

Housing Services Committee
7 March 1996

Irvine, 7 March 1996 - At a Meeting of the Housing Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

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

In Attendance

The Chief Executive, the Director of Housing Services, the Head of Property Services (Housing Services), the Head of Customer Services (Housing Services), the Head of Strategy and Development (Housing Services), a Corporate Policy Officer (Miss Hewitt) and an Administration Officer (Mr. Paxton).

Chair

Mr. Taylor in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Patrick Browne.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 25 January 1996, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Scheme of Delegation to Committee

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the decision of the Corporate Strategy Committee on 27 February to approve a Scheme of Delegation to the Committee including the establishment of a Housing Benefit Review Board.

The Committee (a) agreed to appoint the Chair, the Vice- Chair, Mr. D. Gallagher, Mr. T. Dickie and Mrs. J. Gorman to the Housing Benefit Review Board; and (b) noted the Scheme of Delegation to the Committee.

3. Housing Services Directorate: Structure

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the management structure of the Housing Services Directorate established to allow a staged handover of responsibility from the existing District to the new Unitary Authority.

It has only been possible to put in place the senior level of the structure to date as the outcome of the ballot for IDC stock is still unknown. The existing Cunninghame District Council Housing Department Staff have transferred to the new Directorate in line with Staff Commission guidance. A further report on the lower levels of the structure will be submitted to the Committee once the outcome of the ballot is known, to address alterations which may be required to the structure to accommodate IDC staff who may transfer to the Council under the TUPE Regulations.

Noted.

4. Irvine Development Corporation: Stock Disposal

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the submission of the revised financial bid for IDC housing stock.

The Secretary of State for Scotland was due to announce the successful bidders for the five ballot areas at the end of January 1996 but this announcement has been delayed. The Scottish Office have advised that the Council requires to reconsider its bid in light of new restrictions relating to the use of capital receipts as a source of income to fund improvements. Other potential landlords such as Housing Associations are not governed by these restrictions.

IDC has asked the Council to alter its bid, to adhere to its original bid or to withdraw from the process. Cunninghame District Council on 27th February agreed to adhere to its original bid and its commitments made to IDC tenants although the sum now offered will not meet with the District Valuer's valuation. It is anticipated that the ballot will now be delayed until mid-May with the results being known by mid-June.

A Meeting has been arranged on 11 March 1996 with tenants' organisations and the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of North Ayrshire and Cunninghame District Council Housing Committees together with all Irvine New Town Members to explain the Council's position.

Noted.

5. Scottish Homes

(a) Stock Disposal Strategy

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the disposal by Scottish Homes of its housing stock which it aims to transfer to locally based housing organisations. There has been no opportunity for Councils to become involved in this process despite extensive lobbying by Cunninghame District Council. The Secretary of State announced in late 1995 that he was prepared to reconsider the principle of allowing Councils access to the ballot process for Scottish Homes stock but to date no response has been received. A survey of Scottish Homes tenants carried out by Cunninghame District Council strongly indicated that if the restrictions were lifted the Council would be the tenants' preferred landlord.

The Committee agreed to make representations to the Secretary of State pressing for a change of policy to allow all Councils to participate in the ballot process for Scottish Homes stock.

(b) Notification of Rent Increase

Submitted report by the Director of Housing on notification received from Scottish Homes advising that rents for Scottish Homes' tenants would increase by an average of 4% in 1996/97.

Noted.

6. Review of Percentage Quotas

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the method adopted by Cunninghame District Council to decide the percentage quotas for each Needs Group within its Allocations system. These quotas must now be set for the next year from 1st April 1996. Appended to the report were the recommended quotas for each area for this period.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Director of Housing Services be advised of any alteration sought to the proposed quotas and that this be reported to the next Meeting of the Committee; and (b) otherwise to approve the proposed percentage quotas for the year to 1st April 1997.

7. Monitoring Information

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee 25/1/96)

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on monitoring the information as at 31 January 1996 relating to housing allocations, homelessness, rent arrears, etc.

After a full discussion the Committee (a) agreed that the Director of Housing Services report on the operation of the housing benefits system to its next Meeting; and (b) otherwise noted the report.

8. Accounts Commission: Publication of Performance Standards

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the performance of local authorities during 1993/94 in meeting targets set by the Accounts Commission.

A number of concerns over the validity of the information submitted generally have been identified but there is a requirement to produce this information for the Accounts Commission on an annual basis. Alternative structures to obtain information which would more accurately reflect the performance are being examined.

Noted.

9. Below Tolerable Standard Housing in North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services advising that in terms of Section 85 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 the Council has a duty to ensure that all houses in their area which do not meet the tolerable standard are closed, demolished or brought up to the tolerable standard within a reasonable time. Cunninghame District Council completed a local house condition survey in 1993 which, if regularly updated, would provide North Ayrshire Council with a comprehensive picture of housing conditions. A copy of the key survey findings was attached as an Appendix to the report.

Noted.

10. Housing Benefit: Discretionary Power to Award Additional Benefit in Cases of "Exceptional Hardship"

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services advising that Cunninghame District Council's Housing Committee on 5 February 1996 agreed to authorise the Director of Housing to make additional payments of Housing Benefit in cases of exceptional hardship within the Permitted Total, applying local criteria where appropriate. The Permitted Total for expenditure on exceptional hardship for 1996/97 is £48,688 and is made up of a Central Government contribution of £21,910 and a Council contribution of £26,778.

The Committee approved the decision of Cunninghame District Council's Housing Committee and authorised the Director accordingly.

11. Requests for Financial Assistance

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services advising that Cunninghame District Council, as housing authority, made the following contributions in the financial year 1995/96 to the organisations shown below:-

Arran Information and Advice Service -	£1,025
Institute of Housing -	£917

Tenant Participation Advisory Service -	£1,319
Scottish Council for Single Homeless -	£789
SHELTER -	£256
Scottish Women's Aid -	£512

The Committee approved the above contributions to each of these organisations for the financial year 1996/97.

12. Housing Seminars

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the following series of seminars on housing matters to be held in Cunninghame House:-

Subject	Date
Housing Allocation	21 March
Housing Repairs	4 April
Estate Management	11 April

Noted.

13. Community Care Planning: Joint Planning Structures

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a Meeting of Leaders and Chief Executives of the three Ayrshire Authorities where appointments had been made to various community care groups. The Accommodation Planning Group will be chaired in its first year by the Director of Housing Services and chairmanship of all the community care groups will be rotated annually. Housing is a critical aspect of community care planning and this has been recognised in the structural arrangements established.

Noted.

14. Conference

Submitted an invitation to attend the Chartered Institute of Housing Conference to be held in Harrogate on 10-14 June 1996.

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

The Meeting ended at 3.00 p.m.