

Corporate Strategy Committee
3 March 1998

Irvine, 3 March 1998 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Strategy Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

James Clements, Jack Carson, Ian Clarkson, Stewart Dewar, John Donn, David Gallagher, Samuel Gooding, Jane Gorman, James Jennings, Joseph McKinney, Thomas Morris, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, Robert Reilly and John Sillars.

In Attendance

The Chief Executive, the Directors of Education, Financial Services and Community and Recreational Services, the Head of Corporate Business, the Legal Services, Personnel Services, Architectural Services and Information Technology Services Managers, J. Tulips, Head of Education Services (Education), A. Hewitt, Head of Service Management (Social Work), M. Pepper, Principal Officer Marketing and Publicity, M. Hewitt, Corporate Policy Officer and S. Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr Clements in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Thomas Dickie, George Steven and Samuel Taylor.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 20 January and 17 February 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Year 2000

Submitted report by the Architectural Services Manager on the potential impact of the century date change on Council business systems and non-IT equipment and the action being taken to address this issue. A presentation was also made to the Committee by the Information Technology Services Manager.

An Officers Working Group has been established to consider the problem and agree an action plan. The century date change will impact on the Council in relation to IT equipment and non-IT equipment embedded systems, which cover facilities such as fire alarms, heating controls, warden call systems, lift systems, traffic light systems etc. The action required includes (i) creating a verified inventory of all systems of IT hardware/software and non-IT embedded systems; (ii) auditing these systems for date compliance; (iii) conducting a risk analysis on the impact of failure and producing a prioritised list of systems to fix, with contingency plans for systems which cannot be fixed in time; (iv) estimating the time and cost necessary to fix systems; and (v) preparing a programme for implementation and testing. Due to the complexities of the problem and the short timescale, it is considered that that necessary skills to carry out the tasks required are not available from within the authority given also the engineering element involved in the embedded systems. Consequently this service will require to be obtained from the private sector, viz. a full time Project Team, inclusive of two Analysts/Programmers for a period of one year at a cost of approximately £180,000.

A letter has been received jointly from the Scottish Office Development Department and COSLA impressing on local authorities the need to act quickly to address the problems surrounding the year 2000 computer date change, but there is no indication of any additional finance being made available.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to note the proposed action to minimise the impact of the year 2000 on the Council's services; (b) to approve in principle appropriate funding from the Capital Programme estimated at £250,000 in 1998/99, which will include the cost of obtaining a Project Team, and £200,000 in 1999/2000 to support the action, subject to ratification by the Special Corporate Strategy Committee on the Capital Programme; (c) to respond to the letter from the Scottish Office Development Department and COSLA welcoming their initiative on the matter, but urging the Scottish Office to provide appropriate funding; and (d) to write to the two local MPs in similar terms.

3. Scheme of Delegation to Officers

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on adjustments to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

On 21 May 1996, the Committee approved the Scheme of Delegation to Officers which provided for a subsequent review to be undertaken. The review is in the process of being completed, taking into account changes in legislation as well as structures within Directorates and the transfer of functions. The main amendments proposed relate to small scale land transactions.

The Committee agreed that the next Special Meeting of the Committee consider the full revised Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

4. North Ayrshire Economic Renewal

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on discussions to date with the Scottish Office in relation to Enterprise Zone status and options for determining development partnerships.

Since the conference on the Regeneration of North Ayrshire held in Ardrossan in February 1997, a number of activities have taken place in pursuit of Enterprise Zone status, including a meeting with the Ministers of the Scottish Office and continued contact between senior officials at the Scottish Office and the Council. Scottish Office officials have indicated that the possibility of Enterprise Zone status will take 2/3 years to develop and will be dependent on a number of issues. The Scottish Office initially requested that the Council submit a list of sites which would in the Council's opinion be likely to form the area of an Enterprise Zone. This list has since been submitted. The Scottish Office have also indicated that they would wish the Council to carry out a cost benefit analysis on the relative significance of existing assistance measures compared with those which might be available under Enterprise Zone status. The indications are that progress towards Enterprise Zone status will be inevitably slow. A similar initiative at East Durham, with whom the Council have been liaising, took 4 years. As well as the pursuit of Enterprise Zone status, consideration has been given to looking at alternative methods for achieving the development of North Ayrshire, in particular the creation of partnerships with appropriate developers.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Head of Corporate Business continue to work directly with the Scottish Office towards the achievement of Enterprise Zone status; (b) to note that subject to information being received from the Scottish Office on the criteria for a cost benefit analysis on the appropriateness of Enterprise Zone status compared to other economic development measures, a further report will be submitted detailing the likely costs of such an analysis; and (c) that the Head of Corporate Business identify possible developers to enter into a partnership arrangement with the Council and report back with proposals to a future meeting of the Committee.

5. North Ayrshire Regeneration Partnership: Decisions on Applications

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the decisions taken by the North Ayrshire Regeneration Partnership on applications for funding.

On 20 January 1998, the Committee agreed (a) to establish a Working Group to consider the applications for funding under the Urban Programme currently being evaluated by the North Ayrshire Regeneration Partnership, with a view to making recommendations to the Partnership, and (b) to appoint the Leader of the Council as the representative on the Partnership Committee.

The Working Group's views were subsequently submitted to Partnership Implementation Team and the final decisions on the applications were taken by the Partnership on 12 February 1998. The Partnership further agreed that priority should be given to supporting the development of the community and voluntary sectors and their involvement with the Partnership and that the Council be invited to submit proposals on how this might be achieved.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the decisions taken by the North Ayrshire Regeneration Partnership on 12 February 1998 as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report; and (b) that a report on the involvement of the community and voluntary sectors within the Partnership be submitted to a future meeting.

6. Catering Contract for the Magnum and Auchenharvie Leisure Centres and Vikingar

Submitted (a) Note of the meeting of the Member/Officer Working Group on the catering contract for the Magnum and Auchenharvie Leisure Centres and Vikingar held on 20 February, 1998; (b) report by the Legal Services Manager on the results of the tender evaluation process; and (c) report by the Directors of Community and Recreational Services and Commercial Services on the future provision of catering services at the centres.

On 23 September 1997, the Committee agreed to exercise the break clause in the contract for the catering services at the Magnum and Auchenharvie Centres and to advise the present contractor that the contract would be terminated with effect from 31 March 1998. On 26 November 1997, the Committee agreed that four contractors be invited to tender for the contract and that Vikingar be included. An Officers' Evaluation Panel was established, including an external evaluator to assess the tenders and it was further agreed that the Panel should report in the first instance to a Member/Officer Working Group. By the closing date, only one tender had been received, from Caterleisure Limited. The Member/Officer Working Group received a presentation from Caterleisure Limited on 20 February 1998. The Officers Evaluation Panel thereafter completed the assessment of the tender against a pre-determined set of criteria covering a number of key areas viz. (i) quality management; (ii) catering abilities; (iii) financial standing of the company; (iv) health and safety procedures (v) environmental considerations; and (vi) food safety procedures, as well as comparing the financial aspects of the bid. The weighting element in the evaluation of the contract is 60:40 for price and quality respectively. On the basis of the scoring the tender fell below the minimum requirement on quality and on completion of the evaluation, the Panel is unable to recommend acceptance of the tender.

The Committee agreed not to accept the tender from Caterleisure Limited, on the grounds that it is not considered to be a satisfactory offer and does not represent good value to the Council.

Following this decision, in order to ensure a continuity of catering service at these facilities, the Committee further agreed (a) that the catering service at the Magnum, the Auchenharvie Centre and Vikingar be provided by the Commercial Services Directorate with effect from 1 April 1998; and (b) that a report on (i) the financial implications of this provision; and (ii) the long term provision of the services be submitted to a future meeting.

7. Welfare to Work: New Deal

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on the proposed Council participation in the New Deal.

The New Deal is the major part of the government's Welfare to Work Strategy. The target client groups are young people aged 18 - 24 years who have been out of work for 6 months or more and those who are aged 25 and over who have been out of work for 2 years or more with the programme for 18 - 24 year olds commencing on 1 April 1998 and for 25 year olds and over on 1 June 1998. In the case of 18 - 24 year olds, there will be participation in a programme of options, viz. (i) employment subsidy; (ii) environment task force; (iii) voluntary sector; and (iv) full time education. At a strategic level, the New Deal is being co-ordinated and planned on an Ayrshire wide basis through an Ayrshire Strategic Planning Group, comprising representatives of the three Ayrshire Councils, Enterprise Ayrshire, the voluntary sector, the Chamber of Commerce, Trade Unions and the Employment Service. The overall lead body responsible for delivering the New Deal is the Employment Service. At a local level, the most widely developed model of delivery is through partnership with other bodies such as local authorities, enterprise companies and the voluntary sector, although an alternative delivery model of a consortium has also been developed.

Local authorities in Scotland have been requested by the Employment Service to undertake the lead body role in managing the environment option and to submit a tender proposal to manage this option by 20 February 1998. In view of the short timescale, the Personnel Services Department and the Planning, Roads and Environment Directorate submitted the tender, subject to the Committee's final decision.

The Council can also contribute to the New Deal as an employer in its own right or through current programmes e.g. Employment Grants Scheme.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Council confirm its commitment to participation in the Ayrshire Strategic Planning Group for the New Deal; (b) within the North Ayrshire area (i) that the Council be the lead body in the Environment Task Force Option with other New Deal options being led by the Employment Service, Enterprise Ayrshire and the voluntary sector; and (ii) that the Director of Planning, Roads and Environment report back in due course on options for the rationalising of existing partnership arrangements into a new consortium which would incorporate the lead body role for all New Deal options; and (c) to instruct all Council Directorates to examine existing service provision and community support programmes where they overlap with or complement New Deal; (d) that a report be submitted in due course on the implications of adapting that service provision to incorporate the New Deal objectives; (e) that where the Council is acting as an employer, the £60.00 per week subsidy be lodged in a separate central development fund to offset the costs of operating the scheme; and (f) that the existing Skillseeker and Adult Training Programmes be continued in so far as they complement the New Deal programme.

8. Best Value

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on progress on the Best Value submission.

On 20 January 1998, the Committee noted that the Scottish Office had advised that the Council would be included within the next batch of Authorities to be granted further exemption from CCT, subject to final agreement on the Council's Best Value Implementation Plan. A formal announcement by the Secretary of State has now been made confirming this exemption.

The Council's Implementation Plan, including the 3 Year Service Review Programme now requires to be finalised. The Council will thereafter require to make a further submission to the Scottish Office in autumn 1998 to demonstrate progress in achieving Best Value. A report on the Implementation Plan will be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Noted.

9. Customer Comments Scheme: Performance Review Report for Quarter Ended 31 December 1998

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on the statistics for the Customer Comments Scheme for the quarter ending 31 December 1997.

The overall number of customer comments recorded during the quarter was 251, which compares with 211 received during the previous quarter. A clear upward trend is emerging, which should be viewed as a positive sign that the Scheme is increasingly being used as a method of customer feedback.

Noted.

10. Children's Services Plan

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the proposed North Ayrshire Children's Services Plan.

On 27 November 1996, the Committee agreed to establish a Member/Officer Working Group to oversee the preparation of a Children's Services Plan for North Ayrshire. The Working Group have now produced the Draft Plan, which is a strategic document on the delivery of children's services over the 3 year period from 1998 to 2001. It is to be reviewed each year, with a full review every 3 years. The Plan explains the significant issues for each service in terms of how they are delivered to children in need and additionally each section highlights the existing significant issues for services and how these can be addressed. Full public consultation was undertaken on the Plan and comments made were taken into account. The Plan will now be submitted to the Secretary of State.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the Children's Services Plan; (b) that a Review Group be established comprising the Member/Officer Working Group and representatives from the Police, the Health Services, the Authority Reporter and the Children's Panel Chair; and (c) that the Group meet on a regular basis with a view to overseeing the implementation of the Plan.

11. Off Site Activities

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on progress in the formation of a new North Ayrshire Council Excursion Policy and a proposed circular on off site activities.

On 15 April 1997, the Committee approved that part of the North Ayrshire Council Excursion Policy relating to adventure activities in particular to hill walking. There was also a need, however, to address the matter of regulating activities of a lesser nature than those covered under the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations. A proposed Circular has therefore been drawn up covering all off-site activities including day excursion trips, overnight trips, residential and overseas visits. The Circular relates to all Council Directorates particularly Education, Community and Recreational Services and Social Work, who provide organised activities for members of the public, including schoolchildren, young people, community groups, the elderly etc. It provides guidelines for the running of such activities to ensure as far as possible the safety and enjoyment of those participating and includes a set of standard forms for obtaining approval to run off-site activities and for participants to give their consent. Any outside body who supplies an activity to the Council will require to comply with the Council's standards and enter into a Service Level Agreement with the Council to ensure that the standards are maintained.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the Circular on off-site activities as appended to the report; and (b) to advise all Directorates (i) to adhere to procedures contained in the Circular in respect of all off-site activities; and (ii) that any provider of off-site activity to the Council should

comply with the standard set by the Council and enter into a Service Level Agreement.

12. Further Education Implementation Group

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the current position with regard to further education developments in North Ayrshire.

On 26 November 1997, the Committee considered a letter from the Scottish Office Minister for Education and Industry, confirming his approval of the McCool report on further education provision in North Ayrshire and the establishment by James Watt College of a mainstream further education college in Kilwinning. His letter also indicated that decisions involving capital investment in the Three Towns should be deferred until the Kilwinning college is on stream. It was envisaged, however, that once the curriculum for Kilwinning was clarified, representations could be made to the Minister to look at provision in the Three Towns.

A Further Education Implementation Group was set up, led by the Council, to progress the development of the further education college in Kilwinning including the exact scale of the development and its planned curriculum. The Group which includes representatives from James Watt, Kilmarnock and Ayr colleges, has now issued the proposed curriculum for the Kilwinning college to interested parties for consultation, including the respective college boards. The Minister for Education and Industry has been updated on the progress and has also been advised that the Group considers it would now be possible to proceed with the expansion of further education provision in the Three Towns, while ensuring that the provision is complementary to that being planned in Kilwinning and any new developments complement the existing provision in the Three Towns.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the work of the Implementation Group to date; and (b) that a report on the Minister's response in relation to an earlier development in the Three Towns be submitted to the Committee in due course.

13. Code of Guidance on Funding External Bodies and Following the Public Pound

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on the Operational Guidance issued by COSLA and the Accounts Commission for Scotland in respect of Funding External Bodies and Following the Public Pound.

The Operational Guidance seeks to deal with a number of issues on the use by Councils of Trusts and companies which they set up and the funding provided for grant aided organisations and voluntary bodies, including the issue of proportionality. It suggests that Councils in considering whether a funding relationship is "substantial" should take into account the following factors:- (i) the Guidance does not apply to straightforward contractor relationships; (ii) a substantial financial relationship is likely to involve Council expenditure equal to the product of at least £1 in the Council Tax; (iii) the significance to the external organisation of the Council's financial contribution; and (iv) whether the Council's contribution represent 30% or more of the organisation's funding.

The Committee agreed (a) to establish an Officer Working Group to consider the implications of implementing the Code of Guidance in its entirety in North Ayrshire and report back in early course; and (b) that the Officer Working Group report in the first instance to Members comprising the Chair and Vice-Chair, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Support Services Committee and Councillor Donn, prior to reporting back to the Committee.

14. Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Membership

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the terms of reference and the membership of the Commission on Local Government and the local Parliament.

The Commission will (a) consider (i) how to build the most effective relations between

local Government and the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive so that collectively they can best serve Scotland's people; (ii) how Councils can make themselves responsive and democratically accountable to the communities which they serve; and (b) report to the First Minister of the Scottish Parliament as soon as possible after his or her election. The remit is wide-ranging and may include examination of the role of Councillors, Councils' political management structures and alternative models such as directly elected leadership and "Cabinet" systems of political management. In carrying out its task, the Commission intends to visit all Councils in Scotland between April and June 1998.

Noted.

15. Area Committees

(a) North Coast and Arran Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS1) of the North Coast and Arran Area Committee, being the Minutes of its meeting held on 16 February 1998.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

(b) Garnock Valley Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS2) of the Garnock Valley Area Committee, being the Minutes of its meeting held on 17 February 1998.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

(c) Kilwinning, Dreghorn and Springside Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS3) of the Kilwinning, Dreghorn and Springside Area Committee, being the Minutes of its meeting held on 18 February 1998.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

(d) Irvine Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS4) of the Irvine Area Committee, being the Minutes of its meeting held on 18 February 1998.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

(e) Three Towns Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS5) of the Three Towns Area Committee, being the Minutes of its meeting held on 19 February 1998.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

16. CCTV in North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on proposals by the Three Towns Initiative to implement a pilot CCTV scheme in the Three Towns area.

On 26 November 1997, the Committee agreed that the possibility of funding CCTV on a North Ayrshire wide basis should be investigated. Subsequently, a letter has been received from the Three Towns Initiative seeking the Council's formal support for plans to implement a CCTV scheme within North Ayrshire. Initially the scheme will cover Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston, but it is anticipated that it will act as a pilot for the eventual introduction of CCTV throughout the rest of the area. As a first step, the Three Towns Initiative plan to produce a feasibility study and

related business plan to demonstrate the viability of the project.

The Committee agreed (a) to support the introduction of a CCTV scheme in the Three Towns area as a first step towards implementing a scheme covering the whole of North Ayrshire; and (b) to make a financial contribution from the Community Safety Challenge Budget towards the feasibility study.

17. North Ayrshire Women's Aid

Submitted report by Chief Executive on an application for financial assistance in 1998/99 from North Ayrshire Women's Aid.

In 1996/97 and 1997/98 a total grant of £340,575 was awarded to Women's Aid. Women's Aid have requested an increased amount of £363,735 in 1998/99, to allow a cost of living rise to be built into the wages for the full-time and part-time workers, to provide for a part-time Administration Officer and to meet the costs of a proposed rent increase for their offices and three refuges. There is provision in the Housing Services Directorate's budget for the same level of award as in 1997/98. In order that the award is not reduced by higher rental payments, it is proposed that the intended rent review be postponed.

The Committee agreed to approve payment of a grant of £340,575, including Housing Benefit payments, to North Ayrshire Women's Aid for 1998/99, to be made in two instalments.

18. Request for Financial Assistance: NHS 50th Anniversary Celebrations

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a request from Ayrshire and Arran Health Board for financial assistance of £100 towards the NHS 50th Anniversary Celebrations.

A Steering Group has been established to organise various functions and events. The Group has no source of income and is seeking contributions from the Health Board, Health Trusts and local authorities.

The Committee agreed to approve an award of £100.

19. European Information Service: Subscription

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a request to renew the annual subscription to the European Information Service, which provides a regular bulletin on European Policy and Legislation, along with a back-up enquiry service.

The Committee agreed to approve the renewal of the annual subscription at a cost of £195.

20. Corporate Strategy Grants Budget 1998/99

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the proposed grants budget for 1998/99 to community and voluntary organisations and other outside bodies.

The budget has been reduced by £25,000 from 1997/98, representing a saving of 6%. In determining priorities within the overall figure, consideration has been given to those activities targeted exclusively on North Ayrshire, organisations operating wholly within North Ayrshire and other bodies whose activities can be shown to benefit North Ayrshire or are consistent with policies and strategies of the Council.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the grants budget as detailed in the report; and (b) to consider at future meetings further applications for funding against outstanding balances within the relevant budget headings.

21. Celebrating the Millennium: Scottish Conference

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on an invitation to be represented at the Celebrating the Millennium Conference to be held in the City Chambers, Glasgow on 13 March 1998.

The Committee agreed to approve the attendance of the Vice-Chair and Councillor Highet at this Conference.

The Meeting ended at 3 p.m.