

Corporate Policy Standing Sub Committee
9 June 2005

IRVINE, 9 June 2005 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Policy Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Thomas Barr, Jean Highgate, Margaret Munn, David O'Neill and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

I. Snodgrass, Chief Executive; A. Herbert, Assistant Chief Executive (Finance); J. Paul, Head of Technical Services (Property Services); A. Osborne and M. McKeown, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers and J. Montgomery, Principal Performance Review Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Barr in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

John Bell, Alan Hill, Margaret McDougall and John Reid.

1. Audit of Best Value and Community Planning: Improvement Plan Progress Report

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on progress in implementing the Improvement Plan in response to the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning.

In March 2005, the Council was advised of the content of the Controller of Audit's report on Best Value and Community Planning arrangements within the Council. The Council agreed (i) to implement an Improvement Plan to address the report's recommendations and (ii) that twice yearly reports highlighting the progress of the Improvement Plan be submitted to the Corporate Policy Committee. The first of these monitoring reports was presented to the Committee in May 2005 and was remitted to the Standing Sub Committee for further scrutiny.

Appendix 1 to the report highlighted progress against the fifty actions contained within the Action Plan. These actions cover improvements in the following areas:-

- A - Elected Member Development;
- B - Community Planning and Joint Working;
- C - Strategic Planning and Budgeting;
- D - Performance Management, Challenge and Improvement;
- E - Public Performance Reporting;
- F - Managing People;
- G - Managing Information and Knowledge;
- H - Managing Assets;

I - Managing Procurement;
J - Equal Opportunities;
K - Sustainability;
L - Customer Care;
M - Leisure;
N - Economic Development.

To date, 39 actions have been completed or are on target for completion within agreed timescales. In respect of the remaining 11 actions, these are progressing more slowly than originally planned but are nevertheless progressing towards completion. Appendix 2 to the report highlighted actions being taken in relation to Elected Member Development, Community Planning and Joint Working, and Strategic Planning and Budgeting, as follows:-

Elected Member Development (Actions A1 and A2)

- A short-life Member/Officer Working Group, involving the Chairs of the Audit and Standards Committee and the Standing Sub Committees, will be established to look at how the scrutiny role of these Committees can be strengthened. The Working Group will look at Committee remits, Member training, and the role of Officers in supporting effective scrutiny. A report on the work of the Group will be submitted to the Corporate Policy Committee on 6 September 2005.
- A Member/Officer Working Group, involving the Chief Executive and the Leaders of the political groups, will be established to look at the implications of the introduction of the Single Transferable Voting System (STV) at the 2007 Local Government Elections. The Group will assess the implications of changes to the political composition of the Council, review best practice elsewhere, and make recommendations on changes to the Scheme of Administration and other governance issues. The Working Group will also examine support to Members in undertaking their scrutiny role effectively.

Joint Working (Actions B6 and B7)

- A number of measures are being taken to improve joint working between the Council and Ayrshire and Arran NHS. These measures will address aspects of joint management, joint governance, joint resourcing and joint performance management arrangements.

Strategic Planning and Budgeting (C1 and C2)

- The Council's senior management structure is being reviewed by the Chief Executive with support from Solace Enterprises, the Chief Executives organisation. The Chief Executive will report to Members with recommendations in due course.
- The operation of the Corporate Management Team (CMT), which consists of the Chief Executive, the three Corporate Directors and the two statutory officers for

finance and monitoring, was reviewed in September 2004 with a view to increasing its effectiveness. A further review on progress has been undertaken recently and a number of areas identified which will further improve the strategic role of the CMT within the Council.

- A new citizen focused Corporate Plan, which will set out a clear direction for Council Services, is being developed. Elected Members will be involved at key stages. It is intended that the new Plan will be in place by March 2006 and will cover a three year period to March 1999.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the Council's external auditors, have completed the first of 3 annual progress audits of the Improvement Plan and are satisfied with the progress being made.

The Sub Committee agreed to (a) note the progress in implementing the Improvement Plan arising from the audit of best value and community planning; (b) approve the actions being taken in relation to Elected Member Development, Community Planning and Joint Working, and Strategic Planning and Budgeting, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report; (c) note that the Council's auditor is satisfied with the progress achieved against the Improvement Plan; and (d) receive monitoring reports on a quarterly rather than six-monthly basis in future.

2. Managing and Monitoring of Capital Programmes

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on arrangements put in place to manage and monitor the projects and programmes contained within the Housing and General Services Capital Programmes for 2005/06 and beyond.

At its meeting on 16 March 2005, the Sub Committee was advised of the projected out-turn expenditure on the Housing and General Services Capital Programmes for 2004/05. The Sub Committee noted that spending targets had not been achieved during 2004/05, and agreed to receive a report at a future meeting on the implementation of a corporate approach to managing and monitoring capital expenditure.

Technical Services have now introduced new procedures to improve the overall project management of the Housing and General Services Capital Programmes. These arrangements comprise (a) a resource planning exercise setting out timescales on a project by project basis, necessary to achieve approved budget expenditure and translating this into quantified workload for the various professional services and (b) an expenditure monitoring exercise produced in liaison with Financial Services to monitor actual expenditure on a monthly basis against monthly target expenditure figures.

The resource planning exercise has already identified a need to externalise professional services in respect of some of the workload and this process has already been initiated. In addition it is also emerging that certain General Services Capital Programme budget figures for 2005/06 will not be achievable for a range of reasons including the absence of agreed briefs with clients. As a result measures are being taken to bring forward expenditure from future years within the four-year

capital programme which is an acceptable practice under the new prudential regime. At this stage this has consisted principally of bringing forward classroom upgrade projects to the value of over £1m. Details of these projects were highlighted in the report.

The capital programmes will continue to be closely monitored on a monthly basis by Technical Services and Financial Services to maximise spend against approved budget figures. Quarterly monitoring reports will be submitted to the Corporate Management Team and to the Corporate Policy Sub Committee.

The Head of Technical Services advised the Sub Committee that tenders had been received in respect of the upgrading and extension of The Harbour Arts Centre, Irvine. The project is being funded jointly by the Arts Council and North Ayrshire Council. The lowest acceptable tender received was from Maxi Construction, West Lothian, in the sum of £1,234,134.30. Following a savings exercise this was reduced to £970,853.41 which is still in excess of the approved budget. As the contribution from the Arts Council to the project is fixed, the Council requires to increase its own contribution from £330,000 to £565,000. Additional funding has been identified from the General Services provision within the Capital Plan and from other Educational Services capital budgets.

The Sub Committee agreed to (a) note the arrangements put in place to monitor capital programmes; (b) receive further capital monitoring reports at future meetings; and (c) note the increase in the Council's contribution towards the refurbishment and extension of the Harbour Arts Centre, Irvine, and that the Chief Executive will accept the tender submitted by Maxi Construction, West Lothian, in the sum of £970,853.41, under delegated powers.

The meeting ended at 3.05 p.m.