

MINUTE

‘A’ & ‘B’

Services Committee

Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lerwick

Thursday 2 September 2010 at 10 a.m.

Present:

L Angus	L Baisley
J Budge	A Cluness
A Cooper	A Doull
F B Grains	I Hawkins
R Henderson	J Henry
A Hughson	W Manson
C Miller	R Nickerson
F Robertson	J Simpson
C Smith	J Wills

Apologies:

A Duncan	B Fullerton
G Robinson	A S Wishart

In Attendance:

H Sutherland, Executive Director of Education and Social Care
H Budge, Head of Schools
C Ferguson, Head of Community Care
C Medley, Head of Housing
R Sinclair, Head of Capital Programming
S Morgan, Head of Children's Services
A Williamson, Chief Social Work Officer
N Watt, Sports and Leisure Services Manager
W Weis, Service Manager – Community Care Resources
M Duncan, Grants Co-ordinator
K Foster, Accountancy Officer
J Thomason, Management Accountant
C Wiseman, Senior Assistant Accountant
A Cogle, Service Manager - Administration

Chairperson

Mr L Angus, Chairperson of the Committee, presided.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr J Henry, returning to his first meeting of the Services Committee since his accident. Members applauded.

Circular

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

Declarations of Interest

Mrs C Miller declared an interest in agenda item 9 – COPE Update on Future Funding Arrangements – adding that a family member was a full time member with COPE.

Dr J Wills declared an interest in matters which may relate to the employment of his wife as an Education Officer.

Minutes

The minutes of meetings held on 17 June and 24 June 2010, having been circulated, were confirmed.

Members Attendance at External Meetings

Mr L Angus advised that he had met with the Depute Leader of East Renfrewshire Council and held discussions regarding their recent re-organisation of Social Care services. He added that the Chief Executive had undertaken a similar exercise in Orkney Islands Council, and it was intended that further discussions would be held between Members and senior staff in this area, with a view to bringing forward proposals to the Committee in due course.

Mr A J Cluness said that the Scottish Government had yet to receive its settlement figures, but had imposed a fixed rate on local authority staff, from which Teachers were excluded. He said the message from all quarters was the same, in that a period of considerable cutbacks was required and would result in the end of services, and that the Shetland community would not be exempt from that and the Council should be prepared for hard times ahead.

71/10 Trips Away! - Policy on Health and Safety of Young People on Off Site Trips and Visits

The Committee considered a report by the Sport and Leisure Services Manager (Appendix 1).

Dr J Wills said he was pleased to see this report, which was much clearer than that proposed at a previous meeting.

Mr L Angus said that he shared that view, but referred to the Appendix and to paragraph 2.2, and suggested that given the guidelines were to be shared with agencies other than the Council, that a definition of “managers” may be appropriate for clarification. Mr Angus said that there was also reference within the guidelines to the GTC Code of Professionalism, and suggested that this may be a lot of information for voluntary groups to take on board.

The Sports and Leisure Services Manager said that the Council was taking the lead in promoting this Policy with other agencies, and it was expected that they would use this as the basis for adapting their policy in order to ensure a consistent

approach. Regarding managers, he said that the level of management authority was understood within Schools and other Service areas as to what level of delegation there was in terms of responsibility for ensuring the safety of children on trips. For example for Schools it would be the Head Teacher and for most other service areas it would be the Service Manager.

Mr L Angus asked if anyone getting grant assistance would be expected to adopt this policy.

[Mr W Manson attended the meeting.]

The Sports and Leisure Services Manager said that there was no explicit requirement to adopt the policy, but groups would be made aware of it when applying for grant assistance. The Chief Social Worker added that work was currently being done on corporate child protection in relation to grants and Service Level Agreements. In this regard, she said that any organisation accessing public funding in this way would be subject to any policy that the Council felt necessary.

Mr R Nickerson said there were many overly bureaucratic procedures in place, particularly for Community Councils in relation to their funding. He said that those procedures seemed to be quite onerous, and said that care should be taken to ensure that this Policy on trips was being put in place to simplify matters for voluntary groups as well as the Council. Dr J Wills agreed, saying that grant recipients should certainly be made aware of the standards expected, but there was a danger of overloading them with bureaucracy.

The Committee approved the recommendations in the report, on the motion of Mrs I J Hawkins, seconded by Mr C Smith.

72/10

Mortgage Meeting Update and Further Proposal for Shared Equity Scheme

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Housing (Appendix 2).

Mr A J Cluness said that he welcomed this report as a way of promoting housing for young people and others.

Mr R Henderson said he also welcomed the proposals in the report, but said that he would like to see first time buyers being given a grant to allow them to build a house anywhere in Shetland. He suggested that some agreement could be put in place to pay back the grant after a period of time, and this would allow houses to be built throughout Shetland rather than in big clumps in the central mainland.

Dr J Wills said that Mr Henderson's proposal was an attractive idea, but was not achievable by the Council as it did not have the funding available to give grants for this purpose. He said that the Scheme being proposed in the report was a good one.

Mr A Cooper said he thought there was more scope for private housing being attached to new or existing schemes, where services and infrastructure were nearby and available.

Mr R Nickerson said he thought the recommendation was a splendid scheme, but he was concerned that the Council would not be pursuing the mortgage option. He said there was going to be a real crunch in the private sector and he already knew that Total was looking at private sector rentals, and that would push up local rents. Mr Nickerson said he fully supported the recommendations in the report, but moved them with an additional 8.1.7 "That the option of mortgages is kept open for review." Dr J Wills seconded.

Mr W H Manson said he saw no barrier to the scheme being applied in areas other than Hoofields and Brae.

Mrs L Baisley said she agreed that the Council could not realistically offer grants at this time. However, she said the Council should bear in mind that the scheme was being proposed as a pilot, and if it worked well, it could then be rolled out to other areas in Shetland.

Mrs I Hawkins said that the scheme appeared similar to the shared ownership scheme that Hjaltland Housing Association [HHA] operated.

Mrs F Grains asked how long the pilot would go before it would be extended.

Mr F Robertson said the scheme was a very good idea, adding that one of the problems for housing in Lerwick and the Central area was the cost of the site.

Mr L Angus referred to the question from Mrs Hawkins and asked whether this was any different to the Shared Ownership Scheme operated by the HHA.

The Head of Housing explained that the HHA own a share of the house and the person pays HHA rental for that part of the share. He said that the proposed scheme would not require a rental payment, as it would apply to any house, not just a Council house. He added that the Council's return on its investment would be when the house is sold. In terms of housing sites, the Head of Housing said that a meeting had been planned to look at opening up building plots across the authority, and also, if there was interest, to sell sites on the Hoofields and Brae schemes. He said that the intention would be to advertise for expressions of interest, and then to conduct an analysis of that, to firm up on the proposals and report back to the Committee at a later date.

With regard to the source of funding for this, the Head of Housing confirmed that funding would initially come from the Council's General Fund Reserves, but would be managed through the approved Gateway Process for capital projects.

Mr L Angus referred to paragraph 4.4.10 and questioned whether the criteria could be looked at, bearing in mind family breakdowns and issues regarding custody of children. Mr Angus said his concern was that the criteria may exclude those people on the grounds of them being tenants or home owners. The Head of Housing said that the criteria could be reviewed as the proposal developed.

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Finance (Appendix 3).

In response to questions from Dr Wills, the Executive Director explained that the objective position described the services involved, and the subjective position described the detailed spending, and that these were accounting terms. She added that payment for the Service Level Agreement for the Museums Service was made through the Executive Director Management budgets, was updated annually and paid in two instalments.

With regarding Modern Apprenticeships, the Executive Director confirmed the budgets included subsistence and allowances for Modern Apprenticeships, but that there was a gap in funding that the Council had agreed would be an item of growth, and this would allow more places to be offered. Mr A Hughson confirmed that 45 Modern Apprenticeship places were now available, and 39 had been taken up so far.

Mr J Henry referred to the underspend in staffing costs referred to in paragraph 5.2. The Executive Director confirmed that the Social Care Service was required to make a £1.1m contribution to the Council's requirement for £9.9m savings, and that savings were being offered in terms of staffing.

The Committee noted that grazing lets referred to land purchased or owned by the Council which had been set aside for development such as housing, but until development commenced or the land sold, it was rented out for common grazing.

The Committee noted the report.

74/10

Capital Projects Update – Services Committee Projects

The Committee considered a report by the Capital Programme Service Manager (Appendix 4).

Mr A Cooper referred to the number of completed projects some of which had no spend and some ongoing projects had a lot of spend. He said that a lot more effort had to be made on being clear on what costs were coming through so that Members knew what was being spent, what was slippage and what was not being spent, and this would give a real financial picture. The Head of Capital Programming agreed to take on board these comments.

Mr L Angus said he was delighted to see work on the new Eric Gray Centre was now finally underway. However, he said that this project, and a number of other ones had a very long lead in time. Mr Angus referred to the Nederdale play area, and said that had been a 3 year lead in time, and said that this seemed to be a feature of a number of projects. The Head of Capital Programming confirmed that this was an area that would be addressed.

Mr A Cooper referred to the OT store. The Head of Capital Programming advised that the project was moving towards seeking planning permission from the Planning Board in October, and would progress from there.

Regarding play areas, Members discussed the decision to close a number of the smaller play areas, or not to invest further in small play areas, but to replace with bigger and more central areas. However, some Members were concerned that provision of a play area, whether with equipment or not, was not routinely provided for within housing schemes being planned and children were have to go some distance to a play area. In this regard, the Committee agreed to recommend that the Planning Board be asked to consider the provision of play areas as a requirement, in terms of community benefit, in new housing schemes, particularly in bigger commercial developments.

75/10 **Blueprint for Education in Shetland – Stage 4: Consultation and Proposal to Relocate the Anderson High School: Statutory Consultation**

The Committee noted a report by the Head of Schools (Appendix 5).

76/10 **Reports by HM Inspectorate of Education: Uyeasound Primary School and Sound Primary School and Nursery Class**

The Committee noted a report by the Head of Schools (Appendix 6).

The Committee also agreed to compliment the Schools on the quality of the report and the efforts made by the staff of those Schools.

77/10 **Young Carers**

The Committee noted a report by the Head of Children's Services (Appendix 7).

Mr W H Manson said that the report showed the current position, and that if the good work which was ongoing results in any needs, this will result in a further report. Mr Manson said that the Princes Trust report was estimating over 290 young carers in Shetland, but based on the 29 known carers, it was considered unlikely that there would be so many more. However, he confirmed that if there were much higher figures and would result in further work or efforts, a report would come back to the Committee for consideration.

Mrs L Baisley said that the problem with the identification of young carers was of concern, and hoped that the mechanisms already in place were robust enough.

Mr L Angus questioned the use of an Educational Psychologist for research and if this was the best use of resources. However, the Head of Children's Services advised that the Assistant Psychologist had a psychology degree and a research background, but was not able to practice as an Educational Psychologist, but would be able to meet the specific remit required for this research for the Educational Psychology service, which had a statutory remit to undertake research on behalf of the local authority. In addition he added that the collection of information was due

to conclude by end of this year, and this would be followed by an analysis of the results and recommendations as to how the Council had to respond.

In response to a question from Dr J Wills, the Head of Children's Services confirmed that the Shetland Childcare Partnership were not involved in the action plan.

Mr A J Cluness said the real difficulty here is because children do slip through the system, and some were therefore not getting the help they needed. He added that every single member of the community had a duty to alert someone if they think something is wrong.

Mr L Angus said a number of children had been identified through the Befriending Scheme, and said that there were a number of agencies already involved in this area, and all resources that the community had would be used.

Mr Angus added that it had been requested that this item become a standing item on the Services Committee agenda. Members agreed.

78/10

Shetland Child Protection Committee – Annual Report and Business Plan

The Committee noted a report by the Executive Director of Education and Social Care (Appendix 8).

79/10

COPE Ltd – Update on Future Funding Arrangements

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Community Care (Appendix 9).

Mr C Smith said that COPE Ltd did a wonderful job for the community, and said that the Council should have no other option to support it, and that the Committee should note the report.

Mr L Angus said he accepted that this was supported employment and was happy to recommend continued support.

Mr J G Simpson said he had no problem supporting the organisation, but said there had to be a business plan into the future.

[Mr A J Cluness left the meeting.]

Mr W H Manson said that the organisation was often spoken about as a commercial entity, but it was clear that it was also a sheltered employment venture. He agreed that core funding needed to be stable, but that if the organisation did not provide this employment, the alternatives would be vastly more expensive for this Council.

Mr A Cooper said that this was one of the best ventures in recent years, and agreed that it should be given a long term future through a funding commitment. Regarding long term funding, the Executive Director said that consideration would

have to be given to EU regulations regarding buying of goods and services and only up to 4 year funding could be given.

In response to a question from Mr R Nickerson, the Head of Community Care explained that a new funding mechanism could be put in place which would include an individual support plan for each client, thereby allowing a budget to be in place for each individual based on their disabilities and related needs, and allowing them the freedom to apply that budget as required. She said this mechanism would ensure that the Council was not subsidising the trading part of the business. The Head of Community Care confirmed that the funding would therefore come from the Community Care budget, and that it would be ready for inclusion within the revenue estimates for 2011/12.

The Committee noted the report, on the motion of Mr C Smith seconded by Mr R Henderson.

80/10 **Service Level Agreements**

Mr L Angus advised that a recommendation had come from COSLA that local authorities should be looking at their Service Level Agreements and determine if they should be replaced with contracts. In this regard, Mr Angus said that it would be a fairly complicated task in Shetland, and thought it may be useful for the Committee to receive a report on whether it would be desirable to implement this recommendation in Shetland. The Executive Director agreed to prepare a report for the next meeting, providing an overview and update of current Service Level Agreements.

The meeting concluded at 11.05 p.m.

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L Angus
Chairperson