

Property Services Standing Sub Committee
18 February 2004

Irvine, 18 February 2004 - At a Meeting of the Property Services Standing Sub Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

John Bell, Stewart Dewar, David O'Neill, Nan Wallace and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

T. Orr, Corporate Director, O. Clayton, Head of Housing, J. Currie, Head of Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport, J. Paul, Head of Technical Services, C. Nelson, Head of Catering and Cleaning, I. Grice, Head of Building Services; N. Buchan, Head of Roads; J. Montgomery, Principal Performance Review Officer, M. Adams and A. Little, Corporate & Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Jane Gorman, Margaret McDougall and Elizabeth McLardy.

1. Performance Reports

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on Service Performance for the six months ended 30 September 2003.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 has established Best Value and Community Planning as statutory duties for local authorities. As a result, the Accounts Commission has introduced new arrangements for the audit of Best Value which represents a significant change to the approach taken in previous years. North Ayrshire Council will be one of seven authorities to undergo an "Audit of Best Value" during 2004.

Members currently receive Annual Reviews of performance within Service Plans and Annual Reports in relation to Statutory Performance Indicators. The Council's Corporate Management Team has identified through self-assessment that performance monitoring should be improved through the introduction of half-yearly performance reporting. This should ensure that Members have a more current view of performance across Services at any given time.

Officers reported on the performance highs and lows for the six months ended 30 September 2003 and on the immediate priorities for Property Services as follows:-

Housing

Performance Highs

- New void policy & procedures were introduced in January 2003 and were developed jointly with Building Services with the aim of improving the relet performance on void properties. At the core of these procedures were new challenging targets for Building Services to repair a void property and a new targeted approach to lettings. Maximum use is made of the notice period and ensure that pre-allocation is the norm. This has been a success. In 2001/02 less than 5% of houses were let in less than 2 weeks. In 2002/03 the figure was 23% and at 30 September 2003 60.9% of all void properties had been let in less than 2 weeks.
- An efficient approach to void management and allocation of houses ensures that void rent loss is kept to a minimum. In April 2003 void rent loss as a % of gross rent due was 1.69% and in September it reduced to 1.42%. In 2001/02 void rent loss was 2.13%, which is a sustained improvement.
- Section 11 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced the new Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) for tenants of local authorities and registered social landlords. From 30 September 2002 all tenants were entitled to the statutory rights of the new SST. The Scottish Executive also recommended that all landlords introduce a new tenancy agreement and get all tenants to sign this. This is a major exercise and at the end of September 2003 contact was made with over 55% of tenants to sign this agreement.
- Introduced Estate Warden service in BNSF areas
- 33 staff in Further Education, 81% of staff had Personal Development Reviews completed, two Mental Health Housing Officer posts established, two Welfare Rights and Debt Adviser posts established
- Homelessness:-

Policy & Procedure manual produced, Expanded support, advice and assistance to homeless and potentially homeless applicants and 32 additional temporary furnished accommodation units provided by end of September, bringing the total to 89
- Supporting People

Attracted £14.7m of grant funding, jointly with Social Services, for financial year 2003/2004

- Development

Working in partnership with Communities Scotland, and Housing Associations, 71 properties have been completed and there has been expenditure of approximately £2m.

Performance Lows

- Performance on Rent Arrears - significantly above Peer Group average at 13.1%
- There has been a continuing increase in homelessness presentations to 30 September, accentuating the need to develop prevention services.
- Difficulty in progressing Tenant Participation Strategy

Immediate Priorities

- Rent arrears
- Set-up Anti-Social Behaviour Team, roll out mediation service, establish Community Warden service.
- Consult on draft Tenant Participation Strategy
- Finalise Local Housing Strategy & Fuel Poverty Strategy
- Develop prevention services for homeless people
- Complete multi agency review of Adaptations Service
- Establish Equal Opportunities Working Group
- Supporting People – continue to develop Supporting People services through support and funding for providers, and in partnership with Social Services
- Develop service standards for core services

The Corporate Director (Property Services) reported that the effects of the transfer of the Housing Benefits Service to Finance in July 2002 can be seen by the fluctuation in the figures for the collection of rent arrears. Improvements have been made to the system and Finance are continuing to work towards achieving the Scottish average collection rates for rent arrears.

Building Services

Performance Highs

- Sustained financial viability
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) Award
- Apprentice of the Year Award
- European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) submission for 2003
- 28% of staff involved in external training
- Continuous improvement on statutory KPIs for % response repairs completed on time
- Proportion of repairs by appointment increasing
- Approval for 24 hour call-centre

Performance Lows

- Increased sickness absence rates
- Feedback reports from EFQM highlighted weaknesses in communication

Immediate Priorities

- To address the increased absenteeism by continuing to follow the council's sickness absence policy and procedures and by looking at other initiatives for absence prevention
- Introduction of specific service based Occupational Health initiatives
- To identify measures for improving communication

In response to Members enquiries on sickness absence rates and weaknesses in communication, the Corporate Director (Property Services) advised that a new service is now available for staff following the introduction of an on-site Occupational Therapy Nurse. Communication with staff had previously occurred through annual budget meetings with the Trades Unions. New measures are now being identified to improve communication with staff.

Roads

Performance Highs

- Commissioning and construction of the Largs Flood Prevention Scheme
- Continued achievement in excess of the Government's targets for reductions in road safety accidents and casualties
- Upgrading of street lighting in Ardeer and Irvine Vineburgh through Better Neighbourhood Partnership working thus enhancing public safety
- Replacement of Torbeg Bridge in Arran which removed a previous weight restriction and enabled easier access by commercial traffic

Performance Lows

- Ongoing problems with the Lighting Maintenance Contract Software (Highlights)
- Slow progress on traffic management schemes due to limited staff resources and problems of recruitment
- Limited progress in upgrading the Street Gazetteer to required local and national standards

Immediate Priorities

- Improved consultations with stakeholders to determine what are seen as priorities by the public at large and to obtain feedback on what Roads Services has delivered
- Achieving full operational status of Lighting Maintenance Contract Software (Highlights)
- Upgrading of Street Gazetteer to satisfy local and national requirements
- Continued progress on extending our ISO 9001:2000 quality accreditation to the whole of Roads Services

The Sub Committee was advised that traffic management had not been included in the immediate priority section because of limited staff resources and recruitment difficulties.

Refuse Collection

Performance Highs

- Maintaining below average refuse collection costs whilst providing multiple weekly collections for garden waste, bulky household waste, white goods and residual household wastes
- A projected 18% recycling rate for 2003/2004 whilst maintaining the lowest mixed Council disposal costs and remaining self sufficient in waste disposal
- Satisfactory performance in relation to special uplifts and missed collections
- Reorganisation of vehicles to ensure continuity of service
- Introduction of 30 cubic metre collection boxes to recycling centres and internal customers to improve service and recycling
- Brown bins now fully rolled out and compost produced from garden waste used by Grounds Maintenance Service
- Involvement with LEAMS and ECO Schools

Performance Lows

- Slow progress in obtaining the necessary permit for a waste disposal facility at Shewalton Area 2
- Uncertainty regarding Arran's waste disposal/treatment provision
- No provision of recycling centre in Ardrossan/Saltcoats/Stevenston

Immediate Priorities

- Introduction of separate Kerbside Collection Scheme, coupled with increased provision of banks to facilitate an increase in recycling by 2006
- Further bid for Strategic Waste Fund monies to improve recycling centres, support waste minimisation, further increase recycling, landfill diversion
- Obtain permit to operate waste disposal at Shewalton Area 2
- Site search to determine availability of a waste disposal facility for Arran
- Implementation Plan for Arran

- Renew contract for collection of Arran's municipal waste and introduction of wheeled bins
- Maintain improvement in sickness absence figures
- Maintain reduced level of complaints via the Council's Customer Comments
- Identify site for recycling centre in Ardrossan/Saltcoats/Stevenston area and obtain necessary permissions
- Implementation of recycling campaign

Following discussion on the lack of recycling facilities within the Three Towns area the Sub Committee was advised that possible sites for the location of civic amenity facilities are being explored and the provision of funding from the Strategic Waste Fund is being investigated.

Grounds Maintenance

Performance Highs

- Reduction in sickness and absenteeism levels
- Introduction of sports strategy in conjunction with Education and North Ayrshire Leisure Limited
- Participation with various community groups in joint working ventures
- Improvement of play areas, surfaces and equipment
- Joint working with East and South Ayrshire Councils and Ayrshire & Arran Health Board

Performance Lows

- Problems relating to existing incentive schemes
- Staff grievances
- Weakness in communication
- Lack of involvement from Community Groups and willingness to take ownership and become involved in various strategies

Immediate Priorities

- Alternatives to incentive schemes in relation to Single Status
- Improve communication in order to promote better working relationships
- Devise customer questionnaires to determine the aspirations of customers
- Continued reduction in sickness/absenteeism
- Establishment of KPI's in line with APSE Performance Networks

Catering

Performance Highs

- All Primary and Secondary School dining rooms have been de-branded. All now carry 'The Lunch Bunch' logo for Primary Schools and 'NA Café' logo for Secondary Schools
- Hungry for Success initiative has been successfully implemented in 20 of the 53 mainstream Primary Schools. The four Special Schools will be included in the next phase of this project. This project remains on target of 100% completion by June 2004
- 27 Primary Schools and 1 Secondary School have the Scottish Healthy Choices Award. Both 'Hungry for Success' and the Scottish Healthy Choices Award are Scottish Executive initiatives set in the national context of policy and action to improve the Scottish diet
- A Breakfast Service is now available in all Secondary Schools. Pupils are given the opportunity to purchase nourishing food prior to going to class

Performance Lows

- The programme of customer call visits to Head of Establishments has fallen behind target
- Quality Assurance Inspections have fallen behind target
- Staff induction is not being formally recorded at commencement of employment
- Increased sickness level absence
- Occasional failure to meet Food Safety Standards
- To de-brand all vending equipment

Immediate Priorities

- To ensure customer call visits meet agreed targets
- To ensure Quality Assurance Inspections meet agreed target
- Ensure Induction is carried out on commencement of employment
- To address increasing absenteeism by continuing to follow the Council's Sickness Absence Policy in partnership with Occupational Health
- To ensure Food Safety Standards are achieved in each location
- To de-brand all vending equipment

In response to a question on the high sickness absence level, the Sub Committee was advised that additional occupational health support has been purchased in an effort to reduce this level.

Technical Services

Performance Highs

- Distribution of Property Handbooks to all major operational properties and associated staff briefings completed. The Handbooks contain all relevant technical information on each property, and are used to order work on the properties and are a key reference for property managers and contractors
- Competitive tendering exercise for Gas Maintenance contract completed
- Woodlands Primary School completed ahead of target
- Completion of major refurbishment to Cunninghame House
- Completion of 2 non-maintained Fire Stations in Arran
- Implementation of Consultant appointments on price/quality basis rather than the lowest price
- Completion of work on Strategic Review of the Service

Performance Lows

- Central Heating questionnaire has indicated that Contractor performance has dropped

- Staff survey indicates need for closer involvement in taking forward the Service and improved training opportunities

Immediate Priorities

- Gas maintenance - successfully implement new Contracts
- Develop an Improvement Plan to take forward the recommendations of Best Value Strategic Review
- Review of the procedures for assessing and claiming professional fees

Cleaning

Performance Highs

- Cleaning Service maintained registration against ISO 9002:1994 while achieving revised standard of ISO 9001:2000. This to be achieved by April 2004
- It has been agreed that SVQ Building Cleaning Level 2 can now be delivered by the Cleaning Service
- Four Mobile Cleaning Supervisors have been appointed to assist and support Area Officers at site level
- A Cleaning Training Manual is being piloted in a number of areas
- Void House Cleaning Programme introduced to assist Housing in re-letting process
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Performance Lows

- High staff turnover
- The programme of Customer Call visits to Head of Establishments has fallen behind target
- Increased sickness absence levels

Immediate Priorities

- To reduce staff turnover
- To ensure customer call visits meet agreed targets
- To address increasing absenteeism by continuing to follow the Council's Sickness Absence Policy in partnership with Occupational Health
- Evaluate and issue Training Manual and incorporate Induction and Programmed Training

Other Cleaning/Public Conveniences

Performance Highs

- Further reduction in unattended public toilet provision (conventional)
- Increase in litter bin and dog bin provision (1,273 litter bins; and 256 dog bins)
- Continued emphasis on tackling litter and graffiti
- Litter Awareness Campaign - "At Last - A Cure for Litter"
- Involvement with "Eco Schools" and partnership working
- Appointment of Litter/Recycling Officer with immediate benefits
- Change over from 'Topsy' bins to 'Brunel' type bins in town centres
- Public toilet cleaning brought back in-house
- Continued elected member involvement in litter awareness and campaign promotions

Performance Lows

- Complaints received re cleanliness of public conveniences on Arran
- Failure to designate officers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices

Immediate Priorities

- Ongoing Litter Awareness Campaign

- Using results of Local Environmental Audit Management System (LEAMS) to maintain and improve standards of cleanliness
- Renegotiate 8 APC leases with J C Decaux to facilitate provision of 3 universal superloos to accommodate disabled users and demolish 2 conventional unattended toilets
- Reorganise cleaning of public toilets

The public convenience facilities within the Stevenston area are limited as a result of the manned facility in Stevenston having restricted opening hours. The Sub Committee was advised that there are a number of initiatives which may assist with staffing costs to enable full time operation of facilities and these will be investigated.

Transport

Performance Highs

- MOT Testing Facility now operational
- Multi functional vehicles purchased to support recycling initiatives
- Special vehicle designed for transporting people of limited mobility
- Improved tyre management to gain higher mileage from casings and thus reduce costs
- Introduction of low sulphur fuel to comply with council policy on environmental pollution reduction
- Oil sampling extending oil life to reduce the frequencies of oil changes

Performance Lows

- Sickness levels high due to long term absences and small workforce
- Technical training reduced in the workshop due to low manpower levels
- Reception area of workshops is not customer or user friendly
- Computer system updates and reports

Immediate Priorities

- Reduce sickness level

- Improve reception area
- Computer system upgrade

Janitorial Services

Performance Highs

- Janitors Training Programme as identified through a Training Needs Analysis has been completed
- The Out of Hours Service provided to Educational Establishments on a cluster basis has resulted in
 - (a) Increased management control
 - (b) Reduction in interruption to Head Teachers and Site Janitors
 - (c) Increased customer satisfaction
- Reconfiguration by management of budgets and staff has resulted in four additional full-time Janitorial posts being created
- Reduction in absence levels

Performance Lows

- The programme of Customer Call visits to Heads of Establishment has fallen behind target
- Unable to source a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) that is suitable to the role of Janitor

Immediate Priorities

- To ensure Customer Call visits meet agreed targets
- To source an appropriate Scottish Vocational Qualification suitable to the Janitorial role

Attention was drawn attention to the problem of litter from schools extending beyond the school boundary and the responsibility for the clean up of these areas was discussed.

Cemeteries

Performance Highs

- Millport Cemetery selected as a finalist in the Cemetery of the Year award for cemeteries over 3.5 acres. This national competition is run by the Confederation of Burial Authorities
- The war memorial in Kilwinning winning first place in the Best Kept Memorial Award administered by the Royal British Legion
- The opening and dedication of Largs Brisbane Glen Cemetery, a new burial ground built to modern standards including woodland burial, cremated remains and infant burial areas
- A marked reduction in the level of sickness absence, both long and short term from over 16% to 5%

Performance Lows

- Initial delay in responding to the problems arising from the Memorial Safety Inspection Programme

Immediate Priorities

- The further introduction of a programme of memorial inspections to encompass greater involvement of Members and the public. The purpose of this is to ensure the safety of those visiting and working in NAC cemeteries
- Review of the administrative and operational function of the section to provide a greater degree of versatility in service delivery within the context of the Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport Service and also the greater context of the council
- Further consultation with the various stakeholders such as clergy, funeral directors, stonemasons, etc to ensure a focused approach to service delivery
- Working towards achieving the ICCM Charter Mark through the Charter Best Value Assessment Process

The Sub Committee highlighted the excellent new facility now available following the opening of Largs Brisbane Glen Cemetery.

School Crossing Patrols

Performance Highs

- School Crossing Patroller in Stevenston awarded "runner up" in a national competition for "School Crosser of the Year"
- All School Crossing Patrollers were completely re-equipped with Personal Protective Clothing (PPE)
- There was 100% attendance by School Crossers for training on Crossing Procedures and Health & Safety

Performance Lows

- Recruitment and retention of School Crossing Patrol staff
- The programme of Customer Call visits to Heads of Establishment has fallen behind target
- Seasonal sickness absence levels leads to prioritising of cover

Immediate Priorities

- Ensure exit interviews are conducted and recorded
- To ensure Customer Call visits meet agreed targets
- To follow the Council's Sickness Absence Policy in partnership with Occupational Health to ensure maximum coverage

Noted.

2. Statutory Performance Indicators 2002/03: Scottish Context

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the Scottish context for a selection of statutory performance indicators for 2002/03 which were released by Audit Scotland in January and February 2004.

These figures enable a number of areas within Housing, Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance and Transport to be viewed in a national context thereby allowing informed judgements on performance.

Noted.

3. Development of a Tenant Participation Strategy for North Ayrshire Council Tenants

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed draft Tenant Participation Strategy.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced new duties for local authority and registered social landlords in relation to tenant participation. On 23 April 2002 the Property Services Committee agreed to:-

- commission Consultants to work with the Council and its tenants to produce a Tenants Participation Strategy
- produce a tenants' newsletter on a quarterly basis to improve communication and act as a mechanism to consulting on the development of the Participation Strategy

A draft framework of the Tenant Participation Strategy is now complete and consultation is underway with staff and tenants. This was reported to the Committee on 25 November 2003 and it was noted that the draft strategy would be referred to the Sub Committee. Consultation will be enhanced through the development of a Consultation Register which will allow individual tenants to be consulted without having to join a tenants group. The Council will produce a participation timetable illustrating when key decisions are taken. The strategy proposes a new approach to the development of tenant participation which will include support and training for new and existing groups. A dedicated staff resource will be established to take this work forward.

The Sub Committee agreed to recommend approval of the proposals as detailed in the report.

The meeting ended at 3.10 p.m.