

Property Services Standing Sub Committee
5 November 2003

Irvine, 5 November 2003 - At a Meeting of the Property Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

John Bell, Jane Gorman, Margaret McDougall, Elizabeth McLardy, Samuel Taylor and Nan Wallace.

In Attendance

T. Orr, Corporate Director, O. Clayton, Head of Housing, J. Currie, Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport, J. Paul, Head of Technical Services, C. Nelson, Head of Catering and Cleaning, I. Grice, Head of Building Services and J. Mason, Principal Engineer (Property Services); A Osborne and A. Little, Corporate & Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Richard Wilkinson.

1. Business and Service Plans 2003/06

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the Business and Service Plans for consideration by the Sub Committee which were initially considered by the Property Services Committee on 17 June 2003.

Property Services is a composite Service comprising 6 business units. The business units are Building Services, Catering and Cleaning Services, Cleansing/Grounds Maintenance & Transport Services, Housing Services, Roads Services and Technical Services.

Building Services

Within Building Services a number of training initiatives commenced including supported further education, modular management development programme Year 1 and 2, specialist office skills, Health and Safety training and customer interaction training. In addition the number of training hours will more than double in 2003/04.

The current levels of absence were achieved by using the absence management policies, including the occupational health service and in-house physiotherapy clinics.

New initiatives have been introduced to improve service including improved stores and procurement processes and the replacement of 3 local depots by 4 cyclic mobile work units which operate in 20 separate locations each week. Improved repair diagnostic software is being developed and introduced to improve repair reporting. Communication development continues with all operatives having hand-held radios and working towards all vehicles being supplied with fixed radios. The integration of IT and communication systems will enable on-line data transfer by 2004.

Building Services is exceeding all targets of housing repairs with the exception of routine repairs which stands at 93% as against the target of 97.3%. The figures show continuous improvement and targeted future improvement.

The Head of Building Services provided the following information in response to enquiries from members of the Sub Committee.

- Although management information is available in relation to non-housing clients there is no PI requirement to record information in this area. A system is however being developed to track progress of each job thereby enabling feedback to the customer.
- The range of courses currently being undertaken by staff include - HNC in Construction Management, HNC in Management and MBA.

Catering and Cleaning

Catering and Cleaning is structured across 5 geographical areas, with Area Officers assuming responsibility for each of the designated services within their area. School Crossing Patrol Services, is the exception and is managed by the School Crossing Patrol Monitor.

Catering, in partnership with AAHB and Educational Services, have introduced various health initiatives to schools:- healthy tuck shops, breakfast clubs/ breakfast service, water/healthy vending machines. Utilising New Opportunities Funding free fruit is provided to all primary pupils attending community schools. Scottish Executive funding has allowed the introduction of free fruit to all P1 and 2 children 3 days per week.

The Cleaning service has introduced a comprehensive training programme and 4 mobile supervisors have been appointed to provide training and support for cleaning and to assist Area Officers

The Sub Committee was advised that the first meeting of the PPP Board has taken place. PPP is likely to have an affect on Council services to schools including the catering and cleaning services.

The Head of Catering and Cleaning provided the following information in response to questions by Members of the Sub Committee:-

- Drinking water is provided free of charge to pupils at lunchtimes, and is available for purchase at all other times from the water vending machines. Breakfast clubs provide amongst other things hot drinks, cereal and toast.

Cleansing Grounds Maintenance and Transport

The Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport Service has an estimated gross turnover of £31m.

The Cleansing service delivered by the DSO, and Grounds Maintenance Services have a major impact on the environment of North Ayrshire by providing clean and safe public places. Existing recycling schemes continue and further expansions are being considered at existing bring sites as well as changing the priority from disposal to recycling at two civic amenity sites. Discussions are ongoing with SEPA regarding the permit application for the disposal of wastes at Shewalton.

Transport services in the main are provided to internal customers within the Council. An MOT station has come on line and discussions are taking place with the Police and Fire Services, amongst others, to provide an MOT service for their vehicles.

Cemeteries Services have embarked on a modernisation and upgrading programme which includes safety inspections of memorials and their safe restoration. Improved access to burial registers has been achieved by the adoption of software enabling recording of memorials. This has also allowed limited electronic access to burial records by members of the public.

The Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport provided the following information in response to questions by Members of the Sub Committee.

- Litter Warden - Legal and Protective Services are progressing the establishment of the post of Litter Warden and this should be in place shortly.
- Stevenston Toilet Block - internal works require to be completed before the toilet block at Stevenston can be opened to the public.
- Area Grounds Maintenance Plans are prepared for each area and are available for inspection by Members.

- Best Kept Village/Town Competition – consideration could be given to the introduction of such a scheme to encourage residents to maintain their outdoor areas.
- Parking at Stevenston Cemetery - the provision of additional parking facilities will be investigated.

The Corporate Director (Property Services) added that a bid for additional staffing within the grounds maintenance service was unsuccessful in the last financial year. A bid for additional staff will be submitted in the new financial year.

Housing Services

Housing Services are based on a decentralised network of teams comprising staff trained across all housing disciplines. Centrally based staff provide services and support in areas such as housing strategy and development, homelessness, Supporting People, performance management, IT systems and financial systems.

Service standards have been reviewed as a direct result of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 having particular regard to the Single Regulatory Framework and the role of the new Executive Agency, Communities Scotland. The Act also introduces the need to produce a Local Housing Strategy covering housing of all tenures in North Ayrshire by April 2004.

Service improvements within Housing have continued with information on rent payment included in the sign-up process and at new tenant visits, publicising the profile of rent payments by mail drops and leaflets, the introduction of area targets, more choice in payment methods including debit and credit card payments as well improved communication/information to tenants by newsletters, tenants handbook, Navigate and tenant consultation meetings. Staff development has included training, in liaison with Social Services, on arrears recovery, welfare benefits, debt counselling and mediation skills. Also, jointly with Social Services, a Welfare Rights Officer was introduced into Housing to assist with benefit claims.

The Head of Housing provided the following information in response to questions from Members of the Sub Committee.

- Staff training – almost two thirds of the 175 housing staff are undertaking further education.
- A Housing Forum has been established involving tenants and their representatives as well as representatives from various public, private and voluntary sector agencies. Information on the agencies represented at the Forum can be provided to Members.

- The approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour will see important developments, with the introduction of both an independent mediation services and specialist Anti-Social Behaviour Investigation Team.

Roads

Roads Services operates as a multi-functional unit with responsibility for the management and maintenance of the Council's roads network, transportation planning, coastal protection and flood prevention.

In addition to core programmes, Roads has been involved in major initiatives such as the Largs Flood Prevention Scheme, the Better Neighbourhoods Project and the Traffic Management at Schools review.

Roads Operations is the contracting arm of Roads and the business plan considers financial matters and performance measurements.

The Principal Roads Engineer provided the following information in response to question by Members of the Sub Committee.

- The challenges in recruiting staff remains and is attributable, in the main, to the financial influences within the recruitment market place.
- Absenteeism rates are within the Council average and changes to working practices are now in place to improve the health and welfare of employees.
- Specialist and minor tasks are sub-contracted where necessary e.g. white lining of roads and repairs to cobbled areas.
- AMEY have established themselves within the trunk road network and this will be a difficult area to break back into.

Technical Services

Technical Services provides a comprehensive property management and building design service for all North Ayrshire Council directorates. This service includes technical input to, and management of the Council's properties, reporting to the Council and other services on a range of property Health and Safety and energy management issues and the administration of private housing grants.

The Head of Technical Services provided the following information in response to questions by Members of the Sub Committee:-

- There have been issues with regard to the data provided by the previous gas maintenance contractor which have now been resolved.

- The European Directives on tendering apply to contracts with values over defined limits. In the case of works contracts procured by Technical Services, only major contracts such as the construction of a new school are likely to fall within the scope of the Directives and require to be advertised in the European Journal.
- It is incumbent on Councils to take reasonable steps to ensure that all Council properties comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. The Council have successfully completed a full survey to assess all their operational properties against the requirements of the Act and now have an annual programme of works to ensure compliance with the Act.

The Sub Committee noted the Business and Service Plans and thanked the Corporate Director and Heads of Service for their informative presentations.

The next meeting of the Property Services Standing Sub Committee will be held on 18 February 2004.

The meeting ended at 3.45 p.m.