

Support Services Committee
1 October 1996

Irvine, 1 October 1996 - 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, John Donn, Elliot Gray, Margaret Highet, James Jennings, David Munn, Stewart Dewar and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

The Chief Executive, the Director of Financial Services, Director of Housing Services, the Head of Corporate Business, the Personnel Services Manager, the Legal Services Manager, the Information Technology Services Manager and B. Hannah, an Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr. O'Neill in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Patrick Browne and George Steven.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Support Services Committee held on 20 August 1996, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Tendering for Banking Services

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services on the issue of tender documents for banking services.

On 25 October 1995 the Council approved the appointment of the Royal Bank of Scotland as interim bankers until 31 March 1997 with the selection of bankers thereafter being by competitive tender.

Tender documents have now been issued to the Royal Bank of Scotland, Clydesdale Bank, Co-operative Bank, Giro Bank Scotland, Bank of Scotland and TSB Bank of Scotland with the return date for submission of tenders being 18 October 1996. Thereafter an evaluation process will be undertaken.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) that, as part of the evaluation process, the three tenderers whose bids are considered to be most suitable be invited to give a presentation to the Chair, Vice-Chair and ex officio Members; and (b) that the Director of Financial Services report on the outcome of the tendering process to the next meeting of the Committee.

3. Recovery of Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and Community Charges

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services detailing, inter alia, policies for the recovery of outstanding Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and Community Charges.

At 1 April 1996 a total of £36,239,000 was owed to the Council in respect of outstanding payments for Community Charges, Council Tax and Non-Domestic rates. Of this sum a bad debt

provision in respect of arrears requires to be made by Glasgow City Council, the accounting authority responsible for Strathclyde Region. In 1996/97 a total of £65.3m is payable to the Council in respect of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates. Procedures have therefore been developed which, maximise collection and will be sensitive to the needs of those who, because of their personal circumstances find difficulty in paying but, will also demonstrate that the Council is willing to use its statutory powers against those who, whilst able to pay, are unwilling to do so.

Proactive measures will be used to recover all outstanding debt including liaison with Social Security and the use of Sheriff Officers to take action under Summary Warrants granted to the Council. The approach suggested will also refer people who are experiencing difficulty in meeting debts to agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Cunninghame Money Advice. In addition it is proposed that a procedure be introduced for Non-Domestic Rates cases with requests to proceed to Warrant Sales and hardship being considered by a Sub-Committee comprising the Chair and Vice-Chair together with the local Member by invitation. In the case of Council Tax or Community Charges the decision as to whether or not to proceed to a Warrant Sale is a matter for the Sheriff Officer but, it is considered that to safeguard the interests of those persons who are unable to pay, Sheriff Officers would provide details of the case to the Director of Financial Services who, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee would determine whether, in the circumstances, the Sale should proceed.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) to introduce the procedures detailed in the report for the billing, follow-up and recovery of Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and Community Charge; and (b) to establish a Sub-Committee comprising the Chair, Vice-Chair and the local Member to consider requests to proceed to Warrant Sale in respect of Non-Domestic Rates cases.

4. Collection Statement

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services on the current collection levels in respect of Community Charge and Council Tax.

The total outstanding recoverable debt in respect of Community Charge payments is £18,982 with collections to 27th September 1996 totalling £521,000. The outstanding amount of Council Tax is £17,786,000 with collections to 27 September 1996 being £10,052,000.

The Director of Financial Services reported that the Sheriff Officers had been requested to modify the terms of their correspondence to debtors following recent complaints received by the Council and this had now been done.

The Committee agreed that the Director of Financial Services (a) in consultation with the Council's Marketing and Publicity Officer, prepare a Press Release advising of payment mechanisms etc. for Council Tax bills; and (b) prepare a comprehensive briefing paper on the Council Tax for circulation to tenants/residents organisation, community councils and other community groups.

5. Group Life Assurance Cover for Elected Members

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services on the extension to the Group Life Assurance Scheme to include elected Members.

The Group Life Assurance Scheme operated by the Council is a non-contributory scheme for employees. The Scheme provides for the payment of twice the annual salary or earnings, inclusive of bonus payments where applicable, in the event of the death of an employee in service. The Scheme may be extended to include elected Members up to the age of 65 or 70 subject to the submission of a satisfactory medical report. The estimated cost of introducing this modification would be approximately £2,000.

After discussion the Committee agreed to extend the Group Life Assurance Scheme to provide cover for Members up to the age of 70 years.

6. Caird Centre, Hamilton

(Previous Minute Reference - Support Services Committee - 19 March 1996)

Submitted report by the Information Technology Services Manager on the proposed replacement of all Caird Centre services by 31 March 1998.

On 19 March 1996, the Committee agreed to approve the Information Technology Services Department's Service Delivery Plan. The Service Delivery Plan advised that a Service Level Agreement with South Lanarkshire Council for the Caird Centre services with regard to Council Tax and Benefits may last until 1998 beyond which alternative arrangements for Council Tax etc. would require to be made.

The services provided by the Caird Centre are Council Tax and Benefits System, Community Charge System and Printing Services (for financial systems and payroll) at an annual cost to the Council of £200,000 which is funded from the Information Technology Services Department's Revenue Budget. South Lanarkshire Council have now requested that the Council decide whether or not to commit to a third year with the Caird Centre i.e. until 31 March 1999 by 4 October 1996.

Since the introduction of the Service Level Agreement the revenue costs associated with Caird have increased twice and are now £235,000 per annum. The Service Level Agreement was received by the Council on 11 September 1996, five months after the contract commenced and, to date, no financial monitoring information relating to the Caird Centre has been received. The management arrangements for the Caird Centre have proved difficult and it is considered that there will be a depletion in the skills and knowledge leading to a further diminution in service.

As the costs associated with ending the use of services provided by the Caird Centre will be the same in year 3 as in year 2 and it is considered that the replacement of the systems should be commenced during year 2 thereby not incurring costs of a third year. The Council will therefore require to allocate appropriate resources for this.

After discussion the Committee agreed, subject to the approval of the Corporate Strategy Committee, to (a) end the use of services provided by the Caird Centre by 31 March 1998; and (b) to instruct the Information Technology Services Manager to (i) advise South Lanarkshire Council; and (ii) submit progress reports to the Committee on the proposed transfer from the Caird Centre.

7. Replacement of Council Tax Benefits and Rent Systems

((Previous Minute Reference - Support Services Committee - 30 April 1996

Submitted report by the Information Technology Services Manager on progress made in relation to the replacement of Council Tax, Benefits and Rent Systems.

On 30 April 1996 the Committee agreed that the Information Technology Services Manager, in consultation with the Director of Housing Services investigate the provision of a new computer system for the administration of Council Tax, Benefits and Rent Systems which would cater for all benefit transactions by usage of a common database.

The specification for the system is now nearing completion. The tender document seeks a modular solution thus allowing, at a future date, both the Housing Services and Financial Services Directorates to provide fully integrated systems in support of their service objectives. The tenders in respect of the new system will be returned towards the end of November 1996 with the evaluation thereof taking place in December 1996/January 1997.

After discussion the Committee agreed to instruct the Information Technology Services Manager to proceed with the tendering and evaluation process for the replacement of Council Tax, unified Benefits and Rents Systems.

8. Information Technology Services Manager: Progress Report

Submitted report by the Information Technology Services Manager on progress made in securing support services for Information Technology applications.

In June 1996, the Council in conjunction with other authorities and the West of Scotland Water Authority issued an invitation to tender for the support and maintenance of the following ex-regional systems, namely, Payroll Financial Management Systems, Social Work Systems, Architectural Systems and Road and Transport Costing.

A preliminary examination of the responses to the tender documents indicates that it is not financially possible for the Council to enter into a support contract for some of the systems. A further option involving mutual support from other authorities has been examined but can only provide limited cover in relation to system faults and will not permit any enhancement.

It is therefore proposed to support the existing systems for Payroll and Finance by extending the present maintenance contract to support the Social Work and Architectural Systems in-house and to obtain an external support contract for the Roads System.

After discussion the Committee approved the proposals for the support of existing systems.

9. Training Provision in North Ayrshire Council

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on training courses currently being undertaken by North Ayrshire Council employees.

Noted.

10. Arran Outdoor Education Resource

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on proposed additions to staffing within the Arran Outdoor Education Resource.

On 17 September 1996 the Education Committee agreed to an expansion of the Arran Outdoor Education Resource Centre. Consequently, an additional full-time instructor on salary grade AP4/PO1 requires to be appointed to work, on average, 42 hours per week. In addition, the hours of the existing cook, (manual worker grade 2) will require to be increased from 20 hours to 32 hours per week.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) to the creation of one additional full-time instructor on grade AP4/PO1; and (b) to the increase in the existing hours of the cook (manual worker grade 2) from 20 hours to 32 hours per week.

11. Staffing: Municipal Bank and Cash Section

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services on proposed staffing increases within the Municipal Bank and Cash Section of the Financial Services Directorate.

A review of staffing requirements at the Municipal Bank and Cash Section has recently been conducted which has identified that, due to the increase in volume of business, a further two Clerical Assistants at Grade GS1/2 are required.

After discussion the Committee agreed to the revised establishment structure for the Municipal Bank and Cash Section by the creation of 2 Clerical Assistant posts at Grade 1/2.

12. Housing Services Directorate: Structure

(Previous Minute Reference - Housing Services Committee - 19 September 1996)

Submitted report by the Chief Executive detailing changes/alterations to the structure of the Housing Services Directorate.

On 19 September 1996 the Housing Services Committee considered a report by the Director of Housing Services advising of a proposed structure for the Housing Services Directorate following the decision that properties in four of the Irvine Development Corporation ballot areas transfer to North Ayrshire Council. The Housing Services Committee agreed, subject to the approval of the Support Services Committee, to approve the revised structure.

The monitoring of the service delivery of Housing Services will be conducted through the Housing Services Committee and, where appropriate, through the Area Committees.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the revised staffing structure and grades as detailed in the report by the Director of Housing Services.

13. Out of School Care Services: Pilot Scheme: Cunninghame House

(Previous Minute Reference - Community and Recreational Services Committee - 24 September 1996)

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the proposed establishment of a pilot scheme for out of school care services.

On 24 September 1996 the Community and Recreational Services Committee agreed, subject to the approval of the Support Services Committee in respect of staffing implications, to establish a pilot Out of Care Services Scheme for employees of Cunninghame House during the October school week. A Scheme would allow employees based at Cunninghame House with children on holiday during the October school week to place them in the care of the Community and Recreational Services Directorate at an approximate cost of £50 per child.

After discussion the Committee agreed to remit any temporary staffing implications in relation to the operation of the Scheme to the Personnel Services Manager in consultation with the Director of Community and Recreational Services.

14. Staffing Establishment: Commercial Services and Financial Services Directorates

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager detailing the staffing establishments in the Directorates of Financial Services and Commercial Services and advising of a limited number of adjustments thereto.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) to approve the updated staffing establishments in respect of the Financial Services and Commercial Services Directorates; and (b) that the Personnel Services Manager, in consultation with the Director of Commercial Services advise Mr. Dewar of the operation of the system in relation to grounds maintenance in the Irvine area.

15. Irvine Development Corporation: Transfer of Staff

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager in respect of the transfer of staff from Irvine Development Corporation to North Ayrshire Council following success in the ballot for Irvine Development Corporation housing stock.

It is anticipated that approximately 21 members of staff will transfer to the Housing Services Directorate with a further 20 employees, mainly employed in ground maintenance, transferring to the

Commercial Services Directorate. The transfer of employees may be governed by the TUPE and Acquired Rights Directive. A number of differences exist between the Conditions of Service offered by Irvine Development Corporation and North Ayrshire Council which require to be addressed in consultations with the staff and their trade union representatives.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) to authorise the Personnel Services Manager to consult with the employees concerned and their trade union representatives on the issues arising from the transfer with a view to harmonising Conditions of Service and matching those transferred to posts in North Ayrshire Council; (b) that the Directors of Commercial Services and Housing Services submit reports to the appropriate Area Committees following the transfer of Irvine Development Corporation staff to the Commercial Services and Housing Services Directorates.

16. Summary of Staffing Numbers Within North Ayrshire Council

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on the staffing establishment of North Ayrshire Council.

The Personnel Services Manager reported on the number of full-time, temporary and seasonal employees in the Directorates of the Council.

Noted.

17. Irvine: Outbuilding at NMH (Scotland) Limited, Irvine Industrial Estate

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the proposed sale of an outbuilding at NMH (Scotland) Limited, Irvine Industrial Estate to NACCO Materials (Scotland) Limited.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposed sale of the building on the terms and conditions provisionally agreed by the Legal Services Manager.

18. Stevenston: 29/31 Warner Street and 1/11 Carment Drive

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the proposed purchase of Title in respect of 29/31 Warner Street and 1/11 Carment Drive.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Legal Services Manager to conclude the purchase of Title on the terms and conditions provisionally negotiated.

19. Largs Tourist Information Centre: Promenade, Largs

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the lease of Largs Tourist Information Centre to Ayrshire and Arran Tourist Board.

The Committee agreed to approve the grant of lease on the terms and conditions agreed by the Legal Services Manager.

20. Unit 1, Bridgend Dalry; Unit 2, Keppenburn, Fairlie; and Unit 3, Quarry Road, Irvine

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on applications for the grant of lease in respect of Unit 1, Bridgend, Dalry; Unit 2, Keppenburn, Fairlie; and Unit 3, Quarry Road, Irvine. The prospective tenants in all cases had indicated that there was urgency in obtaining the premises and, therefore, the Legal Services Manager in consultation with the Chair agreed to proceed with the tenancies subject to the conclusion of formal Missives of Let.

The Committee agreed to homologate the action taken.

21. Ground Lease of Former School Site Adjacent to the Springhill Institute, Overtoun Road, Springside

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on the proposed lease of ground extending to 0.197 acres at the former school site adjacent to the Springhill Institute, Overtoun Road, Springside to Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust.

The Legal Services Manager, in consultation with the Chair had, as a matter of urgency, approved the provisional terms and conditions of lease of the site.

The Committee agreed to homologate the action taken by the Chair.

22. Urgent Items

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

23. Council Tax Review Board: Membership

The Chief Executive reported on the requirement to establish a Council Tax Review Board for the consideration of appeals/reviews in respect of Council Tax levels.

The Council have a Housing Benefits Review Board comprising the Chair, Vice-Chair of Housing Services together with Mr. Dickie, Mrs. Gorman and Mr. Gallagher. It is therefore proposed to create a Joint Board dealing with both Council Tax and Housing Benefits.

The Committee agreed to establish a Review Board comprising the Chair and Vice-Chair together with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Housing together with Mr. Thomas Dickie, Mrs. Jane Gorman and Mr. David Gallagher.

24. Exclusion of the Public

Resolved, in terms of Section 50(A)4 of The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude from the meeting the press and the public for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

24. Education Directorate: Appeal Against Final Written Warning

Submitted the annexed reports (SS1 and SS2) of the Support Services (Appeals) Sub-Committee being the Minutes of their meeting held on (a) 30 August 1996; and (b) 11 September 1996.

The Committee agreed to adopt the reports.

The Meeting ended at 3.00 p.m.