

Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee
1 June 2005

IRVINE, 1 June 2005 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Tom Barr, Gordon Clarkson, John Moffat, David Munn, Robert Rae and Ian Richardson.

In Attendance

I. Snodgrass, Chief Executive; B. MacDonald, Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion); A. Herbert, Assistant Chief Executive (Finance); J. Barrett, Assistant Chief Executive (Information Technology); I.T. Mackay, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective); G. Young, Personnel Manager and E. Gunn, Customer Services Manager (Personnel); J. Montgomery, Principal Performance Review Officer, M. Adams and D. McCaw, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Barr in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Margaret McDougall.

1. Service Plans

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the draft Service Plans for each of the main service areas within Corporate Services demonstrating how services intend to align their activities with the Council's strategic aims and deliver continuous improvement.

The Chief Executive gave an overview of the Council's Service Planning process and advised that a review of that process is underway. Work will commence on next year's plans from August and this will be linked with the budget process.

Each of the service areas provided information on their key performance indicators, strategic risk assessment, priorities and supporting actions in terms of:

- customer perspective;
- financial perspective;
- resources and joint working perspective; and
- continuous improvement and learning.

Chief Executive's Service

The following key issues were highlighted for the Chief Executive's service:

- the promotion of greater awareness of the implications of the Civil Contingency Act. A Working Group has been established and a Plan will be produced later this year
- the production of the Corporate Plan by the end of this year
- the review of the community planning process and update of the Community Plan
- a review of the service planning process
- a review of the scrutiny function of Standing Sub Committees and Audit and Standards Committee
- Elected Member development

Clarification was provided on points raised as follows:-

- The Best Value Audit recommended a review of the senior management structure of the Council, particularly in the areas of the Chief Executive/Corporate Services Group. As a result of this, a review is underway and the findings will be presented to the Council in the near future.
- Questionnaires on the service provided from the Performance Review and Best Value Team were issued to the Corporate Directors, their Heads of Service and the 5 Assistant Chief Executives. Of the questionnaires returned, 73% of the Chief Officers were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall level of service received.

Customer Services

The following key issues were highlighted for the Customer Services section:

- Customer Contact Strategy was developed after the Best Value review in 2001 and the Service Plan builds on operational performance and drives forward this strategy
- the balance of qualitative and quantitative measures including customer satisfaction, cost of handling a transaction, accuracy and productivity
- the Telephone Contact Centre which has a comprehensive Business Continuity Plan incorporating all major risks (ie facilities, people and IT systems)
- Phase 3 of the Customer Contact Strategy Project
 - transfer of the Cunninghame House switchboard
 - transfer of the hall lets facility

Clarification was provided on points raised as follows:-

- When requested, direct line numbers for the Contact Centre have been provided to Members in order to avoid delays in providing their service to constituents.

- Hall lets operate from a centralised team at present and will move to the customer contact centre in Phase 3 of the project. This will enable a consistent approach to be implemented in terms of charges levied.

Development and Promotion

The following key issues were highlighted for the Development and Promotion service:

Challenges:-

- Loss of the Property Enquiry Service
- Changing Expectations and the need to move to shared systems with multi skilling of staff

Economic Development

- unemployment levels still high and economic development is vital
- links between Ayrshire and Glasgow need to be further improved

Additional Responsibilities

- Working for Families Initiative
- Better Neighbourhood Services Fund

Planning

- difficulties in the recruitment of new and of experienced planners

Estates

- employee development issues
- Asset management changes

Clarification was provided on points raised as follows:-

- the staffing issues affecting Planning are not specific to North Ayrshire as there is a difficulty in recruiting professional staff across the country. Glasgow University is looking at ways of improving its post graduate courses for Planners. The Scottish Executive is also aware of this problem and has committed resources to it.
- Consideration could be given to recruitment packages and benefits to assist in the recruitment of planners.
- The rent arrears figure of 20% will hopefully improve after implementation of an overall review of the Estates Section.

Financial Services

The following key issues were highlighted for the Financial Services section:

- within Council Tax improvements to collection to generate additional resources which can be used to enhance all Council services. Extending the direct debit uptake and reviewing follow up procedures will be two of the areas examined
- within Benefits, whilst processing times have improved significantly, efforts continue to improve performance. Improved communication with customers, extensive consultation with partners, and developing new initiatives with DWP are some of the areas identified for improvement
- the risk register will be formalised
- a Procurement Strategy will be developed
- an Asset Management Strategy will continue to be developed

Clarification was provided on points raised as follows:-

- There has been a significant improvement within the Benefits section. In 2003/04 the processing time for Benefits was 117 days. This has been reduced in 2004/05 to 55 days. In the first quarter of 2005/06 this is down to 45 days.
- £1.8m of funding from the DWP will enable the processing of every claim on computer. The computerised system can highlight where there are delays in the service which will also improve performance.
- With regard to the collection of bad debts, the Council is looking at various improvement mechanisms, including a campaign for direct debits to manage debts. The number of customers using the Direct Debit system is rising and this will continue to be monitored.
- The cause of staff absences are a regular item on management meetings to try to determine ways of reducing the level of absence within the section.

Information Technology Services

The following key issues were highlighted for the Information Technology Services section:

- the Scottish Executive's Customer First Programme (replacing Modernising Government) and National Projects such as the Citizens Account
- the Efficient Government initiative to generate efficiency savings and the establishment of Efficient Government programme within the Council
- the ICT Environment with continued rapid change in available technology, security risks from e.g. viruses and the increasing need to share data and information with other organisations (e.g. Criminal Justice, Social Services and NHS)

- the ICT Strategy, developments, Customer First and Efficient Government initiatives
- the recruitment and retention of staff to support projects (Customer First etc. short-term contracts)
- developing business continuity plans for each Service
- joint working to continue to support the former Ayrshire Economic Community infrastructure
- working with other Councils and organisations to develop information sharing between services
- tracking of efficiency savings
- integration of systems e.g. e-Procurement with financial systems; land and property and citizens account with other Council systems

Clarification was provided on the various points raised as follows:-

- With regard to e-Procurement, the savings over a 5 year period can be as much as £5 or £6m. There is a model which tracks the savings associated with e-Procurement and can identify efficiency savings within the Council.
- Security of ICT systems is improving. The National Computer Centre undertook a security review of attacks on our systems and the main issue for the Council is viruses.
- Social Services and the Call Centre are the only 2 services at present with Business Continuity Plans in place. An ICT Security Officer is working with services to assist with the preparation of these Plans.
- The accommodation problem for IT is being considered as part of the Council's accommodation review.
- Charter Mark accreditation is possible for all services. At present only IT have participated in this initiative.

The Sub Committee was of the view with regard to the key performance indicator on "Council Wide Orders Placed through the Service Desk" that this information should be expressed as a percentage as well as a figure in future plans.

Legal and Protective Services

The following key issues were highlighted for the Legal and Protective Services section:

- significant changes in legislation covering services dealing with:
 - Licensing
 - District Court
 - smoking in public places
 - changes in the regulation of private housing stock
 - anti social behaviour
 - mental health and adults with incapacity

- the new regime for Building Standards which commenced on 1 May
- the development of e-planning which will require the service to introduce new systems and this will involve significant resources throughout the year
- difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff, particularly professional staff
- the work required to improve the condition of the Townhouse

The Sub Committee was advised that the service plan this year would concentrate more on the new Key Performance Indicators designed to demonstrate service delivery to customers rather than the existing Statutory Performance Indicators.

Clarification was provided on the point raised as follows:-

- fluctuations in the sickness absence statistics which were caused by the long term illness of a few staff.

Personnel Services

The following key issues were highlighted for the Personnel Services section:

- Review of the Human Resource Strategy. Personnel will review this strategy and this will incorporate a review of the recruitment and retention strategy and workforce planning framework
- Single Status and the agreement being sought on the new pay and grading scheme
- new Employment and Health and Safety Legislation relating to:
 - age discrimination
 - Protection of Children Act
 - Protection of Vulnerable Adults Bill
 - Fire Bill
 - Control of Asbestos Regulations
 - Physical Agents Directive
- the PPP project and the potential transfer of Janitation and Cleaning staff to the successful bidder
- Absence Management and improvements to absence management processes and procedures in conjunction with Occupational Health

Clarification was provided on points raised as follows:-

- The Employee Kiosk within the Chris21 system will allow employees access to view their own payroll details.
- Apprentice levels within the Council have increased over the last 4 years.

The Sub Committee was advised that recruitment and retention of staff is an issue affecting the Council as a whole. This issue was highlighted as part of the Best Value Audit and will be addressed as part of the review of the Human Resource Strategy, with a workforce planning framework being prepared for use throughout the Council.

Noted.

The Meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.