

Property Services Committee
3 October 2006

IRVINE, 3 October 2006 - At a meeting of the Property Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Samuel Taylor, Stewart Dewar, John Bell, Ian Clarkson, Margie Currie, Jane Gorman, Margaret McDougall, Margaret Munn, David O'Neill, John Reid and Nan Wallace.

In Attendance

T. Orr, Corporate Director, O. Clayton, Head of Housing, J. Currie, Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport, J. Paul, Head of Technical Services, J. Mason, Transport Manager (Property Services); K. McDonald, Finance Manager (Finance); and J. Stevenson, Communications Officer and M. McKeown and P. Shiach, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Also In Attendance

P. Sutherland and P. Cobley, Jacobs Babbie Consultants.

Chair

Councillor Taylor in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Jacqueline Browne, Anna Donn, Drew Duncan, Elizabeth McLardy, Robert Rae, Richard Wilkinson.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 August 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Property Services Standing Sub Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix PS1) being the Minutes of the Meeting of the Property Services Standing Sub Committee held on 21 September 2006.

The Committee agreed to approve the minutes.

3. Irvine: A71: Replacement of Bailey Bridge

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposals for the replacement of the Bailey Bridge, Irvine.

The Bailey Bridge was constructed in 1971 as a temporary measure to carry single carriageway traffic into the centre of Irvine. Subsequent financial constraints prevented the construction of a permanent structure. The bridge is now 35 years old and carries an increasing volume of traffic. In addition to regular maintenance, a major refurbishment was carried out to the bridge deck in 1998 to extend its life for a further 10 years. The specialist bridge maintenance contractors who carry out regular inspections and maintenance of the bridge have advised that the remaining working life of the bridge is 5 years, and thereafter, if not replaced, will require either substantial strengthening works or the reintroduction of weight restrictions.

Following a scoping study for the replacement of the temporary bridge undertaken in 2002, a subsequent bid was submitted for the inclusion of an options study in the capital programme. The object of the study, carried out by Jacobs Babbie, Consultant Engineers, was to examine and submit for consideration, options for a best value structure which would take account of a number of factors including the location of the bridge between a recreational and residential area and flood prevention measures.

A presentation was given to the Committee by Jacobs Babbie which provided information on the seven options examined, the appraisal process, flood prevention measures, and the recommended three preferred options. Funding for the project is contained within the Council's general fund capital plan 2005/2009, with an allocation of £200,000 in 2006/2007, and £180,000 in 2007/2008.

Given the importance of the bridge as a main arterial gateway to town centre and its effect on the surrounding amenity area, it was recommended that a public exhibition be undertaken, and interested parties afforded the opportunity to indicate their preferred option.

The Committee agreed to (a) approve the choice of the preferred options 1, 4 or 7 set out in the report as a basis to progress the project; (b) the mounting of a public exhibition and the subsequent selection of a preferred option; (c) authorise the Head of Roads to tender for the services of a designer of a bridge based on the selected option; and (d) make representation to the Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Company regarding possible funding to extend the carriageway to two lanes between the Merryvale and Milgarholm roundabouts.

4. Revenue Budget 2006/07: Budgetary Control

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the budgetary control position for Property Services at the end of August 2006, and on projections to the end of financial year 2006/07.

The Committee agreed to approve the current financial position and the year-end projections.

5. Stevenston: McGregor Avenue: Ground Works

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed course of action required to deal with the unstable ground conditions at McGregor Avenue, Stevenston.

Following the identification of a structural crack in a flatted property in McGregor Avenue, Stevenston, test bores were carried out which indicated the presence of mine workings. Following consideration by the Joint Officers Working Group of a number of options, a Risk Assessment was carried out on each option, resulting in the preferred option of carrying out remedial works at the worst affected area. These works will involve grouting of the ground beneath the blocks at 19/25, 27/33, 36/42 McGregor Avenue and protection of the garden ground with a Geotextile membrane. The estimated cost of the works is £255,000.

The properties contain a mix of Council and privately owned flats, and given the significant cost implications, the possibility of funding from the Scottish Executive is being investigated. Remedial works to the worst affected areas are considered to be unavoidable, and individual owners may require to meet their share of the cost of these works from their own resources or buildings insurance.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposed course of action detailed in the report.

6. Common Housing Register

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on progress with the North Ayrshire Common Housing Register and the proposed implementation of a joint database with local Housing Associations.

The submission of a previous bid in partnership with three local Housing Associations in relation to funding for the development of a Common Housing Register (CHR) successfully secured £50,000 from the Scottish Executive in financial years 2004/05 and 2005/06. The procurement of an IT system, funded by the Council and its partners is now required to further develop the CHR.

Under the calculator used to determine the contribution of each of the partners, the Council is required to meet 80% of the capital and revenue costs. The indicative capital cost is estimated at between £70,000 and £90,000, plus 10% on costs, which can be met from the HRA Capital Programme budget and the existing revenue budget respectively.

The Committee agreed to approve the implementation and the Council's financial contribution to the development of a joint Common Housing Register database, as set out in the report.

7. Ardrossan: 51 - 57 Ashgrove Road

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposals for the refurbishment of vacant houses at 51 - 57 Ashgrove Road, Ardrossan.

Difficulties have been experienced in letting the blocks of 4 terraced houses at 51/57 and 59/65 Ashgrove Road, Ardrossan due to a number of factors including anti-social behaviour. In 2001 major refurbishment, including landscaping and the closure of the public footpath as a through route, was carried out at 59/65 Ashgrove Road. The block at 51/57 has been vacant for a considerable period and has been subjected to vandalism and fire damage.

The refurbishment of the block together with environmental improvement works has been investigated, with the lowest tender resulting in costs of approximately £500,000. It is considered that these costs are prohibitive and consequently the alternative options are (a) the demolition of the block and suitable landscaping of the site, or (b) the demolition of the block and the cleared site marketed for sale for housing purposes. The associated costs of either option would require to be accommodated within a future Housing Capital Programme.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Corporate Director (Property Services) investigate each option in more detail and report back to the Committee in due course with further recommendations; and (b) that the local Neighbourhood Compact be consulted on the options.

8. Irvine: Shewalton: Tender approval to carry out cell construction works

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on arrangements for tendering for the work to carry out cell construction at Shewalton Area 2, Landfill.

The Committee agreed to approve the awarding of the contract for cell construction to Messrs. R J McLeod (Contractors) Limited, Glasgow, on the terms set out in the report.

9. Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2006

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2006.

Previously the Property Services Committee had agreed that a Tenant Satisfaction Survey be undertaken to obtain the views on the Service from a greater number of tenants. The results of the survey were contained in Appendix 1 to the report.

While the overall satisfaction with North Ayrshire Council as a Landlord was high, with 91% of tenants satisfied with their landlord, the survey indicated significant levels of dissatisfaction with the information provided on Allocations and Transfers (35%), the follow up service in relation to repairs (18%) and the outcome of complaints in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (40%)

The Committee agreed (a) to accept the findings of the survey; (b) to issue a summary of the findings to tenants, staff and other stakeholders; (c) that an action plan be developed to address areas of high dissatisfaction; and (d) that the survey be repeated periodically to compare information on the satisfaction with the service over time and to measure improvement.

10. Extension of the Garden Refuse Collection Service

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed extension of the Garden Refuse Collection Service to 1 December 2006.

Currently the collection of garden refuse is undertaken between April and October with the waste collected equating to approximately 10,000 tonnes. A number of requests have been received from households that the service be extended. A previous extension in 2005 resulted in the collection of a further 400 tonnes of green waste.

A further extension to the service until 1 December 2006 would satisfy requests from members of the public, and increase the Council's recycling and composting rate. The extra cost of the extension has been determined at £30,000, provision of which is contained within the Strategic Waste Fund.

The Committee agreed to extend the Garden Refuse Collection Service on the Mainland to 1 December 2006.

11. Winter Service and Weather Emergencies 2006/2007

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the winter maintenance service in place for North Ayrshire.

The Procedures Document, a copy of which was appended to the report, covers all measures to be taken to prevent adverse weather conditions endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads. The measures include the introduction of 7 new gritting vehicles with high speed snow blades, Global Positioning System (GPS) for all vehicles used for the winter service, regular discussions with the weather forecast provider with regard to the adverse weather forecasting system, and information from ice sensors, placed at various locations throughout North Ayrshire. The document also includes procedures for the closure of the flood gates for the Largs Flood Prevention Scheme.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the Procedures in place to fulfil the Council's Statutory Duty; (b) to approve the measures taken to improve the winter service Procedures; and (c) that the Procedures document be automatically issued in future years without specific Committee approval unless major changes are being proposed.

12. Street Furniture: Display and Attachment of Election Posters and Attachment of Apparatus to Lighting Units

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the display of posters and the attachment of non-roads related material to street furniture.

The Arrangements in Force at the Poll issued by the Returning Officer to election agents includes provision for the fixing of election posters to street furniture subject to certain conditions. Similarly local organisations within North Ayrshire have sought and been granted permission to erect Christmas and other decorations on road furniture. While recognising the amenity value of these decorations, there are concerns over the structural integrity of many of the street lighting columns and their ability to withstand additional loading, and the effect of any additional electrical load on the existing network.

The Health and Safety Executive in 2004 issued advice on the use of ladders and working at height. The use of ladders is discouraged, but where it is essential, ladders must be free-standing and stable or fitted with appropriate stability devices.

In light of the advise from the Health and Safety Executive, additional conditions as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report are proposed for the fixing of campaign posters to lighting columns. Similarly it is proposed that License Conditions for Erection of Amenity Displays on Road Furniture, as contained in Appendix 2 to the report be adopted. It is further proposed in order to allow organisations sufficient time to apply for permission, that the timescales set out in Condition (a) of the Licensing Conditions, requiring two months notice prior to the date of the erection of attachments to road furniture, is cut to two weeks for Christmas 2006 only.

The Committee agreed, subject to satisfactory consultation with the Returning Officer in relation to election materials, to approve the change to arrangements in relation to the method of attachment of posters, Christmas lights and other items to street furniture, as set out in the report.

13. Tenders for Vehicles

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the purchases proposed in the replacement vehicles programme for 2006/07.

The Committee agreed to the acceptance of the vehicles recommended by the Senior Transport Officer, on the terms set out in the report.

14. Closing Order

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the condition of the property at 12 Crichton Street, Millport.

The Committee agreed to authorise serving of a Closing Order on the owners of the property.

The meeting ended at 3.40 p.m.

Property Services Committee
03/10/2006

Appendix No
PS1

Property Services Standing Sub Committee
21 September 2006

IRVINE, 21 September 2006 - At a Meeting of the Property Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

John Bell, Margaret McDougall, Samuel Taylor, Nan Wallace and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

T. Orr, Corporate Director; O. Clayton, Head of Housing; C. Nelson, Head of Catering and Cleaning; J. Currie, Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport; R. Small, Head of Roads; K. Sillars, Commercial Support Manager and J. Andrews, Principal Officer, Technical Services; M. McKeown and A. Little, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Stewart Dewar, Jane Gorman, Elizabeth McLardy and David O'Neill.

1. Service Performance Reports for 12 months ended 31 March 2006

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the performance of each of the main services areas within Property Services in the 12 months to 31 March 2006.

The appendices to the report set out Service Performance Reports for Building Services, Catering Services, Cleaning Services, Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance, Cemeteries and Transport Services, Housing Services, Roads Services and Technical Services. The reports set out the performance highs and lows and the immediate priorities for each of these Service areas.

The Sub Committee discussed each of the Performance Reports in turn and asked questions of the officers present.

The Sub Committee agreed to note the performance of each of the Service areas in the 12 months to 31 March 2006.

2. Housing Service Standards

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the performance of Housing Services against the Housing Service Standards in the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006.

Housing Services monitor the level of service being provided to customers via Service Standards which include:-

- Customer Care
- Complaints
- Equal Opportunities
- Rehousing Services
- Managing Empty Properties
- Collecting rent
- Managing the estate
- Concierge services
- Services for elderly people
- Repairs
- Major repair and improvement work
- Homelessness

Performance against these Standards is measured through customer satisfaction surveys, mystery shopping and exit interviews. The appendix to the report summarised performance against the Service Standards. Overall services have been delivered to the Service Standards specified. Relevant steps have been taken to address any shortfalls in performance.

Noted.

3. Rent Arrears

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on eviction actions against Council tenants for rent arrears.

The Council's policy in respect of rent arrears is to recover all monies due from tenants in a fair and reasonable way. Prevention policies and procedures have been introduced to assist and encourage tenants to avoid eviction by addressing their arrears position. Eviction will only be considered as a last resort and after reasonable repeated attempts have been made to resolve the situation.

During 2005/06 184 tenants were approved for eviction but only 33 tenants were evicted. Social Services are notified and consulted in relation to cases where tenants are considered to be vulnerable. All tenants evicted are provided with information about their future housing options and their rights as homeless persons under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.