

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Committee Room, Fourth Floor, Council Building, 2 High Street, Perth on Wednesday 20 June 2012 at 3.00pm.

Present: Councillors A Stewart, B Vaughan, M Barnacle, D Cuthbert, D Doogan (until Art. 311(iv)), A MacLellan and A Younger.

In Attendance: B Malone (Chief Executive); I Innes, M Kay, C Flynn, K Donaldson (until Art. 311(iv)), J Clark (until Art. 311(iv)), D Henderson (from Art. 311(i)) and R Fry (until Art. 311(iv)) (all Chief Executive's Service); B Renton (the Environment Service); J Walker (Housing and Community Care); M Cochlan, J Gilchrist, K Harker (until Art. 311(iv)) and H Stuart (all Education and Children's Services).

Also Attending: Councillor M Roberts (until Art. 311(i))

Apology for Absence: Mr I Jackson.

Councillor A Stewart, Convener, Presiding

308. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

309. MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minute of Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of 28 March 2012 (Arts. 168-176) was submitted, approved as a correct record and authorised for signature.

310. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Convener reported on the need to appoint five members to the Audit Sub-Committee.

Resolved:

- (i) Councillors D Cuthbert, A MacLellan, A Stewart, B Vaughan and A Younger be appointed to the Audit Sub-Committee.
- (ii) In addition to the scheduled meetings of the Audit Sub-Committee, a special meeting be held on Wednesday 27 June 2012 at 9.00am.

311. JOINT BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PLANS AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORTS

For the benefit of new members, B Renton, Depute Director (Environment), outlined the role of Business Management and Improvement Plans and the Scrutiny Committee in the Council's performance framework.

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In response to a request from Councillor Vaughan that officers report back to the Committee on proposals to involve elected members in the process at an early stage, B Malone, Chief Executive, agreed that it would be helpful to secure greater involvement and engagement, and that this could be addressed in the report to be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the review of the Community Planning Framework, with one option being the formation of a number of focus groups to inform the year end report.

In response to a question from Councillor Cuthbert as to the cost of performance activity, B Malone advised that information gathered previously in this regard had not proved to be useful; the Council did not use activity based costing; and that Audit Scotland's focus on performance was to look at delivery of outcomes by Partnerships. Councillor Cuthbert enquired if it was possible to set costs against objectives and B Malone explained that this could prove difficult as objectives could change, although it may be possible to use changes in level of expenditure and workforce as a measure.

(i) Chief Executive's Service

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive (12/243) presenting the Chief Executive's Service Joint Business Management and Improvement Plan for 2012-15 and Annual Performance Report for the period 2011/12, which had been approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting earlier in the day.

Councillor Barnacle referred to the level of applications received by the Perth and Kinross Local Review Body being one of the highest in Scotland and enquired as to the reason for this. B Malone confirmed that, since the Local Review Body had been established in 2009, 194 applications for review of decisions made under delegated powers had been received, second only to City of Edinburgh Council, and I Innes pointed to the level of delegation which had been agreed by the Council and approved by Scottish Ministers.

Councillor Cuthbert enquired how the level of delegation compared to those of other Councils and B Malone (i) explained that this would require sophisticated benchmarking data from other Councils; (ii) advised that some areas of activity better lent themselves to comparator data which could be reported; and (iii) advised that it was intended to re-establish the Planning Etc (Scotland) 2006 Member/Officer Working Group to examine the Local Review Body operation in more detail to establish if recommendations for changes were required.

D HENDERSON ENTERED THE MEETING AT THIS POINT.

In response to a suggestion by Councillor Vaughan that it would be helpful if sickness absence figures were dis-aggregated, K Donaldson

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reported that the figures quoted related to a Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) and advised that, as part of the framework of governance put in place the previous year, there was a level of scrutiny at management level to establish what actions were required to support staff in returning to work. B Malone noted that there were numerous issues to be addressed relating to long-term sickness absence, chronic conditions and an ageing workforce and pointed to the physiotherapy project within Housing and Community Care as an example of proactively addressing a specific issue.

In response to Councillor Doogan's suggestions that (1) it would be useful to report separately on absences related to term time working, K Donaldson reported that term time working had been taken account of in calculations and (2) that figures be presented as percentages, B Malone reported that the sickness absence SPI had been previously reported as a percentage but had been changed by Audit Scotland to number of days to enable comparison between public and private sectors.

Resolved:

The Chief Executive's Service Joint Business Management and Improvement Plan for 2012-15 and Annual Performance Report for the period 2011-12, as detailed in the Appendix to Report 12/243, be accepted.

COUNCILLOR M ROBERTS LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT.

(ii) Education and Children's Services

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) (12/221) presenting the Education and Children's Services Joint Business Management Improvement Plan for 2012-15 and Annual Performance Report for the period 2011-12, which had been approved by the Lifelong Learning Committee at its meeting on 6 June 2012.

H Stuart was present to answer members' questions on the Report and, in response to a question from Councillor A Stewart on benchmarking related to 'Getting It Right For Every Child', advised that there was a network of senior professionals considering how best to collect data and share information with agencies involved in service delivery. B Malone also advised that, whilst certain areas of activity lent themselves to quantitative comparison, this was not appropriate in all cases, and for other activities it was better to identify and learn from good practice, with the focus of efforts being on improving outcomes for individuals, which could be measured over time. H Stuart advised that the Education Scotland Working Group who were reviewing areas of good practice were disseminating this to education authorities.

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Councillor Vaughan suggested that the Council should base future projections on school capacities on information known on Primary 1 rolls, B Malone agreed to discuss this with the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) and obtain information on Primary 1 intake and would circulate this information to advise local members.

Councillor Doogan requested further information in relation to the measure of those entering positive destinations and H Stuart reported that Perth and Kinross Council had a number of strengths in this area; in schools knowing the young people concerned, integrated team meetings being held, and in identifying leaving choices in education, training or employment opportunities which best met their needs. B Malone advised that Skills Development Scotland produced national measures providing headline information on comparisons with other authorities, which had identified that in Perth and Kinross more were entering higher education but fewer were entering further education and the reasons for this were being examined. She reported that there were still employment opportunities locally at entry level and the Council worked closely with employers to carry out sustained tracking, particularly where young people remained in the local area; providing where necessary a bridge into sustainable long-term opportunities. To address barriers to employability, it was necessary to address any top-up skills required to meet the requirements of job opportunities available.

Councillor Doogan enquired as to what action could be taken for those young people who were unable to secure employment. J Walker advised that Housing and Community Care provided transitional support to age 21 in an effort to assist those outwith the labour market and there were a number of initiatives being pursued such as Youth Build Challenges to address employability issues.

Resolved:

The Education and Children's Services Joint Business Management and Improvement Plan for 2012-15 and Annual Performance Report for the period 2011-12, as detailed in the Appendix to Report 12/221, be accepted.

(iii) The Environment Service

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Environment) (12/227) presenting The Environment Service's Joint Business Management and Improvement Plan 2012-15 and Annual Performance Report for the period 2011-12, which had been approved by the Environment Committee, the Community Safety Committee and the Enterprise and Infrastructure Committee, at their meetings on 13 June 2012.

B Renton reported further that transformation activities were ahead of the review timetable with changes made earlier than expected in a

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number of areas. She reported that there had been a steady increase in the number of planning applications delivered on time and reported on the service's approach to regeneration and how best to use the economic benefit of City Status.

Councillor Barnacle made reference to concerns raised during 2011 following the reduction in frequency of verge cutting and the issue of visibility splays at road junctions in the area around the T in the Park site and asked that this be taken account of for the 2012 event.

In response to a question from Councillor Vaughan as to whether success rates of business start ups were measured, B Renton agreed that further consideration would be given to how best to assess this.

Councillor Vaughan enquired as to the delay in completion of Employee Review and Development meetings and was advised that this had been delayed due to the service undergoing restructuring changes. B Malone advised that the considerable number of reviews which had been agreed were now coming to an end, which would bring a period of stability.

Resolved:

The Environment Service's Joint Business Management and Improvement Plan 2012-15 and Annual Performance Report for the period 2011-12, as detailed in the Appendix to Report 12/227, be accepted.

(iv) Housing and Community Care

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Housing and Community Care) (12/222) presenting Housing and Community Care's Joint Business Management and Improvement Plan for 2012-15 and Annual Performance Report for the period 2011-12, which had been approved by the Housing and Health Committee at its meeting on 6 June 2012 and by the Community Safety Committee on 13 June 2012.

J Walker gave a presentation on the considerable efforts being made to address sickness absence which had been recognised as a priority; and reported that signs of improvement had been identified. He (i) explained that the process had to take cognisance of the age profile of the workforce, chronic conditions and medical capability; (ii) confirmed the maximising attendance policy was being applied vigorously; (iii) advised that, to provide solutions to address specific issues, initiatives such as the physiotherapy project which had been introduced to address the high level of musculoskeletal conditions and flexible working patterns were being used; and (iv) advised that a report would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee later in the year on progress made.

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In response to a question from Councillor Barnacle as to whether absence due to stress was higher in Housing and Community Care than other services, J Walker confirmed this and advised that many staff were engaged in mentally and physically demanding tasks.

Councillor Younger enquired if there had been any noticeable difference following the introduction of Fit notes; J Walker advised on the approach taken to encourage early return to work and K Donaldson advised that managers had received training on how to assist employees back to work and consideration given to developing links with NHS Tayside to assist in a range of options the Council could put in place to help with this.

COUNCILLOR DOOGAN LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT.

J Walker gave a presentation on action being taken to address rent arrears. He reported that (i) the Perth and Kinross collection rate at the end of 2011 was 98.5%, the Scottish average for 2010-11 being 5.9% uncollected; (ii) with the introduction of Welfare Reform changes from October 2013 when universal credit would be paid direct to households rather than Housing benefit being paid direct to Councils, it would be necessary to ensure there was no deterioration in the rate of collection; (iii) there was a strata of arrear debt levels, evidenced by a localised analysis exercise carried out, which had produced much useful information; (iv) the arrears team had been restructured and deployed to area offices to address a trend of increasing debt; (v) as payment patterns could be related to life events, social workers were assisting in targeting interventions where most needed; (vi) the possibility of introducing a credit union was being investigated; and (vi) advised that he would report back in one year on progress.

In response to a question from Councillor Barnacle as to what discussions had taken place with the government on the impact of the introduction of universal credit in October 2013, J Walker explained that advice had been received that, if rent remained unpaid for 6-8 weeks, the benefit payment could then be paid to the Council direct, however this did not address the arrears, and there was concern that arrears would increase and the in-year collection rates affected. Councillor Stewart also expressed concern over the significant implications for the Council of the forthcoming changes. In response to a request from Councillor Cuthbert, J Walker agreed to provide current figures on arrears.

J Walker referred to the transformation agenda activity with Housing and Community Care, and the work to date on health and social care integration to ensure the best use of resources for supporting vulnerable people.

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Resolved:

Housing and Community Care's Joint Business Management and Improvement Plan for 2012-15 and Annual Performance Report for the period 2011-12, as detailed in the Appendix to Report 11/222, be accepted.

R FRY, K DONALDSON, J CLARK AND K HARKER LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT.

312. COMPLAINTS REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2011-MARCH 2012

There was submitted a report by the Head of Legal Services (12/247) outlining the performance of the Council's Complaints Procedure for the period October 2011 to March 2012.

D Henderson, Information Compliance Manager, was present to answer members questions on the report.

In response to questions from Councillor Cuthbert (1) D Henderson advised on the operation of the Council's two stage complaints process and the Council's approach to definitions of complaints and service requests; (2) B Malone referred to the local authority view on the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) recommendation that there should be an additional stage and explained that the Council's priority was to resolve complaints, to learn from them and make any necessary improvements; and (3) D Henderson advised on the difficulty in assessing complainants' satisfaction levels.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Barnacle on the level of complaints in respect of the planning system and if action could be taken to reduce these, B Malone explained the difficulty in addressing the concerns of those aggrieved with a planning decision, and confirmed that there was no indication that suggested a change to the current procedures was necessary.

Resolved:

The contents of Report 12/247 be noted.

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