

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23 September 2015

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Hay Room, Dewar's Centre, Glover Street, Perth on Wednesday 23 September 2015 at 2.00pm.

Present: Councillors A Stewart, B Vaughan, D Doogan, A Munro and A Younger.

In Attendance: C Flynn (up to and including Art. 600), H Lorimer (up to and including Art. 600), H Rheinallt, L Simpson and G Taylor (all Chief Executive's Service); N Copland, J Gilruth, F Low and A Taylor (all Housing and Community Care); M Cochlan, K McNamara and B Renton (The Environment Service); B Atkinson (Education and Children's Services).

Apology for Absence: Councillor D Cuthbert.

Councillor A Stewart, Convener, Presiding

596. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES / SUBSTITUTES

The Convener welcomed all those present to the meeting, and an apology for absence was noted as above.

597. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

598. MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of 17 June 2015 (Arts. 412-418) was submitted, approved as correct record and authorised for signature.

599. UPDATE ON FOURTH SCRUTINY REVIEW – MEMBER/OFFICER WORKING GROUPS

There was submitted a report by the Head of Democratic Services (15/405), providing the Committee with a further update on the progress made to date on the recommendations from the Fourth Scrutiny Review on Member Officer Groups (MOGs).

G Taylor provided an update to the Committee on progress with the ongoing mapping exercise, highlighting the importance of including all relevant information, such as the Community Planning Outcome Delivery Groups, Annual Performance Reports, key elements of public service reform agendas including new legislation for community empowerment and engagement.

Councillor Vaughan suggested that, as a recent short-life MOG considering wider scrutiny of education performance had been useful, similar arrangements be considered in relation to other issues.

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Resolved:

The progress made to date on the recommendations from the Fourth Scrutiny Review on MOGs be noted.

600. REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS, DEATHS, MARRIAGES AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS – INSPECTION REPORTS BY NATIONAL RECORDS SCOTLAND

There was submitted a report by the Head of Democratic Services (15/406), commenting on the annual inspection reports from the National Records of Scotland on the provision of registration services in the Perth and Kinross local government area in 2014.

In response to a query from the Convener regarding the accuracy rate, C Flynn confirmed that a number of improvement measures had been put in place, such as a new rota to allow local registrars to visit the Perth office more frequently. Councillor Doogan questioned the higher levels of accuracy in other areas compared to Perth, commenting that the advantage of the higher volume of registrations in Perth should show in the accuracy rate.

Resolved:

The annual inspection reports by the National Records of Scotland on the provision of registration services in the Perth and Kinross local government area be noted.

C FLYNN AND H LORIMER LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT

601. COUNCIL COMPLAINTS REPORT FOR APRIL 2014 – MARCH 2015

There was submitted a report by the Head of Legal Services (15/407), outlining the performance of the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) during the second year of its operation – April 2014 to March 2015.

It was noted that the report content had been revised to comply with Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) requirements of reporting performance measures for Local Authorities.

In response to a query from the Convener, L Simpson advised that where there is a large volume of complaints in particular areas or parts of a Service, a Complaints Officer would attend and speak face-to-face with relevant officers. Where there are a number of complaints, this can indicate that a policy or procedure has not been fit for purpose; if this is the case, the Complaints Officer would suggest a change, and it is then an operational matter for the Service to implement.

Councillor Vaughan questioned the monitoring of inconsistent complaints handling statistics across schools. L Simpson confirmed that Complaints Officers had been to schools and emphasised the importance of complaints handling, and that there could be changes made as regards complaints handling when the new handbooks are published. There had also been better communication with schools since the officers had been to visit them. B Atkinson confirmed that S Watson,

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Communications Manager, receives information on complaints in schools, and if there is variation across the school estate, these issues are focused on and considered in more detail with colleagues from Legal Services. L Simpson commented that if there are hotspots or trends in types of complaints, officers would visit schools, adopting a proactive approach and escalating the issue if required. Councillor Vaughan suggested that school complaints be separated from other complaints in the annual report. L Simpson agreed to consider with B Atkinson the most useful way to report this information.

Councillor Vaughan commented that a year ago, the Committee had been assured that quarterly reports on complaints would be provided, as well as a survey carried out within six months; however, this had not happened. She highlighted an example of this also occurring at another Committee. Councillor Vaughan suggested that the Committee receive a report at the next meeting setting out responsibility for ensuring that actions agreed at committee meetings are followed up and reported back. The Convener noted the need for elected members to receive this information.

Councillor Doogan questioned whether officers were aware of the impact that changes to public service budgets, and the resulting substantial changes to how services are delivered, may have on complaints. B Renton confirmed that in The Environment Service, work is being done with officers and managers to allow them to highlight what the budget means for the services they provide. It is important to look at innovate ways of providing services; services need to change and this needs to be communicated to the service user. In response to a further query from Councillor Doogan regarding the distinction between a complaint and a service request, B Renton confirmed that work is being done with Legal Services to ensure that each is being recorded appropriately. Ten percent of people who had phoned to make a service request or complaint are also phoned back to ask how they felt their request was dealt with, or whether they were satisfied with the resolution.

Councillor Vaughan suggested that figures be provided broken down by Service. L Simpson agreed to explore what information could be provided by the system. B Renton suggested that complaints information could be included in the section for customer feedback in the Service Business Management and Improvement Plans.

Councillor Younger queried whether information could be provided on complaints which had been authorised to extend beyond twenty days whether concluded or not, in order to provide more detail on when it is decided that complaints cannot be resolved. L Simpson agreed to investigate if this could be provided.

Resolved:

- (i) The information contained in Report 15/407 be noted.
- (ii) It be noted that further work is to be carried out on the operation and performance of the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) over the next six months.
- (iii) It be noted that quarterly CHP performance information will be published during 2015/2016.

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- (iv) The Head of Democratic Services submit a report to the next meeting of the committee on responsibility for following up, implementing and reporting back on actions agreed by the Council, Committees and Sub-Committees.

602. ACCOUNTS COMMISSION'S ASSESSMENT OF PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE REPORTING FOR 2013/14

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive (15/401), presenting the Accounts Commission's assessment of the Council's approach to responding to its statutory public performance reporting duties.

It was noted that the report had been considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at a meeting held earlier in the day.

In response to a query from Councillor Doogan regarding the Council's ability to keep pace with technological advancement, A Taylor replied that the Digital Strategy would be submitted to Council in due course. The Strategy would provide a more holistic approach rather than being focussed on particular areas of the network. Councillor Munro noted the importance of involving elected members in the development of the Strategy.

Councillor Younger noted the importance of demonstrating to the public that the Council has improved due to public feedback. In response to a query from the Convener regarding the Council's website, K McNamara confirmed that one of the transformation projects, 'Open Observatory,' would be focussed on improving information on the website. The performance management systems are also being modernised, which would further improve the information available.

Resolved:

- (i) The Accounts Commission's assessment of Perth and Kinross Council's performance reporting for 2013/14 be noted.
- (ii) The next steps, as detailed in Section 3 of Report 15/401, to secure further improvement, be noted.

603. REVIEW OF INVOICING ARRANGEMENTS FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY CARE CONTRIBUTION'S POLICY (ART 415)

Following on from agreement at the last meeting of the committee that the Executive Director (Housing and Community Care) submit a report to this meeting regarding invoicing arrangements for day care services within community care, there was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Housing and Community Care) (15/408), (1) examining the background to events leading up to the press publicity; the invoicing process; action already taken and planned to address the situation; and (2) setting out the current position in relation to this activity.

Councillor Vaughan noted the importance of learning lessons from the process, commenting on the co-ordination and time needed to train additional staff as a possible issue in this case. J Gilruth responded that it had been known that the work entailed reassessment, meeting with families, and looking at financials; however, at the beginning it was not clear what the figures would look like.

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The Convener commented on the importance, as demonstrated by the timeline of events, of making elected members aware of a potential issue before they would be contacted by the public and the press, as had happened in this case. J Gilruth accepted that all elected members should have been notified at an earlier stage.

Resolved:

The circumstances surrounding the recent invoice administration issues, the progress to date in dealing with this situation, and the future target for processing work, be noted.

604. NOTICE OF SIXTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REVIEW

There was submitted a briefing note (15/409), by Councillor Stewart, Convener of the Scrutiny Committee, stating that Planning Enforcement has been selected for the Sixth Scrutiny Committee Review.

Resolved:

The topic of the Sixth Scrutiny Committee Review be noted.

605. VALEDICTORY

The Convener congratulated M Cochlan on her new post with Aberdeen City Council and paid tribute to her work and support for the Committee, and also expressed thanks on behalf of the previous Convener.

IT WAS AGREED THAT THE PUBLIC AND PRESS SHOULD BE EXCLUDED DURING CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM IN ORDER TO AVOID THE DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION WHICH IS EXEMPT IN TERMS OF SCHEDULE 7A TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (SCOTLAND) ACT 1973.

606. MINUTE OF MEETING OF SOCIAL WORK COMPLAINTS REVIEW COMMITTEE OF 19 JUNE 2015

There was submitted and noted the minute of meeting of the Social Work Complaints Review Committee of 19 June 2015.

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