

Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee
23 September 2005

IRVINE, 23 September 2005 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Tom Barr, Jack Carson, Margaret McDougall, David Munn, Robert Rae and Ian Richardson.

Also Present

I. Snodgrass, Chief Executive; A. Herbert, Assistant Chief Executive (Finance); I.T. Mackay, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective); G. Young, Personnel Manager and R. Young, Principal Officer (Personnel); R. Forrest, Planning Services Manager (Development and Promotion); D. Gemmell, Technical Support Manager (Information Technology); 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

Elizabeth McLardy and John Moffat.

1. Service Performance Reports for the Year to 31 March 2005

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the performance for each of the main service areas for the year to 31 March 2005.

Statutory Guidance issued by Scottish Ministers advises local authorities what they are expected to demonstrate to fulfil the duty of Best Value, including:-

- Commitment and Leadership and
- Sound Governance - Effective Performance Management Systems.

Officers reported on performance highs, lows and immediate priorities for each of the services as follows:-

Chief Executive's

Performance Highs

- Smooth hand-over from outgoing to incoming Chief Executive.
- Efficient and effective co-ordination of Best Value Audit, leading to a positive report.

Performance Lows

- Overspend on the budget due to unbudgeted and higher than expected one off costs.
- The non compliance of services with the corporate style guidelines.
- Fewer suppliers' invoices processed for payment within the target timescales.

Immediate Priorities

- Review the scrutiny function and organise training for Members.
- Implement and monitor the 3 year Regeneration Outcome Agreement.
- Produce and implement an updated Communications strategy. This will be considered over the next 6 month period.
- Continue to make preparations for impending changes in local government post 2007. The Minute from the first meeting of the 2007 Group will be reported to the Corporate Policy Standing Sub Committee at its next meeting.

Customer Services

Performance Highs

Customers

- 99.7% of face to face enquiries/transactions were dealt with across the counter at that time.
- 98% expressed overall satisfaction with the face-to-face service and 98% with the Telephone Contact Centre (TCC). During an exit poll all customers expressed satisfaction with the way staff in Local Office Services (LOS) dealt with their enquiries.
- The TCC was benchmarked against 25 private sector companies for quality of customer service. The average placing over 1 year was 12 out of 25 companies, scoring 75% against the set criteria.
- Saltcoats, Largs and Arran Local Offices comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. Cumbrae Local Office does not currently comply but will when it relocates to Garrison House in 2007/08.

Financial

- The Service is operating within budget and making best use of the financial resources available.
- Cost per call was reduced to 80p per minute from £1.68 in 2004/5.

Continuous Improvement and Learning

- Training courses for Council Tax re-designed were as a result of staff feedback.
- A new 'What's Stress' course was designed and delivered to all Customer Services staff in response to staff feedback.
- IIP accreditation was achieved at both the Telephone Contact Centre and Local Office Services.

Performance Lows

Continuous Improvement and Learning

- Staff in-house training, identified through individual Personal Development Reviews, were not fully fulfilled due to cancellation of in-house courses in Local Office Services
- Some inconsistencies between Local Offices and the TCC have still to be eliminated viz. the introduction of a competence based Yardstick for Local Office staff.

Immediate Priorities

- Complete training identified through staff PDRs.
- Introduce competence based Yardstick for Local Office staff.
- Develop "Quickplace", the intranet facility accessed by Local Office staff, and roll out to the TCC.
- Transfer Cunninghame House Switchboard and Hall Lets into the TCC as part of Phase 3 of the project.
- Process map Benefits Service.

Development and Promotion

Performance Highs

- On Montgomerie Park Phase 1 successful negotiations were completed with preferred bidder and initial purchase payment made. Development is inclusive of infrastructure proceeding satisfactorily. Negotiations on educational and health provision are proceeding on timetable.
- Ardrossan Harbour Regeneration Phase 1 received the Scottish Enterprise Dynamic Places Award in "Open Spaces" category.
- The 'Land Reform: Access Strategy' adopted and published February 2005.

Performance Lows

- Increased competition from external providers of Property Enquiry Service resulting in a loss of income and a review of administration staff delivering the service.

- General delays in implementing the Service Delivery Plan (Development Plans) as a result of pressure on staff resources. Staff resources are depleted following retirement and resignations.

Immediate Priorities

- Local Plan customer forum to be developed.
- Promote the establishment of an area regeneration initiative for the Irvine Bay.
- Monitor performance against new service indicators for development briefs; urban capacity; industrial land review; and Montgomerie Park.

The Chief Executive advised that a Best Value Audit of the Estates function had recently been completed and that an Action Plan was in the course of being prepared to take matters forward. The Action Plan will be reported to the Corporate Policy Committee in due course.

Financial Services

Performance Highs

- There was a restructure of council tax staff into teams and sub-teams to match local performance indicators. This allowed a more customer focused service to be delivered.
- An amalgamated debt recovery unit is now in place. This has resulted in an improvement in the collection of certain debt types.
- The volume of creditors payments made by BACS has increased by almost 10%.

Performance Lows

- There has been a delay in approval for setting up a Risk Management Group.
- The SPI for creditors paid on time has decreased by 1.7% since 2003/04.
- The cost of collecting council tax continues to cause concern due to high internal costs e.g. Contact Centre, payments made at First Stop Shop.
- There is a continuing internal auditor vacancy.

Immediate Priorities

- Ensure local performance indicators are met for Council Tax processing.
- Provision of Risk Management Workshops (in conjunction with Service Plan requirements).
- Further improvement in the number of days to process new claims and change of circumstance within benefits.
- To continue to improve council tax collection levels (already up 0.8% on this time last year).

Information Technology Services

Performance Highs

- New ICT Strategy completed and ICT Steering Group formed to strengthen alignment of ICT investment with the business needs of the Council.
- Implementation of new Cash Collection system to provides a more secure and efficient environment for the receipt of payments from the public.
- Secure and safe Internet access and email access provided for all schools.
- A bid to the Scottish Executive's Modernising Government Fund was successful, with £765,000 awarded to develop systems to complement both the Council's own Customer Contact Strategy and the Executive's Customer First programme.
- Customer satisfaction, as measured in the annual customer survey, was maintained at a very high level keeping IT Services in the top quarter of IT departments in UK Councils (as measured by SOCITM benchmarking services).

Performance Lows

- Low response from schools to the annual customer satisfaction survey. The way the survey is conducted in schools will be reviewed for 2005/06.
- Some negative feedback from staff, public and Elected Members to the new web-site design. Several changes have already been made in the light of comments received and further improvements are being prepared for implementation in Autumn 2005.
- The target for invoice payment was not achieved.

Immediate Priorities

- Development of the 3rd phase of the Customer Relationship Management system for the Customer Contact Strategy.
- Continue further expansion of the use of the eProcurement Scotland system throughout the Council.
- Complete re-design of the Council website to be launched in Autumn 2005.
- Commence preparation of an Information and Knowledge Management Strategy.
- The allocation of more internal resources to improve the time taken to pay invoices.

Legal and Protective Services

Performance Highs

- Performance in all areas continues to achieve a high level of satisfaction despite significant increases in numbers of applications particularly within Development Control, Building Standards and Registration.

- The introduction of a new service offering Baby Naming and Renewal of Vows Ceremonies throughout North Ayrshire.
- Involvement by Trading Standards in addressing priorities on under age sales of tobacco and alcohol through the Community Safety Programme.
- The year end financial position resulted in substantial surpluses as a result of increased fee income across the Service.

Performance Lows

- Increase in difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff within the Service.
- Pressure on staff to maintain levels of service delivery expected by the public, given the recognised increase in demands for service and the resources available.
- The continual deterioration in the fabric of the Townhouse.
- Deterioration in performance indicator for Council House Sales during the year due to change in legislation and volume of workload.
- Deterioration in performance indicator for Building Warrants due to volume of business and preparation for the introduction of the new Building Standards system.

Immediate Priorities

- The introduction and implementation of the Building Standards System under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003.
- To adapt the Service to deal with the continuing increase in planning and building warrant applications and registrations affecting the ability of staff to keep up with improvements on statutory performance indicators.
- The continuation of development of a scheme for the introduction of e-Planning for both Development Control and Building Standards.
- Environmental Health to lead the Antisocial Behaviour Noise Team for all three Ayrshire Councils.
- To work with other Services and outside agencies to take forward the restoration of the Townhouse.

The Sub Committee was advised that information on the number and percentage of appeals which follow on from Planning Consents will be included in future reports.

Personnel Services

Performance Highs

- The continuing programme to improve the sickness absence rates through proactive personnel policies and procedures, improved monitoring arrangements and an increased role for the Occupational Health service.

- Ensuring legislative compliance through the continuing development of policies and procedures such as the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act, 2003 and employment update sessions for managers.
- The successful redeployment of personnel following the closure of Kerelaw school and the reduction in scope of the Better Neighbourhood Services Project.
- The approval of the new Health and Safety Strategy for the Council.

Performance Lows

- A delay in implementing the Home Computing Initiative due to difficulties associated with the Scottish Executive Framework Agreement for public bodies in Scotland.
- High turnover of staff

Immediate Priorities

- Finalise with the Unions, the understandings reached on a Trade Union Facilities Agreement.
- Complete preparations for the successful re-accreditation of Personnel's Investors in People Award later in the year.
- Maintaining progress in the Job Evaluation Scheme to enable discussion with the Unions on the Scheme.

In response to members' questions, officers provided further information and clarification on the reports.

Noted.

The Meeting ended at 11.20 a.m.