

Cabinet
17 June 2014

Irvine, 17 June 2014 - At a Meeting of Cabinet of North Ayrshire Council at 2.30 p.m.

Present

Willie Gibson, Alan Hill, Marie Burns, John Bruce, Anthea Dickson, Tony Gurney and Ruth Maguire.

In Attendance

E. Murray, Chief Executive; Y. Baulk, Head of Finance and Property, P. Doak, Senior Manager (Internal Audit and Risk Management), G. Macgregor, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, D. Tate, Senior Manager (Property Management and Investment), S. Humphries, Chief Revenues and Benefits Officer (Finance and Corporate Support); A. Sutton, Head of Community and Culture (Education and Skills); A. Laurenson, Team Manager Regeneration (Development and Environment); S. Cloete, Policy and Performance Officer, K. Dyson, Communications Officer and A. Little, Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Gibson in the Chair.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of Standing Order 16 and Section 5 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2014 were confirmed and signed in accordance with Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

3. Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates Write off 2013-14

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on the write-off of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates debts during 2013-14, as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report, respectively.

The Cabinet agreed to homologate the write-off of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates for 2013-14, as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

4. Write off of irrecoverable and non-recoverable Housing Benefit and former Council Tax Benefit overpayments 2013/14

Submitted report by Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) which (a) provided information on balances written off under delegated powers during 2013/14; and (b) sought approval to write off non-recoverable and irrecoverable Housing Benefit and former Council Tax Benefit overpayments in excess of £1,000.

The Cabinet agreed to (a) note the sums written off under delegated powers; and (b) approve the write off of Housing Benefit and former Council Tax Benefit overpayments in excess of £1,000, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

5. A Vacant & Derelict Land Strategy for North Ayrshire

Submitted report and presentation by the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) which provided information on (a) vacant and derelict land in North Ayrshire; and (b) the draft Vacant and Derelict Land Strategy and Action Plan for North Ayrshire.

Members asked questions and were provided with information in relation to:-

- the use of appropriate legal interventions where other actions fail;
- phytoremediation that can mitigate pollutants in contaminated soils through the use of plants and trees to degrade or eliminate environmental problems
- the prioritisation of investment by the Council and partners in vacant and derelict sites where appropriate;
- the Scottish Government's Vacant and Derelict Land Fund which is currently limited to 5 local authorities and does not include North Ayrshire;
- work that will be done by the Scottish Government and Colsa to revisit the focus of the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund to provide more flexibility to local authorities and widen its scope from 2015/16.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the Vacant and Derelict Land Strategy and Action Plan for North Ayrshire as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.

6. Benchmarking in the Council

Submitted report by the Chief Executive which provided information on (a) the current progress of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF); (b) how the Framework is being used to support continuous improvement and self-evaluation by the Council; and (c) the benchmarking and best practice activities that the Council has undertaken.

Members asked questions and were provided with information in relation to the Council's inclusion in benchmarking families that ensures comparison and measurement of like with like.

Noted.

7. Audit Scotland Report: An Overview of Local Government in Scotland 2014

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) which (a) summarised the findings of the recent Audit Scotland report on Local Government in Scotland; (b) provided information on the current position in North Ayrshire; and (c) presented further actions being taken to address the issues identified within the Audit Scotland report.

Members asked questions and were provided with information in relation to:-

- the publication of Members' attendance at Council meetings on the Council's website; and
- the examination of Members' attendance at Council meetings by Audit Scotland where there are concerns around governance arrangements.

Noted.

8. Risk Management Annual Report 2013/14

Submitted report by Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) which (a) updated the Cabinet on the scope of work carried out across the Council in relation to risk management during 2013/14 and on actions arising from this work; and (b) set out proposed areas for development in 2013/14.

Members asked questions and were provided with information in relation to the increased risk rating in respect of Information Governance that reflected the continuing and increasing challenges being faced by the Council in managing data and action that has now been taken to mitigate the risk.

The Cabinet agreed to note (a) the content of the Annual Report, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report; and (b) progress being made in developing the Council's approach to risk management.

9. Maximising Attendance Performance - March 2014 (Quarter 4 Summary)

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on an analysis of sickness absence in Quarter 4 and the quarterly trend from 2011/12 to 2013/14.

Members asked questions and were provided with information in relation to:-

- a review of the flexible working hours scheme that will be undertaken;
- a review that has been undertaken of the guidance on the Management of Stress;
- absence rates for North Ayrshire that are below the national average;

- a number of factors that are examined to differentiate between stress and work related stress and the use of Stredia (Stress Risk Assessment System) to monitor and analyse information; and
- the integration of health and social care and the similar maximising attendance policies in place in the NHS and the Council.

Noted.

10. Employee Engagement Survey

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) which provided an update on (a) progress of the Employee Engagement Survey Council-wide Improvement Plan; and (b) the next steps in relation to monitoring the impact of improvement plan actions.

Noted.

11. Asset Management Plans

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) which provided information on progress made in delivering the agreed actions for each of the six themed Asset Management Plans during 2013/14.

The Cabinet agreed that the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) provide information on mobile working and BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) directly to Members.

12. Minutes of 1st Tier JCC and Corporate Health & Safety Group held on 29 May 2014

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the minutes of the 1st Tier JCC and Corporate Health and Safety Group held on 29 May 2014.

Noted.

13. Exclusion of the Public

The Cabinet resolved, in terms of Section 50(A)4 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude from the Meeting the press and the public for the following items of business on the grounds indicated in terms of Paragraph 9 (Items 13.1 and 13.2) of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

13.1 Land at Sharphill, Dalry Road, Saltcoats

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) which sought approval to dispose of Council owned land at Sharphill, Dalry Road, Saltcoats.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the disposal of the land at Sharphill, Dalry Road, Saltcoats, in the terms detailed in the report.

13.2 Surplus Property - Shiskine Schoolhouse, Shiskine, Isle of Arran

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) which sought approval to disposal of the residential property known as Shiskine Schoolhouse, Shiskine, Isle of Arran.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the disposal of the residential property known as Shiskine Schoolhouse, Shiskine, Isle of Arran, in the terms detailed in the report.

14. Urgent Item

The Chair agreed that the following item be considered as a matter of urgency to allow the matter to be actioned without delay.

14.1 Spare Room Subsidy and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) which provided information on (a) the financial impact of the spare room subsidy and the current position in respect of Discretionary Housing Payments; (b) DHP funding projections; (c) pending legislative changes; and (d) an assurance from the Scottish Government that will allow mitigation of the full impact of the spare room subsidy.

Members asked questions and were provided with information in relation to the prioritisation of applications from those tenants who did not previously qualify for DHP.

The Cabinet agreed to (a) approve the payment of DHP to tenants affected by the spare room subsidy, on application and without financial assessment; and (b) otherwise note the report.

The meeting ended at 3.45 p.m.