

Cabinet  
12 March 2013

**IRVINE, 12 March 2013** - At a Meeting of the Cabinet of North Ayrshire Council at 2.30 p.m.

**Present**

Willie Gibson, Alan Hill, Marie Burns, John Ferguson, Tony Gurney and Alex McLean.

**Also Present**

Donald Reid.

**In Attendance**

L. Friel, Corporate Director, G. Macgregor, Head of HR and Organisational Development, S. Humphries, Chief Revenues and Benefits Officer, T. Reaney, Team Manager (Corporate Procurement), A. Blakely, IT Manager and E. Gunn-Stewart, Customer Services Manager (Finance and Corporate Support), C. Hatton, Corporate Director and K. Yeomans, Head of Development Planning (Development and Environment); and L. McEwan, Corporate Communications Manager, E. McDonald, Communications Officer and M. Anderson, Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's Service).

**Also In Attendance**

E. Graham, Director (ibp Strategy & Research).

**Chair**

Councillor Gibson in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Anthea Dickson.

**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 Minute of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 26 February 2013 was agreed and the Minute signed in accordance with paragraph 7(1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

**3. Digital Services Strategy**

Submitted report by Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on the new Digital Services Strategy and on progress in terms of its implementation. The Cabinet also received a presentation by the Customer Services Manager on the background to the strategy, including a demonstration of the refreshed website.

A project to review the Council's existing website was approved by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) in March 2012 and Liverpool Direct Limited was engaged to provide support to the internal team. The Strategy set out at Appendix 1 to the report was informed by a series of workshops and individual meetings with key stakeholders, including Elected Members, and was developed following consultation with managers across the Council.

The new website will be delivered on 3 April 2013 and a communication plan is in place both to promote the website and to monitor its effectiveness. The Council will adopt a centralised approach to the management of the website, with Customer Services taking the lead and working closely with IT and Communications. The new website will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and regular analysis will be undertaken to encourage more customers to visit the site.

Members asked questions, and received clarification, on the following:-

- whether the 'top tasks' on the website would be generated automatically according to volume of traffic, or selected manually;
- the feasibility and value of linking a proposed website workshop event on Arran with the planned 'Straight Talking' session;
- the number of members of staff who would have authorship rights to the new website;
- the scope for including links on the website to external sites which might be of interest to visitors to North Ayrshire; and
- whether the website's links to different providers (such as the new CMIS site for committee papers) would be compatible with the Council's intention to allow open access APIs.

The Cabinet agreed to (a) approve the Digital Services Strategy set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to any necessary minor amendments in terms of formatting or typographical errors; and (b) note progress in terms of the implementation of the strategy.

#### **4. Household Survey**

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on options for conducting a household survey.

The Council's household survey is traditionally undertaken every four years by an independent market research company. The broad aims of the survey were set out at Section 2.2 of the report and the proposed 2013 questionnaire was provided at Appendix 2.

The advantages, disadvantages and cost implications of a number of survey methods were outlined in Section 2 of the report and summarised at Appendix 1. The report recommended a door-to-door survey comprising 3,000 interviews, broken down into six geographical settlement areas across North Ayrshire. This method offers the Council a good balance between cost and confidence values and would cost £22,900.

The Cabinet agreed (a) that a door-to-door household survey be undertaken in Spring 2013; and (b) to note the survey questions set out at Appendix 2 to the report.

## **5. Montgomerie Park, Irvine – Masterplan Review**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) on a review of the approved Masterplan and associated strategies for the delivery and funding of development sites at Montgomerie Park.

The 2007 Masterplan was set out at Appendix 1 to the report. The report suggested that the current requirements in the Masterplan for the installation of a relatively expensive distributor road may present a challenge in terms of securing further private sector developer interest in Montgomerie Park. The Scottish Government's street design policy "Designing Places", however, marks an move towards place making and away from systems dominated by the motor car. This may provide an opportunity to refine the development of Montgomerie Park to overcome the higher infrastructure costs of the 2007 Masterplan. A fresh Masterplan would also be underpinned by a re-assessment of land values and abnormal development costs and it would be informed by using the results from selective intrusive site investigations.

The report proposed the development of a revised sales strategy based on a refreshed Masterplan. An outline reinvestment plan for capital receipts will be developed looking at potential use of receipts to fund on-site infrastructure and to develop a fund to improve marketability and attract partnership funding. The annual breakdown of funding was detailed at Sections 3.5 and 4.1 of the report.

The Cabinet agreed (a) to approve the programme of works and associated expenditure to deliver a revised Masterplan for the development and sale of sites within Montgomerie Park with associated infrastructure; (b) that further site investigations be undertaken to inform the revised Masterplan; (c) to a review of the approach to marketing new development parcels designed to improve the viability of and marketability of sites; (d) to the development of an ongoing programme to include the preparation of associated infrastructure design, marketing particulars and management strategy for the undeveloped land; (e) that an outline reinvestment plan for capital receipts from the development be used as an infrastructure fund to improve marketability and attract partnership funding; and (f) that the revised plan and proposals be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet for approval.

## **6. Upper Garnock Valley Flood Mitigation Scheme Progress Report**

Submit report by the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) on the progress of the development of the Upper Garnock Flood Protection Scheme.

Consultants were appointed by the Council to produce outline designs for an Upper Garnock Flood Protection Scheme which would allow the associated cost/benefit ratios to be identified which would allow schemes to be consulted upon and considered by the Council. Significant work has been undertaken which has involved conducting a number of in-depth surveys and studies.

The two options set out at Section 3.3 of the report have been identified for consultation. Option 2 has the advantage of reducing the wall heights within the towns while ensuring the correct protection level from flooding. It could be viewed as a softer, more environmentally friendly option, creating a seasonal wetland. The estimated cost of this option is £32m, which is significantly higher than the £21.4m identified in a Strategy Report in December 2011, mainly due to a revised view of the investment requirement in the utilities infrastructure of the affected areas. In addition, the cost/benefit analysis currently indicates a figure close to the considered minimum acceptable ratio of 1 and, as such, the options outlined may not compare favourably to other Local Authority schemes competing to secure funding.

Given the public interest in this scheme, the report proposed a 2-day exhibition on 21 and 22 March along with a 28-day period of time after to ascertain the views of the affected residents within the Garnock Valley area. These views will then be fed into the continued refinement of the option appraisals prior to presenting a complete analysis for Cabinet consideration. A full formal consultation would be undertaken prior to any final decision and approval of the preferred option.

Members asked questions, and received clarification, on whether a range of shorter term measures, such as dredging, would also be considered.

The Cabinet agreed to (a) note the progress made to date in terms of the two options; (b) note the current cost of the two options; (c) approve further work to be undertaken to refine the costings for a broader range of options; and (d) approve the proposed exhibition for residents in the Garnock Valley on 21 and 22 March 2013.

## **7. Write off of Tenant Rent Arrears**

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

In terms of the Council's Financial Regulations (Code of Financial Practice 3) relating to the control of income, individual arrears of under £1,000 can be written off with the approval of the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) after consultation with the Chief Executive. Arrears of £1,000 and over can only be written off following approval by Elected Members.

Rent arrears of £970,928 were outstanding as at 31 January 2013, with £64,282.27 now deemed to be irrecoverable. A further £8,008.50 of court costs were also deemed to be irrecoverable, i.e. a total of £72,290.77. The proposed rent write-off of £64,282.27 represents 0.15% of the Council's budgeted house rent income for 2012/13 and 23.1% of the budget available to meet the cost of write-offs in the year. In accordance with the Code of Practice, £35,788.68 has been written off under delegated authority. The remaining £36,502.09, relating to tenants with total balances owed of £1,000 or more, requires the approval of Cabinet for write off.

The Cabinet agreed to write off balances in excess of £1,000, per tenant, totalling £36,502.09.

## **8. Proposed Tree and Woodlands Management Policy**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) in respect of a Tree and Woodland Management Policy.

The Council is responsible for many thousands of trees and over 275 hectares of woodlands within its area. There are a number of legal obligations in both Common Law and Statute placed upon the Council in the management of trees and woodlands for which it is responsible. There is currently no formal policy setting down how the Council will discharge its responsibilities and manage its tree and woodland stock in a sustainable manner.

The proposed Tree and Woodland Management Policy, attached at Appendix 1 was considered by the Environment and Infrastructure Policy Board at its meetings on 3 September 2012, 3 December 2012 and on 18 February 2013.

Members asked questions, and received clarification, on the importance of healthy and safety issues being treated as a priority.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the Tree and Woodland Management Policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

## **9. Water Safety Policy**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) in respect of a Water Safety Policy.1.1

The Council is responsible for a number of inland and coastal waters. There are a number of legal obligations in both Common Law and Statute upon the Council in the safe operation of inland and coastal waters for which it is responsible. As part of a cyclical review of policies a new policy has been drawn together that recognises a number of legislative changes and the Council's approach to risk management.

At its meeting on 3 September 2012, the Environment and Infrastructure Policy Board considered the draft Water Safety Policy set out at Appendix 1 to the report, for the safe provision and use of inland and coastal waters.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the Water Safety Policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

## **10. Welfare Reform**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on the progress made against the Welfare Reform Action Plan.

Progress in terms of the Welfare Reform Action Plan was summarised in Appendix 1 to the report. The report itself highlighted the current position in respect of the following key issues:-

- under-occupation in social housing;
- the Social Welfare Fund;
- Universal Credit;
- the benefit cap;
- the Council Tax reduction scheme;
- Discretionary Housing Payments;
- Personal Independence Payment / Passported Benefit; and
- staff training and communication.

Section 4.1 of the report provided details on the funding which the Council will receive from the Scottish Welfare Fund, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) and DWP additional funding for welfare reform.

Members asked questions, and received clarification on the following:-

- whether responsibility for managing and administering exceptions to Direct Payments would lie solely with the DWP; and
- the value of holding a Members' seminar on the latest position in terms of Welfare Reform.

The Cabinet agreed (a) to note the content of the report; and (b) that a Members' seminar be provided to update Members on progress in terms of Welfare Reform.

## **11. Bridgegate Streetscape Enhancement Project - Procurement of Street Art**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) of the actions taken to award a contract for street art at Bridgegate.

Part of the overall Bridgegate Enhancement Streetscape Project was to develop a Bridgegate Art Strategy and to subsequently procure a main sculpture and supporting pieces. Only three companies were identified as having the potential to deliver the street art and, of these, only one (m-tec) was able to provide a sample. For the reasons set out at Section 2.3 of the report, the award of this tender to m-tec was treated as urgent in terms of clause 18.7 of the Standing Orders Relating to Contracts.

The cost of the artwork is £127,165 (exclusive of VAT) and has been provided within the overall Bridgegate Streetscape Enhancement Project. Irvine Bay Regeneration Company has made a contribution towards the cost of this.

Noted.

## **12. ICT Infrastructure Strategic Review - Managed WAN Services**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on the results of a tender for Managed Wide Area Network (WAN) Services and presenting a recommendation on award of the contract.

On 19 June 2012, the Cabinet gave approval for the ICT Infrastructure Review to progress to the tender phase. One requirement identified by the Review was the procurement of Managed Wide Area Network (WAN) Services. The contract term is for 5 years commencing in April 2013, with the option to extend for 24 months.

A mini-competition was held for design, supply, implementation and support of a fully Managed WAN Service for the Council. Three bids were received in response. These were analysed, further clarification obtained where required and scores determined against previously published evaluation criteria and weightings. A tender outcome report and award recommendation were provided at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Cabinet agreed to approve the contract award to Capita Business Services Ltd., subject to finalisation of the contract and agreement on work schedules.

## **13. Environment and Infrastructure Policy Board : Minutes of Meeting held on 18 February 2013**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Development and Environment) on the Minutes of the Environment and Infrastructure Policy Board held on 18 February 2013.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.25 p.m.