

Cabinet
11 March 2014

Irvine, 11 March 2014 - At a meeting of the Cabinet of North Ayrshire Council at 2.30 p.m.

Present

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

In Attendance

E. Murray, Chief Executive; C. Hatton, Corporate Director, K. Yeomans, Head of Service (Development Planning) and A. Adrain, Interim Head of Housing (Development and Environment); H. Hair, Senior Manager (Financial Management) and D. Tate, Senior Manager (Property Management and Investment) (Finance and Corporate Support); K. Dyson, Communications Officer and A. Little, Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's Service).

Also In Attendance

R. Scothorne, Rocket Science.

Chair

Councillor Gibson in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Alan Hill.

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 accuracy of the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2014 was confirmed and the Minutes signed in accordance with Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

3. North Ayrshire Employability and Skills Strategy

Submitted report and presentation by the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) on findings from the North Ayrshire Employability and Skills review. A representative from Rocket Science was in attendance.

The review highlighted a number of area, such as:-

- North Ayrshire Council and its partners are taking decisive action on economic development particularly around supporting businesses and delivering employability and skills services;
- the employability and skills 'system' in North Ayrshire that is made up of a wide range of organisations with varying roles;
- the 'system' is complex because of the number of organisations involved and different services provided;
- the significant 'jobs gap' in North Ayrshire that is an issue of fundamental importance and lies behind the difficulty in making a serious impact on unemployment;
- the role of smaller businesses and micro enterprise that have a significant capacity to increase their workforce, if the right support is available;
- the current programme of employability support managed by North Ayrshire Council and delivered across the employability and skills pipeline, providing a range of approaches which meet the different needs of different client groups and has many services tailored to the needs of local businesses;

The review report recommends a 'system-wide' approach as the most effective approach to the future delivery of employability and skills services in North Ayrshire and will focus on five broad recommendations, including the establishment of a strategic group responsible for providing a strategic overview for employability and skills activity. This group has already met and agreed a that a number of workstreams should be set up based on the recommendations of the report. The five workstreams, detailed in the report, will develop more detailed actions around each of the recommendations and these actions will be collated into an employability and skills plan for North Ayrshire.

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

- the speed of business change and the time required to develop a workforce with new skills and knowledge;
- base matching of skills and the six soft skills that require to be built into training by schools and colleges in order to meet employers' needs;
- supporting business growth and responding to the specific needs of businesses; and
- making full use of business engagement by Council regulatory staff.

The Cabinet agreed (a) to note the findings of the employability and skills review report; and (b) that the time-limited workstreams be set up to develop detailed action plans to take forward the recommendations.

4. Write-off of Ex Tenant Arrears

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on tenant rent arrears and court costs, and seeking approval to write-off irrecoverable amounts.

The table at 2.2 of the report summarised the total proposed write-offs for 2013/14, analysing write-offs that were approved in October and those that have been identified to be written off. £59,653.59, relates to tenants with total balances owed of £1,000 or more and requires the approval of Cabinet for write-off. This includes £28,776.75 in relation to under occupancy arrears for homeless temporary accommodation whilst the remainder relates to Tenant accounts that have been pursued by Legal Services but where all avenues open to them have been exhausted, or the individual concerned has been sequestered. The HRA Revenue budget for 2013/14 include Write-offs a provision of £1,046,909 to meet the cost of rent write-offs in the year.

It is anticipated that the total outstanding rent arrears as at 31 March 2014 (including mainstream arrears) will show a significant increase in comparison to the opening arrears position at 1 April 2013, as a result of the new under-occupation rules. The Period 10 budgetary control report which will be submitted to Cabinet on 25 March 2014 will include a projection of the total spend against this budget.

The Cabinet agreed to write off balances in excess of £1,000 per tenant, totalling £59,653.59.

5. Annual Review of Fees and Charges

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on the proposed increases in the level of fees and charges for Council services from April 2014.

Appendix 1 to the report listed all those charges which it is proposed to increase in line with inflation. Appendix 2 contained details of all those charges which it is proposed to increase by a factor other than the October 2013 Consumer Price Index (C.P.I.). Increases already approved as part of the 2014/15 budget were summarised at Appendix 3.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the increases to Council fees and charges, as outlined in the report and its appendices, with effect from 1 April 2014.

6. Largs: 3 Morris Street: Ground Floor, Left Rear: Closing Order

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support seeking approval for the serving of a Closing Order on the property at Ground Floor, Left Rear, 3 Morris Street, Largs.

Upon inspection the property was found to be below the tolerable standard as defined by Section 86 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the serving of a Closing Order on the property in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987.

7. Housing Service Standards

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) on the outcome of the review of the Housing Service Standards.

In April 2012, the Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Housing Charter to improve the quality and value of services that social landlords provide. The Charter set out 16 outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve. The existing standards have now been reviewed and amended to take account of the requirements of the Charter. The revised draft Service Standards were outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the revised draft Housing Service Standards as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

The meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.