

Property Services Committee
25 April 2006

IRVINE, 25 April 2006 - At a Meeting of the Property Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Samuel Taylor, Stewart Dewar, John Bell, Gordon Allison, Jacqueline Browne, Drew Duncan, Jane Gorman, Margaret McDougall, Margaret Munn, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, John Reid, and Nan Wallace.

In Attendance

T. Orr, Corporate Director, R. Small, Head of Roads, J. Currie, Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport, J. Paul, Head of Technical Services, and M. Cashmore, Principal Officer (Property Services); P. Doak, Finance Manager (Finance); and M. McKeown, Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Taylor in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Ian Clarkson, Margie Currie, Elizabeth McLardy and Richard Wilkinson.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 7 March 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Current Tenants and Former Tenants Arrears

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposed policies covering the recovery of rent arrears from current and former Council tenants and the write-off of rent arrears deemed to be irrecoverable.

The Council has a statutory duty to collect arrears of rent and, in the last three years, considerable progress has been made to reduce the level of rent arrears owed by Council tenants. As part of an ongoing improvement plan to reduce rent arrears further, Housing Services have reviewed a number of policy areas in order to incorporate good practice recommended by Communities Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Housing, and the Housing Quality Network. Draft policies have been developed covering the recovery of rent arrears from current and former Council tenants, and the write-off of rent arrears deemed to be irrecoverable. These policies, copies of which were appended to the report, set out how Housing Services will meet statutory duties in relation to rent collection, arrears recovery, and possessions.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the policies set out in the appendices to the report; and (b) that the Corporate Director (Property Services) report to the next meeting on the feasibility of pursuing joint court actions for rent arrears repayment and evictions as required.

3. Implementation of Kerbside Recycling Scheme on Island of Arran: Strategic Waste Fund Offer of Grant

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on an award of funding from the Scottish Executive's Strategic Waste Fund to implement a kerbside recycling scheme on Arran.

In April 2005, the Committee received a report advising that following the closure of the Arran landfill site in August 2006, the only option open to the Council will be to transport municipal solid waste from the island to the mainland for disposal at the landfill site at Shewalton. In pursuance of the transfer of waste, Professor Jim Baird of the Caledonian Environment Centre was asked to prepare a bid on the Council's behalf to the Scottish Executive's Strategic Waste Fund for funding to implement a kerbside recycling scheme on the island.

A copy of the bid document submitted to the Scottish Executive was appended to the report. Of the 9 options considered in the document, the Council's preference in terms of cost and deliverability was option 5B, which involves the alternative weekly collection of residual waste and the collection of recyclable material in a 240 litre blue bin. This option will cost £12.221m over a 14 year period. Scottish Executive funding was sought to meet the cost differential between implementing option 5B as opposed to option 1B which would involve establishing an operational site from which waste could be bulk transferred off the island by ferry without any recycling or segregation of waste taking place. Option 1B would cost £10.055m over a 14 year period. The Scottish Executive has now agreed to meet the cost differential of £2.166m between options 5B and 1B from the Strategic Waste Fund. It was therefore proposed that a 2 bin collection system should commence on the island from 6 November 2006.

The Council has already introduced approximately 3000 home composters onto the island in association with a Waste & Resources Action Programme to address the issue of garden waste and food waste. This composting scheme will be maintained and further offers of bins will be made available to Arran householders to ensure waste minimisation and reduction at source.

A letter from Councillor Currie in connection with this item was tabled. The Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport addressed the issues raised in the letter.

The Committee agreed to (a) note the offer of grant from the Scottish Executive's Strategic Waste Fund; and (b) approve the introduction of a 2 bin system for the collection of residual waste and dry recycle materials on Arran from 6 November 2006.

4. Lighting Maintenance Contract: Extension of Contract Period

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on an extension to the term of the existing Lighting Maintenance Contract.

Lighting maintenance is currently carried out in terms of a three year contract awarded to Jarvis plc for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2006. In April 2005, the Committee was advised that Jarvis had assigned the contract to Centre Great Ltd., who have been carrying out maintenance works satisfactorily throughout 2005/06.

The Lighting Maintenance Contract allows for the contract period to be extended by up to one year. Following discussions, Centre Great Ltd., have accepted the offer of a contract extension to 31 March 2007. The terms of the extension, as set out in the report, have been checked against prevailing commercial conditions. The works to be carried will be to the same specification and response requirements as applied in the initial contract period.

Noted.

5. Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care: Inspection of Tenancy Support Project

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the outcome of the recent inspection of the Tenancy Support Project by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care.

The Care Commission regulates care services against National Care Standards, and according to the requirements of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 and associated regulations. All local authority care services are required to register with the Commission and to meet the same standards as private providers.

In November 2005, Ardrossan Short Stay Hostel became the first Housing Services project to receive a Care Commission inspection. A report on this inspection was presented to the Property Services Standing Sub Committee on 22 February 2006.

The Commission has now carried out an inspection of the Tenancy Support Project. The inspection report concluded that the Tenancy Support Project is meeting National Care Standards and highlighted several strengths. Consequently no enforcement or follow up action is required.

Noted.

6. Scottish Housing Quality Standard: Energy Efficiency Work

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on a proposal to proceed with the provision of energy efficiency work to Council houses on a negotiated contract basis.

The Council had previously agreed to retain ownership of its housing stock and to adopt a 30 year Business Plan with provision for increased investment in the stock in order to achieve compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by 2015. As a result additional funding has been made available for home energy efficiency work to meet the requirements of the SHQS in this respect. The target is to identify and complete all necessary insulation works over a 4 year period from 2005/06 to 2008/09.

The Council has existing contracts with Best Energy Ltd., Irvine, and Solas Insulation Ltd., Dumbarton, to carry out energy efficiency work to its housing stock. Over a number of years, these contractors have demonstrated their ability to work to strict targets, have provided their services at competitive rates when benchmarked against other providers, and have achieved an average tenants satisfaction rating of 97.5% in respect of their activities. Both companies are approved as energy efficiency installers by the Government energy agency, EAGA, which allows them to access means tested grant funding through the government's Warm Deal. Both companies have participated in the New Deal to provide training and employment opportunities linked to additional government funding for insulation work and, in addition to carrying out home energy insulation works, have invested in training and software to assist the Council with the assessment of the stock against the energy efficiency elements of the SHQS.

Taking all the above circumstances into account it is considered that the Best Value option for the Council is to continue the current arrangements with both companies on a formalised footing through a negotiated tender process based on benchmarked market rates for standard home insulation works over a three year period with an option to extend this arrangement for a further 2 years if necessary to ensure completion of the current programme of work. The value of work carried out under the negotiated contracts will not exceed the funding available for this purpose within the 30 year Business Plan and other funding sources.

The Committee, being satisfied that there are special circumstances justifying the use of the negotiated tender procedure, agreed (a) in accordance with clause 7.6 of the Council's Standing Orders relating to Contracts, that the Head of Technical Services negotiate with Best Energy Ltd., and Solas Insulation Ltd., terms for the provision of energy efficiency work to Council houses for a three year period, with the option of a two year extension; and (b) to receive a report on the results of these negotiations at a future meeting.

7. Ardrossan Academy: New Electrical Installation and Associated Works

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on tenders received for electrical installation and associated works at Ardrossan Academy.

The Committee agreed to accept the lowest tender of £702,539.55 from W.W.W. Electrical Contractors Ltd., Glasgow, on the terms set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 2.30 p.m.