

Housing Services Committee
30 October 1997

Irvine, 30 October 1997 - At a Meeting of the Housing Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

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

In Attendance

The Chief Executive; The Director of Housing Services; E. McNaught, Head of Customer Services and J. Paul, Head of Property Services (Housing Services); J. Hair, Principal Officer and H. Hunter, Senior Accountant, Accountancy (Financial Services); M. McCormick, Media Relations Officer (Marketing and Publicity); M. Hewitt, Corporate Policy Officer and S. Paxton, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr. Taylor in the Chair.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 September 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Mainstream Housing Allocation Policy

Since January a number of seminars involving all Members have been held to conduct a fundamental review of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy which has been in operation since 1988 and as a result an entirely new Mainstream Policy has been framed.

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services providing full details of the policy which it is proposed to implement in three phases. Provisions in relation to new applicants (phase one) and existing applicants (phase two) will be implemented immediately while the remainder of the policy (phase three) will be implemented on 1 April 1998. It is also proposed to issue the policy, once approved, to interested groups and agencies prior to implementation with any requisite amendments being brought to Committee in due course.

Implementation of the policy will require a review of all existing applicants, the introduction of new procedures and new documentation all of which are likely to cost around £80,000 and may require the employment of temporary staff.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the Mainstream Housing Allocation Policy and its phased implementation; and (b) to receive further reports on the implications of implementing the policy (at the December Meeting).

3. Sheltered and Amenity Housing Allocation Policy

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee January 1997.)

The Housing Allocation review which was initiated in January perceived a need for a separate policy relating to Sheltered and Amenity Housing specifically.

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services confirming full details of the new policy document which has been framed by a joint Housing Services and Social Work Officers' Working Group. The intention is to implement the policy in the same three phases as the new Mainstream Policy and such implementation will also have cost and staffing implications whilst not duplicating those already identified in relation to implementing the Mainstream Policy. In this case external consultation is also proposed prior to implementation of the policy.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the Sheltered and Amenity Allocation Policy and its phased implementation; and (b) to receive further reports on the implications of implementing the policy (at the December Meeting) and any requisite amendments to the policy following consultation (in due course).

4. Rough Sleepers Initiative: North and South Ayrshire Council's Joint Bid

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the outcome of a joint bid for Challenge Funding submitted by North and South Ayrshire Councils, Scottish Homes and Ayrshire and Arran Health Board to the Scottish Office in response to their initiatives on rough sleeping.

Although less than had been sought, £69,000 has been awarded to the two Councils to fund a survey and to employ two Outreach Workers for an eighteen-month period to undertake this work.

The research undertaken will establish the housing needs of young people in relation to rough sleeping and homelessness in North and South Ayrshire.

The Committee, in noting the outcome of the joint bid, agreed to accept the funding and proceed with the research in conjunction with South Ayrshire Council.

5. Homeless Policy: Code of Guidance on Homelessness

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee 5 December 1996.)

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on a new Code of Guidance on Homelessness which has been issued by the Scottish Office for implementation on 1 December 1997 and which replaces the previous code issued in 1991. The Council has already agreed a Policy on Homelessness which takes account of the provisions of Part 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and which incorporates the main recommendations of the Code.

Noted.

6. Housing Services Directorate: Structure Update

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee 19 September 1996.)

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on progress in implementing the staffing structure for the Directorate.

In September 1996 the Housing Services Committee approved the present structure of the Housing Services Directorate following the result of the ballot exercise for houses owned and managed by the Irvine Development Corporation which resulted in the transfer of around two thousand properties and twenty Irvine Development Corporation staff to the Council.

The report provided an update on the current position with regard to (a) central client related services, given the likely replacement of Compulsory Competitive Tendering with the "Best Value" Regime; (b) midline services, including the proposed decentralisation of Housing Benefit processing and attendant staffing and information technology issues; and (c) divisional and area services including the establishment of divisional offices and issues associated therewith.

Further reports detailing minor changes to the existing structure together with changes to the Housing finance function will be submitted to a future Meeting of the Committee.

Noted.

7. Housing Services Budgetary Control

(Previous Minute Reference: Corporate Strategy Committee 21 October 1997.)

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the revenue position of the Housing Services Directorate against its previously agreed budget as at 12 September 1997 which reflected an operating overspend of £55,000 but projected an underspend of £1.1m by the end of the current financial year.

The Committee discussed the level of void properties and its impact on the budgetary position and agreed that a further report be submitted to a future meeting on the level of lost rent due to void houses.

8. Aids and Adaptations Policy for Council Housing Stock

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee 19 September 1996.)

Submitted joint report by the Directors of Housing Services and Social Work on the Aids and Adaptations Policy for Council Housing Stock.

The Aids and Adaptations Policy for Council House stock established a five point system to prioritise applicants on the basis of need and a two tier waiting list for assessed applicants, a Qualifying List and a Hospital Discharge List. The principles of the best use of housing stock and value for money were incorporated in the Policy. In addition the Policy established a procedure for assessing and meeting the needs of tenants who required handrails, grabrails or banisters. Tenants are assessed by the Housing Services Directorate using criteria established by the Social Work Directorate. The budget for 1997/98 is £250,000.

The report gave details of the number of adaptations undertaken in 1997/98 together with information on progress made since the implementation of the policy in September 1996. Although there are no tenants on the Hospital Discharge List, there are currently one hundred and one tenants on the Qualifying List and three hundred awaiting adaptations for handrails, grabrails and banisters. Applicants awaiting showers were reassessed by the Social Work Directorate and only those who qualified under the Bathing Policy were referred to the Housing Services Directorate for the installation of a shower.

Further initiatives will be undertaken to enhance best use of Council Housing stock, training for Social Work and Housing Services staff and the information and marketing of the service. In addition it is anticipated that the aids and adaptations budget for 1998/99 will be increased to £304,000.

The Social Work Committee at its Meeting on 29 October 1997 had considered the same report and agreed to recommend to the Housing Services Committee that representations be made to the Scottish Office advising of the Council's concerns over (a) the level of resources required to adapt Council house stock for disabled people and problems associated with such adaptations for future tenants; and (b) the need for further resources to cope with the demand for adapted housing by individuals leaving hospital requiring community care.

The Committee, in noting the current position (a) agreed to accept the Social Work Committee's recommendations; and additionally (b) that North Ayrshire's MPs be advised accordingly.

9. Scottish House Condition Survey 1996

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the findings of the Scottish House Condition Survey 1996.

The Scottish House Condition 1996, which replaces the previous survey carried out in 1991, provided information on the physical condition of the housing stock in Scotland and a socio-economic profile of the occupant. The survey found that, amongst other things, 25% of all dwellings suffered from problems of dampness or condensation, 78% of all dwellings had at least one item of physical disrepair and that tackling below tolerable standard housing would cost almost £8b.

The Committee agreed that the Director of Housing Services take into account the findings of the survey in relation to the preparation of strategic documents and bids and in partnership working with other agencies and organisations.

10. Home Energy Conservation Act

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee 5 June 1997.)

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the key findings of the Council's first Home Energy Conservation Act report.

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 which came into force on 1 December 1996 required that all local authorities in Scotland prepare a report setting out the measures which would lead to a significant improvement in the energy efficiency of their stock. The first report was to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Scotland by 1 September 1997 and followed by regular progress reports. The Secretary of State has set authorities a target to achieve a 30% increase in energy efficiency in housing stock over the next ten years but has not allocated additional resources for this purpose. The submission date for the first Home

Energy Efficiency report has been extended to 1 December 1997. The Council's report has now been completed.

The Committee agreed (a) that the report be published and forwarded to the Secretary of State for Scotland; (b) that the energy targets and measures in the report be taken into account when revenue estimates and capital programmes are being constructed; and (c) that the Director of Housing Services produce a further report on any matters which are relevant to meeting the Council's responsibilities in terms of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

11. Kilwinning: Montgomerie Terrace: Strategy for Action

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee 7 August 1997.)

In line with the Committee's decision of 7 August 1997, submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on progress in the Strategy for Action for Montgomerie Terrace, Kilwinning.

The report shows that the level of vacancies has risen from eleven to fifteen as four properties have been vacated. The remaining vacancies have, however, been promoted to all needs groups with particular reference to those applicants who expressed an interest in the Corsehill area. This has resulted in potential tenants being selected for seven of the vacant properties. The remaining eight vacant properties could be let to applicants from the Outwith Queue. Additionally, although dampness has been detected in eight properties, some of which have prospective tenants and others which are still vacant, this will be addressed.

Progress has also been made in establishing a Tenants' Association in the area and the level of crime are decreasing.

The Committee, in noting the analysis of demand from current waiting lists agreed (a) to offer the remaining void properties to applicants from the Outwith Needs Group Queue; and (b) to receive a further report on this at the meeting in February 1998.

12. Housing Benefit Backlog: Strategy for Action

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on a proposed strategy to address the Housing Benefit backlog.

It has been acknowledged that the administration of Housing Benefit applications for both private and public sector tenants in North Ayrshire has been marked by delays, despite the purchase of a new unified Housing Benefit and Council Tax computer system, and constant overtime by staff. In addition, processing times have been affected by the volume of personal enquiries from applicants who are awaiting decisions and the annual review of Housing Benefit applications in the Irvine area. There is currently a backlog in processing private and public sector applications received in June 1997, applications for backdating of Housing Benefit received in April 1997, notification of change in circumstances received in June 1997 and overpayments identified in June 1997.

The Director of Housing Services will, during November and December, employ seven Employment Bureau staff and, until 31 March 1998, six temporary staff at a total cost of £42,000 which can be accommodated within the Housing HRA Capital Programme. Following the processing of all outstanding applications management measures will be

implemented to ensure that no further backlogs arise in the future.

The Committee agreed to approve the measures detailed in the report.

13. Largs: Sinclair Terrace: Adoption of Road

(Previous Minute Reference: Infrastructure and Environment Services Committee 24 September 1997.)

Submitted report by the Chief Executive advising of a recommendation from the Infrastructure and Environment Services Committee on the proposed adoption of the road at Sinclair Terrace, Largs.

The owner of the property at 50 Sinclair Drive, Largs has advised the Council of the effects on his property of uncontrolled access of motor vehicles to Sinclair Terrace and that these problems appear to be caused by (a) the narrowness of the street; (b) the parking of motor vehicles; and (c) the surcharging of the boundary wall by motor vehicles mounting the footway.

Sinclair Terrace has not been adopted by the local authority but the east side of the street is owned by the Council. There are however difficulties in determining ownership on the west side of the street. If the road were adopted by the Planning, Roads and Environment Directorate traffic management issues could be further investigated and the action required to alleviate the problems determined. It is proposed that a programme of works be undertaken to bring the road up to the necessary standard for adoption by the Planning, Roads and Environment Directorate.

The Committee agreed a programme of works at an estimated cost of £5,545 to bring the road at Sinclair Terrace, Largs up to a minimum standard for adoption.

14. Stevenston: Land Adjacent to 83C Glencairn Street

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee 18 September 1997.)

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the outcome of a site visit to ground adjacent to 83C Glencairn Street, Stevenston by the Chair, Vice-Chair and local Member which recommended that the Committee refuse to declare the ground in question surplus to requirements.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to continue consideration of the item to allow the appropriate officers to carry out further investigations on the possibility of enhancing the security of the property and report to the next meeting.

15. Sale of Assets: 23 Keppenburn Avenue, Fairlie and 108 Overtoun Road, Springside

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on the proposed sale of properties and associated ground at 23 Keppenburn Avenue, Fairlie and 108 Overtoun Road, Springside.

(a) 23 Keppenburn Avenue, Fairlie

Quarriers Homes have expressed an interest in purchasing the property at 23 Keppenburn Avenue, Fairlie which they have let from the Council since September 1983 and

currently use as a “halfway house” to prepare young people for living independently in the community.

Organisations do not have the right to buy at a discounted price Council property which they currently lease. The market price for the property would be in the region of £35,000 and Quarriers Homes have now formally approached the Council with an offer of purchase during the financial year 1 April 1998;

(b) 108 Overtoun Road, Springside

The four bedroomed house at 108 Overtoun Road, Springside is a former schoolhouse and has been vacant due to the lack of demand for four bedroomed

accommodation in the Springside area. The market value of the property at Overtoun Road is estimated at between £20,000 and £25,000.

In conclusion the Committee agreed (a) to recommend to the Support Services Committee the sale of the property at 23 Keppernburn Road, Fairlie to Quarriers Homes; and (b) that the Director of Housing Services submit a report to the next Meeting on the condition and likely demand for the property at 108 Overtoun Road, Springside.

16. Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland: Complaint of Injustice

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a complaint of injustice investigated by the Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland.

The Commissioner for Local Government Administration in Scotland investigated a complaint by Mr. T., the owner of a property in a Housing Action Area for Improvement regarding the handling by the Council of his individual grant application for improvement works compared to the handling of an earlier application which was submitted by a Housing application. Mr. T. had complained that works to his property which had previously been considered grant eligible, were not considered to be grant eligible after his individual application.

The Ombudsman advised that the Council should (a) re-assess what work would attract grant assistance taking account that the house, of which the rear extension forms part, requires to be brought up to the tolerable standard; and (b) that the Council should pay Mr. T. £500 for inconvenience suffered.

In addition, the Ombudsman has advised the Council to instruct staff to keep adequate records including notes of meetings. The Director of Housing Services has advised that his staff will be instructed to comply with these requirements.

The Committee agreed (a) to the payment of £500 to the complainant; (b) that the Director of Housing Services review the handling of Improvement Grant applications to ensure that they are determined in a consistent manner and that adequate records are kept at all times; and (c) to submit with powers, to the Chair and Vice-Chair to determine, if necessary, the outstanding grant applications by Mr. T. at the earliest possible date.

17. Private Sector Housing Grants

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

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

18. Saltcoats: No. 4 (55/77 Raise Street) Housing Action area for Improvement

(Previous Minute Reference: Housing Services Committee 5 June 1997.)

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on proposed Final Resolutions in respect of the Saltcoats Nos. 4, 5, & 6 Housing Action Areas for Improvement.

The Housing Services Committee at its Meeting on 5 June 1997 agreed (a) to make Draft Resolutions in respect of the Saltcoats Nos. 4, 5 & 6 Housing Action Areas for Improvement; and (b) to authorise the service of Repairs Notices in respect of the property as detailed therein.

The Committee agreed (a) to make the annexed Final Resolutions (Appendix HS2); and (b) to authorise the service of Repairs Notices in respect of the properties as detailed herein in respect of the following:-

Saltcoats No. 4 (55/77 Raise Street) Housing Action Area for Improvement;

Saltcoats No. 5 (42/52 Wellpark Road) Housing Action Area for Improvement;

Saltcoats No. 6 (1/5 Victoria Road and 2 Gladstone Road) Housing Action Area for Improvement.

19. Urgent Items

The Chair agreed that the undernoted item be considered as a matter of urgency.

20. Conferences and Seminars

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on an invitation from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to attend a one day Seminar in Glasgow on Wednesday, 26 November 1997 regarding Housing Benefit Review Board Procedures and Practice.

The Committee agreed to authorise Members of the North Ayrshire Housing Benefit Review Board to attend.

The Meeting ended at 3.10 p.m.