

Scrutiny Committee
2 August 2010

IRVINE, 2 August 2010 - At a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

John Hunter, Anthea Dickson, Matthew Brown, Andrew Chamberlain, Alex Gallagher, Anthony Gurney, Jean Highgate and Pat McPhee.

In Attendance

E. Murray, Chief Executive; A. Herbert, Corporate Director and A Bodie, Head of Infrastructure and Design (Finance and Infrastructure); C. Kirk, Corporate Director and J. McHarg, Assistant Manager Community Services (Education and Skills); J. Montgomery, General Manager and A. Little, Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's Service).

Chair

Councillor Hunter in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

David Munn and Alan Munro.

1. Declarations of Interest

In terms of Standing Order 16, Councillor McPhee, as a Trustee of the Scottish Maritime Museum Trust, declared an interest in agenda Item 2.5.

2. Following the Public Pound: Monitoring Reports

2.1 Redburn and Vineburgh Community Association

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education and Skills) on a monitoring report on the utilisation of the grant awarded to Redburn and Vineburgh Community Association.

In financial year 2008/09, Redburn and Vineburgh Community Association was awarded a grant of £54,000 from the Education and Skills revenue account. The programme of lets and activities available within the Community Centre in 2009/10 was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report. Additional income is generated from lets and fundraising events organised by the Association, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

A working group was established by the Community Association in November 2009 to complete a full efficiency review which encompassed cleaning, caretaking contracts, additional hours payments, scheduling and allowances. Staff were notified of the review process and invited to become involved in the process of negotiation. Negotiated changes in conditions are planned to be implemented following consultation with employees and ratification by the Community Association Executive. A further review of these improvements will be undertaken in November 2010 to ensure continued best value and improvement in community use of the facility.

Members asked questions and were provided with information in relation to:-

- The method for collating information on the number of individuals attending activities within the Centres;
- The historical basis for allocation of funding from the Council to the Centres and the disparity between allocations;
- The requirement for Associations to ensure maintenance and repair of the Centres;
- The requirement for each Centre to undertake their own payroll functions;
- Exclusion of these Centres from the review being undertaken of leisure, sport and recreational services in North Ayrshire;
- Monitoring systems in place to ensure Centres are fulfilling their Service Level Agreement (SLA);
- Ongoing work with Centres to improve administration, utilise funds more effectively and increase marketing of the facility;
- A new fund 'Investing in Communities' operated by the Big Lottery Fund open to a wide range of organisations including voluntary and community organisations;
- Progress in increasing the educational component of the activities in place within Centres and the increased involvement of young people as an indication of improvements achieved in relation to the SLA;
- Comparisons between other community-run centres in relation to running costs;
- Assistance in kind to Centres via a Council subsidy in rental charges; and
- Costs for the Council to run similar sized facilities.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Corporate Director (Education and Skills) provide a report on the salary costs incurred by Redburn and Vineburgh, Fullarton and Vineburgh Community Associations and West Kilbride Village Hall Committee for the running of their facilities to a future meeting; and (b) otherwise to note the report.

2.2 Fullarton Community Association

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education and Skills) on the utilisation of the grant awarded to Fullarton Community Association.

In 2009/10, Fullarton Community Association was awarded a grant of £28,120 from the Education and Skills revenue account. The programme of lets and activities available within the Community Centre in 2009/10 was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report. Additional funding is generated through the letting of accommodation to community groups and organisations, income from the kitchen, together with fundraising events organised by the Association, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

The Association have been working with Community Development staff to explore registration as an incorporated organisation within the Social Economy Sector and are currently developing a business plan. In pursuit of Best Value, the Association will also work with Community Services in the review of a range of working practices to identify where efficiencies can be achieved, without loss of quality of service.

Members asked questions and received information on the undernoted:-

- Work with Optimise and progress towards registration as an incorporated organisation within the Social Economy Sector;
- The requirement for the organisation to work to the OSCAR accounting calendar; and
- The use of additional grant funding to create a computer area for young people.

Noted.

2.3 Vineburgh Community Centre Management Committee

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education and Skills) on the utilisation of the grant awarded to Vineburgh Community Centre Management Committee.

In 2009/10, the Vineburgh Community Centre Management Committee was awarded a grant of £36,543 from the Education and Skills revenue account. The programme of lets and activities available within the Community Centre in 2009/10 was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report. Additional funding is generated through the letting of accommodation to community groups and organisations, income from the kitchen together with fundraising events organised by the Association, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

In pursuit of Best Value, the Association will work with Community Services in the review of a range of working practices to identify where efficiencies can be achieved, without loss of quality of service.

Members asked questions and received further information in respect of:-

- The problems experienced within the new Community Centre building and the associated costs incurred by the Association in maintaining and repairing the Centre; and
- A review of current working practices to ensure efficiency, including associated salary costs.

Noted.

2.4 West Kilbride Public Hall

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education and Skills) on the utilisation of the grant awarded to West Kilbride Public Hall.

In 2009/10, the West Kilbride Village Hall Committee was awarded a grant of £10,100 from the Education and Skills revenue account. The programme of activities and lets during 2009/10 was attached as an appendix to the report.

The programme of lets and activities available within the Community Centre in 2009/10 was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report. Additional income is generated through lets to community groups and organisations and as a result of fundraising activities, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

The Village Hall Committee has worked steadily on upgrading the quality of the hall. The hall has been redecorated and new lighting, stage curtains, and a replacement boiler system have been installed. These improvements have added value and increased the use of the facility by local residents.

Noted.

2.5 Scottish Maritime Museum Trust

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education and Skills) on the utilisation of the grant awarded to the Scottish Maritime Museum.

In 2009/10, the Scottish Maritime Museum was awarded £86,000 from the Education and Skills revenue account. The Scottish Government provided funding of £305,000 and a further £115,000 was provided by bodies such as Museums and Galleries Scotland, Irvine Bay, National Historic Ships, Scottish Government, Association for Industrial Archaeology and Scottish Maritime Heritage Association.

The report provided details of the many factors that had affected the operation of the Trust in previous years and which continue to dominate their current operation. Grant funding towards the Scottish Maritime Museum Trust's running costs were discontinued as part of the Council's budget considerations for 2010/11. Additional support has been received in the short term from the Scottish Government.

Members asked questions and received further information in relation to:-

- Assistance provided by Museums Scotland in grant application processes;
- A recent positive meeting with Museums Scotland; and
- A joint curriculum for excellence project with Irvine Royal Academy which received an award from the Technology Teachers Association.

It was considered that an appropriate return was secured for the investment in the Museum in 2009/10.

Noted.

3. Winter Maintenance Performance Review

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Infrastructure) on the Winter Maintenance Procedures and Resource Policy during the extreme winter weather of 2009/10 and the key lessons learned.

At its meeting on 14 January 2010, the Council requested a report be presented to the Scrutiny Committee on the Council's performance against its agreed Winter Maintenance Programme priorities, highlighting the key lessons learned and issues being reviewed relating to winter 2009/10.

Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 requires that "a Roads Authority shall take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads". The Council's Winter Service and Weather Emergencies Procedures and Resources document sets out the Council's policy to meet its statutory obligations. The policy recognises that it is not possible to treat all roads and footways within the Council area and sets out priorities for treatment. Details of each of the carriageway priorities were provided in the report. Information on the resources deployed during December 2009 and January 2010 were provided in Appendix 1. Footways and footpaths are only treated when considered absolutely necessary and with the assistance of the Grounds Maintenance Section.

The severe winter weather affected the whole of the UK, and salt usage outstripped national production rates. Over the Christmas period, and for the remainder of the winter period, salt was mixed with sand and grit to preserve supplies. After Christmas Eve the treatment of footways stopped, which resulted in some criticism of the Council for not doing enough. However treatment of priority carriageways was carried out twice daily and on days of snowfall continuous patrols and snow ploughing were carried out, often repeatedly, keeping the network largely free of snow and ice.

The allocated budget for winter maintenance for 2009/10 was £780,000, however due to the severe prolonged period of adverse weather, actual expenditure on winter maintenance was £1,500,000. The budget allocation for 2010/11 is £906,490.

The review of the service has considered the resource provision, routes and procedures and salt resilience. A draft Winter Maintenance Action Plan has been prepared to assist and support the updating of the Winter Service and Weather Emergencies Procedures and Resources Policy and will be presented to the Executive in September 2010. The Action Plan addresses the main issues identified from recent winter periods, principally the determination of level of service, route prioritisation, fleet requirements, operational controls, salt storage and capacity, communications and performance management.

Details of the recommendations of the national review of all Councils' performance in conjunction with Transport Scotland and their trunk road operators were provided in the report.

The report concluded that whilst there had been some general criticism of performance during the winter period, the Council's response to the severe adverse weather was delivered in accordance with its Winter Service and Weather Emergencies Procedures and Resources Policy at that time.

Members asked questions and received further information on the following:-

- The increased expenditure set against the 2009/10 Roads budget as a result of the extreme weather conditions;
- Reassessment of prioritisation in relation to the treatment of footways and footpaths;
- Implications for the Council of footways and footpaths in areas of high pedestrian concentration not being treated;
- The reduction in public liability to the Council for this period compared to previous years;
- The use of external contractors during the Christmas holiday period;

- The need for a publicity campaign providing consistent advice about liability for clearing snow and ice on footways and encouraging the public to clear areas within their community;
- Investigations into pro-active footway treatments;
- New grit bin procedures, including a review of the number and location of grit bins, the provision of unobtrusive bins and leaving bins in situ rather than delivering and collecting each winter;
- National guidance in relation to non-filling of grit bins over the Christmas period and for the remainder of the winter period;
- The costs to fill approximately 300 grit bins (½ tonne capacity) within North Ayrshire;
- Examination of alternatives to salt to assist in reducing the environment impact of salt leaching into the watercourse;
- The need for careful salt management, salt storage options and stock building of products where practical;
- The provision of a salt supply to the Grounds Maintenance Section;
- Examination of the number of standby staff, including staff from Grounds Maintenance; and
- The changing nature of the level and service to take account of unpredictable factors.

Noted.

4. Investigation into Grants to External Organisations

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a proposed investigation into the Council's grants to external organisations.

The Committee agreed to continue consideration of this item to a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.