Asset Management Plan; and (5) completion of rent management pilot (early intervention work designed to prevent homelessness and improve income).

The report continued to outline the Modernisation Programme and advised that the housing services would therefore review and redesign its services to ensure that they were performing at the highest level of productivity and had the right staff in the right place by assessing and reviewing staffing levels, and in consulting with staff, tenants and service users to gauge service requirements and facilities and assess the impact on the cost per housing unit. The report provided an example of Mastrick Customer Access Point (formerly Mastrick Housing Office) as a service that had been changed dramatically to achieve better outcomes, as traditionally, this had been a Housing Office that delivered established housing type activities (including tenancy and arrears management, benefits advice, cash collection and repairs reporting). Mastrick Housing Office had been identified as the ideal starting point for rolling out the development of Customer Access Points with the emphasis and vision of providing 'one stop shop' facilities including a wide range of customer facing services. The report highlighted that the aims of the Customer Access Point were to (a) deliver accessible and seamless services through the use of modern technology and engagement with local people; (b) enable the delivery of streamlined processes for customer engagement across the Council and promote a culture shift to customer focused environment; (c) project an image that emphasised the importance of the customer, through the day to day high quality service delivery and which focused on the needs of service users; and (d) offer a range of services at first point of contact and consistently and effectively track and resolve customers' queries.

The report concluded that the Mastrick Customer Access Point had successfully introduced these services since its inception, and further development work had been undertaken by colleagues in Corporate Governance resulting in the opening of two further Customer Access Points at Kincorth and Woodside as well as the development work being undertaken at the Contact Centre and the future Customer Service Centre scheduled for Marischal College.

The report advised that officers were of the opinion that the Council had to establish robust responsive and highly efficient staffing and support structures which would fully meet Aberdeen's housing needs, and that this could be achieved through (1) a new improved caretaking and cleaning service; (2) the introduction of

new mobile technology to improve communication between frontline officers and tenants/home seekers (for example, the development of more on line facilities such as applying for Council housing and applying for a mutual exchange); (3) a greater focus on tenancy and environmental management and monitoring managed by a generic housing officer function which would be supported by an escalation process and delivered by specialist roles (for example tenant participation, debt recovery case work, anti social behaviour and tenancy support); (4) a new staffing formula for distribution of generic housing staff resources to 'neighbourhood patches' to address areas of pressure including governance, tenancy support, the investment programme and managing estates in mixed ownership; and (5) the introduction of new proactive customer focused housing management work practices which would ensure Council was able to achieve the highest customer service standards.

The report further advised that the expected outcomes of this undertaking would be better customer service, improved safety and security of tenants, a cleaner and better maintained environment for tenants and the improvement of neighbourhoods through effective neighbourhood management.

With regard to the staffing implications in this report, the report advised that the proposed revised staffing structure arrangements would make better use of staff time and resources within neighbourhood patches, and the emphasis would be on switching to smarter ways of working to allow an efficient reallocation of resources across the areas, and as a result, housing management staff would be better equipped to address strategic issues relating to investment programmes, governance, owner occupiers, maximising income through tackling rent arrears, reducing further the number of empty numbers, reducing the number of evictions – and essentially doing everything possible to enable tenants to continue to live in their homes. Staff would have the chance to develop their skills and advance their careers through a structured training and development programme, as well as providing a higher standard of service to tenants. The report continued that officers were committed to providing a supportive environment as well as learning and development for staff as they adapt to more efficient and rewarding ways of working.

The report concluded by detailing the implementation of the proposed new structure. Appended to the report were a number of options in this regard and a table outlining the interim Housing and Environment (Housing and Community Safety) structure.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the possible options as outlined within the report, and to agree that consultation should begin on the process to deliver a more customer focused generic housing officer style of working, with authority to approve the escalation of cases requiring more intensive assistance to specialist housing support teams;
- (ii) in relation to the housing management staffing structure, to approve option 2 (600 tenancies per patch) as contained within the report;
- (iii) in relation to the housing management structure, to approve option 2 (four manager proposal) as contained within the report; and
- (iv) to request officers to provide a report in six months time on the efficiency of the new service structure.

- COUNCILLOR AILEEN MALONE, Convener.