

Corporate Services Committee
11 March 2003

IRVINE, 11 March 2003 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

David Munn, Robert Reilly, Ian Clarkson, David Gallagher, Jane Gorman, Elizabeth McLardy, Alan Munro, David O'Neill and Robert Rae.

In Attendance

B. Devine, Chief Executive; A. Herbert, Assistant Chief Executive (Finance); I.T. Mackay, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective); J.M. Macfarlane, Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel); R. Samson, Principal Estates Officer and S. Morley, Economist/Statistician (Development and Promotion); M. Adams and M. McKeown, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Munn in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Samuel Gooding, Jack Carson, John Donn, Elisabeth Marshall, Peter McNamara, John Moffat, Donald Reid, John Reid and Samuel Taylor.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2003, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Revenue Budget 2002/03: Budgetary Control

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the budgetary control position for Corporate Services at the end of January 2003, and on projections for the financial year end.

Noted.

3. Banking Services

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the provision of banking services for the three year period to 31st March 2006.

In March 2000 the Committee agreed to appoint the Clydesdale Bank as the Council's bankers until 31 March 2003. During this period the Clydesdale Bank has provided a good service to the Council

Benchmarking of banking services by the Scottish Directors of Finance Group indicates that the prices charged by the Clydesdale Bank are competitive for an authority of North Ayrshire's size. The cost of tendering for banking services and the disruption and expense of changing banks would outweigh any potential savings that could be achieved by the tender process. It was therefore recommended that the Council continue to use its existing bankers.

The Committee agreed to reappoint the Clydesdale Bank to provide banking services to the Council until 31st March 2006.

4. Sundry Debtors Write Off

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on balances written off under delegated powers and requesting authority to write off balances outwith those powers.

The sums submitted for "write off" relate to businesses that are in liquidation, debtors who cannot be traced from information available, debt inherited from former Councils and debts that are uneconomic to recover through legal processes.

A new debtors module is being implemented by Financial Services which will allow the Council to monitor debtors closely in the future.

The Committee agreed to approve the write off of sundry debtors as detailed in the report.

5. New Official Local Area Claimant Unemployment Rates

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on changes made by the Office for National Statistics to the method of calculating official unemployment rates and on amendments to the North Ayrshire methodology for calculating ward unemployment rates.

Whilst the new residence based unemployment rates are lower than the previously published workforce rate, the relative position of North Ayrshire in comparison with the national average is unchanged. The new methodology will allow direct comparisons between locally produced ward rates and officially produced national and regional rates.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the changes to the North Ayrshire methodology for calculating ward unemployment rates; and (b) that this be the preferred source of small area unemployment data for North Ayrshire in future.

6. Largs: Residential Property at 11A and 11B Routenburn Road

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on options for the disposal by lease or sale of two semi detached houses in Routenburn Road, Largs.

The two semi-detached dwellinghouses at 11A and 11B Routenburn Road, are in the ownership of Largs Common Good Fund. Both houses are now vacant and three options were considered in relation to the lease or disposal of the properties.

The Committee agreed to sell the properties for the redevelopment of the site for one dwellinghouse or their rehabilitation by the successful purchaser for private letting.

7. Royal National Mod, Largs 2002: Impact Assessment

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the economic benefits of hosting the Royal National Mod 2002 in Largs.

The Council and Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire invested £50,000 each towards hosting the Mod. Combined with other "in kind" assistance in terms of officers time, promotional and civic activity, provision of venues, and street decoration, total public investment amounted to £119,958. Public investment also attracted private community investment of around £150,000.

Hosting the Mod brought overnight visitors and economic benefits to Largs and North Ayrshire in what is traditionally an off season period. The Mod generated around £800,000 expenditure into the local economy, created the equivalent of 14 full time jobs at an Ayrshire level, and raised the profile of the area.

The Committee agreed to continue to support the implementation of the visitor events strategy in order to generate additional economic benefits for the North Ayrshire economy.

8. Land at East Road/Quarry Road, Irvine

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the sale of land at East Road/Quarry Road, Irvine to Perth City Wall, property developers.

At its meeting on 22 October 2002, the Committee agreed to enter into negotiations with the Company for the sale of 4.19 hectares of land at East Road/Quarry Road, Irvine. The Company has submitted a formal offer to purchase the land at a price of £4.25m subject to several conditions, including issues relating to service connections and detailed planning permission for the construction and operation of a food and/or non food retail development with ancillary car parking.

Discussions are continuing to identify opportunities for the Council to participate more fully in the development of the site as part of the Town Centre regeneration process. If the Council participates in the regeneration of the site, there may be a reduced capital receipt but, in the longer term, income will be generated from tenants. Alternatively, there could be reduced costs to the Council if it was to occupy any new facilities created.

The Committee agreed to the sale of land at East Road/Quarry Road, Irvine, on the terms set out in the report.

9. Strategic Assessment of Potential for Wind Farm Developments in North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on current windfarm proposals and enquiries in North Ayrshire, and on the steps being taken to assess their potential cumulative visual impact and to formulate Development Plan policy.

The development and promotion of renewable sources of energy is an integral part of the Government's energy policy. The Scottish Executive expects Planning Authorities to make provision for such developments by facilitating and guiding developments, ensuring development control decisions are taken efficiently and consistently with national and international commitments and obligations, and by preventing unnecessary sterilisation of renewable energy sources.

An increasing number of renewable energy projects are for windfarms. The Council has been made aware of 12 schemes for windfarms in North Ayrshire. To assess the impact of these projects the MacAulay Institute in Aberdeen has been commissioned to provide a critical appraisal of current applications and to provide an analysis of the potential impact of all current windfarm proposals for the area. A more extensive commission is being prepared to assess the capacity for, and potential constraints on, wind farm developments whilst ensuring that the energy generated through wind turbines can be maximised.

Noted.

10. Irvine: Kilwinning Road: Former Burnside Children's Home and Ground

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the disposal of the former Burnside Children's Home at Kilwinning Road, Irvine.

In April 2001, the Social Services Committee declared the property surplus to requirements. Subsequently in June 2001 the Corporate Services Committee agreed that the Principal Estates Officer should identify means of securing and maintaining the building whilst the Better Neighbourhood Services Fund (BNSF) Vineburgh project was under consideration. Interest in the property for the BNSF Vineburgh project has now been withdrawn.

The Committee agreed that the former Burnside Children's Home and land to the rear be placed on the open market for sale.

11. Animal Feedingstuffs Enforcement Service Plan 2003/2004

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective) on the Animal Feedingstuffs Enforcement Service Plan as part of the Council's obligations towards Food Safety Enforcement.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) requires all local authorities to produce and publish Animal Feedingstuffs Enforcement Service Plans on an annual basis. In line with this requirement, the Council's Trading Standards Section has produced a Plan, a copy of which was appended to the report. The Plan aims to ensure the consistent and effective enforcement of Feedingstuffs legislation within North Ayrshire.

The Committee agreed to approve the Feedingstuffs Enforcement Service Plan for 2003/2004.

12. Revision of Pest Control Charges from 1st April 2003

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Protective) on the current charges for pest control treatments and on a proposed modification to these charges.

Fees in respect of pest control services have not increased since 1998 and the report set out proposals for increased charges effective from 1st April 2003. Benchmarking has indicated that the proposed new fee levels compare favourably with the private sector.

The Committee agreed the fee levels for pest control services as detailed in the report.

13. Employment Act 2002: Draft Ground Rules for Employment of Staff (excluding Teaching Staff)

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on the employment contracts for local government staff to be used within the Council.

In December 2002, the Committee agreed that the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) submit specific proposals on changes to the Council's personnel policies and procedures as a result of the Employment Act 2002. One of the main areas that has been highlighted is the need to rationalise and standardise (i) the employment contract types and employee descriptions used across the Council, and (ii) the titles given to describe employees with various contracts.

The "Ground Rules for Employment of Staff (excluding teaching staff)", a copy of which was appended to the report, will allow a standard approach throughout the Council. It will provide a more rigorous approach to ensuring that employees are given contracts that accurately reflect their actual working arrangements and will also protect the Council's interests more effectively in the event of a challenge.

The Committee approved the Ground Rules for Employment of Staff (excluding Teaching Staff) as set out in the report, subject to consultation with the trades unions.

14. Employment Act 2002: Flexible Working: The Right to Apply Policy and Associated Procedure

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on the introduction of a new policy and associated procedures for flexible working for eligible employees.

In December 2002 the Committee agreed that the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) submit specific proposals on changes to the Council's personnel policies and procedures as a result of the Employment Act 2002. One of the issues arising related to the requirement to introduce and follow a specific procedure to allow eligible employees to apply to work flexibly. From April 2003 North Ayrshire Council has a statutory duty to consider seriously such applications.

The "Flexible Working - The Right to Apply" policy and associated procedure appended to the report facilitates compliance with the 2002 Act, and will ensure a consistent and fair approach to considering flexible working applications throughout the Council. In conjunction with the package of enhanced rights for parents, this policy should provide parents with greater choice than before in balancing work and family life. Simultaneously, more flexible ways of working should meet the business needs of Council services by reducing absence, improving recruitment and retention of staff, and raising staff motivation.

The Committee agreed to approve the policy and procedures as detailed in the report.

The Meeting ended at 2.30 p.m.