

Corporate Services Committee
13 June 2006

IRVINE, 13 June 2006 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

David Munn, Tom Barr, John Moffat, Drew Duncan, Jane Gorman, Alan Hill, Elisabeth Marshall, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, Donald Reid, John Reid and Ian Richardson.

In Attendance

I. Snodgrass, Chief Executive; S. Ferguson, Personnel Manager (Personnel); R. Forrest, Planning Services Manager (Development and Promotion); A. Fraser, Manager Legal Services (Legal and Protective); C. McCourt, Finance Manager (Finance); G. Lawson, Head of Corporate and Democratic Support, A. Wattie, Communications Officer and M. Anderson, Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Munn in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Elizabeth McLardy and Margaret McDougall.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 3 May 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Irvine: 93 High Street: Shop Premises

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the granting of a 10-year lease in respect of the tenancy at 93 High Street, Irvine.

At its meeting on 14 March 2006, the Committee considered 2 offers for the lease of shop premises at 93 High Street, Irvine and agreed to grant a 10-year lease in respect of the higher offer of £18,100 per annum. However, the prospective tenant withdrew at the legal stage and the proposed lease was not concluded. The second offer, from Jacquall Ltd., for a 10-year lease at an annual rental of £18,000, remains viable.

The Committee agreed (a) in terms of Standing Order 21, to suspend Standing Orders to allow the reconsideration of this matter; and (b) to grant a lease to Jacquall Ltd. for a period of 10 years at an annual rental of £18,000 and terms to be agreed.

3. Review of the Assisted Areas

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the initial response to the Department of Trade & Industry's first stage consultation on the Review of the Assisted Areas.

Much of North Ayrshire currently benefits from Assisted Area status and, in 2005/06, the fund was used to create or safeguard 554 jobs and award grants totalling £8,655,000. A review of the Assisted Areas is now being carried out and the first stage of consultation by the Government seeks views on the method of designating future Assisted Areas from 2007-2013.

The response to the consultation submitted on behalf of the Council was set out in the Appendix and proposed that:-

- South Yorkshire and Merseyside should not be automatically included in full within the Great Britain population "envelope";
- indicators should reflect weaknesses in the labour market and that there should be an indicator to measure the likely take-up of Regional Selective Assistance;
- CAS wards from the 2001 Census should be used for statistical analysis and electoral wards utilised for the Assisted Area map itself; and
- Assisted Area status, and the accompanying support for jobs, economic growth, innovation and enterprise, should be recognised as an integral mechanism to support the regeneration of North Ayrshire.

Discussion took place on the Kilbirnie North area, which is not currently included in the proposed Assisted Area map for North Ayrshire.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the initial response to the consultation made on its behalf by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development & Promotion); and (b) that the present ineligibility of Kilbirnie North be reviewed in the context of the second stage consultation.

4. Works Funded by the Community Outdoor Access Grant Scheme for 2006/07

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on a proposed programme of works to be funded through the Community Outdoor Access Grant Scheme (COAGS) in 2006/07.

Since its inception in 2003, the Scheme has attracted £6,000 in funding from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), matched by funding from the Outdoor Access budget. This has enabled the provision of up to £500 to local groups for outdoor access works, including improving and extending existing routes, providing items such as seating and cycle stands, waymarking and signage and the production/printing of promotional literature.

A total of £5,000 in funding is available for grants in 2006/07. Grant applications have been assessed against criteria agreed by the Council and SNH. Appendix 1 provided information about 7 applications which met the assessment criteria and which were recommended for funding.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the following awards in 2006/07:-

Organisation	Award
Arran Coastalway Supporters Group	£500
North Ayrshire Skate Park	£500
Whiting Bay Improvements Committee (Path Improvements at Whiting Bay)	£475
Kilwinning Community Sports Club	£500
Whiting Bay Improvements Committee (Upgrade of Union Bridge)	£500
Lamlash Improvements Committee	£500
West Kilbride Amenity Society	£500
TOTAL	£3,475

and (b) to invite further applications, and authorise the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion), in consultation with the Chair of the Corporate Services Committee, to (i) award further grants under the scheme during the financial year 2006/2007; and (ii) address any minor variations in the approved programme.

5. Projects Funded from Landfill Tax Credits 2006/07

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on a proposed programme of projects to be funded from Landfill Tax Credits in 2006/07.

Under the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, the Council, as the landfill operator, can distribute up to 6.7% of the Landfill Tax it collects to enrolled bodies to fund projects which fall within the objects of the scheme. Around £100,000 will be available to fund projects in 2006/07.

Appendix 3 provided information about the 19 applications submitted for consideration. Following an evaluation of these projects, it is recommended that the 8 identified in Appendix 1 should be funded. Given that the amount requested by SWT for the Wetland is a best estimate of costs, it is proposed that, in the event of any over-provision, surplus funds be redistributed to other projects.

Discussion took place on the distribution of funding on a geographical basis and concern was expressed that the fund appears undersubscribed in the Garnock Valley.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the following projects for funding from the Council's Landfill Tax Credits in 2006/07:-

Project	Funding
Beaches Awards	£16,500
SWT Wetland, Shewalton	£30,000
Sportscotland Fitness Trail	£6,000
Kerelaw Castle Ground Environmental Works	£15,000
Lamlash Church Restoration	£10,745
Portencross Castle Temporary Roof	£7,300
Dalgarven Mill Final Works	£3,500
Kilwinning Sports Club Drainage Improvements	£10,455
TOTAL	£99,500

(b) that Park Parish Church and Beith Playpark be prioritised for funding from any surplus in 2006/07; and (c) that the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion), in consultation with the Chair of the Corporate Services Committee, undertake a review of the local eligibility criteria.

6. Childcare Vouchers

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on a proposal to participate in the Government-sponsored Childcare Voucher Scheme.

Childcare Vouchers were introduced by the Government in April 2005 and provide relief from tax and National Insurance contributions up to the value of £55 per week on an employee's childcare costs. The scheme operates through an Inland Revenue approved facility known as "salary sacrifice", where an employee agrees to forego some of his/her gross salary, reducing the amount of salary liable to tax and National Insurance contributions. The employer also receives relief on the National Insurance contributions for each employee in the scheme.

Under the scheme, the employer appoints an authorised Childcare Voucher Scheme Administrator to administer the scheme and issue vouchers on behalf of the employee to an approved child carer or child-care organisation. The savings made by the Council through exemption from employer National Insurance costs will be used to offset the administration fee made to the chosen Childcare Voucher Scheme Administrator and the cost of the additional workload for Payroll and Personnel staff. Appendices 1 and 2 set out the estimated savings to the Council and the employee.

The Committee agreed to approve the adoption of the Government's Childcare Voucher Scheme within North Ayrshire Council.

7. Building Services: Pay Rates

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on amendments to the pay rates of Craft Operatives within Building Services.

The Council has, over the past 2 years, experienced recruitment difficulties in relation to Craft Operatives, partly due to the pay rates offered. Officers of the Council have been engaged in discussions with the Craft Trade Unions for some time, with a view to introducing more attractive conditions of employment to aid recruitment and retention of this workforce. In addition, agreement has been sought at a local level to carry out job assessment as a first step towards modernising the working arrangements of Craft Operatives and aligning their employment conditions with those of other employee groups within the Council.

An agreement has now been reached under the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers, to increase the basic hourly rate of pay for Building Services employees by £0.25 with effect from 1 April 2006, linked to the participation of the workforce in a job assessment review of their duties and responsibilities.

The Committee agreed to approve the actions taken by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) to amend the pay rates of Craft Operatives within Building Services, in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

8. Corporate Services (Conditions of Service) Sub Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS1) being the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Services (Conditions of Service) Sub Committee held on 3 May 2006.

Noted.

9. Corporate Health and Safety Group

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS2) being the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Health and Safety Group held on 12 May 2006.

Noted.

10. 1st Tier Joint Consultative Committee (Local Government and Craft Operatives)

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS3) being the Minutes of the Meeting of the 1st Tier Joint Consultative Committee (Local Government and Craft Operatives) held on 12 May 2006.

Noted.

11. Urgent Items

The Chair agreed that the following item of business be considered as a matter of urgency due to the timescale involved.

11.1 Taxi Fares Scales Appeal

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective) on the decision of the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland in the recent Taxi Fares Scales Appeal.

The Licensing Sub Committee of 20 November 2005 agreed, following a review of taxi fares and public consultation on the matter, to approve an amended scale for taxi fares. The Council's proposals were appealed to the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland by a number of taxi operators. The appeal sought to have the Council's decision to remove the inter-zone supplement overturned and also alleged that the Council had failed to afford adequate consultation to the trade.

The Deputy Traffic Commissioner issued a decision on 29 April 2006, reinstating the supplement for travel between zones, removing the additional tariff for Largs operators and indicating that the Council's review arrangements had been reasonable, although the new fare structure should not have been implemented for at least 14 days after the Council had approved the Licensing Sub Committee Minute. The Deputy Traffic Commissioner also removed the provision allowing operators to charge a supplement all day on a Sunday and on any other day between midnight and 7.00 a.m., although a corrective decision was subsequently issued in this regard.

The Committee noted (a) the decision of the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland as detailed within the report; and (b) that the new taxi fares, which require to be re-advertised, will take effect on 19 June 2006.

The Meeting ended at 2.35 p.m.

**Corporate Services Committee
13/06/2006**

Appendix No
CS1

Corporate Services (Conditions of Service) Sub Committee
3 May 2006

IRVINE, 3 May 2006 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Services (Conditions of Service) Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 1.30 p.m.

Present

David Munn, Alan Munro and David O'Neill.

Also Present

In Attendance

T. Orr, Corporate Director (Property Services); G. Young, Personnel Manager (Personnel); and M. Anderson, Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (Chief Executive's).

Also In Attendance

Chair

Councillor Munn in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Peter McNamara and Samuel Taylor.

1. Exclusion of the Public

The Sub Committee 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 item of business on the grounds indicated in terms of Paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 7A of the Act.

2. Request for Early Retirement: Property Services

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on a request for early retirement from an employee within Property Services.

The report indicated the implications for the Council should the request be approved.

The Sub Committee agreed to approve the request for early retirement on the terms and conditions as detailed in the report.

The Meeting ended at 1.35 p.m.

Corporate Services Committee
13/06/2006

Appendix No
CS2

Corporate Health and Safety Group
12 May 2006

IRVINE, 12 May 2006 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Health and Safety Group of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Councillors David Munn, Peter McNamara, Alan Munro, David O'Neill and Samuel Taylor; J.M. Macfarlane, Assistant Chief Executive, S. Ferguson, Personnel Manager, C. McBreen, Principal Health and Safety Adviser (Personnel); J. Leckie, Head of Service (Educational Services); B. Burns, Manager (Resources)(Social Services) and G. Clark, Operations Manager, Grounds Maintenance (Property Services)(North Ayrshire Council); F. Minnery (GMB); E. Lamb (PAT); S. O'Reilly and A. Cairns (T&GWU); and J. MacDonald, S Herd and C Turbett (UNISON).

Also Present

In Attendance

M. Anderson, Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (Chief Executive's)(North Ayrshire Council).

Also In Attendance

Chair

Councillor Munn in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

I. Ross (EIS).

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Group held on 10 February 2006 were confirmed.

2. Health and Safety Strategy and Policy: Progress Report

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on the implementation of the Council's Health and Safety Strategy and Policy.

The Strategy sets out a revised and strengthened framework for the management of Health and Safety within the Council and provides a framework for policy development, organisation of resources, hazard identification and risk assessment, planning, monitoring and audit. The Strategy also defines the roles of senior managers within the Council and the Personnel Health and Safety Division, as well as the contributions expected of individual employees.

The 2005/06 Action Plan was attached at Appendix 1 to the report with progress on management of stress detailed in Appendix 2 to the report. The following progress was highlighted and discussed:-

- **Health and Safety Planning Groups**

Most Health and Safety Planning Groups have now held their fourth meetings. The groups are making a positive contribution to effective cross-service working.

- **Stress Management**

The programme of stress risk assessments is almost complete, with the exception of Educational Services. However, after discussion with HSE, an arrangement has now been agreed to progress the latter.

The Stress Working Group met again in February 2006 to discuss the means of taking forward issues arising. A revised Employee Handbook on stress has been prepared for consultation.

- **Health and Safety Master File**

All Files have now been issued to designated holders and work continues to revise and introduce additional policies and guidance. There has been some slippage in terms of the revision of a number of topics, but action is being taken to address this.

- **Service Health and Safety Action Plans**

All Services now have individual Health and Safety Action Plans in place. The Lead Safety Advisers continue to work with the nominated Officers in each service in order to develop the plans and resolve issues arising from them.

Discussion took place on the appropriate mechanism for requesting that risk assessments be undertaken in respect of particular tasks.

Noted.

4. Employee Accident Statistics: Monitoring Report

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on employee injury accident statistics for the period from 1 January 2006 to 31 March 2006.

There were 53 employee accidents resulting in injury during the period. Seven were serious enough to be reported to the Health and Safety Executive, including one which required to be reported as an "major injury". The report provided a breakdown of the types of injuries and the causes of these.

Monitoring reports will be submitted to the regular meetings of each of the Health and Safety Planning Groups. This will allow Services to monitor the statistical reports on workplace accidents and incidents and ensure appropriate action is taken to reduce risk and avoid recurrence.

Noted.

5. Violence and Aggression Incidents: Monitoring Report

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) summarising incidents involving violence and aggression towards employees.

During the period 1 January 2006 to 31 March 2006, a total of 69 incidents involving violence and aggression were reported. The report provided a breakdown of incidents by Service.

Under the Council's Policy and Guidance on Aggression and Violence, incidents must be monitored and identified actions followed up. Monitoring reports will continue to be submitted to the regular meetings of each Service Health and Safety Planning Group and Services will monitor the statistical reports on incidents to ensure appropriate action is taken to reduce risk and avoid recurrence.

Discussion took place on the issues surrounding the reporting of incidents of violence and aggression associated with particular client groups, such as adults with additional support needs and children.

Noted.

6. Affirmation of Office Bearers

The Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) advised the Group that the current Chair and the Council-nominated Joint Secretary had been appointed for a period of one year on 23 June 2005.

The Group agreed (a) that the Joint Secretaries submit a report on office bearer appointments to the next meeting of the Group in August 2006; and (b) meantime, to continue the appointments of the current Chair, Councillor David Munn and Council-nominated Joint Secretary, the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel).

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Corporate Health and Safety Group will be held on Friday 18 August 2006 in Cunninghame House, Irvine.

The Group agreed that, in future, meetings would commence at 1.00 p.m.

The meeting ended at 2.40 p.m.

Corporate Services Committee
13/06/2006

Appendix No
CS3

1st Tier Joint Consultative Committee (Local government Employees and Craft Operatives)
12 May 2006

IRVINE, 12 May 2006 - At a Meeting of the 1st Tier Joint Consultative Committee (Local Government Employees and Craft Operatives) of North Ayrshire Council at 3.15 pm.

Present

Councillors David Munn, Peter McNamara, Alan Munro, David O'Neill and Samuel Taylor (North Ayrshire Council); S. Herd and C. Turbett (UNISON); A. Cairns and S. O'Reilly (T&GWU); and F. Minnery (GMB).

Also Present

In Attendance

J.M. Macfarlane, Assistant Chief Executive and S. Ferguson, Personnel Manager (Personnel); A. Herbert, Assistant Chief Executive (Finance); J. Barrett, Assistant Chief Executive (Information Technology); and J. Montgomery, Principal Performance Officer and M. Anderson, Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (Chief Executive's).

Also In Attendance

Chair

Councillor Munn in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

P. Houston (GMB).

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 November 2005 were confirmed.

2.1 Budget Update

The Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) advised that the Council's 2005/06 accounts have now been closed and will be submitted for audit by 30 June 2006. Thereafter, it is envisaged that the final audited accounts will be available for circulation to Members in Autumn 2006. A deficit of some £6.6M is anticipated in the General Services Account for 2005/06, with the Housing Revenue Account likely to show a small surplus.

Reference was made to the 2006/07 budget presentation to the unions which took place earlier in the year and a copy of the Council's 2006/07 budget leaflet was circulated for information.

Preliminary work has commenced on the 2007/08 budget and the 2007/08 Council Tax levels are due to be announced in February 2007. Issues likely to require to be taken into account during the budgeting exercise will be Job Evaluation/Single Status, the Efficient Government initiative and the need to curtail Council Tax increases.

Discussion took place on the timescale for including union representatives in the budgeting process, with the unions requesting involvement at an earlier stage in future.

Noted.

2.2 Trading Accounts

The Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) tabled, for information, a report on trading operations within the Council which was considered by the Corporate Policy Committee at its meeting on 9 May 2006.

The Local Government Act 2004 requires local authorities to set up Trading Accounts for "activities that are provided in a competitive environment" and "are provided on a basis other than a recharge of cost". In March 2005, the Council's Corporate Policy Committee agreed to the establishment of a range of both statutory and non-statutory Trading Accounts.

Trading operations are required to break even over a 3-year rolling period. Whilst the Council has satisfied this requirement through to 31 March 2005, the impact of compensation payments as a result of the Job Evaluation exercise in 2005/06 will result in at least 2 of the statutory accounts, Catering and Cleaning, not achieving a surplus in that year. Trading operations must also agree a charge rate and service level with each of their client Services prior to 1 April for the following year. This has proved difficult and the current operations continue to charge generally on the basis of former contract rates.

As part of the process of introducing trading operations, Council Services were asked to identify principal activities and numbers of transactions key to the provision of service level agreements. This has been only partially successful and some Services require to obtain further expertise in this area.

Given the uncertainty surrounding wage rates in each of current trading operations, it was proposed that Trading Accounts should be suspended for the year 2006/07. During that year consultants will be engaged to undertake a critical review of trading operations to develop robust service level agreements where these are to be continued. The consultants will also advise on other ways in which the Council can demonstrate Best Value in these operations.

Discussion took place on the background to the establishment of non statutory trading accounts and the use of consultants.

Noted.

3. Council Plan 2006/09

The Principal Performance Officer tabled, for information, a report on the preparation of a new Council Plan for 2006/09, "Building a Better North Ayrshire" which was approved by the Corporate Policy Committee on 9 May 2006.

The new Plan has at its core the aim of building a better North Ayrshire through sustainable regeneration and the continuous improvement of Council services. The document sets out the 12 strategic priorities that the Council will pursue over the next 3 years. These priorities cover 4 broad areas, namely our economy, our environment, our communities and our organisation. Key actions have been identified against each of the strategic priorities and these will be implemented over the course of the Council Plan.

The Plan will subject to annual review by Members to monitor progress and to ensure its currency. Arrangements are being put in place to launch and publicise the Plan and the trades unions will be included in this process.

Noted.

4. Best Value Update

The Principal Performance Officer reported on the implementation of the Improvement Plan following the audit of Best Value and Community Planning.

Of the 50 action points contained in the Improvement Plan, all are either on target or have slipped to some extent in relation to the original planned timescale. Where slippage has occurred, it is considered to be within acceptable parameters and revised timescales have been set. The Plan will continue to be monitored and a report on the position at the end 2005/06 will be submitted to the Corporate Policy Standing Sub-Committee in June 2006. Thereafter, the Plan is due to be reviewed by Council's external auditors.

The Committee (a) noted the progress to date in implementing the Council's Improvement Plan; and (b) agreed that a copy of the Corporate Policy Standing Sub Committee report on this matter be submitted for information to the next meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee.

5. Efficient Government Fund: Ayrshire Partnership

The Assistant Chief Executive (Information Technology) tabled, for information, a report on the Ayrshire Partnership's Efficient Government Fund Bid which was submitted to the Corporate Services Committee on 3 May and reports considered by the Corporate Policy Committee on 9 May 2006 on an Efficient Government Fund bid by the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation (SCOTS) and on the Council's Procurement Strategy.

The 3 Ayrshire Councils and Ayrshire and Arran NHS have submitted a joint bid to introduce a Shared Correspondence Distribution Centre to process inbound paper correspondence for Revenues, Benefits and Account payable processes and a Shared Disaster Recovery Centre for IT. Due to a recent refocusing of the Fund by the Scottish Executive, there are now 5 key themes identified for funding and, accordingly, the Ayrshire partners' bid will be resubmitted to align with these key themes.

The Society of Chief Officers of Transportation (SCOTS) has applied, on behalf of Scottish Roads Authorities, for Efficient Government Fund monies to develop a National Asset Management Framework and Database of Road Assets. The outcome of the bid process is awaited.

Separately, two business analysts have been working with senior managers within the Council to identify potential efficiencies. Four projects are being explored, namely flexible working, procurement, transport within Educational and Social Services and rationalising the use of printers across the Council.

Following an extensive examination of the Council's existing procurement procedures and practices, a new Procurement Strategy has been prepared which sets out how Council Services will procure goods, works and services from external services in the future. The introduction of the Procurement Strategy will ensure that the Council achieves Best Value in all its purchasing activities and generates efficiencies and savings.

Discussion took place on the issue of flexible working within the context of the Council's Accommodation Strategy, the Disability Discrimination Act and the Efficient Government agenda.

Noted.

6. Statutory Performance Indicators: Employee Absence Statistics

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on the current sickness absence levels within the Council.

The Council's overall absence rate for 2005/06 is 5.3%, which represents a slight reduction on the final figure of 5.4% for 2004/05. This compares with a average rate of absence of 5.2% across all Councils in Scotland for 2004/05. 2005/06 figures are not yet available for Scotland as a whole.

Compared with 2004/05 absence figures for North Ayrshire, the 2005/06 figures show no change in former APT&C staff and Chief Officers, a decrease in the former manual workers and crafts and a small increase in the rate for teachers. Appendix 1 to the report provided a breakdown of sickness by category and Appendix 2 illustrated North Ayrshire Council's absence levels against overall figures for Scottish local authorities.

Discussion took place on the importance of seeking to establish which of the categories of sickness absence might also be attributable to work-related stress.

Noted.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the 1st Tier Joint Consultative Committee (Local Government and Craft Operatives) will be held on Friday 18 August 2006 in Cunninghame House, Irvine.

The Committee agreed that future meetings commence at 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm.