

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SPECIAL POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 14 FEBRUARY 1996 AT 1000 HOURS IN THE LONDON ROAD CENTRE, KILMARNOCK

PRESENT: Councillors David Sneller, Drew McIntyre, Irene Reeves, Wilma Doyle, Ronald Brailsford, Robert Stirling, Jane Darnbrough, Jim O'Neill, Kathleen Hall, Bob Beattie, Daniel Coffey, David Fulton, Eric Ross, Jimmy Kelly and Eric Jackson.

ATTENDING: David Montgomery, Chief Executive; Fiona Lees, Depute Chief Executive; Gordon Clark, Director of Finance; John Hillis, Director of Housing; Iain McLachlan, Director of Personnel Services; Barbara Haughan, Director of Support Services; Tom McHugh, Depute Director of Finance; Chris McAleavey, Senior Depute Director of Housing; Robert McLeary, Head of Property; Douglas Campbell, Head of Public Relations and Marketing; and Support Unit (Anne Marie Carr and Margaret McManus).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Douglas Reid, Kim Nicoll, George Turnbull, Jimmy Boyd and Tommy Farrell.

CHAIR: Councillor David Sneller, (Chair)

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 1996/97

1. There was submitted a joint report dated 8 February 1996 (circulated) by the Directors of Housing and of Finance which sought approval for the Revenue Estimates 1996/97 and requested agreement on the level at which Council house rents and other charges would be levied for the financial year 1996/97.

The Chair advised the Committee that the turn-out from tenants and Tenants Associations for the series of public consultation meetings held between 30 January and 1 February 1996 had been disappointing. However, it was hoped that it would be possible to stimulate more interest in the consultation exercise for the budget proposals for next year. He also took the opportunity to extend thanks, on behalf of the Committee, to the Directors of Housing and of Finance and to their support staff for their hard work during the preparation of the Housing Budget proposals.

The Chair also advised that the package of measures before the Committee had been designed to take the Council's housing services forward, but that the Council needed to ensure wider public consultation/involvement in the process. He also indicated that future success of attracting the public to such meetings could be viewed as a performance indicator for the Council.

The Chair further advised that the issues facing the Housing Service of East Ayrshire Council had not changed from those outlined in the report considered by the Policy and Resources Committee on 23 January 1996 concerning the rent levels and harmonisation strategy and that the Council's intention would be to keep rent rises to a minimum whilst recognising the need to maintain jobs and services. However, this had to be viewed in the light of the lack of balances available from the demitting authorities.

The Chair stated also that the Council had to be accountable to local people via the Local Committees for the provision of a comprehensive housing service with full responsibility for Council Tax and Housing Benefit, Improvement Grants, Sheltered Housing and Capital and cyclic programmes.

With regard to the recent winter freeze over the new year, the Chair informed the Committee that plans would be prepared to ensure that the problems encountered on this occasion and, which had incurred costs of approximately £500,000 were not repeated. In addition, he intimated that the proposed expenditure for the Housing Revenue Account had been reviewed and that any further cuts would impact on jobs and services.

Councillor Sneller, seconded by Councillor McIntyre, moved:-

- (i) that the basic rent increase of £1.70 per week on a 48 week basis be approved;
- (ii) that a Member/Officer Group be established to review existing practices within the Housing Department for the preparation of a Procedures and Practices Manual and that it report to the Housing Committee outlining options for change for the Council;
- (iii) that a joint report by the Directors of Housing and of Social Work regarding details for the implementation of an Aids and Adaptations scheme be submitted to an appropriate Committee of the Council before April 1996;
- (iv) that the period for achieving harmonisation of house rents be confirmed as 5 years and that an in-built £0.87 increase in rents for the North of East Ayrshire (the existing Kilmarnock and Loudoun area) be approved and that the additional income raised be re-invested in that area;
- (v) that, of the estimated additional income, £435,000 be made available to supplement the window replacement programme in the North of East Ayrshire and that it be remitted to the Housing Capital Sub-Committee to expend the money during the Council's term of office and also to identify any additional issues;
- (vi) that £100,000 be made available for the establishment of a garden scheme from the Housing budget in 1996/97 from the "harmonisation money", that the Council acknowledge its obligation to other than

Council tenants and that consideration be given by the Social Work Committee to the establishment of a garden scheme for them similar to that proposed for Council tenants and that following establishment of unit costs with the Department of Commercial Operations, an implementation scheme be discussed by the Housing and Social Work Committees; and

- (vii) that, on condition that appliances meet the Council's specification, and have the Council's permission, the Council adopt the maintenance of gas central heating systems/appliances within Council houses, the Director of Housing to report on implementation to the Housing Committee.

Councillor Coffey, on behalf of the SNP Group, extended thanks to the Directors of Housing and of Finance and their support staff for their assistance in preparing the Group's budget and thereafter seconded by Councillor Brailsford, moved as an amendment:-

- (i) that the Council advise Kilmarnock and Loudoun District Council to proceed with the disposal of the ground at Altonhill within the current financial year and that the beneficiaries of this Kilmarnock and Loudoun asset be its residents;
- (ii) that the proposed rent increase, based on a 48 week year, for the former Kilmarnock and Loudoun District housing stock be set at £1.52 per week and that the proposed increase, based on a 48 week year, for the former Cumnock and Doon Valley District housing stock be set at £2.01 per week;
- (iii) that a garden scheme be introduced in the former Kilmarnock and Loudoun District, in line with SNP proposals for a number of years, allowing tenants of that district to enjoy a service already provided by the Cumnock and Doon Valley District Council and that £100,000 be set aside for this purpose which is equivalent to an additional £0.16 on the rent in Kilmarnock and Loudoun District for a total of £1.68 per week on a 48 week basis, resulting in a net deficit for the area of £1,768,000; and
- (iv) that in respect of rent harmonisation the Director of Housing re-examine the whole issue, taking into account other relevant factors such as harmonisation of repairs and maintenance expenditure and report back to the appropriate Committee with new proposals.

On a division by a show of hands the motion was carried by 12 votes to 3.

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION - INITIAL DEPARTMENTAL LOCATIONS

2. There was submitted a report dated 2 February 1996 (circulated) by the Director of Support Services seeking the agreement of Members to initial departmental office accommodation locations.

The Chief Executive advised the Committee that the report outlined office accommodation which would be available from 1 April 1996 and that occupation of the premises detailed in the report by East Ayrshire Council would be on a phased basis.

Having heard the Chief Executive and in answer to Members' questions it was agreed to approve the Office Accommodation - Initial Departmental Locations Strategy as detailed in the report.

The meeting terminated at 1033 hours.

14-2.min