

Property Services Standing Sub Committee
25 May 2005

Irvine, 25 May 2005 - At a Meeting of the Property Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

John Bell, Stewart Dewar, Jane Gorman, Margaret McDougall, David O'Neill, Samuel Taylor, Nan Wallace and Richard Wilkinson

In Attendance

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

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

1. Rent Arrears

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the outcome of an independent audit of the Arrears Service carried out by the Housing Quality Network.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced powers for all registered social landlords to be regulated and inspected on their housing services. Following an Efficiency Review of the Arrears Service in 2003 and in preparation of the inspection by Communities Scotland a number of improvements were made to the Arrears service. The Housing Quality Network (Rent Income Excellence) carried out an audit of the service, including current and former tenant arrears, debt and welfare advice, Housing Benefit and legal action. The Housing Quality Network awarded the service a B grading (Good) and made a number of recommendations which have been incorporated into an Action Plan.

The Sub Committee (a) agreed the Action Plan incorporating the recommendations of the Housing Quality Network audit; and (b) noted the continued improvements to the service.

2. Services Plans for 2005/06

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the draft Service Plans for Property Services. Each of the service areas provided information on their scorecard of priorities, key performance indicators, targets and supporting actions.

Building Services

In 2001, Building Services won the Council's repairs and maintenance contract for all housing and non-housing properties for a 3 year period. This contract was extended for 2 years and is entering its final year.

In response to questions, the Corporate Director (Property Services) advised that the apprenticeship scheme will recruit a further 20 apprentices this year. Whilst the service is nearing its optimum staffing level, markets continue to dictate a reliance on external contractors.

The Sub Committee was advised that the use of Best Value as a process for tendering for the repair and maintenance of Council properties may be a consideration for the Council at a future date.

Catering and Cleaning Services

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 introduced new statutory duties relating to Best Value. The Act requires the preparation of Trading Accounts for activities that are provided in a competitive environment, repealing the CCT legislation and allowing the Council to configure services to suit management structures. Trading operations have therefore been prepared for Catering Trading Operation and Cleaning Trading Operation.

The Sub Committee was advised that the service continues to work closely with Personnel and Occupational Health to reduce sickness absence.

Cemeteries, Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport Services

The Cemeteries section has embarked on a modernisation and upgrading programme which includes the safe inspection of memorials and their safe restoration. Cleansing Services require to secure additional ground for landfill with the capacity for the disposal of domestic and commercial waste and the implementation of an area waste plan by the Scottish Executive. There will be considerable changes to the refuse collection service to assist the Council in meeting the Local Authority recycling and composting targets of 25% by 2006.

Grounds Maintenance have completed risk assessments on staff who have received training in relation to risk assessments. Transport Services has been able to maintain the level of service through efficiencies within the fleet and a structured vehicle replacement programme.

In response to questions, the Sub Committee was advised that existing recycling centres within North Ayrshire continue to be fully utilised by the public. 'No go' areas such as play areas and open areas of ground frequented by drug users will be examined by the Anti Social Behaviour Working Group.

Housing Services

Housing Services are based on a decentralised network of teams comprising staff trained across all housing disciplines. A Homeless Team has been established to provide accommodation and advice services to homeless people.

The Sub Committee was advised that Housing Services continue to focus on reducing voids and rent arrears. A Common Housing Register in partnership with Registered Social Landlords to improve access to housing is planned, and following the Council recess a review of the allocation policy will be undertaken to meet legislative requirements and the housing needs of residents in North Ayrshire.

Roads Services

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

In response to questions, the Sub Committee was advised that flood prevention programmes of work are being developed and implemented as funding becomes available. Challenges in recruiting staff remain, and is attributable, in the main, to the financial influences within the recruitment market place.

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 on a range of property, Health and Safety, energy management issues and the administration of private housing grants.

The Sub Committee was advised of new support services to be introduced in 2005/06. A Customer Liaison Team will provide advice and support to tenants receiving major works or repair and improvement to their homes. Energy Management Services will be expanded for the Council's operational properties which will involve the setting of energy consumption target figures for individual buildings, increased security of energy tariffs and bills and dissemination of advice and support throughout the Council.

The Sub Committee discussed staffing and training of Council staff and agreed that further information in relation to the continued capacity to attract, retain and train staff, including young people, be provided to an appropriate meeting.

The meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.