

Property Services Committee
23 January 2007

IRVINE, 23 January 2007 - 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, Ian Clarkson, Jane Gorman, Margaret McDougall, Margaret Munn, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, John Reid and Nan Wallace.

In Attendance

T. Orr, Corporate Director, Olga Clayton, Head of Housing, R. Small, Head of Roads, J. Currie, Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport and J. Paul, Head of Technical Services (Property Services); K. MacDonald, Finance Manager (Finance); J. Stevenson, Communications Officer and M. Anderson, Corporate Support Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Taylor in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Jacqueline Browne, Margie Currie, Drew Duncan and Richard Wilkinson.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Taylor, McDougall, O'Neill and M. Munn declared an interest in Item 5 in respect of the Vineburgh Regeneration Project. Councillor Bell took the Chair for this item of business.

3. Revenue Budget 2006/07: Budgetary Control

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the budgetary control position for Property Services at the end of November 2006 and projections for financial year 2006/07.

The Committee agreed to approve the current financial position and the year-end projections.

4. Saltcoats: Canal Street and Reid Terrace

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on options for the redevelopment and regeneration of Canal Street and Reid Terrace, Saltcoats.

On 17 December 2006, there was a major gas explosion in the block of flats at 50-52 Canal Street, Saltcoats, which necessitated demolition of the property. This block of flats, and the adjacent housing in Reid Terrace, Saltcoats, had been identified as an area of low demand housing. There are currently 5 void properties in Reid Terrace and it has been necessary to suspend letting in the area due to serious incidents of vandalism.

Given the now vacant site at Canal Street and the difficulties associated with letting adjacent properties in Reid Terrace, consideration will be given to options for the re-development of the area as a whole. Appropriate consultation will take place with local tenants and other stakeholders.

The Committee agreed that (a) options for redevelopment and regeneration of this area be explored; and (b) there be no further allocation of vacant properties in Reid Terrace.

5. Vineburgh Regeneration Project

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposals to progress the Vineburgh Regeneration Project.

Following a recent tendering process, the Vineburgh Steering Group appointed a team led by Austin Smith: Lord to develop the Vineburgh Masterplan. There is now a requirement to appoint a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) as a development partner to help take forward the Masterplan proposals. It is feasible that one RSL may carry out the development and construction of the new properties, with a second RSL partner ultimately taking over as landlord.

It is proposed that the Steering Group is given responsibility for:-

- developing an assessment matrix to assess potential RSL development partners, including weighting the criteria set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- assessing bids received; and
- appointing an RSL development partner based on the outcome of the assessment process.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the development of an assessment matrix to identify an RSL development partner and the subsequent appointment of an RSL development partner by the Vineburgh Steering Group; and (b) that there be no further allocation of vacant properties within the regeneration area.

6. Short Scottish Secure Tenancy

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed policy for the use of the Short Scottish Secure Tenancy.

An SSST is a version of the full Scottish Secure Tenancy, but with limited security of tenure and no right to buy or right of succession of the tenant's death. The Council has the power, but not the duty, to offer an SSST to a prospective new tenant in a limited range of circumstances set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, including:-

- where the person has been evicted for antisocial behaviour within the preceding 3 years, or is subject to an Antisocial Behaviour Order; or
- as temporary accommodation for someone in receipt of or requiring housing support services.

A draft policy document, set out in the Appendix to the report, provides a clear framework for the use of SSSTs and incorporates good practice recommended by Communities Scotland.

Members sought clarification on the time period which applies to an SSST before it is subject to review.

The Committee agreed to approve the policy as set out in the appendix to the report, subject to minor amendment to include information of the initial time period of an SSST prior to its review.

7. Term Contract for Re-rendering Work to North Ayrshire Council Houses

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the tenders received for a term contract for re-rendering work to North Ayrshire Council houses.

The current re-rendering contract is drawing to a close. Tenders have been invited for a new term contract for a two year period commencing on 1 April 2007 at an overall contract value of approximately £1m per annum. Contractors were asked to tender globally against pre-priced schedules of rates on a plus or minus percentage basis.

Based on the value of the work, it is considered that a minimum of two contractors should be appointed. Tenders submitted by A.C. Whyte and Garret Nicholson, both for a 10% deduction on the schedule of rates, are competitive and both companies have successfully completed major programmes of rendering work for the Council in recent years.

The Committee agreed to approve the tenders submitted by A. C. Whyte and Garret Nicholson, with the work being shared equally between the two companies, subject to ongoing satisfactory performance.

8. Review of Assisted Pull-Out Service

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on a review of the assisted pull-out service in relation to refuse collection.

In December 2006, the Public Service Ombudsman published an Investigation Report on the Council's "assisted pull-out" service following complaints about the rejection of an Arran resident's application for the service. The report included a recommendation that the Council "carry out a review of their new assisted pull-out policy and consider whether it is appropriate and sufficiently detailed".

Following a review of the policy, the following changes are proposed:-

- the condition relating to an able-bodied person revert to "an able-bodied person within the household";
- the application form for the service be re-drafted to include a form of words which encourages the applicant to consider using another able-bodied person to assist, although this would no longer be obligatory;
- the policy re-drafting should also refer to "the right to request medical evidence relevant to the application from the applicant's General Practitioner or another health professional designated by the Council"; and
- where the need falls outwith the Council's Assisted Pull-Out Service Policy, the Council should be proactive in offering to refer the person for a Community Care Assessment (but only where the person would otherwise have qualified for an assisted pull-out service).

The Committee agreed to approve the revised wording of the Assisted Pull-Out Service Policy as set out in section 3 of the report.

9. WRAP (Waste Resource Action Programme) Home Composting Scheme

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the introduction of a home composting scheme in North Ayrshire.

To date, there have been 3200 composting bins distributed on Arran and Millport. WRAP now proposes to make a range of home composting bins available to all North Ayrshire residents by April 2007 at a significantly subsidised price. Each household can order a maximum of three bins and delivery is free of charge.

The Committee agreed to (a) approve the proposals set out in the report and (b) endorse the home-composting scheme.

10. Irvine: 57 - 59 Woodlands Avenue

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposed major remedial works to 57 - 59 Woodlands Road, Irvine.

The semi-detached, timber-clad block at 57-59 Woodlands Avenue, Irvine, has been affected by subsidence caused by local ground conditions and is now displaying signs of structural stress. A 12-month monitoring exercise has indicated that no further movement is occurring.

It is estimated that remedial works to level floors and carry out other adjustments would be in the region of £50,000.

The Committee agreed that (a) major remedial works be carried out to the block at 57 - 59 Woodlands Avenue; and (b) provision be made for the associated costs within the 2007/08 Housing Capital Programme.

11. Ardrossan: 51 - 57 Ashgrove Road

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposals for the site at 51 - 57 Ashgrove Road, Ardrossan.

The cost of demolishing the block of 4 terraced houses at 51-57 Ashgrove Road, Ardrossan, and clearing the site has been estimated and the market value of the cleared site assessed as follows:-

- Demolition of the block - £70,000
- Demolition of the block and basic landscaping of the cleared site - £100,000
- Demolition of the block and provision of an enhanced landscape scheme to provide car parking and a public amenity area - £200,000.
- Market value of the cleared site £55,000.

It is considered that the most viable option is to proceed with demolition of the block and the provision of basic landscaping, followed by marketing of the cleared site for housing re-development purposes.

The Committee agreed (a) to the demolition of the block at 51 - 57 Ashgrove Road, basic landscaping of the cleared site and marketing of the cleared site for housing redevelopment purposes; and (b) that provision be made for the associated costs within the 2007/08 Housing Capital Programme.

12. Road Lighting Maintenance

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed extension of the existing road lighting maintenance contract.

In 2003, a 3-year contract for road lighting maintenance was awarded to Jarvis Limited and subsequently assigned to Centre Great Limited with the agreement of the Council. The contract was extended for a further year to 31 March 2007.

Consideration is being given to the best method of providing the service in the future and the followed options are under review:-

- a traditional-style Lighting Maintenance Contract;
- direct provision by Roads Operations, which may include some form of partnership with a local electrical contractor;
- a long-term partnering arrangement involving Centre Great or another contractor;
- a form of joint venture or shared working with other Councils; or
- private finance initiative/Public Private Partnership.

Given the time required to develop these alternatives and consult fully of the resultant proposals, it was proposed that the Council enter into negotiations with Centre Great meantime, with a view to extending the present contract for a period of up to 2 years.

The Committee agreed that negotiations take place with the present contractor for an extension of the Lighting Maintenance Contract with the present contractor, for a maximum of two years, subject to satisfactory terms being secured.

13. Provision of Gas Fires

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on a revision to the current arrangements for the provision of new gas fires with new central heating.

Consultation has taken place with tenants' representatives on issues of gas safety and tenant choice in the provision of gas fires. In the course of consultation, tenants' representatives were introduced to the availability of a new type of "Hydroflame" fire which has the appearance of a "living flame" gas fire but operates as an additional radiator with the facility to operate as a one kilowatt electric fire when the central heating system is not switched on.

Based on feedback from the tenants, it would appear that the preference is for:-

- the ongoing provision by the Council of focal point fires with new gas central heating systems;
- tenants having a choice of gas fires; and
- the choice of gas fires including the "Hydroflame" option.

In terms of the choices of gas fires which might continue to be made available to tenants receiving new gas central heating systems, the option favoured by tenants is that of the current standard gas fire and the "Hydroflame" fire. If tenants wish to install any other type of gas fire, they will require to make their own arrangements, subject to approval by the Council through the formal permission process. Tenants following this procedure may be entitled to compensation under the statutory Right to Compensation for Improvements Scheme at the end of their tenancy.

The Committee agreed to the revised arrangements for the provision of gas fires with new central heating as set out in the report.

14. Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2006

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the Tenant Satisfaction Improvement Action Plan.

In June 2006, Research Resource Consultancy carried out a Tenant Satisfaction Survey on behalf of the Council. A total of 1,500 interviews were carried out. The results, which showed high levels of satisfaction, also identified areas for improvement. An improvement action plan, set out in the appendix to the report, has been developed in response to the findings.

The Committee agreed to approve the Tenant Satisfaction Improvement Action Plan set out in the appendix to the report.

15. Arran: Reclassification of Roads

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed reclassification of part of route A841 on Arran.

The A841 completely circles Arran and there is a significant difference along the route in terms of varying volumes of traffic between the east and the west/south of the island. In many places, the road on the west side has poor geometric standards and the carriageway can vary in width between 4 and 5 metres. In terms of road safety, it is considered inappropriate to continue to direct road users onto an 'A' class road with poor geometric standards. It is, therefore, proposed to reclassify the length of route A841 on the west and south of the island to a 'C' class route and maintain the existing classification between Lochranza, Brodick, Lamlash and Whiting Bay. A formal Declaration of Classification will be required from Transport Scotland and the procedure could take a number of months to complete.

Current road lighting design standards require a significant level of new infrastructure to be provided on, and adjacent to, 'A' class roads. The proposed reclassification would serve to remove this unwelcome requirement in the more rural settlements on the west coast between Lochranza and Whiting Bay.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposal to commence the procedure of road reclassification set out in the appendix to the report.

16. Closing Orders

16.1 Stevenston: 58 Boglemart Street

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed service of a Closing Order on a property at 58 Boglemart Street, Stevenston.

A recent inspection of the house found that the property was below the tolerable standard as defined by Section 86 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. The Council has powers under Section 114 of the said Act, to serve a Closing Order on the owners of the house to prevent it being occupied.

The Committee agreed to authorise service of a Closing Order on the property at 58 Boglemart Street, Stevenston.

16.2 Saltcoats: 13 Stanley Place

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed service of a Closing Order on a property at 13 Stanley Place, Saltcoats.

On inspection, the flat was found to be below the tolerable standard as defined by Section 86 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. The Council has powers under Section 114 of the said Act, to serve a Closing Order on the owners of the house to prevent occupation.

The Committee agreed to authorise service of a Closing Order on the property at 13 Stanley Place, Saltcoats.

16.3 Saltcoats: 15 Stanley Place

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed service of a Closing Order on a property at 15 Stanley Place, Saltcoats.

A recent inspection of the flat found that it was below the tolerable standard as defined by Section 86 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. The Council has powers under Section 114 of the said Act, to serve a Closing Order on the owners of the house to prevent it being occupied.

The Committee agreed to authorise service of a Closing Order on the property at 15 Stanley Place, Saltcoats.

The meeting ended at 3.10 p.m.