

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Social Justice Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Rosebery Place, Clydebank on Wednesday, 8 October 2003 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillors James Bollan, James Flynn, Douglas McAllister, Margaret McGregor, Linda McColl, Marie McNair, Martin Rooney and Andy White.

Attending: Alexis Jay, Director of Social Work and Housing Services; Bill Clark, Head of Strategy; Cy Neil, Head of Housing; Jim Pow, Manager of Resources; Jeff Stobo, Strategy Manager; Willie Croft, Property Services Manager; Margaret Caldwell, Section Head - Arrears, Benefits & Cash Control; John Hepburn, Welfare Rights Officer; John McKerracher, Head of Leisure, Property, Catering & Cleaning; Lynda McLaughlin, Section Head - Leisure; and David Rooney, Senior Administrative Officer.

Apology: An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Councillor Denis Agnew.

Councillor James Flynn in the Chair

COMMUNITIES SCOTLAND – PRESENTATION ON INSPECTION OF WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL’S HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

887 The Convener, Councillor Flynn, advised that Yvonne Summers and Jon Grant of Communities Scotland were in attendance to provide a presentation with respect to the item of business on the agenda under the heading “Inspection of West Dunbartonshire Council’s Housing Service by Communities Scotland”.

888 Ms Summers gave a presentation on the forthcoming inspection of the Council’s Housing Management and Homelessness Services by Communities Scotland.

889 It was noted that in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, Communities Scotland was required to regulate local authority housing services and that this would be carried out by inspecting services and publishing reports, the purpose of which was to tell people whether good quality and value for money services were being provided, to identify areas for improvement and to share good practice between landlords.

890 Ms Summers then explained the various stages which would be involved in the inspection of the Council’s Housing Management and Homelessness Services. It was noted that the preparation stage had already commenced;

that the Inspection Team would be working on site during December 2003 and January 2004; and the exercise would culminate with the publication of a Final Inspection Report in May 2004 and the signing-off of an Improvement Plan with the Council by the end of July 2004.

891 Ms Summers answered various questions from Members in the course of a general discussion of the Inspection System and thereafter was thanked by Councillor Flynn for her informative presentation.

892 Ms Summers and Mr Grant then left the meeting.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

893 The Minutes of the Meeting of the Social Justice Committee held on 13 August 2003 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

INTRODUCTION OF AN EXERCISE REFERRAL SCHEME

894 A report was submitted by the Director of Commercial and Technical Services advising the Committee of the introduction of an Exercise Referral Scheme at the Meadow Sports Centre, Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Swimming Pool, Alexandria by entering into a joint partnership agreement with Argyll and Clyde NHS Board.

895 Following discussion it was agreed:-

- (a) that the proposals for the joint partnership initiative between Argyll and Clyde NHS Board and West Dunbartonshire Council be noted and welcomed;
- (b) that Councillor White would raise the issue of the possible introduction of a subsidised health and fitness scheme for employees of the Council at a meeting which he was due to have with representatives of the trades unions on 22 October 2003 and report back to the next meeting of the Committee on the outcome of discussion; and
- (c) that in relation to the issue of encouraging children to take exercise, the Director of Social Work and Housing Services would arrange to consider the matter with the Director of Commercial and Technical Services and the Director of Education and Cultural Services.

PENSION CREDIT – MAXIMISING RETIRED PEOPLES' ENTITLEMENT

896 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services outlining the main features of the new Pension Credit and seeking approval for a campaign of awareness to prepare older people for the introduction of the new scheme.

897 Councillor Rooney, seconded by Councillor White, moved:-

- (a) that the introduction of the new Pension Tax Credit and the steps being taken to prepare older people and other services for the change be noted; and
- (b) that the costs of the Pensioners Rights Awareness Day be approved and that Provost Macdonald be invited to extend the Council's hospitality to the key speakers at a civic reception to be held on Monday, 1 December 2003.

898 As an amendment, Councillor Bollan, seconded by Councillor McGregor, moved:-

899 That the Council should write to the Government asking them to restore the link between earnings and pensions for senior citizens.

900 On a vote being taken, two Members voted for the amendment and six Members voted for the motion. The motion was accordingly declared carried.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL ALLOCATION POLICY

901 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services concerning the finalisation of changes to the West Dunbartonshire Council Allocations Policy arising out of the introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

902 After hearing the Convener, Councillor Flynn, the Committee agreed:-

- (a) that all new applicants for West Dunbartonshire Council housing be awarded waiting time points from their date of application;
- (b) that "Living in Flats" points be retained in the WDC Allocations Policy and extended to all applicants; and
- (c) to note that it was the intention to review the Allocations Policy again in the near future and that a report in this connection would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

INSPECTION OF WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL'S HOUSING SERVICE BY COMMUNITIES SCOTLAND

903 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services advising of the timetable for the first inspection of the Council's Housing Management and Homelessness services by Communities Scotland in their new role as regulators of local authority Housing services. The report also provided details of the work being undertaken by Social Work and Housing Services in preparation for the inspection.

904 The Committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the timetable for the forthcoming inspection as detailed in the Appendix to the report; and
- (b) to note the work that had been undertaken in preparation for the inspection.

HRA CAPITAL BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT: PERIOD 5, 2003/04

905 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services advising of the progress of the HRA Capital Programme to 31 August 2003.

906 After consideration, and having heard officers in response to questions raised by Members, the Committee agreed to note the contents of the report and to refer the report to the Corporate Services Committee for information.

907 It was also agreed that reports on the Council's Void Housing Strategy and House Conditions Survey would be prepared and submitted to the Committee for consideration.

NOTE: Councillor McAllister left the meeting at this point in the proceedings.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGETARY POSITION 2003/04

908 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services informing on how key elements within the Housing Revenue Account were performing against budget for the period ended 31 August 2003.

909 After consideration, and having heard officers in response to questions raised by Members, the Committee agreed to note the contents of the report and to refer the report to the Corporate Services Committee for information.

910 In relation to a point which was raised by Councillor Bollan, it was agreed that reports on Void Houses and Council House Sales would be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

HOUSING MAINTENANCE DLO AND WINDOW FACTORY FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – PERIOD 5, 2003/04

- 911 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services presenting the interim cumulative financial information for the period from 1 April to 31 August 2003.
- 912 After discussion and having heard the Property Services Manager, the Committee agreed to note the contents of the report and to refer the report to the Corporate Services Committee for information.

RENT ARREARS

- 913 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services on the rent arrears position for the financial year 2002/2003 and the current year to August 2003.
- 914 The Committee agreed to note the progress made in the Council's rent arrears performance.

HOUSING & COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 915 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services on the Council's Housing & Council Tax Benefit performance for the financial year 2002/2003.
- 916 After hearing the Section Head - Arrears, Benefits & Cash Control, the Committee agreed:-
- (a) to note the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Performance;
 - (b) to note the new performance reporting requirements; and
 - (c) that the Quarterly Performance Statistics required by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) be reported quarterly to the Social Justice Committee prior to the DWP publication.

NOTE: Councillor White left the meeting at this point in the proceedings.

WHITECROOK COMMUNITY GROUP

- 917 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services requesting the Committee to consider authorising a free let of premises at 28 Lappin Street, Whitecrook, Clydebank to Whitecrook Community Group.
- 918 The Committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the contents of the report; and
- (b) to authorise the free let of 28 Lappin Street, Whitecrook, subject to planning permission, until October 2004, and that the position be reviewed thereafter.

BRUCEHILL ACTION GROUP

919 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services requesting the Committee to consider authorising a free let of premises at 37-43 Napier Crescent, Brucehill, Dumbarton to Brucehill Action Group.

920 The Committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the contents of the report; and
- (b) to approve the free let of 37 - 43 Napier Crescent, Brucehill, subject to planning permission, until October 2004, and that the position be reviewed thereafter.

SOCIAL WORK GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

921 A report was submitted by the Director of Social Work and Housing Services making recommendations on the level of grants payable to voluntary organisations.

922 The Committee agreed to approve the recommendations in relation to the various applications as detailed in the Appendix to the report, a copy of which is appended hereto. It was also agreed that the report be referred to the Corporate Services Committee for information.

923 Councillor Bollan, having failed to obtain a seconder for a proposed amendment, requested that his dissent be recorded with respect to this decision.

The meeting concluded at 12.07 p.m.