

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Gannochy Suite, Dewar's Centre, Glover Street, Perth on Wednesday 11 February 2015 at 2.00pm.

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

In Attendance: D Henderson, S Hendry, H Rheinallt, G Taylor and S Walker (all Chief Executive's Service); B Atkinson and P Davison (both Education and Children's Services); J Mayglothling and A Taylor (both Housing and Community Care); M Cochlan and K McNamara (both The Environment Service).

Councillor A Stewart, Convener, Presiding.

89. WELCOME

The Convener welcomed all present to the meeting.

90. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

91. MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of 3 December 2014 was submitted, approved as a correct record and authorised for signature.

92. STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT 2013/14

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) (15/40) reflecting on the activities of Education and Children's Services over the past year and presenting an overview of the Service's key strengths and areas for development and/or improvement. It was noted that Report 15/40 had been accepted by the Lifelong Learning Committee on 28 January 2015.

Councillor Vaughan questioned the format of the report as it covers a substantial amount of information incorporating a large range of topics; and suggested that it would be helpful for the Service to investigate options for a different format in order to provide a more comprehensive account of the work undertaken by the Service. B Atkinson noted Councillor Vaughan's comments and agreed to investigate whether there are other options for a more streamlined report.

Responding to a question from Councillor Vaughan, B Atkinson assured the Committee that although there is no explicit reference to partnership working in the Executive Summary, neither the positive outcomes or the support in the summary were delivered without partnership working. In response to a further query from Councillor Vaughan, B Atkinson noted that he would undertake benchmarking if it was helpful for the Councillors to better scrutinise the report.

Councillor Stewart requested clarification on how the variety and geographical spread of schools, as well as pressures going forward on the school roll, would be managed. B Atkinson responded that every year, a report is produced for the Lifelong Learning Committee on the school roll and the condition of the school estate. He reported that a longer-term plan for the school estate would be brought to a meeting of the Council later in the year.

Clarity was sought by Councillor Younger regarding the increase in the reintegration of children from nurture provision into a mainstream class, and whether it was connected to an increase in the number of people involved in family learning, adult learning and parenting programmes. B Atkinson responded that although the figures for reintegration were not directly comparable with the number of people involved in the programmes, the gap between mainstream and alternative provision is narrowing; as more people participate in the programmes, hopefully more pupils will come to school able to cope with the emotional, social and educational aspects of school life.

Councillor Cuthbert requested a breakdown in the figures of cultural, sporting and active recreation sessions. B Atkinson agreed to provide these in due course.

Resolved:

The contents of the Standards and Quality Report 2013/14 be noted

93. CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

There was submitted a report by the Chief Social Work Officer (14/550) providing the Committee with the Chief Social Work Officer's assessment of social work and social care practice across Perth and Kinross in the financial year 2013/14. It was noted that Report 14/550 had been approved by the Council on 17 December 2014, where it was agreed the report be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comment.

In response to a query from the Convener regarding the effect of the re-ablement services on Education and Children's Services budget, B Atkinson responded that although re-ablement relieves some pressure on the Home Care budget, the budget is subject to rising demand from the needs of the over eight years old population.

Councillor Cuthbert requested clarification on the figure of the growth of the over seventy-five years old population. B Atkinson advised that comparatively, the older population in Perth and Kinross is growing at a faster rate than other local authority areas. He reported that help from social work services required by the older population due to frailty most commonly begins around the age of seventy-five and increases between the ages of eighty – eighty-five and over.

Councillor Cuthbert requested clarification as to whether the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report would still be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee with the integration of health and social care services. G Taylor advised that until the Joint Board was established and functioning, it was not possible to determine which reports will go to the Scrutiny Committee. In the interim, the Committee will continue to receive the same reports.

In response to a question from Councillor Vaughan regarding the impact of a named person for every child, B Atkinson responded that although the legislation has not been fully implemented yet, there is an indication that where a person supports and is genuinely interested in a child and their family, the outcome for that child is much improved.

Resolved:

The contents of the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2013/14 be noted.

94. FINAL REPORT OF THE FIFTH SCRUTINY REVIEW: CHARGING FOR SERVICES

There was submitted a report by Councillor Alexander Stewart, Convener of the Scrutiny Committee, (15/65) setting out the findings of the Scrutiny Committee Review of Charging for Services to examine the issues highlighted within Audit Scotland's Charging for Services Report in October 2013 and to work together with officers and elected members to consider best practice and explore opportunities for improvement.

The Convener expressed the Committee's appreciation of the support received from all Elected Members and officers involved during the review.

Councillor Doogan expressed concern that: (i) welfare reform has resulted in a reduction in income since 2012/13; (ii) service charges should not be seen as generating income for income's sake; and (iii) it is not appropriate for councillors to set charges. In response to (i), S Walker accepted that welfare reform is a challenge to income from fees and charges. In response to (iii), Councillor Vaughan commented that while councillors have an essential role in deciding the priorities of the Council, it is for the officers of the Council to propose how these priorities will be met, including through the determination of service charges.

Resolved:

- (i) The Corporate Charging Policy is revised to serve as an overarching document, providing a clear link between Corporate Objectives and Service Charging Policies (Paragraphs 4.1.2 - 4.1.6 refer).
- (ii) Council Services should ensure clear charging policies are in place across all key chargeable Council areas (Paragraph 4.1.6 refers).
- (iii) Committee reports related to charging should refer to the Corporate Charging Policy and relevant Service Charging Policy (Paragraphs 4.1.5 – 4.1.7 refer).
- (iv) The Council's charging policies should be published online to provide a transparent charging policy framework accessible to members of the public (Paragraph 4.1.3 refers).
- (v) The Council's Charging Policy Framework should include arrangements for the examination of charges as part of the contract monitoring and reporting arrangements for ALEOs (Paragraph 4.1.7 refers).
- (vi) The requirement within the current financial regulations for Services to submit a revised scheme of charges annually to the relevant themed Committee(s) should be enforced (Paragraphs 4.2.4 – 4.2.7 refer).

- (vii) Services should monitor the impact of Service charging and report information annually to the relevant themed Committee (Paragraph 4.3.5 refers).
- (viii) Each Service should consider adopting a rolling programme approach to conducting strategic reviews of Council charging schemes to provide an in-depth examination of service charges (Paragraph 4.3.7 refers).
- (ix) Reports to Committee on Service Charges are explicit about consultation which has taken place with Service users and include benchmarking information, where available (Paragraphs 4.4.1 – 4.4.6 refer).
- (x) Charging information is available online and linked together in one place (Paragraphs 4.4.7 – 4.4.8 refer).

95. SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN'S RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM COMPLAINTS IN 2013/14

There was submitted a report by the Head of Legal Services (15/69) providing information about the 10 recommendations made by the Scottish Public Ombudsman (SPSO) during 2013/14.

Councillor Cuthbert requested clarification as to why there are two decisions on the SPSO website which are not included in the list of complaints. D Henderson acknowledged Councillor Cuthbert's concerns and agreed to investigate.

In response to a query from Councillor Cuthbert regarding the reporting of internal complaints, the Convener advised that work on the review of complaints within the Council is progressing. D Henderson further advised that the method of reporting itself is also being reviewed. The Convener proposed that it would be helpful if the complaints are presented in a similar format to that in Report 15/69, with a description of the complaint, the recommendation arising from the complaint, and the action taken from the recommendation. D Henderson clarified that this would be the process for Stage Two complaints.

Councillor Vaughan expressed concern that there was a significant gap between the date recommended by SPSO that action be taken, and the date of action having been taken, with regard to two complaints. A Taylor acknowledged Councillor Vaughan's concerns and agreed to investigate and provide clarification.

Resolved:

The Committee noted that all recommendations have been accepted by Council Officers and that appropriate action has been taken in all cases.

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.

96. MINUTE OF MEETING OF SOCIAL WORK COMPLAINTS REVIEW COMMITTEE OF 28 NOVEMBER 2014

There was submitted and noted the minute of meeting of the Social Work Complaints Review Committee of 28 November 2014.