

Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee  
26 May 2004

**Irvine, 26 May 2004** - At a meeting of the Corporate Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

Tom Barr, Jack Carson, David Munn, Robert Rae and Ian Richardson.

**In Attendance**

B. Devine, Chief Executive; B. MacDonald, Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion); J. Barrett, Assistant Chief Executive (Information Technology); I.T. Mackay, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective); J.M. Macfarlane, Assistant Chief Executive and R. Young, Principal Officer (Personnel); D. Addison, Head of Revenues (Finance); J. Montgomery, Principal Performance Review Officer, A. Osborne and A. Little, Corporate & Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

**Chair**

Councillor Barr in the Chair.

**1. Performance - Reports for 2003/04 and Plans for 2004/05 - 2006/07**

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the end of year performance for 2003/04 and on Priorities, Key Performance Indicators, Targets and Supporting Actions for each area within the Corporate Services grouping.

**Chief Executive's**

**Performance Highs**

- Efficiently administered Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government Elections.
- Reviewed constitutional arrangements and introduced revised committee structures.
- Delivered comprehensive induction programme to Members of New Administration.
- Briefed Members and all Services on implications of Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, and of the impending Best Value Audit.
- Introduced Council wide performance reporting mechanism for Elected Members.

- Developed new Community Planning structures and thematic groups.
- Established Joint Ayrshire Panel for Social Work Complaints.
- Reviewed Domestic Abuse Strategy.
- Successfully recruited and trained members of Children's Panel Advisory Committee.
- Selected by Scottish Executive to participate in 2-Year Fast Track Hearings pilot.
- Secured £1/2 m from New Opportunities Fund for the Youth Justice Team.
- Co-ordinated successful bid for Changing Children's services Funding for 2004/06.
- Successfully supported formation of first North Ayrshire "live and work" credit union,
- Successfully embedded culture of corporate image / branding / communications.
- Delivered a more robust and proactive media relations service, resulting in significantly improved press coverage.
- Produced and ensured world-wide distribution of North Ayrshire Council Guide.
- Produced new Civil Contingency Plan and commenced programme of internal Emergency Planning Awareness courses, both of which ensure a better understanding of roles of various agencies.
- Managed budget effectively and reduced sickness absence from 2002/03 level.

### **Performance Lows**

- Relative lack of quantifiable measures of performance.
- Delayed implementation of Sysdox electronic documentation tracking system.
- Difficulty in establishing the role of the Local Area Liaison meetings.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Recruit new Chief Executive.
- Lead and facilitate arrangements for Best Value Audit.
- Conduct public household survey to gauge views on Council services and factor results into strategic planning.
- Develop updated Corporate Plan.
- Review Community Plan within Council structures and then consult with Community Planning partners.
- Continue to develop arrangements for Community Planning, including appointment of CP support team and incorporation of Social Inclusion Partnership into CP Partnership.
- Plan for European Parliamentary Elections on June 10.
- Oversee Social Inclusion funding allocation programme 2004/05 and preparation of 3 Year Regeneration Outcome Agreement.
- Support recruitment of Children's Services Plan Co-ordinator and development of Children's Services Plan 2005 – 08.
- Review effectiveness of Standing Sub Committees after inaugural cycle.

- Further develop meaningful measures of performance (corporate and service).
- Review appropriate policies and procedures to ensure sustainability and equal opportunities issues are mainstreamed.
- Extend to other services media awareness seminars pioneered with Social Services.
- Ensure Elected Members and services are kept fully briefed on implications of Civil Contingency Bill as it develops.

The Sub Committee was advised that training for members will be ongoing. Further training has been planned in the areas of Members Conduct and Ethics as well as Standing Orders for the conduct at meetings and refresher training, particularly for new members, could be provided if required.

### **Development and Promotion - Development Planning and Implementation Service**

#### **Performance Highs**

- Arran Local Plan PLI concluded. Reporter's findings supportive of NAC Plan. He suggested only one significant reallocation of land for housing. Committee endorsed Reporter's findings February 2004. The PLI conclusion to the democratic process was relatively inexpensive at £25,000 ex NAC staff costs and incidentals.
- North Ayrshire Local Plan (excluding Arran) PLI commenced March 2004 with hearings agreed for 7 issues and 9 issues going to Inquiry. The agreed hearing are perceived as more participant friendly and minimise time spent at enquiry.
- Planning permission issued for Montgomerie Park Phase I. Negotiations with preferred bidders now being finalised following resolution of site constraints.
- Beith THI Phase I completed on time and within budget. Opened January 2004 by the US Consul. Beith THI Phase II committed in partnership with St. Vincent Preservation Trust. Community Outdoor Access grants fully subscribed. Awards given to 9 community projects

#### **Performance Lows**

- General delays in implementing the Service Delivery Plan as a result of pressures on staff resources. Staff resources depleted following retirement and resignation. Attempts to replace design advice lost through retirement were unsuccessful.
- Irvine Drainage Area Plan – delay in outcome holding up action programme and potential capital expenditure.
- Award strategy for Beith THI not delivered by the Steering Group.

## **Immediate Priorities**

- Structure Plan Consultation Draft to be endorsed by the 3 Ayrshire Councils.
- Conclude sale of Phase I of Montgomerie Park.
- Planning Audit Review March 2004 to be considered and appropriate action identified.
- Local Plan Customer Forum to be programmed.
- Commence use of performance indicators for service response times in respect of: Development Control Consultation replies; Development Enquiries; Postal address allocation; Postal Address Enquiries; and, street naming and numbering.

The Sub Committee was advised that the difficulty in recruiting staff for design advice is a problem affecting all design services nationwide. The excellent work which has taken place in relation to the regeneration of Beith Town Centre was noted.

## **Development and Promotion - Economic Development Services**

### **Performance Highs**

- 424 company assists and 479 employee beneficiaries assisted representing 23% above target number of company assists and a 1.3% increase on beneficiary targets.
- Securing of over £1.78m of March/support funding for labour market intervention programmes, community economic development, business support – achieving a 100% success rate in applications submitted.
- delivery of three sea-based events delivering an economic impact equivalent to 11 full-time equivalent jobs in the local economy with a public to private expenditure ratio of 1:23.
- launch of 3 new business support initiatives targeting 90 companies
- launch of EU supported EQUIP programme to assist in the removal of barriers to those seeking to enter the jobs market.
- implementation of Business Gateway and assistance with launch of Ayrshire Food Network
- customer survey results showing performance improvements.

### **Performance Lows**

- temporary delay in delivery of community economic support due to winding up of external service delivery agent (Developing North Ayrshire)
- staff vacancy (Research & Intelligence Team)

### **Immediate Priorities**

- to act on customer survey conclusions and recommendations
- to prepare E.U. funding applications to secure current levels of support for local companies and beneficiaries
- review targets for 2004/05 in relation to recent performance
- finalise financial outturn for 2003-2004
- develop partnership performance measurement model

Noted.

### **Development and Promotion - Estates Section**

#### **Performance Highs**

- Maintained occupancy levels for industrial floorspace.
- Property Particulars – continuous improvement of Particulars – on Council Website.

#### **Performance Lows**

- Decimation of Capital Receipts programme due to Scottish water issues continue to impact on capital programme. Undeveloped sites, vacant buildings give false impression of area, and lack of development activity gives a negative perception of area.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Asset Revaluations – planned/phased valuations
- Rating Revaluation – preparation for 2005 Revaluation
- Asset Management Planning – a key feature of the new Prudential code – Estates will assist Asset Registrar (Financial Services) in provision of information.
- Implementation of UNIFORM Estates Management Module – major step towards Corporate GIS – staff training for new system.
- Analysis of occupancy levels for commercial property.

The Sub Committee was advised that the high level of water and sewerage constraints within North Ayrshire provides little scope for servicing new development.

## **Financial Services**

### **Performance Highs**

- The introduction of the customer contact centre to handle council tax enquiries.
- Upgraded Council Tax and Benefits software has been tested and implemented. Went live in January 2004.
- Implemented document image processing in Council Tax
- Annual accounts submitted on time, with resultant audit certificate being received unqualified.
- Debtors module of FMS has been significantly enhanced, tested and implemented. Training of key users completed. Went live in October.
- CHRIS21 payroll upgrade has been tested and implemented. Training of key users completed. Went live in October.
- Revenues Manager and Risk Manager have both been appointed and will start to address outstanding issues within their relative areas of responsibility.
- Provisional performance information has shown an improvement on the previous year throughout most areas of Financial Services.
- In the Benefits Service an initial reduction in performance due to recruitment, training and re-location has been followed by significant continuous improvement in each quarter. This is not wholly reflected in the annual statistics, which provide an average.
- Successful prosecution by the Procurator Fiscal and Sheriff Court of two fraudulent benefits claimants.
- Council's insurance arrangements tendered and re-negotiated with reductions in cost.
- Involvement in introduction of corporate Income Management computer system.

### **Performance Lows**

- Council tax correspondence response times suffered as a result of staff transfers to the contact centre, training and system implementations.
- PDR's have yet to be started, although this is planned for early next year.
- A strategic review of budgeting was due to be submitted to the CMT in the autumn. This is to be finalised.
- Progress against the service plan within Exchequer section has been limited. This was due to the retiral of the Exchequer Manager, delays in subsequent restructuring and appointment of the Risk and Insurance Manager.
- An increased level of sickness absence (6%) which is being addressed.
- Software faults on the introduction of Small Business Rates Relief delayed billing and follow up, impacting on in-year collection levels.

## **Immediate Priorities**

- Benefits processing times will continue to be addressed through process reviews, restructure and performance management.
- Response times for council tax correspondence will be addressed.
- Internal audit will revise their terms of reference and strategy.
- PDR process will start in accountancy section.
- Staff awareness of Best Value and the need for continuous improvement will be raised.
- Internal and external Customer Consultation will be developed.
- E-procurement implementation will commence - finance involvement will be considerable.
- Action to address sickness absence will continue throughout 2004/05.
- Written procedures in accountancy to be completed.
- Implementation of new Business Rates software.

The Sub Committee was advised that the Benefits Section works closely with the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) in monitoring and reviewing performance and an application for funding for Benefits Training will be made to DWP. Improvements have been made in the length of time taken to process new benefit claims and it is anticipated that further improvements will be made to reduce the average rate.

## **Information Technology**

### **Performance Highs**

- Chartermark awarded in February 2003 for 3 years. This award is the first of its kind in the Council, the first for any IT Department in Scotland, and only the second awarded to an IT Department in the UK.
- Overall level of customer satisfaction, as measured through the annual customer survey, was maintained at a very high level. In addition, the overall score is within the top quarter of UK Councils (when compared to the SOCITM benchmark).
- Targets for Service Desk performance was exceeded (measured using time taken to respond to and resolve problems).
- Absence Management Target exceeded.
- Project Management of the implementation of the Council's Telephone Contact Centre.
- Development of computer systems to support both the Contact Centre and the Cleansing Special Uplifts operation.

## **Performance Lows**

- Service Reviews with each Council Service have not been undertaken every quarter, which is the target frequency.

## **Immediate Priorities**

- Ensure Service Reviews are conducted every quarter.
- Maintain performance of Service Desk.
- Achieve absence management target.

Noted.

## **Legal and Protective**

## **Performance Highs**

- Statutory Performance Indicators – Continuation or improvement of high performance in almost all areas, despite increase in volume of business.
- Financial Management – Increase income has permitted enhanced service support resulting in greater customer focused outcome and improved service delivery.
- Registration – Two areas commended by Registrar General as best practice across Scotland.
- Development Control – Scottish Executive Audit Team have found improvements in overall performance in Development Control.
- Legal – Capital Receipts continue to be brought in within timescales agreed with finance.
- Building Control – Lead role with Disability Discrimination Act / Equal Opportunities accommodated within existing resources.
- Trading Standards – Community Safety Award of Grant from Scottish Executive. Joint working initiative on tobacco and education.
- Environmental Health – Food Safety and Health & Safety Audits show high level of service delivery.
- General – Legal & Protective and Registration Handbooks launched both of which were self-financed.
- District Court – Efficiencies and enhanced service through computerisation of court room.

## **Performance Lows**

- Building Control – Increase in number of application resulting in delays in processing application.



- District Court – Fabric of Townhouse deteriorating and causing concern for future use.
- Generally – Increase in volume of business will impose pressure on existing staff resources.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Development Control – Review Staff Structure to address increased workload.
- Preparation of MGF 3 Bid for e-planning.
- Work with other Council Departments and external agencies to secure renovation of Townhouse.
- Building Control – Prepare for introduction of new building standards.
- Environmental Health – Review staffing arrangements following restructuring to deal with legislative adjustments.
- District Court and Licensing – Address issue of professional staff in light of impending retirement.
- All – Prepare for legislative changes relating to Liquor Licensing, Summary Justice, Building Standards, HMOs, Consumer Direct and Registration Services.

Noted.

## **Personnel - Personnel**

### **Performance Highs**

- The continuing overall improvement in sickness absence rates as a result of the introduction of proactive personnel policies and procedures, improved monitoring arrangements and an increased role for the Occupational Health service.
- Investors in People re-accreditation for Personnel.
- Successful completion of the Work/Life Balance project with funding secured from the Department of Trade and Industry.
- The undertaking and implementation of major organisational reviews within Social Services; Cleansing Grounds Maintenance & Transport and Finance
- To ensure legislative compliance, the continuing development of policies and procedures including; Flexible Working, Facilities Agreement for Union Learning Representatives; Fixed Term Working; Redundancy; Redeployment, Retirement; Revised Disciplinary Procedures for Teaching Staff.
- To facilitate Joint Working including the Joint Future agenda, the introduction of Secondment and Attachment Protocols and an Organisational Development Strategy.

- A significant increase in the provision of health and safety courses including the granting of licenses from the Institute of Occupational Health and Safety for specially tailored courses for Technical Services.
- The introduction of employee benefits in the shape of alternative workplace therapies and life plans for employees.
- The successful introduction of a new personnel/payroll employee information system (Chris 21)
- A significant increase in training delegate days for management, personal development and Information Technology courses.

### **Performance Lows**

- Continuation of the Early Years workforce industrial dispute.
- The delay in the introduction of a Pay and Grading Scheme for Local Government Employees due to system development problems at a national level and subsequent trades unions negotiations.

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Resolve the Early Years workforce dispute.
- Develop and introduce revised Grievance and Disputes Resolution Procedures.
- Review, amend and introduce contractual documentation in light of new employment legislation.
- Introduce a policy and employee guidance on the use of mobile communications equipment.

Noted.

## **Personnel - Customer Service - Local Offices**

### **Performance Highs**

- Reorganisation of staffing resources to match revised workload arising from the transfer of telephone calls to the Telephone Contact Centre, including bringing together the Services at Largs Local Office under a loose arrangement whereby they are managed as a single Service through the Principal Officer (Local Office Services).
- Introduction of the Customer Relationship Management System aligned to the TCC and of iWorld
- Award of the Quality Mark Scotland at the Self Help Information level

- Exit Polls and Customer Satisfaction Surveys consistently showing respondents to be satisfied with the services provided from Local Offices
- Good relationships developed through regular meetings with Amenity Groups on the Isle of Arran and local organisations on the Isle of Cumbrae

### **Performance Lows**

- Staff training aligned to the TCC was not fully fulfilled

### **Immediate Priorities**

- Complete training for all Local Office staff in collaboration with the TCC
- Identify and remove where possible any inconsistencies between Local Offices and TCC
- Introduce new cash collection system to Local Offices
- Ensure a quality service continues to be provided to the public for their face-to-face transactional, inquiry and information needs
- As opportunities arise, establish joint working with other public sector agencies.
- The service will seek to promote itself more, to consult wider with its customers and to receive recognition for the information and advice services provided. These improvements will be achieved through greater use of the Council's website; a postal consultation exercise in February 2004 and the attainment of the standards required by Investors in People.

Noted.

## **Personnel - Customer Services - Telephone Contact Centre**

### **Performance Highs**

#### **Customer**

- Achievement of 85% of calls answered.
- 94% accuracy achieved in Council Tax.
- 80%+ calls completed at first point of contact.
- Increase of 60%+ calls answered during Annual Billing, which is a peak business time for Council Tax.
- Increase in Customer Satisfaction in all areas measured.
- 95% of forms issued within 48 hours of receiving the request.
- CoSLA Bronze Award gained in Jan 2003 for improvements to Customer Service

## Financial

- Project went live within budget and timescale.

## Continuous Improvement & Learning

- Robust Business Continuity Plan in place.
- Changes made to the IT systems as a result of customer and staff feedback, which reduced call length and increased accuracy.

## Performance Lows

### Customer

- Higher average handle times than expected.
- External telephony problems in July impacted on the service provided to customers.

### Continuous Improvement & Learning

- Inability to complete all planned training due to resources.

## Immediate Priorities

- Identify regular business peaks and troughs and align staffing patterns to match these.
- Train, coach and develop advisers to reduce call length and further increase accuracy and customer service.
- Introduce a new telephony system which will enable additional calls to be answered with existing resources through intelligent delivery of calls. (Based on employee skills and business priorities).
- Produce structured plan for future phases of the project.
- Provide support to Local Offices in eliminating inconsistencies between the TCC and Local Office network.
- Gain Investors In People accreditation.

In response to an enquiry on why the Council continues to operate 2 call centres, the Sub Committee was advised that the Property Services Call Centre was established prior to the Corporate Call Centre. A high volume of technical enquiries in relation to housing were anticipated at the time of the opening of the Corporate Call Centre and it was considered appropriate that the Property Services Call Centre remain operational to process these calls. It is the intention that all Council services will be accessed via one call centre and a phased programme has been devised to incorporate all services into the sphere of the Corporate Call Centre.

The meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.