

Housing Services Committee
25 February 1999

Irvine, 25 February 1999 - At a meeting of the Housing Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 pm.

Present

Samuel Taylor, Gena Seales, Thomas Barr, James Clements, John Donn, Jane Gorman, Margaret Munn, Irene Oldfather and George Steven.

In Attendance

T Orr, Corporate Director, F Kelly, Head of Housing, J Paul, Head of Technical Services (Property Services), D Nibloe, Principal Officer (Finance) and S Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Mr Taylor in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Thomas Dickie and Samuel Gooding.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 January 1999, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Scottish Homes Stock Transfer in the Irvine Area

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the proposed agreement to proceed with the Partnership proposal for the Scottish Homes stock transfer in the Irvine area.

On 27 August 1998, the Committee agreed to participate in a Steering Group, with representation from Scottish Homes tenants, the Council, local community interests and Scottish Homes Initiatives staff to consider the possibility of a New Housing Partnership vehicle which would become the new landlord for Scottish Homes tenants of the remaining stock of 840 houses in the Irvine area by the year 2000.

The Steering Group has now reached its conclusion and recommends that a new community housing organisation should proceed. It is proposed that a Shadow Board of the new organisation be identified in March 1999 to take forward the detailed work leading up to transfer by March 2000 and that the Board should comprise equal representation from Scottish Homes tenants, the Council and community interests. Scottish Homes will organise public meetings in March to present the proposals to their tenants and invite individual tenants to take part in the Shadow Board. A Tenants' Forum will also be established with independent advisors appointed to ensure that the wider interest of tenants is included

throughout the process. The Steering Group will be asked for its ideas on how to identify valid community interest.

It is further proposed that the Initiatives Manager, who has been working with the Steering Group since November 1998, be seconded to the new organisation for an initial period of 6 months to ensure that the business plan required for the new organisation is prepared and submitted to Scottish Homes for approval.

The Committee agreed (a) that Councillors T Barr and J McKinney, the Council representatives on the Steering Group, should be the representatives on the Shadow Board of the new housing organisation until the Council elections in May 1999, after which up to 5 members of the Council should be nominated to the Board; and (b) to approve the full-time secondment of the Initiatives Manager for an initial period of 6 months until September 1999.

3. Empty Homes Initiative Bid 1999 - 2002

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on the bids made under the Empty Homes Initiative 1999 - 2000.

The Empty Homes Initiative (EHI) was set up by the Government in 1997/98 as a means of encouraging local authorities to bring empty property in their area back into use to meet identified housing need. In 1998/99, the Council was awarded £141,500 under this Initiative for the acquisition and renovation of flats in Countess Street, Saltcoats, which completed this Housing Action Area.

The bid for the period 1999/2002 required to be submitted by 12 February 1999. A bid in partnership with Cunninghame Housing Association has therefore been submitted which meets the criterion set out by EHI. The main projects included are (i) a contribution of £170,000 towards the rehabilitation of properties being undertaken at Beith Town Centre; (ii) a contribution of £181,000 for works to complement the recently completed Housing Action Area at Princes Street, Ardrossan; (iii) the conversion of the Police Station currently being vacated in Saltcoats to accommodation for single homeless people; and (iv) a fast track project costing £240,000 to deal with assessments and allocations for homeless people and to identify the nature and causes of the areas with high turnover in the Council's stock in the Three Towns. The results will be made available in April/May 1999.

Noted.

4. Cornmill House, Kilwinning

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on progress in relation to the demolition of Cornmill House, Kilwinning and the redevelopment of the site.

On 27 August 1998, the Committee agreed to vacate Cornmill House, Kilwinning for the purposes of demolition and redevelopment and that test bores be carried

out to ascertain the area of land which can be developed. The residents of Cornmill House have all been re-housed and the demolition tender should be complete by late March. Test bores are in progress and a planning brief for the site will be submitted to the appropriate Committee as soon as possible.

Discussions have been held with Scottish Homes and it is considered that a combination of houses for rent and for owner occupation would be suitable. Scottish Homes have further agreed to an early inclusion of this redevelopment in the 1999/2000 programme.

The Committee agreed (a) to declare the site surplus to requirements; and (b) to authorise the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) to negotiate for the disposal of the site to an appropriate developer through the Scottish Homes investment programme and report to a future meeting of the Council.

5. Major Common Repair Works to Former North Ayrshire Council Houses

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposals to achieve agreement by owner occupiers to participate in the North Ayrshire Council Major Common Repair Works.

Since the introduction of the Right to Buy legislation, former Council houses have been affected by programmes of Common Repair Works. Title deeds for all sold houses and flats contain conditions which give the Council the legal right to carry out common repair works on blocks where the Council still retain the ownership of at least 1 dwelling and place an obligation on the owners to meet their share of the cost of these works. The Council have always sought to proceed on the basis of agreement with the owners wherever possible. Previously owners were entitled to apply for repairs grant towards the costs of this work, but this entitlement has been discontinued and the absence of grant assistance is making it difficult to obtain agreement from owners.

There are alternative methods of payment which may assist in obtaining agreement with owners. It is proposed that (a) all owners who are unable to meet their costs of the common repair works as a lump sum initially, be allowed to pay off the account by instalments without added interest over an extended period of 24 months; (b) where the owner is unable to obtain a loan from a bank or building society, they be considered for a Council loan; and (c) only in cases where these options have been exhausted would the option of a Standard Security over the owner's property be offered.

It is further proposed that where agreement cannot be reached with an owner, the Council shall only proceed with the work where there is clear and documented evidence of the urgent need for the works and that no other course of action such as a repair is practically and financially feasible. In the absence of such evidence, the block shall be removed from the contract unless it is technically possible to re-roof or re-roughcast part of the block.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the proposals as detailed in

the report.

6. Private Sector Housing Grants

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix HS1) by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on grant applications for improvement, disabled occupants, lead replacement and repair.

The Committee agreed to the decisions intimated in the final column of the said Appendix.

7. Urgent Items

The Chair agreed to hear the following items as a matter of urgency.

8. New Housing Partnerships: Allocation of Resources 1999-2002

Submitted letter dated 24 February 1999 from the Scottish Office Development Department on the outcome of the bids for the New Housing Partnerships 1999-2002.

On 14 January 1999, the Committee was advised of bids for (a) a single housing agency on Arran, in partnership with Kirk Care Housing Association Ltd; and (b) a Stock Strategy and Transfer Feasibility study. SODD has now advised that resources have been provisionally earmarked of £2,247,500 for the Isle of Arran Initiative and £396,000 for the Stock Strategy and Transfer feasibility study.

Noted.

9. Review of Housing Service 1996/1999

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) giving a comprehensive summary of the achievements of the Housing Services Committee during the period April 1996 to February 1999.

The Committee welcomed the report and expressed their appreciation of the work of the Housing Services staff.

The meeting ended at 3 pm.