

Minute

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee

Wednesday, 7 February 2024, 09:30.

Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Place, Kirkwall.



Present

Councillors Gwenda M Shearer, Jean E Stevenson, Stephen G Clackson, Alexander G Cowie, James R Moar, Ivan A Taylor and Heather N Woodbridge.

Present via remote link (Microsoft Teams)

Graham A Bevan, Steven B Heddle, Rachael A King and John A R Scott.

Religious Representatives:

Reverend Susan Kirkbride and Marie Locke.

Clerk

- Hazel Flett, Service Manager (Governance).

In Attendance

- James Wylie, Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.
- Erik Knight, Head of Finance (for Items 3 to 11).
- Frances Troup, Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing.
- Claire Kemp, Assistant Principal, UHI Orkney (for Items 1 to 3).
- Garry Burton, Service Manager (Leisure and Culture).
- Morag Miller, Service Manager (Primary Education).
- Pat Robinson, Service Manager (Accounting).
- Nigel Fyffe, Team Manager (Maintenance and Heritage) (for Items 1 to 3).
- Nick Hewitt, Team Manager (Culture) (for Item 4 to 7).

In Attendance via remote link (Microsoft Teams)

- Peter Diamond, Head of Education.
- Catherine Diamond, Service Manager (Early Learning and Childcare) (for Items 1 to 5).
- Lesley Mulraine, Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation).
- Jane Partridge, Service Manager (Secondary and Tertiary Education) (for Items 1 to 4).
- Georgette Herd, Solicitor.
- Vikki Kerr, Team Leader (Libraries and Archives) (for Items 3 to 6).
- Sandra Craigie, Committees Officer.

Indigo House:

- Andrea Paterson, Director (for Items 4 to 8).

Observing

- David Brown, Service Manager (Resources).

Observing via remote link (Microsoft Teams)

- Kerry Spence, Service Manager (Community Learning, Development and Employability) (for Items 1 to 7).

Apologies

- Jo Hill, Teacher Representative.
- Reverend Fraser Macnaughton, Religious Representative.
- Mary Maley, Teacher Representative.

Declarations of Interest

- Councillor Steven B Heddle – Items 1 and 3.
- Councillor Rachael A King – Items 1 and 3.

Chair

- Councillor Gwenda M Shearer.

1. Revenue Expenditure Monitoring

Councillor Steven B Heddle declared an interest in this item, his connection being that his wife was the Director of the Institute for Northern Studies, and was not present during discussion thereof.

Councillor Rachael A King declared an interest in this item, her connection being that a close family member was employed at UHI Orkney, and was not present during discussion thereof.

After consideration of a report by the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Accountancy), the Committee:

Noted:

1.1. The revenue financial summary statement, in respect of service areas for which the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee was responsible, for the period 1 April to 31 December 2023, attached as Annex 1 to the report by the Head of Finance, indicating a budget overspend position of £1,162,200.

1.2. The revenue financial detail by service area statement, in respect of service areas for which the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee was responsible, for the period 1 April to 31 December 2023, attached as Annex 2 to the Head of Finance.

The Committee scrutinised:

1.3. The explanations given, and actions proposed in respect of significant budget variances, as outlined in the Budget Action Plan, attached as Annex 3 to the report by the Head of Finance and obtained assurance that action was being taken with regard to significant budget variances.

Reverend Susan Kirkbride joined the meeting during discussion of this item.

2. Housing Revenue Account

Revenue Repairs and Maintenance Programme – Expenditure Monitoring

After consideration of a report by the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing, the Committee:

Noted:

2.1. The summary position of expenditure incurred, as at 31 December 2023, against the approved revenue repairs and maintenance programme in respect of the Housing Revenue Account, as detailed in section 4.2 of the report by the Head of Finance.

The Committee scrutinised:

2.2. The explanations given in respect of significant budget variances, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report by the Head of Finance, and obtained assurance with regard to progress being made with delivery of the approved revenue repairs and maintenance programme for 2023/24 in respect of the Housing Revenue Account.

3. UHI Orkney – Draft Revenue Budget

Councillor Steven B Heddle declared an interest in this item, his connection being that his wife was the Director of the Institute for Northern Studies, and was not present during discussion thereof.

Councillor Rachael A King declared an interest in this item, her connection being that a close family member was employed at UHI Orkney, and was not present during discussion thereof.

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Secondary and Tertiary Education), the Committee:

Resolved to **recommend to the Council:**

3.1. That the draft revenue budget for UHI Orkney for financial year 2024/25, attached as Annex 1 to the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration through the budget setting process.

3.2. That the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing should submit, to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee no later than September 2024, a recovery plan setting out how UHI Orkney would deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25, as well as repaying borrowed funds.

4. Housing Services – Performance Monitoring

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation), the Committee:

Noted:

4.1. That housing organisations were required to report performance against a number of service areas and indicators within the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

4.2. Performance in relation to the undernoted range of service areas within Housing Services for the reporting period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing:

- Customer Satisfaction.
- Housing Quality and Maintenance.
- Access to Housing and Support.
- Homelessness.
- Neighbourhood and Community.
- Getting Good Value from Rents.
- Re-lets and Voids.
- Customer/Landlord Relationship.

4.3. Areas of positive performance within Housing Services for the reporting period, as follows:

- Time to complete non-emergency repairs.
- Time to complete medical adaptations.
- Increase in Right First Time repairs.
- Level of stock meeting the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing.
- Low levels of tenancy offers refused.
- Good levels of tenancy sustainment.
- Low levels of Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Low levels of abandonments/evictions.
- Reduction in time taken to assess a homeless application.
- Reduction in length of stay in temporary accommodation.
- Positive tenancy outcomes for homeless households.
- Overall percentage of rent collected continuing to be high.

4.4. Areas where performance within Housing Services could potentially be improved or continue to be improved, as follows:

- Customer Satisfaction.
- Opportunities to participate in landlord decision making.
- Level of stock meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.
- Increase in average time from homeless presentation to completion of duty.
- Increase in number of households in temporary accommodation.
- Increase in average days to re-let properties.
- Time to complete emergency repairs.
- High percentage of tenancies ending in arrears.
- Rent arrears remaining high.

4.5. That, as part of the performance monitoring processes for 2022/23, the Annual Assurance Statement required by the Scottish Housing Regulator was approved by Council in October 2023.

The Committee scrutinised:

4.6. Performance in relation to the range of service areas within Housing Services for the reporting period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, as detailed in Appendix 1 attached to the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, and obtained assurance.

Councillor James R Moar joined the meeting during discussion of this item.

5. Early Learning and Childcare – Review of Policy

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, together with an Equality Impact Assessment, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Early Learning and Childcare), the Committee:

Noted:

5.1. That, on 6 February 2019, the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee recommended approval of the Early Learning and Childcare Policy.

5.2. That, since the policy was last considered at Committee, changes in national guidance had resulted in a small number of updates to the policy.

5.3. That the Early Learning and Childcare Policy had since been updated to reflect current practice, further national guidance and legislation.

The Committee resolved to **recommend to the Council**:

5.4. That the Early Learning and Childcare Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to this Minute, be approved.

Reverend Susan Kirkbride and Marie Locke left the meeting at this point.

6. Orkney Archive Service Accreditation

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Team Manager (Libraries and Archives), the Committee:

Noted:

- 6.1. That Orkney Archives first achieved accreditation in November 2017.
- 6.2. That, in October 2023, inspectors carried out a two-day inspection of Orkney Archives.
- 6.3. That the inspectors commended the archive service on its impressive engagement activity and strong understanding of the island communities it served.
- 6.4. That only eight other archive services in Scotland had achieved accredited status.

The Committee scrutinised:

- 6.5. The inspection letter and report in respect of the Orkney Archives, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, and obtained assurance.

7. Transforming Orkney's Cultural Services

Proposed Establishment of Short-Life Working Group

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Team Manager (Culture), the Committee:

Noted:

- 7.1. That, in March 2023, Bryn Jones Associates were appointed to carry out a full review of the Culture Service.
- 7.2. That the objective of the review was to evaluate the potential for reducing costs and increasing income generation across the whole Culture Service and to produce an options appraisal with strategic recommendations for a framework and a risk register to identify the most economically advantageous delivery model for Cultural Services that would inform planning for the next 10 years and beyond.

The Committee resolved to **recommend to the Council**:

- 7.3. That a short-life member/officer working group, comprising the undernoted core membership, be established to consider the findings of the consultant-led review into the provision of Council-funded cultural services in Orkney:

- Chair, Education, Leisure and Housing Committee – Councillor Gwenda M Shearer.
- Vice Chair, Education, Leisure and Housing Committee – Councillor Jean E Stevenson.

- 3 Additional Elected Members of Education, Leisure and Housing Committee:
 - Councillor Graham A Bevan.
 - Councillor Rachael A King.
 - Councillor John A R Scott.
- Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.
- Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing.
- Service Manager (Leisure and Culture).
- Team Leader (Culture).
- Arts Officer.
- 1 representative from the Collections Teams, Orkney Islands Council.
- 1 representative from the Visitor Services Team, Orkney Islands Council.
- 1 representative from the Pier Arts Centre (Culture Fund Key Client).
- 1 representative from the St Magnus International Festival (Culture Fund Key Client).
- 1 representative from the Orkney Folk Festival (Culture Fund Key Client).
- 1 representative from the Orkney Natural History Society Museum (“Stromness Museum”, Culture Fund Key Client).
- 1 representative from Birsay Heritage Trust (Culture Fund Key Client).
- 1 representative from Museums Galleries Scotland.
- 1 representative from Creative Scotland.
- 1 representative from the Friends of St Magnus.

7.5. That the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing should submit a report, to the meeting of the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee to be held on 11 September 2024, advising of the outcome of the work of the short-life working group and presenting recommendations for consideration.

8. Review of Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

After consideration of a joint report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing and the Corporate Director for Enterprise and Sustainable Regeneration, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing, the Committee:

Noted:

8.1. That a full review of the affordability of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan was required in order to ensure sufficient financial capacity to deliver the challenging energy efficiency requirements and a programme of social rented housing.

8.2. That Indigo House Group were appointed, through Hub North, to review and update the 30-year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, with particular emphasis on the financial capacity of the Housing Revenue Account to:

- Meet the investment needs of the existing housing stock and enhance housing service delivery.
- Deliver new housing supply particularly over the next 10 years to meet the housing needs identified in the Housing Need and Demand Assessment.
- Keep rents for tenants and debt obligations affordable.

8.3. The key assumptions and findings arising from the review of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan by Indigo House Group, as outlined in section 5 of the joint report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing and the Corporate Director for Enterprise and Sustainable Regeneration, indicating that, overall, the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan was financially robust.

8.4. That the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan was tested against a range of risks, as set out in section 5.5 of Appendix 1 to the joint report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing and the Corporate Director for Enterprise and Sustainable Regeneration.

8.5. That, should the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan be approved, the recommendations contained therein, and outlined in section 6 of the joint report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing and the Corporate Director for Enterprise and Sustainable Regeneration, would require:

- To be financially viable through a combination of government grants, internal resources and/or affordable borrowing.
- To be subject to separate approval through the relevant governance processes, which may include reports to Committees, should any additional resources, including financial, be required.

The Committee resolved to **recommend to the Council:**

8.6. That the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, prepared by Indigo House Group, attached as Appendix 2 to this Minute, be approved.

9. Council House Rents

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation), the Committee:

Noted:

9.1. That a consultation, undertaken in December 2023, in relation to the annual increase for Council house rent levels to take effect from 1 April 2024, proposed the following two options:

- A rental increase, in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which as at September 2023 was 6.7%; or
- A rental increase of 7.2%, being CPI plus 0.5%.

9.2. The results of the consultation on the annual increase for Council house rent levels, as detailed in section 5 of the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.

The Committee resolved to **recommend to the Council**:

9.3. That, in recognition that the cost of living was continuing to have a significant impact on households and, therefore, there was a need to keep rents affordable, Council house rents should increase by 6.7% with effect from 1 April 2024.

10. Housing Revenue Account – Draft Budget

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing, the Committee:

Resolved to **recommend to the Council** that the draft revenue budget for the Housing Revenue Account for financial year 2024/25, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration through the budget setting process.

11. Conclusion of Meeting

At 12:11 the Chair declared the meeting concluded.

Signed: Gwenda M Shearer.