

Support Services Committee
24 March 1998

Irvine, 24 March 1998 - At a Meeting of the Support Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

David O'Neill, Alan Munro, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, John Donn, Margaret Highet, James Jennings, David Munn and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

The Chief Executive; the Directors of Financial Services, Housing Services and Community and Recreational Services; the Head of Corporate Business; the Personnel Services Manager; the Legal Services Manager; the Architectural Services Manager; D. Addison, Head of Revenue Service (Financial Services); and J. Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr. O'Neill in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Patrick Browne, Elliot Gray and George Steven.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Support Services Committee held on 10 February 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Collection Statements

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services on the current collection levels in respect of Community Charge and Council Tax to 28 February 1998.

A total of £84,000 was collected in respect of Community Charge during February 1998 leaving an outstanding recoverable debt of £17,006,000 while £2,704,000 was collected for Council Tax due in 1997/98 leaving the outstanding recoverable debt in this case of £6,202,000.

Noted.

3. Council Tax Collection

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services on the outcome of the Accounts Commission study of Council Tax collections in Scotland.

The Accounts Commission study was based on the billing and recovery of Council Tax for 1996/97 to 31 March 1997 being the first year of operation for the Unitary Authorities. The total values of debt outstanding throughout Scotland amount to £500,000,000 in Poll Tax and £310,000,000 in Council Tax and while collection levels of the net Council Tax imposed for 1998/97 in the year of billing vary widely in Scotland from 73.7% to 96%, recovery action in the year after billing will increase collections for 1996/97 to an estimated 90-98%. For purposes of comparison all Councils were divided into family groups. The target collection level for this Council's group was set at 93.5%, but this was not reached by any Council group although it was regarded as an achievable target. The Council's actual collection level for 1996/97 was only

84.8% (second lowest in its group) with an eventual anticipated collection level of 95.7% (representing a bad debt provision of 4.25%). In relation to the total arrears inherited for the 3 years prior to 1 April 1996, the Council is third in its family group with collections of £2.408m indicating effective action by the new Sheriff Officers who started in 1996. When the percentage of inherited debt recovered is taken into consideration, the Council performs badly and is second last in the family group with 29.6% indicating the size of the problem still facing Sheriff Officers and collection staff.

In addition to the comparative statistics the report also detailed the Commissions recommendations to facilitate and increase recovery of outstanding debts and confirmed the proposed responses and initiatives being pursued by the Council.

Noted.

4. Non-Domestic Rates: Write Offs

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services seeking authority to write off specific and global non-domestic rates arrears.

The writing off of certain non-domestic rates arrears is required as part of the Abstract of Accounts. The procedure adopted by the former Strathclyde Regional Council was to provide for a global write off of outstanding rates which had been billed 3 years previously with specific write offs also being made in relation to debtors where, for example, liquidators had been appointed. There are no financial implications to the Council since, as part of the aggregate external finance agreement, all non-domestic rates arrears are pooled and distributed between Councils. Sheriff Officers will continue to pursue any outstanding debts, and any subsequent recoveries will be treated as additional income for the particular year of account. Details on the outstanding balances subject to global write off which are in excess of £1,000 will be made available for inspection on request.

The Committee agreed to approve (a) a total write off of £792,914 in relation to the 1994/95 financial year incorporating £451,190 global and £341,724 specific write offs; and (b) a total of £563,584 in specific write offs for the financial years 1995/96 to 1997/98 inclusive.

5. Ex Council Tenant Arrears for Write Off

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services seeking authority to write off various ex Council tenant rent arrears in excess of £100 in accordance with the provision of Section 7.4 of the Council's Financial Regulations.

In certain circumstances, the Council is unable to recover ex tenants' rent arrears and in the financial year 1997/98 a total of £159,904.01 had not been recovered representing 0.53% of the Council's total rental income for the year. In the event that these arrears are written off, efforts will nonetheless continue to be made to pursue their recovery.

The Committee agreed to approve the write off of ex Council tenant arrears totalling £154,904.01 for the financial year 1997/98.

6. Treasury Management Strategy 1998/99

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services on a proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 1997/98 which is a requirement of the Treasury Management Policy approved by the Council on 25 March 1997.

The Strategy details the expected activities of the Treasury function in the financial year 1998/99, outlines the procedures/prospects in each area, and has been constructed on the basis of advice from the Council's financial advisers in relation to the prospect for interest rates etc. This advice has been applied to the Council's budgetary process and the Director of Financial Services,

in conjunction with the Treasury Advisers, will continually monitor both the prevailing interest rates and the market forecast to enable appropriate responses to be made to changes in long and short-term interest rates.

The Committee agreed to approve the Treasury Management Strategy for 1998/99.

7. Contracts for Works: Final Measurements

Submitted report by the Architectural Services Manager on final accounts for various contracts carried out by the former Cunninghame District and Strathclyde Regional Councils.

Noted.

8. Minutes

(a) Council Tax Review Board

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix SS1) being the Minutes of the meeting of the Council Tax Review Board held on 6 February 1998.

Noted.

(b) Special JCC (APT & C Staffs), (Manual and Craft Workers) and (Teaching Staff)

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix SS2) being the Minutes of the Special JCC (APT & C Staffs), (Manual and Craft Workers) and (Teaching Staff) Meeting held on 9 February 1998.

Noted.

9. Harassment at Work: Policy and Procedures

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on the proposed adoption and implementation of a Harassment at Work Policy and associated procedures in accordance with the recommendations of the EU Codes of Practice.

Although criminal liability for harassment at work may be addressed under various individual statutes, there is currently no legislation within the United Kingdom to deal specifically with this issue which can have a detrimental effect on employees and employers alike. Failure to deal with allegations or incidents of harassment at work may also result in the Council as an employer incurring substantial costs. Consequently the following measures are proposed:-

- a) to adopt the Harassment at Work Policy and Procedures for all North Ayrshire Council employees;
- b) to communicate the policy and procedures to all employees;
- c) to undertake a planned programme of training for managers; and
- d) to monitor the number and nature of complaints through maintenance of a record of formal complaints and take remedial action where necessary.

The Committee agreed to approve the adoption and implementation of the Harassment at Work Policy and Procedures Document as detailed in the report.

10. Retention of Disabled Employees: Policy and Procedures

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on proposals to address the Council's statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 for the retention of disabled employees.

The Legislation places an obligation on employers to make reasonable work related adjustments to assist employees who consider themselves to be disabled, to remain in

employment. Consequently, it is proposed that the Council adopts a new Policy and Procedures which will satisfy the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act reflecting best employment practices and providing clear guidelines to employees and managers of the Council. It is intended through the establishment of training programmes to advise and inform operational managers as to:-

- a) their duty of care and responsibility under the legislation;
- b) guidelines and procedures which will assist in dealing positively and effectively with Disabled Employees;
- c) identification of internal/external sources of support and assistance; and
- d) methods and procedures which will be adopted in monitoring the effectiveness of the policy.

The Committee agreed to approve the introduction of the new Policy and Procedural Document as detailed in the report.

11. Outstanding Industrial Tribunal Cases

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager giving details of a number of cases which have been lodged with the Industrial Tribunal Office which may have an impact on North Ayrshire Council.

Noted.

12. Housing Services Directorate: Alteration to Structure

Further to the decision of the Housing Services Committee on 12 March 1998, submitted joint report by the Director of Housing Services and the Personnel Services Manager presenting full details of (a) a revised staffing structure for the Housing Services Directorate which reflects further areas of decentralisation and the introduction of new systems; and (b) new management arrangements at a local level.

Since reorganisation there have been a number of changes within the structure of the Housing Services Directorate designed to alter the nature and style of service provision. In addition to these changes, there have been various reviews of service activities e.g. finance, allocations, estate management, etc. requiring new policies which have in turn resulted in the need for wholesale replacement of systems. This is most noticeable in relation to housing finance particularly those dealing with housing benefits. A date for the implementation of the requisite systems is close and it will now be possible to implement the new staffing structure and decentralise numerous activities to at least divisional level and possibly area level thereby providing (i) a better use of manpower and resources; (ii) a better and more local service; and (iii) substantial savings.

The Committee agreed to approve the grading proposals and the revised staffing structure within the Housing Services Directorate in the terms indicated in the report, including the reductions in the staffing complement which will result in substantial Revenue savings.

13. Grading Scheme for Building Control Officers

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on a proposal for the introduction of a new career progression grading scheme for Building Control Surveyors as well as a rationalisation of designations.

The new Grading scheme seeks to provide increased flexibility for the initial placing of new employees for career development and progression according to academic achievement and experience. Under the redesignation proposals both the Assistant Building Control Officers and the Building Control Officers will be designated as Building Control Surveyors and employees occupying such posts will be assimilated into the revised salary progression scale.

The Personnel Services Manager also confirmed that the adoption of the Scheme will have

no cost or other implications for any other Directorate of the Council and that the Trade Unions will be consulted on the revised grading scheme, the introduction and full implementation of which is likely to be completed by early July.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the adoption of the new grading scheme and the redesignation proposals outlined in the report; and (b) that existing employees occupying such posts be matched into the grading scheme relative to their academic achievement and experience.

14. Commercial Services Directorate: Administration of Mainland Burial Services

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on the staffing implications of a proposal to centralise the administration of the mainland burial services at the Cemetery Office, Ardrossan Road, Saltcoats.

Following the review of burial services in January 1997, it was originally intended that the administration associated with burials, sale of lairs etc. would be carried out by the Registration Section of the Council's Legal Services Department. In view of the current financial climate, it is however more economical for this function to be carried out for the time being at the cemetery office in Ardrossan Road. To this end it is proposed to establish an additional post of Clerical Assistant within the Commercial Services Directorate to implement the central administration function with the additional staff costs of £10,029 per annum being met from the current cemeteries budget.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve this proposal in principle; and (b) that the Personnel Services Manager, in consultation with the Director of Commercial Services investigate and report the possibility of the Clerical Assistant's post being filled in-house.

15. Irvine Meadow XI Football Club: Minute of Waiver

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on a request from Irvine Meadow XI Football Club to write-off the balance of the outstanding premium payable for a Minute of Waiver granted by Cunninghame District Council in favour of the Club in 1993, allowing it to dispose of an area of ground with a title.

The Club made an initial payment of £1000 towards a total premium of £9000 for the Minute of Waiver with an agreement to delay the balance due until the four plots of land involved had been sold. Although the Club is believed to have received the proceeds from the sale of the land, it has made a formal request to the Council to have the outstanding balance of £8000 written off.

The Committee agreed (a) not to accede to the Club's request to write-off the outstanding balance; and (b) that the Legal Services Manager draw up a deferred payment scheme for the Club reflecting the Club's current financial status.

16. Superior Consents/Feu Duty Inquiries

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on a proposal to introduce an administrative charge to cover the work involved in the issue of Superior's Consents and Feu Duty inquiries, given that similar charges for work of this nature have already been introduced by other Councils.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Legal Services Manager to charge an administrative fee of £50.00 to cover the legal work involved in issuing Superior's Consents and all Feu Duty inquiries, other than applications to redeem Feu Duty.

17. Irvine: Oldhall West Industrial Estate: Clinical Waste Incinerator

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on a request for the grant of a Minute of Waiver to Envirobank (Irvine) Limited over an area of land extending to 0.43 hectares at Murdoch Place, Oldhall West Industrial Estate, Irvine to extend the time for completion of the construction of a Clinical Waste Incinerator and Pet Crematorium by the Company. The Company currently has planning permission which is valid until 2001.

The Committee agreed, subject to the Company paying the Council's legal fees, to grant a Minute of Waiver extending the time within which the development should be completed for a further two years.

18. Dalry: Bridgend Industrial Estate: Unit 2

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the lease of Unit 2, Bridgend Industrial Estate, Dalry to Strathtech Engineering Services Limited, previously agreed by the Chair as a matter of urgency.

The Committee agreed to homologate the decision of the Chair.

19. Dalry: Bridgend Industrial Estate: Unit 3

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the proposed lease of Unit 3, Bridgend Industrial Estate, Dalry to Mr. Stewart Gibb.

The Committee agreed to approve the lease on the terms and conditions provisionally agreed by the Legal Services Manager.

20. Irvine: 15 Kyle Road: Unit 39

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the lease of Unit 39, 15 Kyle Road, Irvine to Mr. R. Drummond of Assured Express Courier, previously agreed by the Chair as a matter of urgency.

The Committee agreed to homologate the decision of the Chair.

21. Irvine: Marine Drive: Land Adjacent to Western Gailes Golf Club

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the proposed sale of land adjacent to Western Gailes Golf Club, Irvine.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Legal Services Manager to proceed with the sale of the land to Western Gailes Golf Club, Irvine on terms and conditions provisionally agreed.

22. Irvine: Quarry Road: Units 9 and 10

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the lease of Units 9 and 10, Quarry Road, Irvine to Mr. John Lindsay of Timber and Wire Fencing, previously agreed by the Chair as a matter of urgency.

The Committee agreed to homologate the decision of the Chair.

23. Dreghorn: Land at Station Brae

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the proposed sale of ground at Station Brae, Dreghorn to allow an access roadway to be widened to an acceptable standard.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Legal Services Manager to proceed to negotiate provisional terms for the sale of the ground at Station Brae, Dreghorn on the above basis.

24. Kilbirnie: Paddockholm Industrial Estate: Block 2 River Place: Unit 5

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the lease of Unit 5, Block 2 River Place, Paddockholm Industrial Estate, Kilbirnie to Mr. Colin Hewitson of KRH Infotech, previously agreed by the Chair as a matter of urgency.

The Committee agreed to homologate the decision of the Chair.

25. Saltcoats: Springvale Street: Former Westbury Snooker Club

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the proposed sale of property at Springvale Street, Saltcoats to R.D.K. Construction.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Legal Services Manager to proceed with the sale of the property at Springvale Street, Saltcoats, on terms and conditions to be negotiated.

26. Stevenston: Glebe Street: Plot 2 The Riggs

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the sale of land at Plot 2 The Riggs, Glebe Street, Stevenston to Cunninghame Housing Association, previously agreed by the Chair as a matter of urgency.

The Committee agreed to homologate the decision of the Chair.

27. Stevenston: Moorpark Place: Block 8: Unit 2

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the lease of Unit 2, Block 8, Moorpark Place, Stevenston to Mr. Joe Barraclough.

The Committee agreed to approve the lease on the terms and conditions provisionally agreed by the Legal Services Manager.

28. Exclusion of Public

Resolved, in terms of Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude from the meeting the press and the public for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 6 and 1 of part 1 of schedule 7A of the Act shown against each item.

29. Scottish Maritime Museum

(Exempt Information: paragraph 6)

Submitted joint report by the Directors of Financial Services and Community and Recreational Services in the current and projected financial position of the Maritime Museum and the implications for the future.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to approve (a) the action taken by the Directors of

Financial Services and Community and Recreational Services; and (b) the proposals for the short to medium term and the financial support for the Scottish Maritime Museum, in the terms indicated in the report.

30. Outcome of APT & C Salary Grading Appeals Considered by COSLA

(Exempt Information: paragraph 1)

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on the decision reached by the Appeals and Disputes Committee of COSLA on a salary grading appeal.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the decision of COSLA as detailed in the report; (b) to approve the payment of the 10% flexibility plusage on the revised salary grading in the meantime; and (c) to authorise a review of the service in the light of the requirements of North Ayrshire Council.

The Meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.