

Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee

ABERDEEN, 6 July 2023. Minute of Meeting of the COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Radley, Convener; Councillor Henrickson, Vice-Convener; and Councillors Bonsell, Bouse (as substitute for Councillor Delaney), Brooks, Copland, Davidson, Farquhar (as substitute for Councillor Cross), Graham, Greig, McLellan and Thomson.

The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be found [here](#).

Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.

PIPER ALPHA

1. The Committee noted that it was the 35th year anniversary of the Piper Alpha disaster, and observed a minute of silence in memory of all those who were lost.

EXEMPT BUSINESS

2. The Convener proposed that the Committee consider item 12.1 (Cost Neutral Environmental Enforcement) with the press and public excluded from the meeting.

The Committee resolved:-

in terms of Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of the above item so as to avoid disclosure of information of the classes described in the following paragraphs of Schedule 7(A) to the Act:- article 13 (paragraphs 6 and 9)

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR CONNECTIONS.

3. No declarations of interest or connections were intimated.

DEPUTATION REQUESTS

4. The Committee received two deputations from Ms Laurie Mackay and Ms Karen Barrett.

Ms Mackay in her presentation, outlined that libraries were about people and the way people had access to local libraries across Aberdeen had changed due to multiple changes in opening hours and a reduction in access to community branches across the city. Ms Mackay advised that whilst more people were using and seeking digital

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resources, there was still digital poverty in the city meaning these resources could not be accessed from every home either due to a lack of education, a lack of IT equipment, affordable internet, language barriers or disability. Libraries were also not all about accessing information and books, but also about learning, getting support to access information, and connecting with communities.

Ms Mackay presented a table ahead of the deputation and explained that it showed how library visits fell and then had been gradually increasing. Ms Mackay outlined that the total library visits did not reflect this within the context of the number of branches open, the total hours they were open for compared to how they once were before the COVID-19 pandemic closures. She advised that they also did not reflect the need in some areas, particularly where schools did not have a library and school librarian. Ms Mackay intimated that an empty classroom with books on display was not the same as a staffed school library service and noted that a school library had very limited access for communities, and that not all families educate their children through the schools. There were many families in Aberdeen who use libraries as part of their child's home learning instead of registering them at school.

Ms Mackay also stated that she hoped that as housing developments were approved in areas around the city, amenities such as community centres and libraries that were accessible to people of all ages were within a safe walking distance from their homes, noting that Stirling Council had been increasing its branches, opening up new staffed community libraries.

Ms Mackay explained that consideration needed to be taken with location. She indicated that many people in Garthdee were unaware of their local library service due to it being based in Kaimhill School as well as it being closed for 2 years during the pandemic. She advised that often libraries within school buildings proved to be a barrier to people in the community who did not have children who attended that particular school.

Ms Mackay said that lower library footfall or lack of engagement in the consultation in neighbourhoods where there was the greatest need to improve mental health, educational attainment, and child literacy levels should not be used as a reason to reduce or close a community library service, but as an indicator that more needed to be done to help people to feel safe and welcome to access the services that could benefit them.

Ms Mackay advised that an important factor was to do consultation with communities who had lost their libraries. She indicated that she felt the closure of the Linkfield Library was still felt by people in Linkfield and Seaton, and many library users in Rosehill & Stockethill, Woodside, Hilton, Garthdee, Ferryhill & Broomhill, Northfield & Heathryfold and Cults had felt the loss of access and now total closure of their libraries. While some had been able to drive to other libraries that were open later and had car parking, others who do not drive had lost that same access they once had. Ms Mackay also hoped that the consultation was undertaken by someone independent of the Council and that the Council spoke with experts such as those at Scottish Library and Information Council, CILIP Scotland, Scottish Book Trust, Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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British Isles Scotland branch, care and residential homes, the VSA, community frontline NHS staff, disability charities, Community Councils, teachers, librarians, and the Save Aberdeen Libraries campaign group.

Ms Mackay also asked that the timeline be changed as many groups and communities would not be meeting over the summer, and to allow community programmes to settle back in so they did not miss the opportunity to take part in the consultation.

In terms of the action to be taken, Ms Mackay asked that the average hourly footfall (calculated by taking into consideration the weekly opening hours of each library) be calculated for all library branches that were open before and after the pandemic and changes to hours/access level should be noted so Councillors could see the impact of this on users. She also asked that officers look at PC usage in libraries in context of their opening hours as an indicator to digital access needed in those communities that could not be found at home.

Members then asked a number of questions based on Ms Mackay's deputation.

The Committee then heard the deputation from Ms Karen Barrett. In her deputation Ms Barrett explained that she campaigned to keep Ferryhill library. Ms Barrett felt that it was a very hasty decision to close libraries as they were alleviating loneliness in so many residents. Ms Barrett indicated that the review should have been done before the closures and asked that the six closed libraries be included in the proposed review.

Ms Barrett outlined her concerns with the timing of the review, noting that students used the library services but would not be in Aberdeen during the summer months in order to participate in the review. She asked that focus groups and interviews be held in September and asked not to consult then ignore the feedback received. Ms Barrett also asked that an independent consultant be used to undertake the review.

Ms Barrett highlighted that many of the closed libraries were used as warm spaces for residents, and also highlighted the 20 minutes neighbourhood that was being adopted in many new housing developments in Scotland.

Members also asked Ms Barrett a number of questions based on her deputation.

Having heard both deputations, the Convener, on behalf of the Committee, expressed her thanks for their comments and input.

The Committee resolved:-

to note the information provided during the deputations and to thank Ms Mackay and Ms Barrett for the information they presented.

MINUTE OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF 16 MAY 2023

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5. The Committee had before it the minute of the previous meeting of 16 May 2023, for approval.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the minute as a correct record.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLANNER

6. The Committee had before it the planner of committee business, as prepared by the Interim Chief Officer – Governance (Legal).

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the reason for the delay for item 5 – Housing improvement Group; and
- (ii) to otherwise note the committee business planner.

SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE - THEMATIC REPORT: 2022/23 - ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

7. The Committee had before it a report by Scottish Fire and Rescue (SFRS), which presented the performance of SFRS against the objectives contained within the Aberdeen City Local Fire and Rescue Plan.

Mr Chay Ewing, Area Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, provided an overview of the report and answered various questions from Members.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee note the performance data provided in Appendix A in relation to the SFRS 2022/23 Performance Report.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to approve the recommendation; and
- (ii) to wish Chay Ewing all the best in his retirement and to thank him for all of his hard work.

POLICE SCOTLAND - VERBAL UPDATE

8. The Committee heard from Chief Superintendent Graeme Mackie, who provided a verbal update to Members on various subjects.

Chief Superintendent Mackie explained that Aberdeen had once again been awarded the Purple Flag status for the tenth year, which recognised both the safety and vibrancy of the city centre at night. He explained that in relation to the city centre, there were still some challenges but these would continue to be worked on.

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Chief Superintendent Mackie also provided information on Naloxone, noting that 525 officers from the division had been trained to carry and use the single use intra-nasal spray.

Chief Superintendent Mackie also spoke about recent pressures on Police Scotland workload.

Members asked a number of questions of Chief Superintendent Mackie.

The Committee resolved:-

to note the verbal update provided by Police Scotland.

POLICE SCOTLAND - PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OFFICER

9. The Committee heard from Superintendent Kate Stephen, Professional Standards Department, Police Scotland, who provided a detailed overview of Professional Standards and what the department dealt with.

Superintendent Stephen indicated that there were five strands to the Professional Standards department and noted that there were 17 more complaints than last year with 315 recorded. These were mainly around service delivery and perceived lack of action from Police Scotland.

Superintendent Stephen explained that following the conviction of Wayne Couzens who had been a serving Police Officer at the time he committed murder, an investigation was carried out from Police Scotland which reviewed all complaints that were sexual complaints, and advised that the review was positive. 206 cases were reviewed and five were determined requiring further investigation.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request that a Service Update be issued to Members providing details on what was presented by the Professional Standards Officer; and
- (ii) to request that the Professional Standards Officer provide information to Councillor Greig via the clerk in relation to the breakdown of data recording, and whether data was recorded divisionally or city based.

PERFORMANCE REPORT - COM/23/176

10. The Committee had before it a report by the Chief Officer – Data and Insights, which presented Members with the status of appropriate key performance measures relating to certain Operations, Customer and Commissioning services.

The report recommended:-

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that the Committee note the report and provide comments and observations on the performance information contained in the report Appendix.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request that a Service Update be issued to Members on Choice Based Lettings, providing details on any feedback received from users, as well as retention levels; and
- (ii) to otherwise note the performance report.

MODERN SLAVERY - COM/23/211

11. The Committee had before it a report by the Interim Chief Officer – Governance (Legal), which updated the Committee on the current status of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and related matters.

The report explained that following a Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Ali to the Council meeting of 26 April 2023, the Council noted that modern slavery affected millions of people globally. The Council also noted that only parts of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 applied to Scotland, but that, as a public body, it should uphold the highest possible ethical standards.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee note the current status of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, proposed legislative changes and the review of what other major public institutions have in place.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note the current status of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, proposed legislative changes and the review of what other major public institutions have in place;
- (ii) to instruct the Chief Executive to develop an Anti Modern Slavery statement that would be included as part of the normal policy review cycle, in areas such as:
 - a. Human Resources including:
 - i. Recruitment
 - ii. Use of temporary / casual / fixed-term staff
 - b. Partner organisations
 - c. Supply chain / Procurement, including:
 - i. IT procurement
 - ii. Use of consultants, contractors, suppliers, vendors
 - d. Capital Projects
 - i. Use of consultants, contractors, suppliers, vendors
 - ii. Materials
 - e. Whistleblowing
 - f. Training and development
 - g. Monitoring & enforcement; and
- (iii) to report the statement back to this committee at the next appropriate time.

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ABERDEEN'S FUTURE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE - CUS/23/216

12. The Committee had before it a report by the Chief Officer – Early Intervention and Community Empowerment, which sought permission to consult with library stakeholders to ensure the design of future city library provision was sustainable and responsive to the evolving needs of the communities ahead of submitting a plan for Aberdeen’s Future Library and Information Service later in 2023/24.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) instructs the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to carry out engagement and consultation with stakeholders to understand current and future demand and how available resources can be maximised to ensure continued access to library and information services that are sustainable and responsive to local need;
- (b) instructs the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to work with stakeholders to co-design a strategic vision and plan for the Library and Information Service in the context of the Community Planning Aberdeen Partnership;
- (c) approves the timeline for consultation, communication, analysis and design of Aberdeen’s Future Libraries and Information Service vision and plan, as set out in 3.8 of the report;
- (d) instructs the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to report back to the Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee on the Future Libraries and Information Service vision and plan at the first Committee meeting of 2024.

The Convener, seconded by the Vice Convener moved:-

that the Committee approve the recommendations contained in the report, but extend the consultation period in recommendation (c) to October 2023.

Councillor Graham, seconded by Councillor Bonsell, moved as an amendment:-

that the Committee

- (1) agrees to include the potential re-opening of libraries in Ferryhill, Cults, Cornhill, Kaimhill, Northfield and Woodside in the consultation process;
- (2) agrees that Aberdeen City Council’s Library and Information Service plays an essential service for citizens who live, work, study and play in Aberdeen apart from the areas of Ferryhill, Cults, Cornhill, Kaimhill, Northfield and Woodside;
- (3) agrees that the continued closure of 6 Aberdeen Libraries, disadvantages children living in Ferryhill, Cults, Cornhill, Kaimhill, Northfield and Woodside, and conflicts with the recommendations given in The Promise;
- (4) agrees that no matter what the findings of the consultation are it will do nothing to repair the damage to children’s future prospects caused by the closure of the six Libraries;

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- (5) agrees that without the inclusion of the potential re-opening of libraries in Ferryhill, Cults, Cornhill, Kaimhill, Northfield and Woodside in the consultation process, the consultation proposals will contradict statements made in Aberdeen City Council's Policy Statement;
- (6) agrees that without the inclusion of the potential re-opening of libraries in Ferryhill, Cults, Cornhill, Kaimhill, Northfield and Woodside in the consultation process, the consultation proposals will contradict statements made in the Aberdeen Local Outcome improvement Plan;
- (7) agrees that without the inclusion of the potential re-opening of libraries in Ferryhill, Cults, Cornhill, Kaimhill, Northfield and Woodside any further consultation is meaningless;
- (8) instructs the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to carry out engagement and consultation with stakeholders to understand current and future demand and how available resources can be maximised to ensure continued access to library and information services that are sustainable and responsive to local need;
- (9) instructs the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to work with stakeholders to co-design a strategic vision and plan for the Library and Information Service in the context of the Community Planning Aberdeen Partnership;
- (10) approves the timeline for consultation, communication, analysis and design of Aberdeen's Future Libraries and Information Service vision and plan, as set out in 3.8 of the report; and
- (11) instructs the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to report back to the Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee on the Future Libraries and Information Service vision and plan at the first Committee meeting of 2024.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (7) – the Convener, the Vice Convener, and Councillors Bouse, Copland, Davidson, Greig and McLellan – for the amendment (4) – Councillors Bonsell, Brooks, Graham and Thomson – absent from the division (1) – Councillor Farquhar.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request that officers look at areas with low feedback received during the consultation and target these areas in order to aim for better response rates in these areas; and
- (ii) to adopt the motion.

In accordance with the decision taken at Article 2 of the minute of meeting, the following item was considered with the press and public excluded.

COST NEUTRAL ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT - CUS/23/219

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13. The Committee had before it a report by the Chief Officer – Early Intervention and Community Empowerment, which provided an update on the feasibility of a cost-neutral environmental enforcement initiative and sought approval to proceed with a 12-month pilot programme with the identified supplier.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (i) agree the implementation of a 12-month pilot programme with the selected supplier for the enforcement of Littering, Dog Fouling and Fly Tipping legislation; and
- (ii) instruct the Chief Officer - Early Intervention and Community Empowerment to monitor and evaluate the pilot and prepare a report for this Committee on conclusion of the pilot in 2024.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the recommendations.

- **Councillor Miranda Radley, Convener**