

Housing Services Committee  
4 December 1997

**Irvine, 4 December 1997** - At a Meeting of the Housing Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

Samuel Taylor, Gena Seales, Thomas Barr, David Gallagher, Jane Gorman, Margaret Munn and Robert Rae.

**In Attendance**

The Director of Housing Services; E. McNaught, Head of Customer Services; F. Kelly, Head of Strategy and Development; E. Munroe, Housing Capital Controller (Housing Services); H. Hunter, Senior Accountant, Accountancy (Financial Services); S. King, Corporate Policy Officer and S. Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

**Chair**

Mr. Taylor in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Patrick Browne, James Clements, Thomas Dickie, Samuel Gooding and George Steven.

**1. Minutes Confirmed**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 30 October 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

**2. Rent Collection: Girobank Pilot Scheme**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on a proposed pilot scheme which will provide Council tenants in the Garnock Valley and Largs with a new method of paying rent through the Post Office which will be in addition to current options to pay (i) to any Area Housing Office, either in person or by post; (ii) through the Outdoor Rent Collection Service; and (iii) by Standing Order through their bank.

Arrangements have now been made with Girobank to provide tenants with voucher books similar to those currently used for the collection of Council Tax, and the scheme will commence on 5th January 1998.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposed pilot scheme; and (b) that a report on the scheme be submitted to the meeting of the Committee in April 1998 once procedures have been tested.

### **3. Multi-Storey Accommodation Strategy**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the Multi-Storey Accommodation Strategy which establishes a mechanism to provide long term management and maintenance solutions for the multi-storey accommodation in Irvine and Saltcoats in the period 1998 to 2004. These proposals will have both capital and revenue implications on a phased basis over the period in question.

The existing tenants in the multi-storey accommodation in Irvine and Saltcoats have been consulted on the Strategy proposals and a substantial majority support them. Tenants representatives have also expressed an interest in being directly involved and consulted during the period of the phased programme and beyond. In Saltcoats a Tenants Group has already been established and in Irvine there may be some interest in forming a Steering Group.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the Multi-Storey Strategy as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; (b) that phase 1 of the programme for capital works outlined in the Strategy be considered for inclusion in the 1998/99 HRA Capital Programme; and (c) to acknowledge the future revenue implications outlined in the Strategy for both the Housing and Social Work Directorates.

### **4. Vacant House Rent Loss/Void Control Policy**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the current situation regarding rent loss on vacant houses and on proposals to adopt a policy for void control.

Rent loss as a result of vacant houses shows an overspend of £72,000 on the budget profile figure of £111,804 as at 12 September 1997. This projects forward to a year end overspend of £180,000 on the total budget of £268,800, assuming performance continues at the present rate. During 1996/97, the total budget was similarly overspent by £132,700 by the year end.

The purpose of the Void Control Policy will be to minimise the length of time a house remains vacant thus reducing the lost rent. It is proposed to commence the allocation process, as soon as a tenant gives notice of termination of a property. The proposals include (i) use of the statutory 4 week notice period to prepare for re-allocation and to ensure the outgoing tenant is made aware of their responsibilities in vacating the property; (ii) use of shortlists to ensure a quick response to refusals of accommodation; (iii) close monitoring of all stages of the process and all parties involved, including liaison with Works and other contractors, with a schedule of work being drawn up to match the approved lettable standard; and (iv) escorted viewings, where an Officer is present to discuss any issues surrounding the offer of accommodation.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the new Void Control Policy, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

### **5. Homeless Persons Individual Needs Accommodation Strategy: Implementation**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on a scheme for the development of 14-20 Shore Road, Stevenston.

On 29 July 1997, the Corporate Strategy Committee as part of its consideration of the Homeless Persons Individual Needs Accommodation Strategy Implementation Plan, approved the establishment of one development of temporary supported accommodation drawn from the previously identified list of priority projects. The site identified at 14-20 Shore Road, Stevenston will provide 12 units of shared accommodation with on-site support for young people, including those who have been looked after by the Council. A key feature of the project will be to allow young people to develop the necessary skills to move on to a less intensive supported environment and ultimately to a mainstream tenancy. The project will require physical alterations to the properties which will remain self-contained with each young person having their own room along with shared common facilities. One shop unit will be converted to provide office

accommodation for support workers, the existing open stairwell will be enclosed and a secure door entry system provided. There is only one existing tenant at present in the properties, who will require to be relocated. The support aspect of the project which will be provided by the Blue Triangle Housing Association, includes supervision, training, budgetary management and other educational aspects. Requisite support will be provided on a 24 hour basis from the accommodation on the ground floor. Blue Triangle are also investigating the feasibility of obtaining European funding for the educational aspects of the project and this may be a possible use for the remaining vacant shops. The estimated cost of the physical alterations and relocation of existing occupiers is £78,000. Whilst the current financial year's HRA Capital Programme has allocated £100,000 for projects aimed at addressing the needs of homeless persons, given the lead-in time a site start will not be made until late February 1998 and there will therefore be a requirement for an allocation of capital funding in the 1998/99 Programme. The support element of the project will be met from the rental charge for the individual units, which will be eligible for Housing Benefit.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the development of 14-20 Shore Road, Stevenston as a unit of temporary supported accommodation, in accordance with the Council's Homeless Persons Individual Needs Accommodation Strategy; (b) to approve the capital expenditure required during 1997/98; (c) to acknowledge the proposed capital expenditure commitment for 1998/99; and (d) to authorise the Director of Housing Services to enter into an agency agreement with the Blue Triangle Housing Association to provide the necessary levels of support for the project.

#### **6. Mainstream Housing Allocation Policy/Sheltered and Amenity Housing Allocation Policy: Implementation Issues**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the issues which require to be addressed to allow the Mainstream Housing and Sheltered and Amenity Housing Allocation Policies to be implemented.

On 30 October 1997, the Committee approved these two policies and their phased implementation. A number of issues, both corporate and service related, do however require to be addressed to allow their implementation, including (i) the purchase of a new IT system which will require to interface with the new unified rents and benefits IT system; (ii) a full review of all current applicants; (iii) a review of the procedures associated with the Allocation Policies; and ; (iv) new documentation to accompany the new Policies.

There are at present some 11,400 applicants for housing recorded on the current system, but there has not been a full review of applicants undertaken since 1988. Whilst a number of these applicants are likely to be either no longer eligible for re-housing under the new Policies or no longer wish to pursue an application for re-housing, it seems likely that around 10,000 applicants will require to be personally interviewed as part of the review process. This will require specially trained staff who will also be able to give information to the applicants on Council policies. Furthermore the I.T. package itself will be a fairly complex system. It is considered that the amount of work required in this review cannot therefore be undertaken by existing staff and it is proposed that a project team consisting of eight temporary Clerical Officers and one re-deployed Housing Officer be established at a cost of approximately £50,000. It is anticipated that the review will take around five to six months to complete and that accordingly the original implementation date of 1 April 1998 has had to be replaced with a revised target of 1 July 1998.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve in principle the purchase of a new I.T. system to facilitate the implementation of the Allocation Policies; (b) to approve in principle the establishment of a project team to undertake the necessary review of all applicants on the current system; (c) to refer the staffing implications to the Support Services Committee; and (d) to acknowledge the requirements to further consider the cost implications in relation to capital and revenue funding for 1998/99.

## **7. Stevenston: 83C Glencairn Street**

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on land adjacent to 83C Glencairn Street, Stevenston.

Mr. & Mrs. McKenzie, the owners of the property at 83C Glencairn Street, Stevenston have applied to purchase an area of ground to the left of their gable wall. On 30 October 1997, the Committee considered a report on the outcome of a visit to the site by the Chair, Vice-Chair and local Member. It had been agreed at that time to continue consideration of the item to allow Officers to carry out further investigations on the possibility of enhancing the security of the property and report to the next meeting.

Officers from the Council and Strathclyde Police's Community Involvement Branch who then visited the site took the view that the security of the property would be enhanced by the erection of a perimeter fence. The Police had also suggested planting of thorny shrubs in the fenced area to act as a further deterrent. In addition Mrs. McKenzie has indicated that she would be willing to erect a fence and undertake any remedial action arising from the work and to maintain the fence thereafter.

Previous concerns had related to the effect which the disposal of the area would have on the public footpath and the option now being proposed provides a reduced area of ground which would allow the retention of the footpath for public use. A smaller area of ground adjacent to the entrance to the property would also be retained by the Housing Services Directorate and Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie would have a right of access over this land to their property.

The Committee agreed (a) to declare surplus to requirements the area of land lying between the gable of 83 Glencairn Street, Stevenston and the grass verge area as detailed on the plan attached to the report; and (b) to remit the proposed disposal of the land to Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie to the Support Services Committee.

## **8. Springside: 108 Overtoun Road**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the waiting list demand for and the condition of the property at 108 Overtoun Road, Springside.

On 30 October 1997, the Committee having considered a report on the proposed sale of the 3 bedroomed house at 108 Overtoun Road, Springside agreed that the Director of Housing Services submit a report to the next meeting on the condition and likely demand for the property. The property has been assessed as being in generally good condition, but is in a poor state of decoration and the large garden to the front and side of the property is also in a poor condition.

With regard to waiting list demand, current practice is that allocations in the Springside area are made to applicants with a connection to the area to ensure a balanced community. There are five applicants with a local connection who match for 3 bedroom housing. Three of these applicants, however, have rent arrears and another has recently purchased their existing Council house. The further applicant is currently in a 3 bedroomed property, and if allocated the property at 108 Overtoun Road this would simply create a same size vacancy with all the associated letting difficulties. The report therefore proposed that the property be declared surplus to requirements since it was felt to be marketable and would generate a capital receipt if sold on the open market.

The local Member did not support this view and after a full discussion the Committee agreed that 108 Overtoun Road, Springside be retained within the housing stock and allocated in accordance with Council policy.

## **9. Private Sector Housing Grants**

Submitted the annexed report by the Director of Housing Services (Appendix HS1) on grant applications for improvements, disabled, repairs and lead replacement grants.

The Committee approved the decisions intimated in the final column of the Appendix.

### **(b) Saltcoats No. 24 Housing Action Area for Improvement**

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on grant applications approved for a property in the Saltcoats No. 24 Housing Action Area for Improvement.

On 30 October 1997, the Committee agreed to remit with powers to the Chair and Vice-Chair to determine, if necessary, the outstanding grant applications by Mr. J. Slaven for his property at 15 Canal Street, Saltcoats in the Saltcoats No. 24 Housing Action Area for Improvement.

On 17 November 1997, the Chair and Vice-Chair met to consider the proposals to upgrade the property and in terms of the powers delegated to them, approved an improvement grant of £36,170 and an environmental improvement grant of £3,000.

Noted.

## **10. Warner Street Children's Home Closure: Alternative Accommodation**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the proposed use of accommodation for Social Work purposes as an alternative to the Warner Street Children's Home, Stevenston.

Following the decision of the Social Work Committee on 12 March 1997, the Warner Street Children's Home, Stevenston closed at the end of November 1997. The Social Work Directorate had requested alternative three or four apartment accommodation from the Housing Services Directorate in the Three Towns and Irvine areas. Within the Three Towns, the property at 44 Garven Road, Stevenston, formerly used as a Caretaker's flat at an existing community house, has been transferred to the Social Work Directorate to accommodate some of the young people previously accommodated at the Warner Street unit.

Within the Irvine area, suitable properties have been identified at 59A to 59C Seaton Terrace, Irvine which have recently been vacated by tenants who are under the care of the Richmond Fellowship (Scotland). These are brand new purpose built properties to barrier free standards and would be suitable for Social Work purposes. It is proposed that they be leased to the Social Work Directorate at the existing rental levels and that any adaptations required be funded by Social Work. The lease of the properties to the Social Work Directorate would also protect the Council's investment in these properties. The local residents would be consulted on the proposals.

The Committee were advised that the property at Warner Street, Stevenston is still the responsibility of the Social Work Directorate and that the feasibility of obtaining additional grant assistance for Cunninghame Housing Association to restore the property is being pursued.

The Committee agreed to approve for the purposes of accommodating young people and staff from the former Children's Unit, Warner Street, Stevenston (a) the transfer of 44 Garven Road, Stevenston to the Social Work Directorate; and (b) the lease of 59A to 59C Seaton Terrace, Irvine to the Social Work Directorate on terms and conditions as detailed in the report and subject to consultation with the local residents by the Social Work Directorate.

The Meeting ended at 2.45 p.m.