

FINANCE COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Finance Committee held within the Council Offices, Dumbarton, on Wednesday, 23rd April, 1997.

Present: Councillors George Cairney (LAB), Mary Campbell (LAB), Daniel McCafferty (LAB), Andrew White (LAB), Duncan Mills (LAB), James Doherty (LAB) James Flynn (LAB), Alistair Macdonald (LAB), Ronnie McColl (SNP), John Wailes (SNP), John McCutcheon (SNP) and Craig McLaughlin ((SNP) substituting for Councillor Mackechnie).

Attending Michael J. Watters, Chief Executive; Ian Leitch, Depute Chief Executive and Solicitor to the Council; Eric Walker, Director of Finance; John Bak, Head of Personnel and Training and Angela Clements, Head of Information Services also Crawford Howat, Manager of Accounting and Vincent Gardiner, Manager of Exchequer.

Apologies: Apologies for absence from the meeting were intimated on behalf of Provost Patrick O'Neill (LAB) and Councillors James McCallum (LAB & CO-OP) and James McElhill (SNP).

Councillor George Cairney in the Chair

TREASURY TRANSACTIONS

There was submitted and noted report by the Director of Finance advising of the Treasury Transactions of the Council for the period from 1st April 1996 to 31st March 1997.

INTEREST RATES

There was submitted and noted report by the Director of Finance advising the Committee of the interest rates during the period from 1st April 1996 to 31st March 1997.

UPDATE ON PAYROLL INTEGRATION

There was submitted report by the Director of Finance advising members of the progress made to date in respect of the integration of West Dunbartonshire Council's payroll services onto a single payroll system.

The Committee noted that the exercise for the transfer of all employees to the Cyborg Payroll system was due to be completed by July 1997

UPDATE ON FINANCE REVENUES COLLECTION

There was submitted report by the Director of Finance on the progress made in respect of the collection of the 1996/97 Council Tax in that as at 28th February 1997 72% had been collected. It was reported that the

collection rate of 72 % would rise and that over and above this every effort was being made to pursue arrears of Council Tax/Poll Tax and to maximise the uptake of benefits.

The Director also advised that work was currently ongoing to procure and implement Council Tax and benefits software with a view to going live during 1998/99 and recommended that the Council agree that the standard discretion and reliefs granted in relation to Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates in operation as at 31st March 1996 be continued during 1997/98.

The Committee, agreed:-

- (a) to note the Council Tax collection rate to date and the likely improvement in this figure; and
- (b) to approve the continuation of the standard discretions and reliefs granted in respect of the Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates for 1997/98 noting that this would not affect the decision taken previously to remove the discretionary relief to Gun Clubs and the disregard of certain army pensions for rebate purposes as resolved by the Council during ~996.

ADMINISTRATION OF GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

There was submitted report by the Director of Finance advising the Committee of the current situation relating to the administration of grants to voluntary organisations and intimating that it had been agreed that the Finance Department would undertake co-ordination of the administration of the grants in association with the appropriate personnel from the Education Department and the Social Work and Housing Department.

The Committee agreed:-

- (a) to note that it was intended to advertise for staff to perform this work, subject to the Finance Department achieving its 'vacancy savings' but that, meantime, the grants would continue to be operated on a modified basis; and
- (b) that this would be the first step in the process of improving the administration of the grants and that the matter would require to be kept under review.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL GRANTS 1996/97

There was submitted report by the Director of Finance advising members of the balance of funding remaining in the Community Council Budget for 1996/97 in the sum of £3,768 23 and that consultation had taken place with the Member/Officer Working Group and the West Dunbartonshire Community Council Forum in respect of proposals for the remaining sum.

The Committee, having heard the Director of Finance, agreed that an amount from the remaining sum of £3,768.23 be allocated to all Community Councils pro rata to the sums they had already received in 1996/97.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL GRANTS 1997/98

There was submitted report by the Director of Finance in respect of financial assistance available to Community Councils in 1997/98 in the sum of £17,532 and advising that application forms had been issued to all Community Councils in order to gather the appropriate information with a view to allocation of funds.

The Committee agreed that each Community Council be allocated an interim grant in a sum equivalent to 50% of the sum awarded to it in 1996/97, and that the remaining budget balance would be distributed later in the financial year following consideration of the applications received from the Community Councils. Details of the interim grants are shown as Appendix IV to the minute.

GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

There was submitted report by the Director of Finance intimating that the 1997/98 Revenue Estimates had now been approved. A summary of the recommendations by the Member/Officer Working Group on applications received in respect of Local and General grants was attached along with a copy of the list of grants agreed in 1996/97. The Director advised that the budgets available for this financial year were as undernoted.

Councillors Mills and Macdonald left the meeting during consideration of this item of business.

General Grants/Donations	£46,035
Local Grants/Donations	£361,730
Community Councils	£ 17,532

There were also submitted reports by the Director of Finance (i) in relation to further information received by the Director relating to various grants in respect of which the Working Group had been unable to make a recommendation as sufficient information had not been available; and (ii) in relation to payment of grant to the Denny Tank Museum and advising that although no budgetary provision had been made for this in the current financial year, there was scope to meet the payment from the Common Good Fund in view of its reduced contribution to the Book Fund. In addition, there was submitted report by the Depute Chief Executive and Solicitor to the Council, intimating that a request had been received from the Clydebank District Pipe Band for financial assistance towards the travel costs involved in up to six of their members travelling to Argenteuil, France to promote West Dunbartonshire in that Town's Scottish Week' to be held between 26th May and 1st June 1997.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed to deal with the applications for grant as follows:-

- (a) that the applications for grant continued or retained from the meeting of 26th February 1997 be dealt with as shown in Appendix I to this Minute;
- (b) that the applications for local grants/donations be dealt with as shown in Appendix II to this minute;
- (c) that the applications for general grant/donations be dealt with as shown in Appendix III to this minute;
- (d) that the application for grant for Denny Tank Museum 1997/98 be dealt with as shown in Appendix II to this minute; and
- (e) that, the application by Clydebank District Pipe Band be dealt with as shown in Appendix II to the minute, on a motion by Councillor Campbell, seconded by Councillor Cairney, that the sum of £1,200 be met from the grants budget, as against an amendment by Councillor McColl, seconded by Councillor Wailes, that no action be taken on the request due to the financial circumstances of the Council. On a vote the motion was carried by seven votes to four.

WRITE OFF OF MISCELLANEOUS INCOME SUNDRY DEBTORS

There was submitted report by the Director of Finance reminding members that in certain instances such as death, liquidation or change in circumstances of the debtor, debts may become uncollectable and that in terms of the Financial Regulations the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Depute Chief Executive and Solicitor to the Council, had authority to write off individual debts up to a sum of £500 but that the write off of debts in excess of £500 required this Committee's approval.

The Committee, following discussion, and having noted that the write offs represented debts inherited by West Dunbartonshire from its predecessor authorities, agreed:-

- (a) to note the write off of various debts up to £500 as shown in the report;
- (b) to approve the write off of debts in excess of £500 in the total sum of £33,582.06 as shown in the report by the Director of Finance; and
- (c) that in respect of future write offs, the particulars of deceased persons should be shown as part of an exempt report.

WRITE OFF OF NON DOMESTIC RATES DEBTORS

There was submitted report by the Director of Finance recommending the write off of debts outstanding in respect of Non Domestic Rates in view of the necessity to write off debts when they become uncollectable so as not to form part of the authority's collectable amount as to do otherwise would affect

the grant allocation by the Secretary of State to this Authority. The Director advised that the final reconciliation of 1993/94 rates collectable was now imminent and approval was sought to write off such debts outstanding from that financial year, in addition to the specific debts from 1994/95 and 1995/96 which were deemed uncollectable.

The Committee, following consideration, agreed: -

- (a) to write off the debts outstanding from 1993/94 in the sum of £578,013.15, from 1994/95 in the sum of £4,677.06 and from 1995/96 in the sum of £1,712.62; and
- (b) to note that while these debts were treated as written off should any circumstances change whereby debts could be collected, the relevant officials would take the necessary action.

VISITS TO GRANTS FUNDED PROJECTS

The Convener suggested that it might be helpful if a visit was carried out to certain projects which received financial assistance from the Council and it was agreed that Councillor Cairney liaise with the SNP Group to identify a date for a visit to Knowetop Farm and to the Health Project for any member who had an interest in going along.