

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**REORGANISATION COMMITTEE - INTERIM DECENTRALISATION
SUB-COMMITTEE****MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 15 JUNE 1995 AT 10.00 AM****IN THE CUMNOCK AND DOON VALLEY DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LUGAR**

Present: Councillors D Fulton (Chair), R Beattie, J Boyd, J Hall, J Kelly, J Knapp, J O'Neill, K Nicoll, D Sneller and R Taylor.

Attending: D Montgomery, Chief Executive; G Fraser, D McVicar, A Fairbairn and D Stewart (Policy Officer, KLDC).

1. Sederunt and apologies

The sederunt was taken and apologies intimated on behalf of Councillors J Darnbrough, T Farrell, A McIntyre and D Reid.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minute of the previous meeting was submitted and noted.

3. Matters arising - Decentralisation Schemes - the legislation, draft guidance on key issues

Reference was made to the meeting of 26 May 1995 when the above item had been submitted and when it had been agreed to continue that item to the next meeting for its further consideration.

Thereon, the report was re-submitted and made reference to Section 23 of the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994 which explicitly stated that every new authority must prepare a draft decentralisation scheme for their area prior to 1 April 1997. These schemes must contain the authorities proposal for the administration of their functions within the whole area, specifying the dates by which the scheme must be implemented. Prior to 1 April 1997, every authority must give public notice of the fact that they have prepared such a scheme and give the general public at least eight weeks to make representations about its content. In addition all community councils within an authorities area must be consulted.

This process being complete, each authority must forward a copy of its scheme to the Secretary of State and give public notice of the details of the agreed scheme.

Schemes may include details of the:

- a) arrangements for holding meetings at particular places within the area of the authority;
- b) establishment of committees for particular areas and the delegation of functions;
- c) location of offices, their staffing and the delegation to staff as specified functions; and
- d) provision of facilities at particular places within the area where advice may be obtained or services provided.

Mr Stewart in outlining the report paid particular reference to:

- i) what the draft guidance says;
- ii) an ideal decentralisation scheme - what best practice says;
- iii) decentralisation - a definition;
- iv) key questions for the corporate prospective;
- v) key questions for DLO/DSOs.

Following discussion when Councillor Sneller indicated that the first public consultation meeting held on 14 June 1995 held in Newmilns had been very successful, it was agreed to:

- A) obtain a report from the Director of Housing following that appointment being made; and
- B) otherwise, note the contents of the report.

4. Decentralisation Issues

Reference was made to the meeting of 26 May 1995 when the Sub-Committee had received a general presentation which ultimately asked that it consider compilation of a working definition for decentralisation within East Ayrshire.

Thereon, there was submitted a report (issued) by the Chief Executive which proposed a working definition and allied that with a series of principles which described the commitments to be made by the East Ayrshire Council.

The report:

- a) outlined the definition when particular reference was made to a document entitled "Local Government Decentralisation - an idea whose time has come?" written by Lucy Gaster and Mo O'Toole which defined the decentralised and devolved authority as one in which "within a corporate policy framework, managerial and political decisions are made nearer to the point of service delivery, where the aim is to make services "accessible" in every sense of the term and where a basic aim is to stop "buck passing" and to work with on behalf of the local community".
- b) highlighted decentralisation as being increasingly about:
 - i) responsiveness;
 - ii) tailoring services to local needs;
 - iii) the efficient and fair allocation of scarce resources; and
 - iv) the creation of links at local level with other organisations (including, in particular, community and voluntary organisations).
- c) indicated the principles consistent with the above definition and which may be described as a potential decentralisation scheme for East Ayrshire to include the:
 - i) establishment of local committees;
 - ii) establishment of formal communication structures between local committees and relevant community organisations;
 - iii) establishment of a scheme of decentralised service delivery consistent with efficient, prompt and cost effective service to the public;
 - iv) development of local offices incorporating information technology, support to ensure service, information and advice is readily available to local people; and
 - v) establishment of a process whereby the financial resources of the Council are allocated in an equitable way and allocated to local committees to allow the development of local initiatives and projects.

The report also highlighted a series of issues requiring further investigation and following from the outlined principles.

Having heard Mr Fraser in explanation and in answer to members questions, it was agreed to:

- A) accept the terms of the definition as indicated at ii) above;
- B) support the principles as highlighted in iii);
- C) consider the issues raised as a result of the principles again highlighted in iii); and
- D) accept the definition with the addition of a section on information and advice;

5. Case Studies

a) Ayrshire Question Time

Reference was made to the Ayr Divisional Community Development Committee which had in an effort to "get closer to its constituents" devised a series of meetings known as Ayrshire Question Time.

Thereon, there was submitted (issued) a case study by the Chief Executive of June 1995 to advise the Sub-Committee on the background and development of the Ayrshire Question Time theme and in so doing made reference to the:

- i) aims of the exercise;
- ii) in chronological order, the Question Time process;
- iii) fact that the meeting concluded with an informal session which enabled questions to be asked of both local elected members and officers and answers received directly; and
- iv) evaluation process.

Having heard Mr McVicar that overall "Ayrshire Question Time" held in many communities throughout Ayrshire was an innovative method of constructing a measure of contact between the Regional Council and its constituents, and in answer to members' questions it was agreed to:

- A) accept that on balance, the style of operation outlined in the case study could form a useful element of consultation within a decentralised strategy for East Ayrshire; and
- B) otherwise, note the contents of the study.

b) Dalmellington - Background to consultation exercise

Reference was made to a review and update of the Cumnock and Doon Valley initiative which was undertaken during 1993.

The review confirmed the overall goal of the initiative - to regenerate the local economy and also made reference to its operational objectives. In addition it identified a number of further issues which were required to be addressed.

These included the linking of social and economic objectives and the development of comprehensive regeneration strategies for individual settlements. The desirability of encouraging community ownership in the process was also recognised and partly to assist this the establishment of the initiative was increased by the appointment of a project Executive Officer.

The report outlined the:

- i) reason why Dalmellington was chosen for the consultation exercise;

- ii) process undertaken; and
- iii) community participation options.

Having heard Mr McVicar and following Councillor Boyd urge that the good work of the initiative be noted and all endeavour made to ensure that the work was not lost, it was agreed to note the terms of the report.

6. Cumnock and Doon Valley - Information and Advice Services

There was submitted a report (issued) by the Development Officer of June 1994 outlining the stages of the review of information and advice service in Cumnock and Doon Valley.

Reference was made to a report from the Regional Councils Poverty Officers group entitled "A Review of Information and Advice Services" which was submitted to the Councils Policy and Resources Sub-Committee on Strategy suggesting that a strategy for Information and Advice Services be developed.

It was therefore agreed that a pilot exercise to assess the viability of that strategy be implemented in two diverse areas. Cumnock and Doon Valley was chosen as the rural area and Easterhouse as the urban area.

The pilot in Easterhouse was not sustained and the Cumnock and Doon Valley review of Information and Advice Services remains the only pilot in Strathclyde Region.

The report made reference to the

- a) establishment of an Officers Group;
- b) committees that the review group reported to; and
- c) consultation strategy which included;
 - i) questionnaires;
 - ii) property audits;
 - iii) findings;
 - iv) service audits; and
 - v) needs assessment
- d) resulting issues to be tackled;
- e) summary of findings;
- f) implementation - with particular reference to the production of a staff reference guide in 1993 which was updated in 1994 and the location of public access terminals (PATS);
- g) staffing;
- h) public awareness/feedback and evaluation; and
- i) future developments.

Having heard Mr McVicar in explanation and in answer to members' questions when the need to obtain equipment and staffing costs were highlighted, it was agreed to note the terms of the report.

7. Outline Decentralisation, Timetable and proposed Agenda

Councillor Fulton advised the meeting that a timetable and agenda was being compiled for future consideration.

8. Decentralisation Scheme

In terms of Standing Order Number 8 in order to consider an urgent and relevant item of business, reference was made to the meeting of 26 May 1995 when a report entitled "Decentralisation Schemes - The Legislation, draft guidance and key issues" written by Kilmarnock and Loudoun District Councils Chief Executive department had been submitted and which had detailed:

- a) the content of Section 23 of the Local Government Etc (Scotland) Act 1994;
- b) the content of the draft guidance issued by the Scottish Office Environment Department;
- c) consideration of "best practice" issues;
- d) a potential definition of decentralisation; and
- e) key questions from a corporate perspective.

Thereon, there was submitted a report (issued) by the Chief Executive of June 1994 to make recommendations with regard to the construction of a response to the guidance document on decentralisation by the Scottish Office Environment Department. The report made reference to the content of the draft guidance including the positive aspects and highlighting those which would be required to be included to strengthen important sections within the document to include:

- i) emphasis to be placed upon the new Councils having an established strategic framework within which to decentralise decision making and the delivery of services;
- ii) the inclusion of the need for the new Councils to adopt a clear communication strategy which will assist local people to participate in the decision making process;
- iii) reference to managerial decentralisation contained within paragraph 12 of the report which emphasised that development within a corporate management structure representing the strategic framework which new Councils should be urged to develop;
- iv) greater emphasis which could be placed upon the development of individuals as consumers of services, participants and change agents if they are to function as full partners in any scheme of decentralisation; and

- v) in conjunction with iv) above, consideration being given to the role of Council staff as change agents not only within the wider community but also within the Council itself.

Having heard Mr Fraser in explanation and in answer to members' questions, it was agreed that:

- A) the Decentralisation Sub-Committee should endorse the contents of the draft guidance on decentralisation and agree to submit the observations set out at i) to v) above intended to strengthen the overall document to the Scottish Office Environment Department for its consideration, emphasising that these comments are submitted against the background of East Ayrshire Councils own version of delivering power to the community and its own commitment to extending democracy through effective decentralisation whose spirit will transcend the requirements of legislation;
- B) funds awarded to Local Government should be increased to take account of decentralisation schemes.

In conclusion Councillor Fulton in response to Councillor Boyd extended his thanks to all officers of the East Ayrshire Council in respect of the work that had been carried out under often difficult circumstances which had enabled the Council to have progressed thus far.