

Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee  
17 November 2004

**IRVINE, 17 November 2004** - At a Meeting of the Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

Tom Barr, 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); M. Macfarlane, Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel); J. Montgomery, Principal Performance Review Officer, A. Osborne and D. McCaw, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

**Chair**

Councillor Barr in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Jack Carson, Gordon Clarkson and Elizabeth McLardy.

**1. Performance Reports**

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the Service Performance for the 6 months ended 30 September 2004.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 has established Best Value as a statutory duty for local authorities. Members currently receive Annual Reviews of performance within Service Plans and Annual Reports in relation to Statutory Performance Indicators. Performance monitoring is also assisted by the half yearly performance reporting for the Standing Sub Committee.

Officers reported on the performance highs and lows for the six months ended 30 September 2004 and on the immediate priorities for Corporate Services as follows:-

**Chief Executive's**

**Performance Highs**

- Smooth hand-over from outgoing to incoming Chief Executive, with minimal disruption to service continuity.
- Efficient and effective co-ordination of Best Value Audit, with initial positive feedback from Audit Scotland.

- Demonstrated strong customer focus via 2004 Household Survey and rapid feedback of results to all households through "North Ayrshire NOW".
- High levels of responsiveness in complaints handling.
- High levels of "client" satisfaction with co-ordination of marketing & publicity events.
- Efficient administration of democratic process via the European Parliamentary Election and Ardrossan North By-Election.
- Continued to improve effectiveness of democracy via Member training on various topics, eg effective meetings.
- Improved transparency of planning process via new procedures for Planning Sub Committee deputations.
- Reviewed the Council's schemes for community grants, enabling easier community access to appropriate grants that are better targeted on need.
- Enabled compliance with law through introduction of Race Equality Scheme, with positive feedback from CRE.
- Children's Panel Advisory Committee monitoring and complaints procedure identified as an example of good practice which will inform national procedures.
- Improved awareness and understanding of emergency planning roles.
- Significant reduction in the rate of sickness absence, which was almost half that of 2003/4.

### **Performance Lows**

- Development of new Corporate Plan rescheduled to enable new Chief Executive involvement.
- Difficulties in establishing role of Local Area Committee liaison meetings.
- Review of scrutiny function rescheduled to enable new Chief Executive involvement.
- Issues re quality and content of staff magazine.
- Projected budget overspend due to unbudgeted costs (SLAM Centre review, Household Survey & recruitment of new Chief Executive).
- Longer than normal processing times for suppliers' invoices.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Complete and publish new Corporate Plan, following completion of Best Value Audit.
- Review scrutiny function and report proposals to committee.
- Complete 3 year Regeneration Outcome Agreement for Community Planning (including Community Regeneration Fund Allocations for 2005/6).
- Engage with Boundary Commission and keep Members informed re redrawing of ward boundaries for local government elections.
- Produce reviewed annual Communications Plan.
- Review the Scheme of Community Councils.
- Produce the Race Equality Scheme Annual Report 2004.

- Support production of the Children's Services Plan 2005-08.
- Review Children's Panel Procedures.
- Improve processing times for suppliers' invoices.

Members received clarification on the various points raised as follows:-

- the response from Audit Scotland on the Best Value Audit is awaited next month and will be reported to the Council in January 2005;
- the role of the Local Area Committee Liaison Meetings is currently being investigated and a report will be submitted to a future meeting;
- a review of the Scheme of Community Councils is currently taking place and this will also be reported to Committee early in 2005.

### **Development and Promotion**

#### **Performance Highs**

##### Estates

- Maintained occupancy levels for industrial and commercial floorspace.
- Property Particulars - improved access to Available Property particulars on the Council's website.

##### Economic Development

- Scottish Executive approval of Working for Families (WfF) Implementation Plan 2004-2006.
- Appointment of WfF Initiative Co-ordinator and Admin support within planned period.
- Successful Business Development / Community Economic Development EU Applications accruing £0.4M of EU match funding for North Ayrshire 100% success rate on four submissions.
- Launch of sectoral employment grant initiative pilot programme and launch of new Supply Chain Programme as scheduled.
- Implementation of events programme - 4 events assisted May and September.
- Contribution of Deprivation analysis to Community Planning Partnership on time.
- Business Support Programmes Performance: 5% ahead at half year stage.

##### Development Plans

- Arran Local Plan - Modifications Hearing held - Proceeding to adoption.
- North Ayrshire Local Plan - Public Local Inquiry concluded - relatively inexpensive at £62K exc NAC staff costs.
- Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan - Consultation Draft issued - on time.

- Draft Access Strategy issued for consultation - on time.
- Montgomerie Park - sale of Phase 1 concluded and development commenced - as programmed.
- Ardrossan Harbour - favourable house sales provided "overage" return of £180K for reinvestment.

## **Performance Lows**

### **Estates**

- Continuing adverse impact on the Capital Receipts programme due to Scottish Water constraints; Undeveloped sites, vacant buildings give false impression of area and lack of development activity gives a negative perception of area.

### **Economic Development**

- Post EU 2006 uncertainties for North Ayrshire area in national debate and at regional level.
- Delay in establishing community benefit fund legal framework.

### **Development Plans**

- General delays in implementing the Service Delivery Plan as a result of pressure on staff resources. Staff resources depleted following retirement and resignations (32% under establishment for professional Planners). Difficulties in recruiting experienced staff also contributed.

### **Administration**

- Reduction in income from Property Enquiries - Property Enquiries are continuing to fall at a rate of 30%.

## **Immediate Priorities**

### **Estates**

- Asset Revaluations - planned/phased valuations.
- Rating Revaluation - preparation for 2005 Revaluation.
- Asset Management Planning - a key feature of the new Prudential code - Estates will assist Asset Registrar (Financial Services) in provision of information.
- Implementation of UNIFORM Estates Management Module - major step towards Corporate GIS - staff training for new System and continuing development work with IT Services.
- Development of a Topographic Survey Service in liaison with Technical Services.

## Economic Development

- Complete recruitment for WfF Initiative team - 3 Link Advisers and 1 Trainee Adviser and arrange formal launch of Initiative prior to 29.11.04.
- Prepare Scottish Executive half yearly progress report for WfF including financial return - November 2004.
- Complete/analyse Irvine Town Centre Regeneration Public consultation as planned.
- Continue to fully participate in Post 2006 EU Agenda including stage and review.
- Complete Industrial Property Review.
- Finalise structure of Community Benefit Trust for North Ayrshire.

## Development Plans

- Replace staff and re-allocate work programme.
- Local Plan Customer Forum to be programmed.
- Investigate impact of SEA legislation.

Members received clarification on the various points raised as follows:-

- figures for the number of property enquiries processed within 24 hours will in future be expressed as a percentage across the board;
- the reduction in rental income levels is as a result of the Council selling more property.

## **Financial Services**

### **Performance Highs**

- The processing times with the benefits service have shown an improvement on 2003/04.
- Backlogs within council tax have been cleared and mail processing is now up to date.
- Amended council tax bills are now issued within one week of the change being notified.
- The mid-year collection levels for both council tax and business rates show an improvement on the same period last year.
- More creditors are now being paid by BACS. This results in a more efficient and economic service.
- The annual accounts were again submitted on time and received an unqualified audit certificate.
- Communication between revenues / benefits / housing has been improved through regular meetings. This has allowed a more customer-focused service to be delivered.

- A risk management strategy has now been approved by the council.
- A process for the electronic distribution of budgetary control reports has been developed.
- An amalgamated debt recovery team is now in place.
- Capital reporting procedures have been further developed.

### **Performance Lows**

- The number of creditors invoices paid on time has marginally deteriorated compared to 2003/04.
- There have been some delays in completing the annual audit plan. The new staffing structure should assist in rectifying this position.
- Sickness absence rates within the service continue to cause some concern. While we are improving, we are still not hitting our targets.
- Implementation of the new business rates system was delayed.
- A revised insurance claim manual and procedures still remains outstanding.
- The proposed upgrade of the FMS has been delayed until next year, due to hardware difficulties. These are being addressed by IT services.
- The proposed roll-out of direct input to CHRIS has not progressed according to plan, due to other activities within services.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Filling of posts within the new internal audit structure.
- Interfacing of cash collection system to FMS.
- "Pended" accounts will be reviewed and recovery action recommenced where appropriate.
- Go live of the business rates system is planned for November.
- A risk management implementation plan requires to be developed and approved.
- Electronic report distribution will be made available to services.
- Local sick absence reporting through CHRIS will be extended to other sections / services.
- The staff consultation exercise will be completed.
- A presentation to members on risk management will be delivered.
- Financial information on Navigate will be updated.
- Close liaison with personnel services to address the sick absence issue will continue.

Members received clarification on the various points raised as follows:-

- the high rate of sickness absence within the Benefits/Revenues sections is as a result of long term sickness absence;
- in general sickness absence is not stress related;

- e-procurement has been piloted within Information Technology and Social Services and will be rolled out to other Departments in 2005;
- the establishment of an amalgamated debt recovery team to consolidate the debt recovery service throughout the Council is in the early stages but improvements are anticipated in the overall collection of debt.

### **Information Technology Services**

#### **Performance Highs**

- Implementation of the Scottish Executive's eProcurement Scotland service in Social Services and IT Services.
- Implementation of new Cash Collection system.
- Completion of first phase of implementation of Internet access and electronic mail for schools.
- Redevelopment of website in conjunction with the Information Management Group.
- Overall level of customer satisfaction, as measured through the annual customer survey, was maintained at a very high level. In addition, the overall score is within the top quarter of UK Councils (when compared to the SOCITM benchmark).
- Targets for Service Desk performance were exceeded (measured using time taken to respond to and resolve problems).
- First staff satisfaction survey completed, with the majority of staff indicating satisfaction with working in IT Services.

#### **Performance Lows**

- Although 589 customers responded to the Customer Satisfaction Survey, there was a low number of respondents from the schools. How the survey is conducted with the schools is being reviewed.

#### **Immediate Priorities**

- Completion of new ICT Strategy.
- Continue development of Customer Relationship Management system for the Contact Centre.
- Completion of first version of Council's Land and Property database.
- Assess outcome of Modernising Government Fund Round 3.
- Continue implementation of Internet and electronic mail access to schools.
- Complete redevelopment of website and launch.
- Commence planning for further expansion of the use of electronic procurement.

Members received clarification on the following point:-

- the new Council website will now be launched early in 2005 following extensive consultation.



## **Legal and Protective Services**

### **Performance Highs**

- Continued performance by services in the face of significant increase in business across all functions.
- Development of new Registration procedures for civil marriages outwith Registration Offices, Citizenship, Renewal of Vows and Baby Naming Ceremonies.
- Support from Legal with new initiatives in PPP, Supporting People, Anti-Social Behaviour, and Montgomerie Park.
- Continued support by Trading Standards of the Community Safety Initiatives.
- Successful report from Food Standards Agency on Food Safety Initiatives run by Environmental Health.
- All budgets being managed within existing parameters.
- Increase in number of applications received - resulting in increased income - Development Control. Registration and Building Standards.

### **Performance Lows**

- Increasing difficulty in recruiting staff within Regulatory Sections.
- Uncertainty on the future of the District Court.
- Pressure on staff to deal with increasing workload within existing workload, while continuing to meet expectations of the public.
- Fabric of Townhouse continues to deteriorate.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- How to accommodate expected budget cuts without impacting on service delivery, against a background of increasing workload.
- Inputting changes in Building Standards procedures including new fee structure.
- Continuing increase in planning applications, building warrant applications, registrations affecting ability of staff to improve service standards/ SPIs.
- E Planning- joint working to fund, develop and implement the handling of planning applications on-line.
- Follow-up on Householder Survey results, in so far as they impact on Legal & Protective.
- Consider various initiatives from Community Safety Forum.
- Joint Ayrshire Council application for funding to Scottish Executive to deal with Noise Nuisance in the context of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.
- District Court/Licensing - to address issues of staffing and structure necessary to deliver legislative change.
- Registration - to reconfigure services in light of changing duties and increasing workload.



- Legal - to implement changes resulting from Abolition of Feudal System/Land Reform without effecting SPI.
- Townhouse Fabric - to work with other services and outside agencies to take forward the restoration of the Townhouse.

Members received clarification on the various points raised as follows:-

- the difficulty in recruiting staff is a general issue throughout the Council;
- the Council is in dialogue with Universities and Colleges to try to encourage them to continue to make Building Surveying courses available;
- the difficulty in responding to Building Warrant applicants within the 15 day timescale is due to the volume of applications being received.

## **Personnel Services**

### **Performance Highs**

- Settlement of the Early Years (Nursery Nurse) workforce industrial dispute.
- The continuing programme to improve the sickness absence rates through proactive personnel policies and procedures, improved monitoring arrangements and an increased role for the Occupational Health service.
- The introduction of new appeals stages within the Procedure for Dealing with Incapability as a result of consultation with managers and trades unions to seek improvements to existing procedures.
- The introduction of employee guidance on the use of mobile telephones to comply with recently introduced legislation.
- Continuation of the Work/Life balance initiative through review of the pilot projects, and reaching the second round of the "Employer of the Year" competition.
- Ensuring legislative compliance through the continuing development of policies and procedures including termination procedures in light of new statutory Dismissal and Disciplinary Regulations.
- Increasing Occupational Health nurse support funded by services showing commitment to the health and well-being of the workforce.
- Establishing e-learning pilot projects within the Contact centre and for absence management procedures.
- Implementation of Modern Apprenticeships in Property Services.
- Completion of Performance Development Reviews (PDR) for all personnel staff during the period.

### **Performance Lows**

- The discussions with the Unions on revised Grievance and Disputes Resolution Procedures were delayed to await clarification of the new Regulations effective from 1 October 2004 and to assess the impact on the Council.

- The delay in the introduction of a pay and grading scheme for Local Government Employees brought about by the degree of relative change within the scheme and difficulties experienced in bonus consolidation.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Complete discussions and obtain agreement on a general Trade Union Facilities Agreement.
- Initiate discussions with unions on revised Grievance and Dispute Resolution Procedures.
- Complete and implement on-line modules for recruitment and selection, sickness absence recording and reporting through the networked Personnel and Payroll computer system (CHRIS).
- Work towards the introduction of a management development programme.
- Review pay and grading structures with a view to reaching consensus on a way forward in rationalising pay and grades coupled with a parallel discussion with unions on consolidation of bonus earnings.

Members received clarification on the various points raised as follows:-

- sickness absence targets for all Council Services of 2.5% for white collar workers and 3.5% for blue collar workers should be in place by next year. These targets will be challenging given the figures for 6 months to 30 September;
- the Accounts Commission consider all absences, long and short term, when looking at targets. Personnel manage these as 2 individual streams but report on them as a single stream;
- the staff turnover rate statistic included within the report is for Personnel Services with the North Ayrshire figure as a comparator. There would be merit in reporting turnover (with actual numbers as well as a percentage) for each service in future.

### **Customer Contact Centre**

#### **Performance Highs**

Customer

- Achievement of 85% of calls answered.
- 20% increase in calls answered for Council Tax in April compared with 2003; 30% increase in May compared with 2003.
- Maintaining customer satisfaction levels through peak times, 96% of customers happy with the outcome of their call.
- Successful implementation within the Telephone Contact Centre of i-world Council Tax system; PARIS payments system; new telephony system.

- Delivery of additional Cleansing processes now through Telephone Contact Centre improving the percentage of calls closed at first point of contact.
- Successful pilot of outbound calling for Benefits.

#### Financial

- Contact Centre is within budget for both capital and revenue.

#### Continuous Improvement and Learning

- 2 employees have gained SVQs.
- TCC has been successful in achieving Investors In People.
- Employee Ideas Forum formed and changes have been made to processes and IT systems which have generated a more efficient way of working.

### **Performance Lows**

#### Customer

- Telephony problems throughout August and September impacted on the TCC's ability to answer calls and have resulted in the statistics available being inaccurate. These problems are now resolved.

#### Continuous Improvement and Learning

- Delay in employees beginning work on SVQs due to resources.
- Delay in development of new training material as a result of resources.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Identify regular business peaks and troughs and align staffing patterns to match these to increase the percentage of calls answered.
- Deployment of Customer Relationship Management and Special Uplifts system to Arran Local Office.
- Deployment of CRM into Hall Lets centralised team.
- Transfer of Contact Us into Telephone Contact Centre.
- Analysis of CRM processes to reduce customer enquiry handling time.
- Extension of outbound calling.
- External benchmarking of quality of service with both public and private sector.
- Assessment against the Contact Centre Association Standard Framework.

Members received clarification on the following point:-

- the number of calls abandoned and when this usually takes place.

## **Local Office Services**

### **Performance Highs**

#### Customer

- Two Exit Polls were held in this period. 174 customers responded and all expressed satisfaction with the way staff handled their enquiry/transaction and with the attitude of staff as regards showing them respect and courtesy.
- 99.7% of face to face enquiries/transactions were dealt with across the counter, there and then.
- Health and Safety audits completed for Moorburn House, Largs and Kirktonhall, West Kilbride.

#### Financial

- Introduction of the PARIS cash collection and receipting system.
- The Service is operating within Budget and making best use of the financial resources available.

#### Continuous Improvement and Learning

- Good relationships developed with Amenity Groups on Arran and community organisations on Cumbrae through regular meetings on the Islands to identify and respond to local issues.
- Local arrangements made for staff on Arran to achieve the European Computer Driving Licence qualification through the Adult Learning Centre in Lamlash.
- Promoting lifelong inclusive learning through arrangements with Opportunities in Retirement and James Watt College to run courses in Moorburn House, Largs.

### **Performance Lows**

#### Continuous Improvement and Learning

- Staff in-house training, identified through individual Personal Development Reviews, were not fully fulfilled. These will be picked up in the remainder of the current financial year.
- Some inconsistencies between Local Offices and the TCC have still to be eliminated. These are of a relatively minor nature and have no major implications for the Service.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Complete training identified through staff PDRs.
- Remove, where possible, the remaining inconsistencies between Local Offices and TCC.
- Achieve Investors in People accreditation.
- Promote the service through greater use of the Council's website.
- Ensure a quality service continues to be provided to the public for their face to face enquiry and transactional needs.
- Undertake a postal Customer Satisfaction Survey of 200+ regular customers in February 05 and two further Exit Polls.

The Sub Committee noted the information provided for the consideration of the Members.

The Meeting ended at 3.40 p.m.