

Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee
18 August 2004

IRVINE, 18 August 2004 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Tom Barr, Elizabeth McLardy, John Moffat and David Munn.

In Attendance

B. Devine, Chief Executive; I.T. Mackay, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective); B. MacDonald, Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion); J. Barrett, Assistant Chief Executive (Information Technology); M. Macfarlane, Assistant Chief Executive and G. Young, Personnel Manager (Personnel); A. Herbert, Assistant Chief Executive and S. Humphries, Benefits Manager (Finance); J. Montgomery, Principal Performance Review Officer, A. Osborne and D. McCaw, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Barr in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Jack Carson.

1. Scheme of Delegation to Officers

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the use of delegated powers by officers within Corporate Services since 1 May 2003.

Details were provided on the decisions taken under the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers by the undernoted services:-

- Chief Executive;
- Information Technology;
- Personnel;
- Development and Promotion; and
- Legal and Protective.

The Sub Committee received clarification on various matters contained within the reports including:-

- the Chief Executive's procedure for dealing with contracts/tenders;
- staffing changes for the period in question;
- progress regarding the provision of scrutiny information on business grants/loans; and

- the new arrangements under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 for Building Standards which will require the publication of information to Members on Building Warrants.

The Sub Committee agreed to note the use of delegated powers by officers within Corporate Services.

2. Public Performance Reporting: Statutory Performance Indicators 2003/04

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the Statutory Performance Indicators for the year ended 31 March 2004.

The Accounts Commission requires Councils to collate and publish a range of Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) in each financial year to provide a comparison between Councils and within Council Services over time. The figures are subject to external scrutiny by Audit Scotland and to national publication by the Accounts Commission.

The Sub Committee was provided with information as follows:-

Benefits Administration

- this is the first reporting year since the introduction of the unified benefits service
- agency staff continue to support the work of the benefits service
- the average cost of administering a benefits case has increased from £47.96 to £52.01
- consultants have been employed to review progress, develop training plans and prepare bids for external Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funding

Additional papers were circulated to the meeting consisting of a letter from the Minister for Finance and Public Services (Scottish Executive) regarding the performance of the Council's Benefits Service in 2003/04 together with a response from the Chief Executive.

Litigation Claims

- this is a new performance indicator and as such no comparative information is available
- there were 425 claims against a population of 135,650, giving a ratio of 31.3 claims per 10,000 population
- the total value of claims was £523,861 against a total revenue budget of £232,257,000 equating to claims amounting to 0.2% of budget

Council Tax Collection

- the in-year collection fell from 89.9% to 89.8% due to resource transfer, contact centre staff training and new system implementation
- new procedures for recovery under the Debt Arrangement and Attachment Scheme were also introduced in 2003/04
- steps will continue to ensure improved recovery

Non Domestic Rates

- software faults on the introduction of Small Business Rates Relief delayed billing and follow up, impacting on in-year collection levels
- a new business rates system will be implemented during 2004/05

Payment of Invoices

- the Council's performance has improved over the previous year despite the staffing changes in the course of the year

Sickness Absence

- this is the second year of reporting since the new Back to Work policy came into effect
- a report will be submitted to the Corporate Services Committee on 31 August detailing improvements to the Managing Absence and Incapability procedures
- further Occupational Health support has also been put into place in the form of the appointment of an additional Nursing Adviser

Equal Opportunities

- the Council's policies and procedures are being updated continuously in the light of changes to employment legislation or when best personnel practice has been identified in a particular area

Council House Sales

- performance continues steadily with almost 85% of all sales completed within the statutory period
- 952 Council houses have been sold in a 14 month period

The Sub Committee was further advised that the Council is publicising through the local media the dangers of tying in house purchases with insurance policies. This can result in purchasers not being able to meet the financial commitments they sign up to. It was emphasised however that the Council has a statutory obligation to allow tenants to purchase their Council houses.

Building Control

- there has been a significant increase in the volume of Building Warrant applications (25%)
- over the measurement period, the service operated with a number of vacant posts
- in the current year a major review of the Building Control/Standards function will be implemented

Planning

- the improved overall performance was achieved despite an increase of over 25% in the number of applications submitted during the period compared with the previous 12 months
- there was an increase of 15% in the number of applications "dealt with"
- the Council has consistently managed to keep the percentage of appeals at a lower rate than the Scottish average
- both the North Ayrshire (excluding Arran) and the Arran Local Plans have completed the public enquiry stage and are proceeding to adoption

Environmental Health

- overall performance regarding workplace safety inspections was slightly down on the previous year
- 51% of noise complaints requiring further action were completed within 14 days
- the food safety performance results showed an increase in performance in all areas against the previous year's figures
- the pest control service showed a slight improvement and continues to be assessed significantly above the Scottish average

Trading Standards

- the Department of Trade and Industry has introduced a national consumer advice helpline and this is expected to have a significant impact on the number of complaints and enquiries handled by Councils

Concern was expressed regarding flooding and sewerage problems and the resultant responses of Scottish Water and it was suggested that it would be helpful if Scottish Water were invited to a future meeting of an appropriate Council Committee to discuss this issue.

The Sub Committee (a) noted the content of the reports; and (b) agreed to the proposals for ensuring this information is made widely accessible to the public and other stakeholders.

The Meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.