

Corporate Policy Standing Sub Committee  
22 November 2006

**IRVINE, 22 November 2006** - At a Meeting of the Corporate Policy Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

John Reid, Tom Barr, John Bell, Jean Highgate, Margaret Munn, David O'Neill and Richard Wilkinson.

**In Attendance**

I. Snodgrass (Chief Executive); A. Herbert, Assistant Chief Executive (Finance); J. M. Macfarlane, Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel); J. Leckie, Head of Service (Educational Services); I. Kelly, Assistant Principal Officer, Welfare Rights and M. Gray, Service Manager, Financial Inclusion Service (Social Services); M. Adams and A. Osborne, Policy Officers; and M. McKeown and C. Graham, Corporate Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

**Chair**

Councillor Reid in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Margaret McDougall.

**1. Disability Equality Scheme**

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the draft Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan 2007-10.

The Council has a duty under the Disability Discrimination (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 to compile and publish a Disability Equality Scheme by 4 December 2006. On 24 October, the Corporate Policy Committee considered a report on the development of the Scheme and Action Plan and agreed to refer detailed consideration of the content to the Standing Sub Committee and thereafter, to remit to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Chief Executive, to approve the final Scheme by the required date.

The Scheme and Action Plan, copies of which were appended to the report, have been developed by the Council's Corporate Equality Officers Group, following consultation with disabled people. The Scheme sets out how the Council intends to meet its disability equality duty. Educational Services have a specific duty to prepare a scheme and this has been incorporated into the overall Scheme.

The Action Plan reflects the priorities raised by disabled people and contains proposals to:

- provide disability awareness training for Council employees;
- improve the accessibility of information on services;
- support the newly-established Access Panel;
- establish a Forum for employees with disabilities;
- ensure the Council's website meets accessibility standards for disabled people;
- increase the number of dropped kerbs at crossing points in consultation with disability groups, and provide dropped kerbs at all new crossing points;
- provide disabled parking bays in town centres and in Council-owned car parks;
- improve access to buildings for disabled people;
- develop access to open space for disabled people;
- improve employment opportunities and recruitment of people with learning disabilities;
- produce a property database of adapted housing through the Disabled Persons' Housing Service;
- develop new accommodation for people with particular needs;
- improve the flexibility of home care services;
- review the refuse collection service; and
- provide facilities for RADAR keys for automatic public conveniences.

Members discussed the importance of staff training and awareness raising in promoting the new duty throughout the Council; the provision of meals to people with special requirements; the need to keep the North Ayrshire Forum on Disability up to date with the Scheme's implementation; the provision of dropped kerbs in consultation with other agencies such as AMEY and the development of disabled friendly routes to the main shopping areas in towns; and the review of the refuse collection service and the obstructions caused by locating wheeled bins on kerbsides during collection periods. It was agreed that these issues would be addressed in the Scheme.

The Sub Committee agreed (a) to approve the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan, subject to the incorporation of minor amendments discussed at the meeting; and (b) that the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Chief Executive, approve the final version for publication.

## **2. Financial Inclusion Plan**

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on progress in implementing the North Ayrshire Financial Inclusion Plan 2006-2008.

The Scottish Executive's Financial Inclusion Action Plan promotes financial inclusion as part of its "Closing the Opportunity Gap" approach to tackling poverty and deprivation. Its purpose is to increase the availability of appropriate financial services and money advice to low-income families and to reduce their vulnerability to financial exclusion and multiple debts by 2008. The Council has received £300,000 for financial years 2006/07 and 2007/08 to fund financial inclusion activities in North Ayrshire. In addition funding of £80,000 per annum has been secured from the Community Planning Partnership's Community Regeneration Fund.

Six projects are being funded through the Scottish Executive Financial Inclusion Fund, details of which were summarised in the report. A Service Manager has been appointed with overall responsibility for delivery of the initiatives and 9 of the 10 staff being recruited are in post. Four of the projects are being managed by the Council's Social Services (Welfare Rights and Debt Advice Team) i.e.

- Financial Inclusion Support and Development
- Debt Advice Aftercare
- Specialist Advice and
- Financial Literacy Initiative

and two by the 1st Alliance Credit Union i.e.

- 1st Alliance 1st Loan and
- 1st Alliance Financial Inclusion Services

The Community Regeneration Funding has been allocated to the North Ayrshire Citizens Advice Service (NACAS) and the Community Led Action Support Project (CLASP) to introduce complementary services under the heading of Financial Inclusion Outreach Services.

The Financial Inclusion Plan was set out in Appendix A to the report and included details of resources, planned outputs, target groups and timescales. The projects will be monitored under the Community Planning Partnership's monitoring procedures. The future sustainability of the projects will be a key issue for the monitoring and management groups. The Financial Inclusion Service will be officially launched in December. This community event will be widely publicised, including an article in the Council's "NOW" magazine.

Noted.

### **3. Capital Plans: Monitoring Statement**

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on movement in the Council's approved capital budgets for 2006/07 and beyond.

The Council's General Services Capital Plan for 2006/07 and beyond, and the Housing Revenue Account 2006/07 and beyond, were approved by a special meeting of the Corporate Policy Committee on 7 February 2006. Since then the programmes have been regularly monitored to take account of changing circumstances. Some projects scheduled to be implemented in 2006/07 have been delayed, whilst others scheduled for future years are being brought forward. The report identified major movements in the General Services Capital Plan and the Housing Revenue Account. The Council's capital expenditure and income position as at 31 October 2006 was summarised in the appendices to the report.

Explanations for the major movements in the capital plans highlighted in the report were provided. Members requested that future monitoring reports should highlight the reasons for major movements in the capital programmes, and stressed the importance of continuous monitoring to ensure that capital projects are delivered on schedule so far as possible.

The Sub Committee agreed (a) to approve the changes to the approved capital budgets for 2006/07 and beyond as detailed in the report; (b) that future monitoring reports should highlight and provide explanations of major variances in the capital plans; and (c) that the £135,000 overspend on the refurbishment of the Harbour Arts Centre be funded from the provisions made for inflationary increases.

#### **4. Customer Contact Strategy**

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on progress of Phase 3 and Phase 4 of the Customer Contact Strategy.

Phase 3 of the Strategy is nearing completion. The report highlighted progress in relation to:-

- The transfer of the main switchboard for Cunninghame House to the Telephone Contact Centre (TCC)
- The merger of the training and accreditation programmes of local offices and the TCC
- The transfer of hall lets to the TCC
- A review of Community and Learning Development public offices
- Implementation of an appointment booking system for debt recovery in the TCC
- Installation of CRM in finance debt recovery and on public counters
- Business process mapping in the Benefits Service
- The transfer of the emergency Roads and Lighting Faults Service (RALF) to the TCC

Phase 4 of the Customer Contact Strategy will include:-

- Expansion of the range of services supplied by the TCC in relation to Financial Services
- The transfer of counter services from Bridgegate House and Cunninghame House to the Irvine Local Office planned for the summer of 2007
- Merging of the Saltcoats Local Office and Social Services public counters and
- The Largs Local Office shared service operation with NHS Ayrshire and Arran within the new Brooksby facility in Largs

In relation to the transfer of the hall letting system to the TCC, Members discussed the impact that the requirement for 14 days prior notice of hall bookings may be having on service users. Members were concerned that hall bookings could be lost as a result of this requirement and requested that the situation should be monitored and a report brought back to the Sub Committee.

The Sub Committee agreed (a) to note the progress to date in implementing Phase 3 of the Strategy and the proposals for Phase 4; (b) to receive a report at a future meeting on the impact of the 14 day notice period for hall lets on service users; and (c) that the Chief Executive meet with the elected Members for Largs at regular intervals to advise on progress in relation to the Largs Local Office.

The meeting ended at 3.40 p.m.