

Property Services Committee  
26 November 2002

**IRVINE, 26 November 2002** - At a meeting of the Property Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

Thomas Barr, John Bell, Jacqueline Browne, Gordon Clarkson, Ian Clarkson, Drew Duncan, Jane Gorman, Margaret McDougall, Elizabeth McLardy, Margaret Munn, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, Samuel Taylor and Richard Wilkinson.

**In Attendance**

B. Devine, Chief Executive, T. Orr, Corporate Director (Property Services), O. Clayton, Head of Housing, J. Currie, Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport, N. Buchan, Head of Roads (Property Services); L. Morton, Assistant Principal Officer (Finance); A. Wattie, Communications Officer, S. Bale, and J. Bannatyne, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

**Chair**

Councillor Barr in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Stewart Dewar, David Gallagher and John Sillars

**1. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 October 2002, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

**2. Management of Vacant Properties**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the outcome of previously agreed void property management initiatives and on proposals to develop further management strategies for identified low demand housing areas.

In January 2002 the Committee agreed to the introduction of a voucher scheme for a targeted proportion of void properties, a new marketing initiative for high turnover void properties and the introduction of a repairs by appointment initiative for non-essential repairs after the tenant has moved in. These became operational in April 2002. The take up of decoration vouchers has been steady, appropriate advertising has resulted in 6 properties being let in difficult to let areas and the repair by appointment system has been fully utilised.

In July some new systems were introduced in the form of pilot schemes in Largs and Ardrossan to address void management. The new processes include joint inspections of voids by the local Housing Officer and Void Supervisor, accompanied viewing for prospective tenants with immediate completion of the tenancy agreement where possible, and the appointment of a key co-ordinator based in Building Services who will liaise on an on-going basis with Housing Services staff. The new

processes have significantly speeded up the allocation process, removed the need for security on voids and have now been expanded to cover Saltcoats and Stevenston. The performance for the year to date shows a significant improvement in reletting times. It is proposed to introduce the new processes to all areas of North Ayrshire by the end of the current financial year.

It is recognised that more emphasis will require to be placed on areas of housing for which there is no or very low demand. Of the £250,000 currently spent on void house security it is estimated that 50% has been allocated to these areas. It is therefore proposed to introduce a programme of options-appraisal covering a wide range of options to address the problems of voids in these areas.

The Committee agreed (a) that the new initiatives to address the management of void properties be adopted on a permanent basis; and (b) that the Corporate Director (Property Services) develop a programme of options-appraisal involving existing tenants covering a range of options including management and design solutions, refurbishment, demolition and disposal of land; and (c) that the first phase of this programme will prioritise developing proposals for Springhill Terrace, Springside, Campsie Walk, Irvine, Towerlands Gate, Irvine, and Lundholm Road, Ardeer (as part of the Better Neighbourhood Services Implementation Plan) where there is a concentration of voids and no demand.

### **3. Review of Current Allocations Policy**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposed amendments to the Council's current Allocations Policy arising from the introduction of new legislation and guidance.

As a result of the introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, good practice guidance on allocations and changes in clients groups, it is necessary to review the Council's current Allocations Policy. The areas for review include (i) awarding insecurity of tenure points to applicants facing homelessness within 2 months and who are not in priority need; (ii) the removal of the current number of choice restrictions; and (iii) applicants who have deliberately worsened their circumstances.

The Committee agreed to approve the following amendments to the current Allocations Policy:-

- 1) that irrespective of whether or not an applicant facing homelessness within 2 months is in priority need, they will receive insecurity of tenure points to assist them in being rehoused quicker to avoid them being faced with homelessness;
- 2) That homeless applicants who were previously entitled to select 5 areas of choice based on their preference will now be selected for more than 5 areas in an effort to respond to the increasing number of homeless applicants who now have to be dealt with to ensure that they are rehoused as quickly as possible;
- 3) That where there is clear evidence that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances and been admitted to the Council's waiting list, they will be pointed from their last addresses to prevent any benefit being obtained from their

move, with their points remaining in place for a period of 12 months; and

- 4) That in the case of current or past eviction for anti-social behaviour or the grant of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order, an application will be suspended for a period of 12 months where there is clear evidence of anti-social behaviour which is related to the tenancy. This will require to be reviewed at a later date due to proposed changes in homeless legislation.

#### **4. Development of Skateboard Park at Auchenharvie, Stevenston**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the action taken to date by the North Ayrshire Skateboard Group to secure funding for the development of a skateboard park at Auchenharvie, Stevenston.

The Committee on 23 April 2002 approved the preparation of a development plan for the provision of a skateboard park at Auchenharvie, Stevenston and agreed that officers, in consultation with the Skateboard Group, investigate appropriate sources of funding. An application for lottery funding for the project has now been submitted which, if successful, will provide 80% of the total funding requirement of £351,000, leaving £70,200 to be funded from other sources.

The outcome of the lottery application will be known in 2003. The Moffat Trust and the Skateboard Group have each committed £20,000 to the project leaving a shortfall of £30,200. It is proposed that funding to a maximum of £30,200 be ring-fenced within the Revenue Budget for Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport to meet this shortfall. Efforts to find alternative funding sources will continue in the meantime with a view to reducing the total shortfall.

The Committee agreed (a) to support the action taken to date by the North Ayrshire Skateboard Group; and (b) that the sum of £30,200 be ring-fenced within the Revenue Budget for Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport to meet any shortfall.

#### **5. National Waste Strategy**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the final version of the Area Waste Plan and the Waste Disposal updated Position Statement for North Ayrshire.

The Committee on 9 October 2001 approved a Position Statement outlining its proposals for inclusion in the development of an Area Waste Plan. Following a series of meetings of the Area Waste Strategy Group and a wide public consultation exercise, the three Ayrshire authorities and Dumfries and Galloway Council in partnership with SEPA have produced a final version of their Area Waste Plan. The best practical environmental option has been chosen for the Plan to allow maximum flexibility for each authority to determine how they implement this option for different target rates. The public consultation exercise undertaken indicated an overall preference for this option which involves a commitment to reducing waste at source, increasing the re-use, recycling and composting of materials through source separated collection systems and ensuring that the remaining mixed waste does not

go direct to end point disposal.

Substantial funding is also being made available to local authorities through the Scottish Executive Strategic Waste Fund Budget, subject to the achievement of set targets. As a result of further instruction from the Scottish Executive, on recycling targets a Waste Disposal Updated Position Statement for the Council has been produced.

The Committee agreed to approve (a) the Area Waste Plan and its publication; (b) the Waste Disposal Updated Position Statement for North Ayrshire Council; and (c) the use of Strategic Waste Fund monies allocated by the Scottish Executive to local authorities for the preparation and planning associated with the implementation of the National Waste Strategy.

## **6. Cemetery Charges 2003 - 2006**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposals to increase the current charges for burial services throughout North Ayrshire on a phased basis.

The charges for burial services throughout North Ayrshire are significantly lower than the Scottish average. It is proposed to introduce a phased increase of these charges over a 3 year period to bring them into line with the Scottish average. It is further proposed to introduce charges in respect of two new services which are available, namely baby plots and cremated remains lairs. No charge will be made for stillborn children or under 16 interments.

The Committee agreed to approve the following charges:-

<b>Service</b>	<b>2002-2003</b>	<b>2003-2004</b>	<b>2004-2005</b>	<b>2005-2006</b>
Right of Burial	180.00	200.00	225.00	260.00
Right of Burial - Cremated Remains Only	50.00	75.00	100.00	128.00
Stillborn Child/Under 16 Interment	No charge	No charge	No charge	No charge
16 and over Interment	180.00	200.00	225.00	260.00
Cremated Remains Interment	50.00	75.00	100.00	128.00
Common Ground Interment	50.00	75.00	100.00	128.00
Disinterments	250.00	400.00	450.00	500.00
Duplicate Title	12.00	13.50	15.00	17.00
Transfer Title	12.00	13.50	15.00	17.00
Memorial Permit & Foundation (Incl VAT)	94.00	105.00	118.00	134.00

## **7. Rent Arrears Management**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the performance of Housing Services in relation to service plan objectives on rent arrears recovery together with proposals to improve relevant advice and support to tenants.

There are currently 6,288 tenants in North Ayrshire in rent arrears, 790 of whom have arrears in excess of £500 and over 60% of whom are in receipt of Housing Benefit. Efforts to date to reduce the arrears include the introduction of a computerised arrears automation system, increased options to pay by direct debit, switch and credit card, improvements to existing monitoring procedures, improved staff training and amendments to current policies and procedures.

Since 1997 arrears in North Ayrshire as a percentage of net debt have reduced from 16.8% to 11.3%. In recognition of the need for further preventative measures it is proposed to provide any vulnerable new tenants, people threatened with homelessness and existing tenants in debt with access to benefit support and money advice. A Money Advice Adviser and a Welfare Benefits Officer will be recruited to provide these services. In addition, a Rent Arrears campaign and a Benefits Take-Up campaign will be run in 2003/04 in partnership with other Council Services. The Committee agreed to approve (a) the introduction of a Money Advice and Welfare Rights Service for Council tenants; and (b) the running of a Rent Arrears and Benefit Take-Up campaign.

## **8. Public Transport Fund Bid: North Ayrshire Bid for Public Transport Corridor between Ardrossan, Irvine and Kilmarnock**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the outcome of the Council's bid to the Scottish Executive for funding through the Public Transport Fund for the Quality Public Transport Corridor project commencing in 2003/04.

The Property Services Committee on 5 June 2002 agreed the details of the Council's bid and authorised its submission to the Scottish Executive. The Scottish Executive has awarded the Council the full amount requested in the sum of £3.302m to be expended on the quality Public Transport Corridor project over the period 2003/06. The award is conditional on the appropriate contributions from the Council and the transport operators to the overall project cost of £3.7m and the supporting operations. This will have implications for the capital programme over the period of the bid implementation (2003/06) and the Council will be responsible for the increased revenue demands from the project infrastructure and management.

The Committee agreed to support the implementation plan for the Quality Public Transport Corridor through its revenue and capital budgets.

## **9. Revenue Budget 2002/03: Budgetary Control**

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the budgetary control position for Property Services at the end of September 2002 and projections for the financial year 2002/03.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.10 p.m.