

Corporate Strategy Committee
26 May 1998

Irvine, 26 May 1998 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Strategy Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

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

In Attendance

Chief Executive, The Directors of Education, Financial Services and Community and Recreational Services; A. Osborne, Corporate Policy Officer and S. Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr. Clements in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

John Donn, Samuel Gooding and George Steven.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 April 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Proposed North Ayrshire Leisure Trust

Submitted report by the Director of Community and Recreational Services on the feasibility of transferring the operation of North Ayrshire Council's leisure facilities to a Charitable Trust.

The Magnum, Vikingar, the Auchenharvie Centre and Garnock Pool among them account for approximately 27% of the entire net expenditure of the Community and Recreational Services Directorate. There has been a declining trend in usage over several years, resulting in income shortfalls in 1997/98 and there is a reduction in the budget of £955,200 for the Directorate in 1998/99. There is also little likelihood of direct reinvestment in the Council's leisure facilities in the foreseeable future, due to the pressures on the limited capital budget available.

It is therefore necessary to look at future options for the provision of these leisure centres. An increasing number of local authorities in the United Kingdom, have either already implemented or are actively considering alternative management arrangements for their leisure centres. One such arrangement is the creation of a charitable body or Trust, in one of two forms, either a company limited by guarantee or an industrial and provident society, taking the form of a workers' co-operative managed and operated by staff. Such arrangements can lead to significant savings, as a company would pay reduced rates and be exempt from VAT on income, along with other tax advantages. The Council would retain an interest through representation of both Members and Officers on the Trust's Board and through an agreement on the level of Council grant aid. Other possible options include various forms of partnership with the private sector or a modified version of the current direct mode of operation.

The Committee agreed to appoint a Member/Officer Working Group comprising the Chairs of the Corporate Strategy, Community and Recreational Services and Support Services Committees, Councillor Carson, appropriate Officers and representatives of the staff affected, to consider the feasibility of transferring the operation of the Council's leisure facilities to a Charitable Trust, along with all other options for their future management.

3. 1998 Viking Festivals: Karmoy and Largs

Submitted report by the Director of Community and Recreational Services seeking authority for arrangements in respect of the Viking Festivals in Karmoy, Norway and Largs in 1998.

Over the past few years, links between North Ayrshire and the Karmoy area of Norway have been developed and a number of exchange visits have taken place to coincide with the Karmoy and Largs Viking Festivals. Since the 1997 exchange, discussions have taken place about future development of the links and the potential of the viking theme as a vehicle for attracting tourists to North Ayrshire.

An invitation has been received from Karmoy for North Ayrshire Council to attend the Karmoy Festival in June 1998 as guests and discussion is taking place on the possibility of organising a conference at the Vikingar during the Largs Viking Festival in August 1998. The conference would consider a number of issues related to the viking theme as a vehicle for tourism.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the attendance of the Convener, the Chair of the North Coast and Arran Area Committee and the Director of Community and Recreational Services at the Karmoy Viking Festival in June 1998; and (b) that the Director of Community and Recreational Services co-ordinate the arrangements for a conference on the viking theme as a vehicle for tourism to be held during the Largs Viking Festival in August 1998.

4. New Primary School in Lawthorn Area, Irvine

Submitted report by the Chief Executive in respect of the capital funding required for the new primary school at Lawthorn.

On 21 April 1998, the Education Committee, having considered a report on the outcome of the consultation on the building of a new primary school within the Lawthorn area of Irvine, agreed (a) to the building of a new primary school within the Lawthorn area; (b) to the amendments to the catchment area of Towerlands primary school; and (c) to remit to the Corporate Strategy Committee consideration of the additional capital costs identified.

Within the capital programme, £325,000 in 1998/99, £950,000 in 1999/2000 and £275,000 in 2000/2001 have already been committed for the construction of a single stream primary school. Whilst in the short term, there is a need for only a single stream school, due to the amount of house building taking place in the area, a double stream school may be required in the longer term. The Architectural Services Manager has advised that there would be advantages in constructing the ancillary spaces, such as the gymnasium, dining hall and non-teaching areas, to a standard which would serve a future double stream school. This approach is likely to be more cost-effective in the longer term and in terms of physical layout, would be more easily achieved by incorporating at this stage.

The Committee agreed to approve an additional allocation of £400,000 in the capital programme for 1999/2000 for the expanded ancillary spaces in the new primary school at Lawthorn.

5. Welfare to Work: New Deal

Submitted report by the Personnel Services Manager on the Welfare to Work - New Deal Programme.

On 3 March 1998, the Committee in agreeing to participate in the New Deal Programme, also instructed Council Directorates to report back on their ability to participate in New Deal at an operational level. The client group participation in New Deal has commenced with a Gateway Guidance Programme, whereby the client group, with the assistance of Employment Services Personal Advisors and the Careers Service are required to map out career development plans and consider participation in the New Deal options.

The Council's participation at an operational level will be undertaken in a variety of ways, including (i) the Education Directorate, through the Ayrshire Careers Service playing an active role in managing the Gateway Guidance Programme; (ii) the Housing Services Directorate's participation in the Home Energy Efficiency Initiative linked to utilising the New Deal client group; and (iii) the Planning, Roads and Environment Directorate's support of the Environment Option of New Deal, as a project funder through the capital programme and the landfill tax credit schemes. It is also considered that the Council can support New Deal directly as an employer through the recruitment of New Deal clients into permanent established posts.

The Committee agreed (a) that future Directorate operational involvement in the New Deal be reported direct to the relevant Service Committee or in the case of corporate developments to the Corporate Strategy Committee or Support Services Committee as appropriate; and (b) to instruct the Personnel Services Manager to submit a report to the Support Services Committee on the recruitment of New Deal clients in support of the Employment Option.

6. Review of Local Delivery Agencies in North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Director of Planning, Roads and Environment on the options for the rationalising of existing partnership arrangements into a new consortium which would incorporate the lead body role for all New Deal options.

Following discussions with Enterprise Ayrshire and the local agencies involved the preferred option is to commission an independent study of the existing roles and options for change. The brief for the study was (i) to review the role and remit of the local agencies in North Ayrshire, including BEFNA, the Three Towns Initiative, the Regeneration Partnership and ASSIST, to identify opportunities for synergy and the elimination of any overlap or duplication; (ii) to assess the potential benefits and costs of reorganising structures to achieve greater effectiveness and value for money; and (iii) to make detailed recommendations on the way forward, taking account of the aims and objectives which these bodies and their sponsors wish to achieve. The study has concluded that the three delivery agencies, BEFNA, the Three Towns Initiative and ASSIST should be amalgamated into a new organisation which should have responsibility for the currently devolved aspects of business and economic development, regeneration including community development, access to opportunity and New Deal activities. It has further concluded that the North Ayrshire Regeneration Partnership should remain intact in order to qualify for Scottish Office regeneration funds and should be expanded to include the new delivery organisation and the employment service. The study also makes a number of detailed recommendations on how to progress matters and includes an outline management structure for the new organisation.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the creation of a single integrated delivery agency for North Ayrshire encompassing the business development role of BEFNA, the regeneration and community development and access roles of the Three Towns Initiative and ASSIST and providing a vehicle for a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to the New Deal; (b) to nominate the Chair and the Convener to the proposed Steering Group to implement the creation of the integrated delivery agency; and (c) to remit to the Chief Executive to nominate appropriate Officers to an Officers Working Group to report to the Steering Group.

7. Urban Programme Evaluations: ASSIST

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the ASSIST project evaluation.

On 27 January 1997, the Committee agreed to establish an Officer Evaluation Group to evaluate all Urban Programme projects within North Ayrshire. The evaluation panel has now completed its report on ASSIST (Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston Information Support Training), which is funded under the Urban Programme to April 1999. The evaluation concludes that the project is fulfilling its aims and objectives of providing good quality provision, established on a sound operational base, employing committed staff working in partnership with a number of agencies and identifying a number of employment opportunities. The report also identifies a number of issues that should be addressed to further enhance the work of ASSIST.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the findings of the evaluation report as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; (b) that the Management Committee should be advised to (i) consider widening the range of expertise brought to bear during project planning; and (ii) give regard to the deployment of existing staff, as there is evidence that the Employment Opportunities Advisers are becoming overstretched; (iii) arrange meetings with Officers of the Financial Services Directorate to consider the auditing procedures for the various elements of funding to establish clear audit trails and consider questions in relation to the advance funding of European programmes; and (c) that the evaluation report be remitted to the North Ayrshire Regeneration Partnership for consideration in relation to applications from ASSIST for future funding.

8. Member/Officer Working Group on the Regeneration of North Ayrshire

Submitted report of the Member/Officer Working Group on the Regeneration of North Ayrshire being the Minutes of their meeting held on 14 May 1998.

Noted.

9. Assistance to Industry

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a request to assist an inward investment company to North Ayrshire in respect of relocation costs.

On 21 January 1997, the Committee agreed to make available loan finance to Core Technologies Limited being the balance of a package of Regional Selective Assistance and assistance from Enterprise Ayrshire towards the estimated costs of £1.9m to move to Riverside Business Park, Irvine. The company are at present situated at Moorfield, Kilmarnock and plan to relocate all functions to the former Escom premises at 3 Riverside Way and consolidate their presence in Irvine. North Ayrshire Council as legal successors to Irvine Development Corporation are entitled to receive a refund of part of the money paid by the Corporation 10 years ago to South of Scotland Electricity Board for the supply of electricity to the industrial estate. Core Technologies are concerned at the level of payment being sought by Scottish Power which includes an additional surcharge most of which is to be refunded to North Ayrshire Council. Scottish Power will not connect the new supply to the building until the question of any refund to the Council is resolved.

To enable the project to proceed, it is proposed that the Council waive the refund due, provided that Scottish Power agree to reduce the connection charges to Core Technologies.

The Committee agreed to waive the Council's entitlement to a refund from Scottish Power, provided (i) that this is reflected in a reduced charge to Core Technologies Limited; and (ii) the company proceed with their relocation to Irvine.

10. Garnock Valley Biblical Garden

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on a contribution towards a feasibility study on the Garnock Valley Biblical Garden proposals.

On 9 September 1997, the Committee agreed (a) to further evaluation and exploratory work being undertaken in support of the development of a Biblical Garden in the Garnock Valley; and (b) that a detailed evaluation report be submitted to a future meeting. An Interim Steering Group comprising representatives of local churches and groups in the Garnock Valley was constituted in March 1998 to (i) set the parameters for the proposed Biblical Garden; and (ii) commission research, following an evaluation of tenders, into the feasibility of the funding and construction of the Biblical Garden. The project is community driven and supported "in kind" by the Council. The Interim Steering Group has completed its task of setting the parameters of the Vision of a Garnock Valley Biblical Garden, which would not only be a unique concept, but could be a source of investment and job creation for the Valley as a whole. The Vision requires, however, to be fully assessed prior to the commencement of any development work. Enterprise Ayrshire has agreed to contribute one third of the costs of a feasibility study and the Council is also requested to contribute one third of the cost. Other sources of funding through Charitable Trusts are being pursued.

The Committee agreed (a) to make a contribution of up to £5,000 to the feasibility study to assess the Vision of a Garnock Valley Biblical Garden; and (b) that a further report be submitted on completion of the feasibility study.

11. Beith Town Centre: Lottery Application

Submitted report by the Director of Housing Services on a partnership approach to the renewal of Beith Town Centre.

The condition of the both the commercial and residential properties in particular parts of Beith Town Centre is poor, resulting in concern that the historic quality of The Cross and other areas of the town may be lost if the buildings are not preserved and brought back into use. The costs, estimated at £2m for the renewal of the properties at 28-30 The Cross and 2-8 Eglinton Street, Beith are, however, prohibitive for the owners and for any one organisation. Discussions have been held with the St. Vincent Crescent Preservation Trust, who have undertaken a feasibility study based on exploring the viability of preserving, rather than demolishing, these properties. The Trust is a charity which has been involved in the conservation, repair and re-use of historic buildings and has completed successful projects in other areas. It is intended to submit a lottery application for this project to the Townscape Heritage Initiative, which is a new Initiative intended to enable partnerships of local, regional and national interests to preserve and enhance the distinctive character of historic areas for the benefit of the community. An application to the THI must be done in partnership and grants can be up to 50% of costs between £100,000 and £2m. Other sources of funding are Challenge Funds, Repair Grants, Landfill Tax Credits and Historic Scotland grants.

Given the Council's commitment to the renewal of Beith Town Centre, it is proposed that the Council support the application by the St. Vincent Crescent Preservation Trust for THI lottery funds. No direct financial contribution is required at this stage, but contributions in kind, in terms of the professional assistance of staff, mainly from the Housing Services, Planning, Roads and Environment and Community and Recreational Services Directorates can continue to be made.

The Committee agreed to enter into a partnership with the St. Vincent Crescent Preservation Trust and local interests, with the aim of supporting a lottery application for the preservation and renewal of the commercial and residential properties at 20-30 The Cross and 2-8 Eglinton Street, Beith.

12. Client Contractor Splits in the Post CCT Era

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on client contractor splits in the post CCT era.

As part of the 1998/99 budget process, Members expressed concern about the apparent duplication of effort in having Officers in both client and contracting departments overseeing the provision of a single service with no obvious added value to the customer and remitted to the Chief Executive to report back after a review of the arrangements which the Council inherited from the CCT era. In addition, the Director of Commercial Services has intimated his wish to retire.

The Commercial Services Directorate was set up following a consultant's report, with the exception of leisure management. This was seen to be the best method of meeting the challenge of CCT. Circumstances have, however, changed with the advent of Best Value and as a result the relevance of a Commercial Services Directorate as structured to meet CCT has had to be re-evaluated, including the role played by Client or Monitoring Officers. In undertaking such a review, the principle to be adopted as far as possible is to combine client and contractor in the same Department although it will not be possible in all areas, as in some cases a single contractor e.g. the Architectural Services Department can serve a number of client Directorates.

The proposed revised Directorate structure shows the absorption of the Commercial Services Directorate within a smaller Council structure retaining reporting lines to relevant Directors viz. Community and Housing and Construction Services. The client/contractor splits which will be tackled by these proposals are (i) Parks and Horticultural Services combining with the Commercial Services Grounds Maintenance; (ii) Commercial Services, Roads DLO combining with the Planning, Roads and Environment, Roads Section as a full Roads Department; (iii) aligning Architectural Services and Building Services with the technical unit of Housing Services which will overcome the inter-departmental difficulties highlighted in the consultant's report; and (iv) Cleaning and Catering whilst essentially a corporate support service, linking in with Community Services through its catering outlets.

The bulk of the Commercial Services Support Section will transfer to the Community Services Directorate, with some posts transferring to the Chief Executive's Directorate. Financial Services including Payroll, should reflect normal departmental relationships, e.g. Education and Social Work.

Some regradings are proposed as well as the deletion of some posts, with the net effect of the proposals being a financial saving to the Council of £121,236 in a full year.

The precise allocations of posts along with the actual allocation of the duties and time of the Client/Monitoring Officers have still to be determined.

Assurances were given that whilst there will still be a certain amount of invoicing carried out within Departments, the Director of Financial Services will have overall responsibility for control of the budgets. The criticisms contained within the consultant's report in relation to financial control have been tackled and the proposed restructuring should do much to reduce the previous problems.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the terms of the report including the elimination of the client contractor splits between and within Directorates as far as possible; (b) to approve the request by the Director of Commercial Services to retire with effect from 3 July 1998; (c) to approve the revised Directorate structure as shown in Appendix 1 to the report and the initial allocation of the posts of the Support Services Section of the Commercial Services Directorate as detailed within the report; (d) to approve the revisions to gradings and deletions of posts resulting in a full year's savings of £121,236; (e) that a further report be submitted to the next meeting on the final allocation of the posts within the Support Services Section of Commercial Services and on an examination of the duties etc. of client/contractor Monitoring Officer; (f) to note that no changes in Committee structure are envisaged as a result of these recommendations; and (g) to thank Mr. W. Cowan, the Director of Commercial Services for his work and loyal service both with North Ayrshire Council and the former Cunninghame District Council and to wish him a long

and happy retirement.

13. Assistance to Community and Voluntary Organisations

Submitted report by the Legal Services Manager on assistance to community and voluntary organisations.

On 20 January 1998, the Committee agreed that the Chief Executive, in consultation with appropriate Officers consider the implications arising from the findings of the research into assistance in kind given by the Council to community and voluntary organisations within North Ayrshire and report to a future meeting.

There are some 40 tenancies where leases have been concluded on nominal rental/concessionary rental terms ranging from £1 to £150 per annum, with the rental in the majority of cases being on an "if asked" basis. It is proposed that in the future new groups/organisations would pay a total of £1 per annum, if asked with the lease ensuring that the tenant is responsible for internal repairs and the Council responsible for building insurance and external repairs. In the case of established groups or where a renewal of a lease is due the rental payable would be fixed on the basis of the group's ability to pay, following an examination of their accounts. Reports on any such cases would be submitted to the Support Services Committee and would indicate the open market rental value of the property in order that the level of assistance in kind could be assessed.

The Committee agreed to approve the policy and procedures on the lease of accommodation at concessionary rent to community and voluntary organisations, as detailed in the report.

14. Economic and Monetary Union: Handbook for Member Councils

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on an Economic and Monetary Union Handbook completed by COSLA for use by Member Councils and to respond to a request for comments.

On 8 January 1998, the Member/Officer Working Group on European Matters requested a report outlining the implications for the Council of Monetary Union and the introduction of the EURO, as a first step in ensuring that the Council adopts a strategic and timely approach to this issue. COSLA has now produced two drafts of an economic and monetary handbook for use by Councils which refers to the implications for local government and others of Economic Monetary Union and sets out a framework for addressing the issues as they emerge.

The introduction of the EURO will impact heavily on all Councils and although the date of UK entry is not fixed, it is important that detailed planning be undertaken as soon as possible. Key issues affecting local authorities include (i) reviewing IT systems to ensure they can operate in a multi-currency environment; (ii) providing guidance to businesses, particularly small to medium sized enterprises; and (iii) curriculum development planning and new learning materials within Education.

The Committee agreed (a) to write to COSLA advising them that the Council (i) welcomes the proposal to issue the final version of the handbook in a loose-leaf format; and (ii) recommends that a chronological summary of seminars be included in the handbook, as a quick guide to Members; (b) that the Head of Corporate Business circulate the final version of the COSLA handbook to all Directorates/Departments; and (c) that a Member/Officer Working Group be appointed to agree a strategy and timetable for addressing the issues raised within the COSLA handbook, the Members to be nominated by the Chair.

15. Passenger Transport Infrastructure Provision 1998/99

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the proposed programme of new bus shelters in 1998/99.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport have recommended a programme for new and replacement bus shelters in 1998/99, which is funded through revenue and capital allocations from the Council. Whilst a programme has been drawn up, the priorities within it may be subject to amendment dependent on requirements arising throughout the year.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve a contribution of £18,000 from the capital allocation towards the Infrastructure Provision Programme within the SPT area of North Ayrshire, along with a further £9,000 for infrastructure projects on the non-SPT areas of Arran and Cumbrae; (b) to approve the proposed programme of new and replacement bus shelters in 1998/99, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and (c) to note that there will be an opportunity for Members to submit proposals throughout the year for consideration within the Programme.

16. Third Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements: Provisional Proposals for Electoral Wards Within North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's provisional proposals for electoral wards in North Ayrshire.

On 4 March 1997, the Council agreed to submit proposals to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland for revised electoral ward boundaries for North Ayrshire Council on the basis of 31 wards. The Boundary Commission had previously requested proposals based on 30 wards.

Having considered the Council's proposals and other representations made during the public consultation period, the Commission has now published its provisional proposals for electoral wards within North Ayrshire including the proposed electoral ward names, the number of electors appearing in the 1996 Register of Electors and the forecasts of the electorate for the year 2001 and has taken the view that a Council of 30 elected Members is the appropriate level of representation to provide effective local government in North Ayrshire. The Commission is seeking comments on the provisional proposals by 27 May 1998.

The Committee agreed (a) to offer no objections to the proposals for the new wards 15-30; and (b) to remit to a meeting of Irvine New Town area Members to examine the proposals in detail for the new wards 1-14 and respond with comments on these to the Boundary Commission.

17. Customer Comments Scheme: Performance Review Report for Quarter Ended 31 March 1998

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the Council's performance in managing customer comments for the three month period to 31 March 1998.

The overall number of customer comments during the quarter was 291, which compares with 251 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.

18. North Ayrshire Citizens Advice Service

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on progress in establishing a single-funded voluntary agency to provide information and advice services.

On 29 July 1997, a Steering Group was appointed to implement the establishment of the single-funded voluntary agency. The Steering Group has now completed the tasks of (i) drawing up the legal and organisational structure for the North Ayrshire Citizens Advice Service; (ii) transferring resources to fund the new agency and arranging the transfer of the staff of existing agencies; (iii) drawing up a service level agreement; (iv) appointing the Network Manager; and (v) continuing negotiations to achieve full membership of Citizens Advice Scotland. It is anticipated that the wind-up of existing organisations and transfer of all services to the new North Ayrshire Citizens Advice Service should be completed by July 1998.

The Committee agreed to approve the service level agreement between North Ayrshire Council and the North Ayrshire Citizens Advice Service, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

19. Liaison with the Health Service

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on arrangements for liaison with the Ayrshire and Arran Health Board and the three NHS Trusts in Ayrshire.

The Council currently liaises with Ayrshire and Arran Health Board and the three Ayrshire NHS Trusts through formal meetings, various ad hoc meetings and informal contacts. The Green Paper "Working Together for a Healthier Scotland" places increasing emphasis on the need for partnership between local authorities and the Health Service to tackle health inequalities and there has also been an increasing demand for participation with the Health Service in dealing with many issues affecting local government services.

An annual consultative Health Forum for North Ayrshire has already been established, comprising Members and Officers of the Council, representatives of the Health Board and Trusts and the two MPs for North Ayrshire the annual meetings of which are held in September. It is considered that the annual consultative Health Forum requires to be developed to provide a more useful function by allowing the Council the opportunity to raise major issues of concern with the Health Board and Trusts in an integrated and effective way.

The Committee agreed to approve the revised format increasing the meetings of the Council's Consultative Health Forum to two per annum.

20. Scottish Parliament: Working Methods

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a consultation from the Scottish Office on the operating methods of the Scottish Parliament.

The Secretary of State for Scotland has established an all-party Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament to consider how the Parliament might operate and Councils have been invited to comment by 31 May 1998. A proposed response has been drawn up which addresses in detail the various questions raised in the consultation. The main thrust of the response is to emphasise that the Parliament should involve appropriate interest groups including local government in its work and should seek to consult as widely as possible to ensure that the views of the Scottish people are being fully considered. The response also suggests that a Consultative Forum be established comprising representatives from local government, the business community, the churches and national interest groups to act as a sounding board and a means of consulting with the people. The Forum could also be used to scrutinise proposals and legislation prior to their implementation, recommending amendments where appropriate.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposed response as detailed in Appendix 1 to

the report.

21. Performance Information for Scottish Councils 1996/97

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on the recently published national report by the Accounts Commission on Performance Information for Scottish Councils 1996/97.

The aim of the report is to demonstrate how Scottish Councils performed in 1996/97 and to stimulate interest in and debate on the performance of local government in Scotland. The Commission has also prepared six explanatory pamphlets as a supplement to the main report, which are being distributed on a phased basis and will be made available to members of the public at libraries and First Stop Shops. The Commission has not included any commentary or findings in relation to individual indicators and also refers to local factors which may influence performance.

The Committee agreed that the data within the Accounts Commission report be considered as part of the Council's Service Review process.

22. 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 11 May 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 12 May 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 13 May 1998.

Arising from the Minutes, the undernoted matter was brought to the attention of the Committee:-

(1) Agenda Item 7: Kilwinning Pedestrian Precinct

The Area Committee agreed to remit to the Corporate Strategy Committee to consider a Town Centre Management Policy for North Ayrshire.

The Committee agreed that a Town Centre Management Policy be drawn up.

(d) Irvine Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS4) of the Irvine Area Committee, being the Minutes of its meeting held on 13 May 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 14 May 1998.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

23. National Resource for Innovative Training Research and Employment Action Ltd.

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on an invitation from the NRITEA that Councillor Clarkson chair their Advisory Committee and that Councillor Seales be Vice-Chair.

The NRITEA organisation through its local organisation the MARI Group Limited provides training and employment development for people aged over 25 who have been unemployed for six months or more and is seeking to re-establish Advisory Committee meetings in Irvine.

The Committee agreed that Councillors Clarkson and Seales should accept the invitations.

24. Special Needs Playscheme Applications: Summer 1998

Submitted report by the Director of Community and Recreational Services on applications for financial assistance from Special Needs Summer Playschemes.

(a) James McFarlane Respite Playscheme Ardrossan

The Committee agreed to award James McFarlane Respite Playscheme £3,050; and

(b) Haysholm Respite Playscheme Irvine

This is a new group who have recently indicated that they will not be in a position to arrange a playscheme in time for the summer months, but hope to be in a position to run playschemes during the October and Easter school holidays. A reduced award is therefore recommended.

The Committee agreed to award Haysholm Respite Playscheme £1,800.

25. Requests for Financial Assistance

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on request for financial assistance:-

(a) Strathclyde and Central Energy Efficiency Advice Centre

The Committee agreed to award Strathclyde and Central Energy Efficiency Advice Centre £120;

(b) Scottish Wildlife Trust

The Committee agreed to award Scottish Wildlife Trust £800; and

(c) Youth Diversion Project/Strathclyde Police

The Committee agreed to award Youth Diversion Project/Strathclyde Police £1,000.

26. Conferences, Seminars Etc.: Invitations

Submitted invitation to attend the SOLACE/CIPFA Conference on Best Value - The Way Forward to be held in Edinburgh on 29 May 1998.

The Committee agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair be authorised to attend.

27. Further Education in the Three Towns

Submitted report by the Director of Education on release of the sites of the former St. Peter's Primary School, Ardrossan and the former Kyleshill Primary School, Saltcoats.

On 14 April 1998, the Committee agreed that a report be submitted on the retention of sites for further education in the Three Towns. At an earlier stage in the development of plans for further education, proposals were submitted by Kilmarnock College and Ayr College based respectively on the sites of the former St. Peter's Primary School, Ardrossan and the former Kyleshill Primary School, Saltcoats, both of which had previously been declared surplus to requirements by the Education Directorate. Whilst discussions on the extension of further education provision in the Three Towns were ongoing, the Committee agreed to retain these sites.

Approval has since been given to the establishment by James Watt College of a mainstream further education college in Kilwinning. Although Kilmarnock College and Ayr College have indicated that their original proposals remain on the table, it appears clear that neither would be of a size which is compatible with the Kilwinning College. Furthermore both proposals were dependent on support funding from the Council and Enterprise Ayrshire, which has now been committed to the Kilwinning College development. A Sub-Group of the Further Education Implementation Group is currently considering the possibility of a collaborative development in the Three Towns either at Auchenharvie Academy or at the APL Centre, which would be more compatible with the Kilwinning College.

A development brief for the St. Peter's Primary School site has already been approved by the Council. The brief drawn up some time ago for the Kyleshill Primary School site will require to be updated. Both sites are continuing to deteriorate.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to release the sites of the former St. Peter's Primary School and Kyleshill Primary School; and (b) to remit the matter to the Support Services Committee for consideration including the development briefs for both sites.

The Meeting ended at 3 p.m.