

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY PLANNING
STANDING SCRUTINY PANEL.

Minutes of meeting in County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr,
on 19th April 2012 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillors Brian Connolly (Chair), Bill Grant, John Hampton, Mairi Low and Alec Oattes.

Apologies: Councillors Sandra Goldie, Helen Moonie and Mike Peddie.

Attending: E. Howat, Executive Director – Corporate Services; V. Andrews, Head of Legal and Administration; C. Monaghan, Head of Policy, Performance and Communication; K. Leinster, Head of Community Care and Housing; J. McQuillan, Head of Property and Neighbourhood Services; H. McLaughlin, Audit Services / Programme Review Manager; A. MacLeod, Performance and Business Manager; and E. Wyllie, Committee Services Officer.

Also Attending: Councillor Bill McIntosh (Portfolio-holder).

1. Item for Call-in.

The Panel noted that there had been no call-ins for this meeting.

2. Minutes of previous meeting.

Decided: to note the Minutes of the previous meeting of 22nd March 2012 (issued).

AUDIT FUNCTION:-

3. Annual Audit Plan 2011/12 – Scottish Housing Quality Standards.

Reference was made to the Minutes of 22nd March 2012 (Page 203, paragraph 5) when the Panel had requested that the Head of Community Care and Housing provided an update on the progress of Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) to this meeting of the Panel.

Thereon, the Head of Community Care and Housing outlined the current position with the SHQS, largely delivered by the Property and Neighbourhood Services team and advised:-

- (1) that a report was provided to the Regulator on an annual basis in June of each year informing of progress and that, in June 2011, 59% had been achieved in meeting the SHQS;
- (2) that information was currently being gathered for this year's report to the Regulator and highlighted that, following some major contracts, a number of houses had been, or were in the process of being, completed in the previous and new financial year and commented on demolitions, house sales, and new builds; and
- (3) that, following submission of the report, a three year programme was being developed to achieve the SHQS revised timescale of March 2015 (instead of December 2015) with finances in place to deliver such a schedule and informed that a Managing Agent would be appointed for the overall co-ordination of internal modernisation work in Council houses.

Various questions were raised by Members of the Panel in relation to:- the impact of the revised SHQS timescale and would this be achievable; the criteria for achieving SHQS; the Managing Agent's role; the difficulties faced in maintaining communal areas particularly in mixed tenure blocks; car parking issues within certain areas and was there scope for redesigning the space; private ownership issues and whether there was an opportunity for factoring arrangements to be developed for mixed tenure blocks; what percentage of the housing stock had currently been reviewed and the process used for reviewing properties; homelessness issues; letting standards; tenants who misuse properties and challenges faced by staff in this regard; the progress being made with meeting the Standards; and the decant of McConnell Square, Girvan and the Head of Community Care and Housing and the Head of Property and Neighbourhood Services responded accordingly.

The Head of Community Care and Housing provided an update on the implementation of the Owner Engagement Strategy for Mixed Tenure Housing which had been approved at the Leadership Panel on 17th January 2012 and also commented on initial discussions with regard to the development of a possible housing inspection system.

Decided: having conveyed their appreciation to staff from both Services, to note the current position with the progress being made with the Scottish Housing Quality Standards.

Councillor Hampton joined the meeting during consideration of the foregoing item, the time being 10.10 a.m.

WIDER SCRUTINY PANEL BUSINESS:-

4. Scrutiny Review of Communications.

There was submitted a report (issued) of 11th April 2012 by the Head of Policy, Performance and Communication

- (1) providing an update on the progress being made with the Communications Strategy which included:- day-to-day communications issues; specific key areas of activity over the past four months since the last update; and the progress being made in respect of the tasks within the Communications Strategy and the Action Plan as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report;
- (2) advising that feedback from Panel Members, in conjunction with feedback from consultative channels being progressed after the Council Elections on 3rd May 2012, would be used to help draft an updated Communications Strategy for the period 2012-2014; and
- (3) concluding the Scrutiny Review of Communications.

Various questions were raised by Members of the Panel in relation to:- the volume of information being circulated; the management of negative publicity; press releases; whether there was a protocol in place for undertaking public consultations; accessing service information and contact details from the Council's website; the average number of hits on the website; the Council's published calendar and whether there was an opportunity for local photographic societies to provide images; the use of other methods of communication with the public; whether information was available on the use of the Customer Services Centre; communication channels within the management structure and between staff and services and also including Elected Members; and Ayrshire TV and the Head of Policy, Performance and Communication responded accordingly.

The Executive Director – Corporate Services suggested that she would obtain details on the customer data obtained from customers and circulate accordingly.

Decided: to note the progress that had been made on delivering the Communications Strategy and Action Plan in this final update paper as agreed on 1st December 2011 and which concluded the Scrutiny Review of Communications.

5. Valedictory.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank Panel Members and Officers for their contribution and support over the years. The Panel Members also thanked Councillor Connolly for his hard work during his term as Chair of this Standing Scrutiny Panel.

The meeting ended at 11.30 a.m.