

Corporate Strategy Committee
21 October 1997

Irvine, 21 October 1997 - At a Meeting of the Corporate Strategy Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

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

In Attendance

The Chief Executive; The Director of Financial Services; M Peffer, Principal Officer (Marketing and Publicity) and J Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive). Inspector R Pollock, Liaison Officer (Strathclyde Police).

Chair

Mr Browne in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

James Clements and George Steven.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 9 and 23 September 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Public Consultation

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on a proposal to consult with members of the public to obtain their views on what the Council's priorities should be in preparing the budget for 1998/99.

It is proposed that a market research exercise be carried out by Ashbrook Research and Consultancy who will undertake 500 interviews across North Ayrshire. 100 interviews will be held in each of the five areas covered by the Council's Area Committees. The survey will involve the issue of a letter with accompanying literature to a sample of 500 households seeking their participation in the research exercise which will be followed by personal visits from researchers. The respondents will then be asked to complete an appropriate questionnaire.

The exercise will take place during November 1997 with results being available by mid-December. Ashbrook Research and Consultancy will devise the questionnaire, carry out the fieldwork and analyse the results for a fee of £9,825. The information obtained through this exercise will be taken into consideration in the budget planning process for 1998/99.

The Committee agreed to appoint Ashbrook Research and Consultancy to carry out the market research on behalf of the Council.

3. Revenue Budget 1997/98: Budgetary Control Report for Period 1 April 1997 to 12 September 1997

Submitted report by the Director of Financial Services updating the Council's Revenue Budget for 1997/98 as at September 1997.

Due to differences in the actual pattern of expenditure from those previously anticipated, there is an adverse variance of £224,514 for the General Fund as at 12 September 1997. This variance has been projected to show an adverse balance of £1.971m for the year ending 31 March 1998.

The final balance will also be influenced by balances to be brought forward from 1996/97, the continued success of arrears collection in respect of Council Tax and Community Charge, the anticipated Loans Fund surplus being achieved and further unbudgeted expenditure materialising. Taking into account various other factors there is a projected net overspend of £1.293m.

Although the potential overspend has been reduced by good Treasury Management and improved collection performance, there is an underlying overspend of approximately £4m in the Council's operations partly financed by "one-off" savings which will not be repeated in future years. These will require to be addressed both in this financial year and in the budget exercise in 1998/99. It is intended that all major spending services will have detailed monitoring statements with full variance reports to assist in the process of identifying potential savings in the 1997/98 budget.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) that Services Committees identify savings within their operations to bring actual expenditure back to budget for the current year; and (b) that the Committees in future receive information on their own revenue budgetary position at regular intervals.

4. Statutory Performance Indicators 1996/97

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business providing information on the performance of the Council across a range of relevant services during 1996/97.

The report gave details of 56 Performance Indicators for 1996/97, some of which are set against standards, thus enabling judgements to be made about actual performance relative to these standards. Comparisons with other authorities will be possible in spring 1998 when the performance information for all 32 unitary authorities is published by the Accounts Commission. The Performance Indicators will be published in the autumn edition of "Look North" through which comments will be sought from customers and members of the public.

Noted.

5. Council Services: "Mystery Shopper" Exercise

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the outcome of a "Mystery Shopper" exercise undertaken in July 1997 by Ashbrook Research and Consultancy Limited.

The exercise took the form of visits to 24 North Ayrshire Council Offices on two separate occasions during July 1997 to ascertain the general standard and quality of the service being provided. The outcome showed this to be generally satisfactory, but issues considered worthy of further examination included the low proportion of staff wearing identification/uniforms, failure to display opening hours, poor signage and a lack of A4 dispensers containing relevant material. Appropriate action will be taken to rectify these matters.

During discussion, it was noted that the survey had been restricted to office staff which failed to reflect the overall standard of service being provided by the Council's front-line staff. The Chief Executive indicated that he accepted the need for further similar surveys to be undertaken in

the future with a view to encompassing a wider range of the Council's services and give an assurance that this matter would be addressed.

The Committee agreed (a) that Directorates be encouraged to provide identification and uniforms for all front-line staff; and (b) otherwise to note the position.

6. Regeneration Strategy

(Previous Minute Reference: Corporate Strategy Committee 9 September 1997.)

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on the progress on the Council's efforts to date to achieve some form of Special Status for North Ayrshire to promote the Council's Regeneration Strategy.

A meeting has been held with the Minister for Education and Industry and the Minister for Local Government when the Council's case for Special Status was discussed. A subsequent meeting with Scottish Office Civil Servants was held and it was agreed to progress this matter.

It is therefore proposed that Officers of the Council continue to work with the Scottish Office to (a) identify the areas which may be included within a North Ayrshire Enterprise Zone; (b) seek alternative models of Enterprise Zone/Special Status from within Europe which may be applicable to North Ayrshire; (c) provide relevant statistics for the Scottish Office; and (d) resume contact with the East Durham Enterprise Zone to clarify the manner in which it successfully presented its case for Special Status.

Noted.

7. Trinity Church

(Previous Minute Reference: Special Corporate Strategy Committee 23 September 1997.)

The Chief Executive confirmed that the necessary urgent repairs to the Trinity Church steeple have now been completed. Land Securities have been advised that work to restore the Bridgegate Square can be undertaken immediately and it is anticipated this will be completed within a few days. Steps will now require to be taken to pursue the recovery of the costs of the emergency work. Historic Scotland have indicated that the work undertaken to date is satisfactory although funding towards a larger scheme will not be considered until 1999/2000.

The Committee agreed (a) to homologate the action of the Chief Executive in authorising additional expenditure to complete the work; and (b) otherwise to note the position meantime.

8. Community Safety

(a) Strategy

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on a proposed Community Safety Strategy to be used as a framework for improving community safety within North Ayrshire.

The Community Safety Strategy has been drafted by Inspector R Pollock, the Police Liaison Officer in consultation with the Council's Directors. It proposes a way forward for the Council within the overall Scottish context of Community Safety and indicates ways in which the Council may drive the issue forward in conjunction with other agencies and through the Area Committees.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve and adopt the Community Safety Strategy as detailed in the report; and (b) that the Head of Corporate Business and the Police Liaison Officer in consultation with the appropriate Chief Officers arrange for the implementation of the Strategy throughout the Directorates of the Council.

(b) Challenge Budget 1997/98

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on proposals for the disbursement of the Community Safety Challenge Budget for 1997/98, which has been increased to £12,000 (1996/97 £10,000).

Details were given of a number of proposals received from groups/organisations seeking funding through the Challenge Budget which were recommended for approval by the five Area Committees in October 1997. Details were also provided on a number of applications in respect of North Ayrshire wide proposals.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) subject to the formation of a Working Group in the terms indicated in the Minute of the Three Towns Area Committee of 9 October 1997, prior to the commencement of the proposed Three Towns Fear of Crime Survey, to approve an award of £450 towards the Survey; (b) to continue consideration of the proposal to promote road safety through the Institute of Advanced Motorists Test pending the outcome of further enquiries to determine whether this is a separate branch being set up and the appropriate source of funding; and (c) otherwise to approve the recommendations of the five Area Committees in respect of their local proposals and the North Ayrshire wide proposals as detailed in Appendix CS1 to the report.

9. Bus Shelters: Council Programme 1997/98

(Previous Minute Reference: Special Corporate Strategy Committee 26 June 1997.)

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on (a) the outcome of surveys undertaken by Strathclyde Passenger Transport in relation to sites identified for new/replacement bus shelter provision; and (b) a proposal for shelters to carry a band displaying the North Ayrshire Council name and logo.

The Committee previously agreed to approve a contribution of £24,000 towards bus stop/shelter provision/replacement and associated works in the current financial year on the mainland and to provide £8,000 towards a Capital Programme on Arran in 1997/98. Decisions on which sites were to have priority within the Capital Programme were to be considered in the light of surveys by SPT which have now been undertaken and details were given on a number of sites recommended for the provision of new or replacement bus shelters. If costs exceed original estimates it is proposed to assign the lowest priority to the site at Meadowside, West Kilbride in the current financial year but to make it a priority location in 1998/99.

SPT have now been advised that the local member is in agreement with the sites and associated works which are to be undertaken on Arran to allow works to proceed without delay.

It has further been proposed that consideration be given for new bus shelters to carry a band displaying the North Ayrshire Council name and logo which could be provided at a cost of approximately £12.50 per shelter.

The Committee agreed (i) to approve the sites recommended within the report for bus shelter provision in the current financial year; (ii) that arrangements be made for new bus shelters to carry a band displaying the North Ayrshire Council logo, with costs being met from existing budgets; and (iii) to note that the Arran programme has been approved.

10. Links with the Business Community

Submitted report by the Head of Corporate Business on the steps taken to date by the Council to develop links with the business community.

Following the Regeneration Conference in February 1997 a number of the members of the business community who had been present indicated their willingness to meet with the Council on a semi-regular basis to discuss matters of mutual interest. An initial meeting with representatives of the business community has been held and a series of meetings with smaller businesses

represented by the Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry is proposed on an invitation basis with the companies being nominated by the Chamber of Commerce.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council organise further meetings with representatives of the business community; and (b) to note the progress to date.

11. European Year Against Racism

(Previous Minute Reference: Corporate Strategy Committee 9 September 1997.)

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the initiatives currently being undertaken by various Directorates of the Council to combat racism in North Ayrshire.

1997 has been nominated as European Year against Racism. The Community and Recreational Services, Education and Social Work Directorates are currently undertaking activities to promote equality and combat discrimination in accordance with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

The Committee agreed that the Directors of Community and Recreational Services, Education and Social Work continue in the development of initiatives to heighten awareness of the dangers of racial prejudice, discrimination and violence.

12. Authorities Buying Consortium (abc)

(Previous Minute Reference: Corporate Strategy Committee 4 March 1997.)

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the costs and benefits of the Council's participation in the Authorities Buying Consortium (abc).

The Council, along with the other eleven councils which formed the former Strathclyde Region have been members of the Authorities Buying Consortium since April 1996. The Council's contribution to the costs of the consortium in 1996/97 was £76,537 which was subsequently reduced to £68,965 due to an underspend. The level of contribution for 1997/98 is £72,557 but with the introduction of premium recharge and photocopying this figure should reduce by £5,890 in the current financial year to £66,667. The Council has continued to benefit from rebates on the electricity contract and on catering amounting to £91,593 including the 1996/97 rebate on abc underspend. In addition the Council benefits from a share of savings through new contracts amounting to £85,443. Further details on the costs and benefits of the Council's membership of the consortium were given in the report.

Noted.

13. Area Committees

(a) North Coast and Arran Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS2) of the North Coast and Arran Area Committee being the Minutes of its Meeting held on 6 October 1997.

The Committee agreed to note the report;

(b) Garnock Valley Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS3) of the Garnock Valley Area Committee being the Minutes of its Meeting held on 7 October 1997.

The Committee agreed to note the report;

(c) Kilwinning, Dreghorn and Springside Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS4) of the Kilwinning, Dreghorn and Springside Area Committee being the Minutes of its Meeting held on 8 October 1997.

The Committee agreed to note the report;

(d) Irvine Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS5) of the Irvine Area Committee being the Minutes of its Meeting held on 8 October 1997.

The Committee agreed to note the report; and

(e) Three Towns Area Committee

Submitted the annexed report (Appendix CS6) of the Three Towns Area Committee being the Minutes of its Meeting held on 9 October 1997.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

14. Strathclyde Fire Brigade: Representation at Area Committees

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a request from Strathclyde Fire Brigade to be represented at all future meetings of the five Area Committees, to provide general advice and assistance including statistical information.

The Committee agreed to the request.

15. Kilbirnie: Youth Drop-In Facility

(Previous Minute Reference: Garnock Valley Area Committee 7 October 1997.)

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a proposal by the Garnock Valley Area Committee that funding of £5,000 be provided to allow essential maintenance work to be undertaken to the Mission Hall, Kilbirnie to enable the property to be used as a Youth Drop-In Centre.

The Walker Hall, Kilbirnie (Lesser Hall) which since January 1997 has been used as a venue for the Kilbirnie Youth Drop-in Centre has proved to be unsuitable for this purpose. It has now been proposed that the Mission Hall, Kilbirnie be considered as an alternative venue. The property is currently owned by Knox Mills. The Architectural Services Manager has indicated that the property could be upgraded to a suitable standard for approximately £5,000. The Principal Estates Officer proposes to enter into discussions with Knox Mills to ascertain if they would enter into a short-term lease arrangement with representatives from the Drop-in Centre in respect of the Mission Hall. This would necessitate a Hall Management Committee being set up which will be responsible for all aspects of the leasing arrangement. Special arrangements have been made for works to the building to be carried out by the young people from the centre with assistance from other agencies such as Geilsland School and the Community Service Order office.

The Committee agreed, subject to (i) the satisfactory outcome of the discussions with Knox Mills regarding the lease; and (ii) the establishment of a Hall Management Committee, that funding of £5,000 be identified and allocated in the current financial year to upgrade the Mission Hall, Kilbirnie for use as a Drop-in Centre.

16. Irvine Housing Association

(Previous Minute Reference: Corporate Strategy Committee 21 January 1997)

Councillor Patrick Browne had previously been nominated by the Council to serve as their representative on the Housing Association but the Association decided at that time not to appoint Mr. Browne to their Management Committee.

Submitted report by the Chief Executive advising that Irvine Housing Association have agreed that Councillor Browne has now been accepted as the Council's representative on the Management Committee of the Association.

Noted.

17. Conferences, Seminars Etc.

Submitted invitations to attend the undernoted Conferences/Seminars etc.:-

- (a) The Friends of the Earth Scotland Annual Conference entitled "Sustainable Waste Management and how to achieve it" to be held in the Caird Hall, Dundee on 27 November 1997;
- (b) The East of Scotland European Consortium Fifth Annual Conference entitled "Scotland's Parliament: a Bridge to Brussels?" to be held in the Caledonian Hotel, Edinburgh on 5 December 1997;
- (c) The 1997 CREST Conference (Centre for Research into Elections and Social Trends) organised by the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland entitled "Understanding Constitutional Change" to be held in the University of Edinburgh on 21 November 1997;
- (d) The Scottish Civic Assembly Conference entitled "Towards a New Democracy" to be held in the Commonwealth Centre (Assembly Rooms) Edinburgh on 25 October 1997;
- (e) The National Steering Committee of Nuclear Free Local Authorities First Irish and UK Local Authorities Joint Standing Conference on Nuclear Hazards to be held in County Hall, Dun Laoghaire on 4/5 December 1997;
- (f) "The Local Agenda 21 in Scotland" Conference organised on a joint basis by the Scottish Office, COSLA and the Scottish Local Agenda 21 Co-ordinator's Network to be held in Edinburgh on 21 November 1997; and
- (g) The Scottish National Rural Partnership Seminar on "Tackling Rural Crime" organised by the Scottish Office to be held at the New Lanark Visitors Centre on 5 November 1997.

The Committee agreed (i) that there be no attendance at (a), (b), (c), (d) or (e); (ii) that the Leader of the Council be authorised to attend (f); and (iii) that Councillor John Sillars be authorised to attend (g).

18. Requests for Financial Assistance

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

(a) The Scottish Environmental Forum

The Committee agreed to award the Scottish Environmental Forum £200; and;

(b) Crimestoppers (Scotland)

The Committee agreed to award Crimestoppers (Scotland) £1,500;

19. Urgent Items

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

20. Irvine: Perceton House: Former IDC Staff Social Club

For a number of years the staff of the former Irvine Development Corporation ran a Staff Social Club based at Perceton House, Irvine. The licence for this club has now expired and the staff of North Ayrshire Council have indicated a desire to reinstate the Social Club, at Perceton House under North Ayrshire Council. This will entail the drafting of a new Constitution and the submission of a formal application to the Sheriff in respect of the renewal of the licence. To enable such an application to be submitted, a letter of authorisation from the Council is required.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Chief Executive to provide the appropriate letter of authorisation.

The meeting ended at 2.50 p.m.