

Support Services Committee
26 January 1999

Irvine, 26 January 1999 - At a Meeting of the Support Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

David O'Neill, Alan Munro, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, John Donn, Elliot Gray, Margaret Highet, James Jennings, David Munn, George Steven and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

The Chief Executive; The Corporate Director (Property Services); The Assistant Chief Executives (Finance, Personnel, Development and Promotion, and Information Technology); D Addison, Head of Revenue Service (Finance); M McCormick, Media Relations Officer; and J Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr. O'Neill in the Chair.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 1 December 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Annual Accounts: Audit Reports for 1996/97 and 1997/98

Submitted reports by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the Audits of the Accounts for 1996/97 and 1997/98, prepared for the Council by the Accounts Commission.

The Chief Executive reported that, while the outcome of both audits has been positive, a number of matters which will require to be addressed have been drawn to the attention of the Council. The Auditor has confirmed that he is satisfied with the explanations offered and with the action proposed by the Council in this regard. The Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) gave a brief summary of the issues identified by the auditor in respect of both sets of Annual Accounts and of the proposals contained within two Action Plans to address these. Both sets of accounts have now been finalised.

Noted.

3. Collection Statements

Submitted statements by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the current collection levels in respect of Community Charge and Council Tax to 31 December 1998.

A total of £75,000 in November 1998 and £95,000 in December 1998 was collected in respect of Community Charge leaving outstanding recoverable debt of £16,181,000. A total of £729,000 has been collected to date during this financial year, and on current trends will result in a shortfall of £600,000 on the allocations originally estimated.

A total of £2,408,000 in November 1998 and £3,245,000 in December 1998 was collected in respect of Council Tax, leaving outstanding recoverable debt of £13,625,000.

Noted.

4. Council Tax Debt Recovery Team

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the activities of the Debt Recovery Team and on proposals to make five existing temporary posts permanent.

North Ayrshire Council was previously allocated £106,690 by the Scottish Office to meet additional expenditure on the recovery of outstanding Community Charge and Council Tax. Consequently, five additional staff were appointed on temporary contracts to undertake debt recovery work in Finance. One post was subsequently moved to Legal and Regulatory Services. Details were provided on the work undertaken by the Debt Recovery Team which has led to the recovery of debts amounting to £171,000 over an eleven-month period plus a further £394,000 secured from Income Support deductions. Since substantial levels of debt remain outstanding in respect of Community Charge and Council Tax, it is proposed that the five temporary Debt Recovery Team posts which are graded GS1/2 be made permanent with effect from 1 April 1999.

The costs of the Debt Recovery Team to 31 March 1999 will be met by additional resources provided by the Scottish Office. Details were provided in respect of the additional costs of the posts in 1999/2000, amounting to £42,340 in Finance and £10,239 in Legal and Regulatory Services. Budget provision will be required for this expenditure.

The Committee agreed (a) that the four temporary GS1/2 posts in Finance and one post in Legal and Regulatory be made permanent, with effect from 1 April 1999; and (b) to recommend to the Corporate Strategy Committee that appropriate provision be made for the additional costs of £52,579 in 1999/2000.

5. Non Domestic Rates: Discretionary Relief

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the powers available to the Council to introduce a scheme for the discretionary relief of rates on certain properties in rural areas.

On 10 February 1998, the Committee agreed to note the arrangements for the mandatory relief of rates, the full cost of which is met by the non-domestic rates pool which is shared by all councils. Mandatory relief of 50% was given for nine Post Offices but no applications for mandatory relief were received in relation to General Stores despite advertisements and contact with local members to attempt to identify potential claims.

In relation to the discretionary relief of rates, 25% of this cost is met by the Council and 75% by the non-domestic rates pool. It is proposed that discretionary relief of 100% be afforded to village schools, village halls, car parks and public conveniences. It is further proposed that 50% discretionary relief be afforded to Post Offices disqualified from mandatory relief because they are not the sole Post Office in an area. Where the Council is the rated occupier of properties subject to discretionary relief, the chargeable service receives a full reduction in the rates charged. Only 25% of the cost of affording discretionary relief is met by the Council in the determination of Revenue Support Grant. The Council will reduce net expenditure met by the Council Tax by approximately £45,000 as a result of the proposed relief scheme. The cost to the Council through the loss of Revenue Support Grant will be approximately £12,000, resulting in savings of £33,000.

A view was expressed that the Council should take the opportunity to consider the discretionary relief of rates to assist businesses in rural areas within North Ayrshire rather than to the types of properties proposed which are in the Council's ownership.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the scheme for discretionary relief of rates to properties in rural settlements in the terms indicated in the report, with effect from 1 April 1999.

6. General Services Capital Programme: Property Management

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) on proposals to undertake certain property management activities which will require Capital funding in 1999/2000.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the Capital Programme proposals for 1999/2000 in the terms indicated in the report and (b) that the proposals for the property management aspects of the General Services Capital Programme for 1999/2000 be referred to the Corporate Strategy Committee for consideration.

7. Standing Restricted List of Contractors for Building and Related Works

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Property Services) seeking approval for additional Contractors to be added to the current List of Contractors for Building and Related Works.

The Committee agreed that the additional Contractors detailed in the report be included on the Council's list.

8. Minutes

(a) Joint Consultative Committee (Teaching Staffs)

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix SS1), being the Minutes of the Joint Consultative Committee (Teaching Staffs) Meeting held on 27 November 1998.

Noted.

(b) Support Services Sub-Committee on Severance Arrangements

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix SS2), being the Minutes of the Support Services Sub-Committee on Severance Arrangements Meeting held on 1 December 1998.

Noted.

(c) Joint Consultative Committee (Manual & Craft Workers)

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix SS3), being the Minutes of the Joint Consultative Committee (Manual & Craft Workers) Meeting held on 4 December 1998.

Noted.

(d) Joint Consultative Committee (APT & C Staffs)

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix SS4), being the Minutes of the Joint Consultative Committee (APT & C Staffs) Meeting held on 4 December 1998.

Noted.

(e) Council Tax Review Board

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix SS5), being the Minutes of the Council Tax Review Board Meeting held on 5 January 1999.

Noted.

9. Policy on Preservation of Earnings and Conditions of Services: Chief Officials, APT & C Staffs, Manual Workers and Craft Operatives

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on Council policy and practice applicable to preservation of earnings and other related conditions of service.

In terms of the current inherited practice in relation to earnings preservation, where a post has been downgraded as the outcome of a review the postholder continues to enjoy the higher grade and salary which is preserved for the duration of the postholder's occupancy of the post. This practice, if continued, will create inequitable pressures in relation to equal opportunities in employment which are challengeable through employment tribunals and will result in increased and continual pressure on budgets.

The current application of earnings preservation where jobs are restructured comes from an interpretation of the various clauses in the National Conditions of Service. It is COSLA's interpretation that the safeguarding clauses do not apply to local reviews within individual councils and in support of this view the pending "single status" agreement anticipated by 1 April 1999 will remove certain clauses from the Conditions of Service of APT&C Staffs and Manual Workers. A number of Councils in Scotland have already taken steps to discontinue the application of safeguarding clauses since 1 April 1996. It is proposed that the Council adopt a new policy on this matter, details of which were given in the report.

The Committee agreed that:-

(a) where the Council undertakes organisational staffing reviews or job restructuring which result in any post being reduced in grade, the current salary of the affected employee(s) will be frozen at the current spinal column point and the current salary applying to that post for a three year period. Thereafter, the grade and salary of the new post will apply. If at any point during the three year period the salary of the new post should exceed the frozen salary of the old post, then the new salary and grading shall take effect at that time. In any event the new salary and grading shall apply at the end of the three year preservation period;

(b) changes to other terms and conditions of service, including overtime, shift and other pay enhancements arising out of organisational reviews or job restructuring, will not be subject to any form of preservation, though the impact of change will be subject to consultation with the trade unions representing the affected employees; and

(c) in the event that employee numbers are to be reduced by reason of redundancy, alternative offers of employment shall be made to the affected employees subject to availability. The alternative offers of employment shall be subject to the pay and terms of conditions applying to that employment with immediate effect. Preservation will not apply to any term of the post being terminated.

10. Social Services: Staffing Reports

(a) Review of Clerical Post within the Irvine Area Team

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on the outcome of a review of the clerical support currently attached to the Irvine Area Team.

A recent increase in the staffing complement of the Irvine Area Team resulting from the transfer of four Community Development staff previously located within the Three Towns, has resulted in an increase in the workload of the existing clerical support. Details were provided on proposals to transfer an existing Clerical Assistant post from the Three Towns Area Team to the Irvine Area Team including amendments to the current hours of work attached to the post. The effect of the staffing change will result in additional costs of £5,365 per annum to be funded from the savings made in the running costs associated with the closure of Ardrossan Community Flat.

The Committee agreed (i) to approve the transfer of one Clerical Assistant post graded GS1/2 from the Three Towns Area Team to the Irvine Area Team; and (ii) that the hours for the post be increased from 17.5 hours per week to 35 hours per week.

(b) Addiction Centre Developments

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on proposed amendments to the staffing structure within Social Services.

Social Services have for some years assisted the local Health Board in delivering a substitute (methadone) prescribing service by providing premises and back-up counselling support at the Addiction Centres in Townhead, Irvine, and in Vernon Street, Saltcoats. This service is now subject to increased and excessive demands resulting in new referrals having to be rejected. It is proposed to augment the service to meet the increasing demand.

Additional funding for expansion has been identified by Ayrshire and Arran Health Board and the Community Health Care NHS Trust and details of proposed additional posts to be created within the Addiction Centres were given in the report. The effect of the proposed staffing changes will result in additional costs amounting to £37,763 per annum, to be funded by Ayrshire and Arran Health Board and the Community Health Care NHS Trust with no additional costs to the Council.

The Committee agreed (i) to approve the addition of two Project Worker posts, graded APII/III and with 7.5% Irregular Hours Allowance with one post to be located within each centre; and (ii) that the existing Clerical Assistant posts (3.5 posts) within the two Centres be redesignated Clerical Officer and regraded from GS1/2 to GS3.

(c) Augmented Home Care: Three Towns

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on proposals for the

establishment of additional posts within Social Work Services.

The Social Work Committee on 18 November 1998 agreed to provide additional Community Care services to the physically frail, elderly and elderly mentally infirm within North Ayrshire. Augmented Home Care Schemes are already established in the Garnock Valley and Irvine areas and it is now proposed to establish a third Scheme based in the Three Towns area. Full details of the proposed new staffing structure incorporating seven new posts were provided in the report. The total additional costs of the new structure amount to £72,611 per annum and budgetary provision has been made for all additional costs through Resource Transfer monies from Ayrshire and Arran Health Board.

The Committee agreed to approve the establishment of a third Augmented Home Care Scheme in the Three Towns area incorporating the staffing structure detailed in the report.

11. IT Services: Revised Grading Schemes for Analyst/Programmers and IT Support Officers

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel) on proposals for a revision of the existing grade schemes for Analyst/Programmers and IT Support Officers.

As a result of increased demand for IT staff within the labour market, difficulties have been experienced in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced Analyst/Programmers and IT Support Officers. Since a number of posts still remain unfilled placing a strain on service delivery, greater flexibility is required within the grading schemes which now require revision. Full details of the proposed revised grading schemes were provided in the report. There will be no financial implications arising from the implementation of the revised grading schemes.

The Committee agreed to approve the revised grading schemes in the terms indicated in the report.

12. Irvine: Heatherhouse Road: Heatherhouse Industrial Estate: Unit 21: New Lease

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the lease of Unit 21, Heatherhouse Industrial Estate, Heatherhouse Road, Irvine to Spraytech Limited, previously agreed by the Chair as a matter of urgency.

The Committee agreed to homologate the decision of the Chair.

13. Irvine: South Newmoor: 28/32 Mackintosh Place: Factory: New Lease

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the lease of the factory at 28/32 Mackintosh Place, South Newmoor, Irvine from Ashtenne Investments (Scotland) Limited, previously agreed by the Chair as a matter of urgency.

The Committee agreed to homologate the decision of the Chair.

14. Irvine: Galt House: Unit G/4

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the Assignment of the Lease of Unit G/4, Galt House, Irvine.

The Committee agreed that the lease of the above premises be assigned from Ramvale Limited to the named Partners of McSherry Halliday on the terms and conditions previously agreed.

15. Irvine: Land at Southern Gailes

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the disposal of land at Southern Gailes, Ayr Road, Irvine.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Principal Estates Officer to enter into detailed negotiations with those parties who have expressed an interest in the above site and report on the outcome.

16. Stevenston: Shops and Flats: 14/28 Shore Road and Car Park at Shore Road

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the disposal of shops and flats at 14/28 Shore Road and the Car Park at Shore Road, Stevenston.

The Committee agreed to continue consideration pending a decision by the Housing Services Committee to declare the land surplus to requirements.

17. Kilbirnie: Sites at Bankfaulds Avenue and Cochrane Street

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on the disposal of sites at Bankfaulds Avenue and Cochrane Street, Kilbirnie.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Principal Estates Officer to negotiate the sale of the above sites to the Cunninghame Housing Association and report on the outcome.

18. Fairlie: Southannan: Southannan House, Gatehouse and Lodge House

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotion) on offers received for the purchase of Southannan House, Gatehouse and Lodge House, Southannan, Fairlie.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the offer from McAlindon Building Contractors Limited in the sum of £425,000 be accepted.

19. Disposal of Properties

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Development and Promotional Services) on the disposal of the undernoted properties, including the re-marketing of the former Kylehill Primary School, Saltcoats, previously agreed by the Chair as a matter of urgency:-

(i)	Saltcoats: The Braes: Development Site	(£70,000);
(ii)	Saltcoats: Glencairn Street: Former Kylehill Primary School	(Demolition and re-marketing of site on open market);
(iii)	Fairlie: School Brae: Former Fairlie Primary School	(£51,110);
(iv)	Ardrossan: South Crescent: Former St Peter's Primary School	(£205,000); and
(v)	Irvine: 82 East Road: Former Roads Depot	(£10,000).

The Committee agreed to homologate the decisions of the Chair in each case.

The meeting ended at 2.55 p.m.