

Housing Services Committee  
29 January 1998

**Irvine, 29 January 1998** - At a Meeting of the Housing Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

Samuel Taylor, Gena Seales, Thomas Barr, James Clements, John Donn, David Gallagher, Samuel Gooding, Jane Gorman, Margaret Munn, Irene Oldfather and Robert Rae.

**In Attendance**

The Director of Housing Services, E. McNaught, Head of Customer Services, F. Kelly, Head of Strategy and Development, J. Paul, Head of Property Services (Housing Services); J. Hair, Principal Officer, Accountancy (Financial Services); G. Lawson, Principal Officer, Policy/Administration and S. Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

**Chair**

Mr. Taylor in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Patrick Browne and Thomas Dickie.

**1. Minutes Confirmed**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 4 December 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

**2. Housing HRA Capital Programme**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the Housing HRA Capital Programme for 1998/99.

The Council has now received confirmation from the Scottish Office of borrowing consent amounting to £2,953,000. Taking into account this borrowing consent, estimated capital receipts, Capital Funded from Current Revenue and carry forward expenditure from slippage in the current year's programme, a sum of approximately £7m is available. The programme takes into account:- (a) the Council's Homeless Persons Individual Needs Accommodation Strategy; (b) Community Care requirements including increased expenditure on Aids and Adaptations and the requirement to upgrade ex-IDC amenity houses; (c) central heating requirements; (d) energy conservation measures; (e) window replacement in a number of ex-IDC houses; (f) phase 1 of the proposals for the multi-storey flats as previously approved by the Committee; (g) health and safety and urban regeneration proposals; and (h) decentralisation of housing services and continued investment in IT systems to improve efficiency and address the implications of the Year 2000.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to remit the draft Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report to the Corporate Strategy Committee for consideration; and (b) that the Director of Housing Services report to future meetings of the Committee on (i) the feasibility of utilising the projected surplus on the Housing Revenue account for environmental improvements; (ii) the current position on the waiting list for aids and adaptations; and (iii) the options available for the future use of Cornmill House, Kilwinning.

### **3. Housing Non-HRA Capital Programme**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on requirements for Housing Non-HRA Capital Expenditure in 1998/99.

The Housing Non-HRA Capital Programme is used almost exclusively to fund private sector housing grants, both mandatory and discretionary and the programme focuses these grants on a number of key priority areas including:- (a) eliminating housing which is below the tolerable standards, through the ongoing Housing Action Area Programme; and (b) care in the community, which covers discretionary disabled grant assistance and the promotion of care and repair schemes.

Committed expenditure of £1,304,000 has been identified in 1998/99, comprising carried forward expenditure on approved discretionary grants and grants in respect of committed Housing Action Areas. In order to maintain priority discretionary grant programmes and declare Housing Action Areas in respect of 42-50 Kirkland Road, Kilbirnie and 12-16 Brisbane Road, Largs, as identified previously by the Committee, additional expenditure of £1,358,000 is required, making a total bid of £2,662,000.

The Committee agreed to remit the draft programme for Housing Non-HRA Capital Expenditure in 1998/99 to the Corporate Strategy Committee for consideration.

### **4. Central Heating Programme**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the future direction of the Council's Central Heating Programme.

Various factors have influenced future priorities. Of significance is the fact that by 1996, the former Cunninghame District Council had achieved its target of ensuring that all its houses had gas or electric storage heating. Additionally, over the past 2 financial years, North Ayrshire Council's priority has been the replacement of the oldest gas systems. Consequently, all gas heating systems installed before 1980 in the former CDC housing stock have been replaced with new heating systems. In ex-IDC stock, however, around 700 houses built before 1980 still have the original heating systems in place. The Committee also agreed in March 1997 that all gas systems installed under the 1997/98 programme would incorporate combi-boilers in view of the clear advantages of the system over conventional systems in relation to capital costs and water storage requirements and because there has generally been a favourable response from tenants to the installation of the new systems.

There are currently some 2,100 houses which have electric storage heating and this system has generally proved unpopular with tenants who have complained of ineffective heating and high fuel costs. In order to provide such tenants with a choice of fuel, the costs of providing a gas supply have to be taken into account. In many cases, the cost is equivalent to slightly in excess of the standard connection charge of £130. In some areas, however, such as Burns Square/Chapelhill Mount, Ardrossan, where there is no gas supply available at present, the average cost is £853 per house. Assurances have nonetheless been given that, for the meantime, tenants will continue to receive a choice of fuel and that investigations will be made into obtaining more competitive prices for the provision of a gas supply. The multi-storey flats in Irvine and Saltcoats also have electric storage systems and the heating requirements for these would have to be looked at in conjunction with all the other major works proposed for these blocks.

Reference was made to older combined back boilers and fires, which were unpopular with a number of tenants. The majority of these have now been replaced but assurances have been given that where these become uneconomical to repair, they will be replaced with other systems.

Against this background, short and medium term priorities have been identified to replace gas systems with obsolete boilers and older gas and electric storage systems and a two-year programme has been drawn up to cover the short-term priorities.

The Committee agreed (i) to approve the short-term and medium-term priorities as detailed in the report; and (ii) that a further report be submitted on the cost of the provision of gas supplies to a future meeting.

## **5. Scottish Homes Stock Transfer in the Garnock Valley**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the proposals for Scottish Homes stock transfer in the Garnock Valley.

On 18 September 1997, the Committee agreed not to bid for the Scottish Homes housing stock in the Garnock Valley as a potential landlord, but to discuss with Scottish Homes the future transfer proposals with a view to strengthening the Council's role. Since then, two Housing Associations, Cunninghame, a local association and Sanctuary, a large national organisation, are proceeding to work up detailed bids for the stock. Both have visited all Garnock Valley Scottish Homes tenants and have also had discussions with the Housing Services Directorate. Bids require to be submitted by March 1998 and following appraisal of the bids by Scottish Homes and approval by the Secretary of State, a ballot of tenants will be organised.

The Government has recently announced two major changes in the way in which Scottish Homes stock transfers should take place, viz. (a) any preferred bidder for transfers, where a ballot has not already taken place, will be required to accept a Council nominee on to its Management Committee, if the Council wishes; and (b) Councils may bid for Scottish Homes stock, but with no additional resources made available.

The Scottish Office has also issued a more detailed guidance to strengthen the role of Councils in the remaining transfer proposals, which will allow local authorities to be involved in the overall appraisal of the technical aspects of the bids and any comments from the local authority being incorporated into the final report to the Scottish Homes Board and to the Secretary of State. Both Cunninghame and Sanctuary Housing Associations have indicated their wish to keep the Council informed of their work in relation to the bids, identify any specific requirements in relation to housing need etc. which the Council might have, incorporate this into the bid where possible and seek the Council's views on appropriate representation on their Committee structures,

The Committee agreed (i) to authorise the Director of Housing Services to register with Scottish Homes the Council's interest in the Garnock Valley transfer proposals; and (ii) that further progress reports be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

## **6. Funding for Tenant and Resident Associations**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on a review of the level of funding provided to Tenant and Resident Associations.

Associations are eligible to apply for annual grant assistance, which is currently fixed at £100 and has not been increased since 1989/90. The level has now been reviewed on the basis of inflationary increases and it is proposed to increase it to £150.

The Committee approved the increase to £150.

## **7. Fire Damage - 1,3,5,7 Misk Knowes, Stevenston**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services providing details of the incident in which the properties at 1,3,5 and 7 Misk Knowes, Stevenston were extensively damaged by fire on the evening of 1 January 1998.

The condition of the properties was such that the tenants were temporarily relocated. The reinstatement works are however due to commence shortly and a claim is being processed through the Council's property insurance. Assurances were given that the Housing Officer on standby duty that evening contacted all affected tenants and offered temporary accommodation; all

works required under the Building Regulations will be carried out; and there has also been liaison with Strathclyde Fire Brigade on the matter.

Noted.

#### **8. Homeless Persons Individual Needs Accommodation Strategy: Implementation**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on a scheme for the development of 49-51 Donaldson Avenue, Stevenston in accordance with the Council's Homeless Persons Individual Needs Accommodation Strategy.

On 4 December 1997, the Committee approved the development of temporary supported accommodation for young single homeless at 14-20 Shore Road, Stevenston and authorised the Director of Housing Services to enter into an agency agreement with the Blue Triangle Housing Association to provide the necessary levels of support for the project. The proposed development of 49-51 Donaldson Avenue, Stevenston to provide four units of temporary furnished accommodation, again in conjunction with the Blue Triangle Housing Association, would be a further extension of the Shore Road project.

The Committee agreed to suspend Standing Orders to allow further discussion on the Shore Road project.

A public exhibition was held to inform local residents of the proposals for Shore Road and in the light of the adverse response received, it was proposed to suspend the development of the Shore Road and Donaldson Avenue proposals meantime.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to withdraw temporarily the proposals to develop 14-20 Shore Road and 49-51 Donaldson Avenue, Stevenston as homeless persons supported accommodation to allow all options to be considered; and (b) that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

#### **9. Estate Management Policy**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the adoption of an Estate Management Policy.

The Housing Services Directorate has been restructured to allow a change in emphasis away from office-based services towards estate-based services, a crucial aspect of which is the effective management of the Council's housing stock. It is proposed to move away from a responsive reaction to management issues, such as whether tenants are adhering to their conditions of tenancy or whether there are any difficulties which can be addressed within local communities, to becoming more proactive in dealing with such issues. The Estate Management Policy clearly outlines the tenants' responsibilities and what steps the Council will take to monitor these, as well as the Council's responsibilities and what level of service the tenant can expect from them. The policy links in with other already approved policies such as Neighbour Disputes and Anti-Social Behaviour and Void Policies and has identified a number of aspects of the Housing service where policy guidance is still required, such as review of lease and conditions of tenancy, permissions, mutual exchanges etc. Proposed policies on the various issues identified will be submitted to the Committee in due course.

Assurances were given that the recovery of outstanding rent arrears is being addressed in a variety of ways and that one aspect of the responsibilities of Housing Officers located in local offices will be debt recovery.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposed Estate Management Policy to be implemented with immediate effect; and (b) that the Director of Housing Services in consultation with the Chair look at appropriate marketing and publicity of the Policy.

## **10. New Housing Partnerships Initiative**

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the New Housing Partnerships Initiative.

In November 1997, the Scottish Office made £10m available to Scottish Local Authorities for spending in the current financial year on Housing Partnership projects. An allocation was provisionally identified for each Authority and would be awarded if Authorities could submit suitable projects. Whilst the criteria were never fully specified, projects did have to have private finance and had to be implemented by a partnership. Within the short timescale available, discussions were held with Cunninghame Housing Association as the partner, and three bids were submitted, viz. (a) the transfer of the former Children's Unit at Warner Street, Stevenston to Cunninghame Housing Association for return to mainstream housing; (b) a hostel for the homeless in conjunction with Cunninghame Housing Association; and (c) a feasibility study into future development in the Garnock Valley. The indications are that the bids have been successful and that the allocation will be around £250,000 which will require to be spent before the end of March 1998. Written confirmation is awaited.

In December 1997, the Government announced the "New Housing Partnerships Initiative" making available £35m for the whole of Scotland for 1998/99 on a competitive bid basis. The essential criteria for bids are that they should include stock transfer, either for future social renting or for development linked to other tenures, and the other criteria relate to the involvement of partners from other agencies, the private sector and the community and the leveraging in of private finance. The bids should also demonstrate innovation and transferability of the model to future projects and only capital costs can be included. The timetable is again very short with bids to be submitted by the end of January, with decisions on these by the Scottish Office by the end of March. There has therefore been little opportunity for consultation on the proposals. A number of possible projects have been identified and are being worked up for submission by the due date.

The Committee agreed (a) to authorise the Director of Housing Services to submit appropriate bids by the due date; and (b) a further report on the outcome of the bids be submitted to a future meeting.

## **11. Private Sector Housing Grants**

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix HS1) by the Director of Housing Services on grant applications for improvement, disabled, lead replacement and repairs grants.

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

## **12. Conferences: Chartered Institute of Housing Conference and Exhibition**

Submitted invitation to attend the Chartered Institute of Housing Conference and Exhibition being held in Harrogate from 15th - 19th June 1998.

The Committee agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair or their nominees be authorised to attend.