

SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Minute of hybrid meeting of the Scrutiny and Performance Committee held in the Council Chambers, 2 High Street, Perth, on Wednesday 7 June 2023 at 10.00am.

Present: Councillor C Stewart, Bailie A Bailey, Councillors K Allan, B Brawn (substituting for Councillor A Forbes), S Carr, E Drysdale, A Forbes, I Massie, W Robertson, F Smith, and J Welch.

In Attendance: K Donaldson (Chief Operating Officer), B Renton (Executive Director, Communities); S Devlin (Executive Director, Education and Children's Services); C Mailer (Executive Lead - Strategic Planning and Transformation) C Guild, G Pinfield, E Ritchie and F Robertson (Communities), S Cooper, G Doogan, S Johnston and B Scott (Education and Children's Services), M Dickson and K Ogilvy (Health and Social Care Partnership); and L Simpson, S Crawford, P Johnstone, L Harris, K Molley, A Brown and R Ramsay (all Corporate and Democratic Services).

Apology: Councillor A Forbes

Councillor C Stewart, Convener, Presiding.

The Convener led discussion on Items 1- 7 and P1 and the Vice-Convener led discussion on items 8-10.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE OF 26 APRIL 2023

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny and Performance Committee of 26 April 2023 was submitted and approved as a correct record.

4. OUTSTANDING BUSINESS STATEMENT

Resolved:

The status of actions in the Outstanding Business Statement, be noted and completed actions removed accordingly.

5. PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

G Guild, Head on Innovation, provided a short slide-based presentation highlighting the change in performance reporting and improvement planning in 2023/24.

6. SERVICE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 – CORPORATE & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

There was submitted a report by Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) (23/175) presenting the Service Annual Performance Report (APR) 2022/23 for Corporate and Democratic Services (CDS); and (2) detailing progress over the last year against improvement actions contained within the 2022/23 Service Business Management Improvement Plan (BMIP).

In response to a question from Councillor C Stewart regarding the reduction in energy consumption this year, S Crawford advised that over the last year Property Services had focused on large building audits. S Crawford thanked Business Managers and Headteachers who had helped in monitoring and using less energy across schools in Perth and Kinross. S Crawford confirmed that this year had been marginally warmer than previous years which had helped. S Crawford advised that the percentages in reduction of consumption this year form part a ten-year ongoing reduction project in Perth and Kinross Council.

In response to a question from Bailie A Bailey regarding sickness absences for employees and if the average of 13 days reflects pre-covid levels, P Johnstone advised that the sickness levels for 2019/20 would be shared with members following committee. P Johnstone confirmed that cases of Covid stopped being recorded in January 2023 and only notifiable infectious diseases were recorded from July 2022 onwards which had an impact on the sickness levels increasing in terms of short-term absences. P Johnstone added that in terms of sickness absence levels it is difficult to determine who is a hybrid employee and who is working from home as data is not recorded. However, P Johnstone confirmed that HR would undertake further analysis to establish the types of roles those sickness absences are in.

In response to a question from Councillor K Allan regarding the pilot of the Microsoft Chatbot in Perth and Kinross Council, L Harris confirmed that in terms of improving customer experience, it is vital to have consultation with employees. L Harris added that employee consultation would allow for appropriate testing to be undertaken to ensure that the Chatbot function is fit for purpose before being rolled out across the organisation.

In response to a question from Councillor W Robertson regarding the devolved decision-making pilot for the Kinross-shire Area, the Convener confirmed that the three areas that agreed to undergo a devolved decision-making process as part of the budget process, would be formed by the outcomes, lessons learned and continuous improvement of the Kinross-shire pilot.

In response to a question from Councillor I Massie regarding sickness absence levels amongst teachers, P Johnstone advised that 8.9 days is per head count of the teacher population. P Johnstone confirmed that details on short-term, medium-term, and long-term absences of the teaching population would be provided following committee. In response to a question from Councillor F Smith regarding teacher sickness absences caused by disruption of pupils, P Johnstone advised that new arrangements are in place to report and monitor levels of violence and aggression by pupils.

In response to a question from Councillor C Shiers regarding the availability of comparative data on sickness absence levels to benchmark with other Local Authorities, K Donaldson advised that timing had been a factor and information would be published formally through the Local Government Benchmarking Framework later in the year.

Members thanked officers for their work in preparing the Corporate and Democratic Services Annual Performance Report.

Resolved:

The contents of the Corporate and Democratic Services' Annual Performance Report 2022/23, be scrutinised.

7. COMMUNITIES SERVICE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23

There was submitted a report by Executive Director (Communities) (23/181) presenting the Service Annual Performance Report 2022/23 for Communities; and (2) detailing progress against targets and improvement actions over the last year against the 2022/23 Service Business Management Improvement Plan.

In response to a question from Councillor K Allan regarding tackling inequalities across Perth and Kinross, B Renton confirmed that the Community Planning Partnership agreed to focus on two areas – Coupar Angus and Crieff, but Perth and Kinross Council are committed to tackling inequalities and poverty across all areas in Perth and Kinross. C Maller added that several locality-based projects are also underway including in areas of Letham and Highland Perthshire. C Maller advised that Perth and Kinross Council have recently initiated a data discovery project which involves mapping poverty and inequalities across all localities to ensure targeted work can be achieved.

Councillor C Shiers raised concerns over individuals in rural areas in Perth and Kinross not having adequate access to broadband provision. G Pinfield sympathised with individuals' frustrations but confirmed that Perth and Kinross Council have bid into the UK Government Programme for the Local Full Fibre Network to help reach properties with connection struggles. G Pinfield confirmed that work had also been underway with Open Reach to target properties in difficult terrain and to encourage overspill into premises off the main contract.

In response to a question from Councillor I Massie regarding support offered to tenants suffering with mould and damp, E Ritchie advised that the Housing Service have developed a robust procedure which offers advice and assistance to tenants who struggle with mould and damp in their premises. E Ritchie added that initially, the property would be investigated to see the appropriate course of action to be taken as the mould could be a result of many factors such as ventilation issues or improvement works needing carried out. E Ritchie confirmed that an Elected Member Briefing Note had been circulated regarding the Council's position and would be recirculated in due course with up-to-date information.

In response to a question from Councillor C Shiers regarding footfall in small towns out with Perth City Centre, B Renton advised that an update would be provided following Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor E Drysdale regarding challenges of recruitment and retention of staff, P Johnstone advised that there had been a shortage nationally of employees in particular roles and work had been underway across the organisation to help retain and attract employees through career fairs and promoting posts on social media, emphasizing the benefits of working and living in Perth and Kinross. P Johnstone added that hybrid opportunities are also available. In response to a supplementary question from Councillor E Drysdale regarding the relationship between Perth and Kinross Council and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), P Johnstone advised that the Council does work closely with SDS in terms of promoting opportunities, economic development, long term unemployed schemes and modern apprenticeships.

Members thanked officers for their work in preparing the Communities Annual Performance Report.

Resolved:

The contents of the Communities Service Annual Performance report 2022/23, be scrutinised.

THERE WAS A SHORT RECESS AND THE MEETING RECONVENED AT 11.20AM.

8. EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23

There was submitted a report by Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) (23/181) presenting the Service Annual Performance Report (APR) 2022/23 for Education and Children's Services; and (2) detailing progress against targets and improvement actions over the last year against the 2022/23 Service Business Management Improvement Plan (BMIP).

As part of her opening remarks, S Devlin advised that data on the achievement of Curriculum for Excellence 2019/20 would be circulated to members following Committee. S Devlin confirmed that the reason it was not originally included in the Annual Performance Report had been due to the data being incomplete. The direction from the Scottish Government at the time was that gathering and the submission of data was not required due to pressures of the pandemic.

In response to a question from Councillor I Massie regarding the new electronic tracking system to monitor children's progress in early learning centre settings, B Scott advised data gathered would not be shared with parents but reassured members that parents are kept well informed about their child's progress through other processes. B Scott confirmed that some settings have physical children's profiles that children can share with their parents.

In response to a question from Councillor C Shiers regarding work being undertaken to improve children's attendance across Perth and Kinross schools, S Johnston advised that challenges regarding attendance had risen following the pandemic, with a range of issues varying from children feeling too anxious to attend school or children that attend school in the morning but do not turn up to all classes throughout the day. S Johnston confirmed that there are ongoing projects to look at emotionally based absences and support children with mental health issues. S Johnston advised that through staffing arrangements, Pupil Care and Welfare

Officers have been introduced into Secondary Schools and Community Link Assistants in Primary Schools to support child attendance. S Johnston added that attendance had been a national issue and work had been underway with other Local Authorities to analyse best practice and see what more could be done in improving child attendance across schools.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor C Shiers regarding recording the reasons for a child's absence, S Johnston advised that as well as recording absences through the system SEEMIS, Quality Improvement Officers have quarterly meetings with senior staff to discuss that school's attendance data. Attendance rates are gathered and any child that has below 80% rate should be actioned and monitored.

In response to a question from Councillor W Robertson regarding the Curriculum for Excellence and the performance of Perth and Kinross Council, S Devlin confirmed that through the Quality Improvement Framework, Education and Children's Services work with Headteachers across schools in Perth and Kinross to monitor the quality of learning and teaching in every classroom to ensure it is the best it can be.

In response to a question from Councillor C Stewart regarding instances where exclusion from school is the appropriate solution for a child demonstrating challenging or violent behaviour, S Devlin confirmed that alternative measures to discipline a child are preferred over the use of exclusion, however, the Exclusion Guidance can permit exclusion to be the appropriate measure based on the context of the situation and to benefit the young person involved and others around them. In response to a supplementary question from Councillor C Stewart, S Johnston advised that a quick and simple electronic recording system had been created to allow staff to be able to record incidents of behaviour as they happen. Incidents that are recorded are sent to the Quality Improvement Officer Team who track the data to see if there is a pattern in behaviour from the same child and if intervention measures are required. If multiple incidents arise for the same child, then a discussion would be held with the school to see if further support could be provided to the child without having to use exclusion.

In response to a question from Councillor E Drysdale regarding work being undertaken to reduce the attainment gap of literacy and numeracy throughout primary schools, G Doogan advised that levels of improvement in reducing the attainment gap had been shown across all ages but confirmed that there had been a significant development at stage Primary 4 due to targeted work. G Doogan confirmed that Education and Children's Services are in the process of gathering data for 2022/23 and early indications are positive. S Johnston added that even though there had been levels of improvement, children who are most disadvantaged within Perth and Kinross continue to improve less well than those who are least disadvantaged. S Johnston confirmed that work continues to improve the gap for all children.

In response to a question from Councillor J Welch regarding actions plan in place to improve areas of free school meal uptake, S Devlin advised that work had been underway across schools in Perth and Kinross and secondary young people had participated in a national survey regarding school meal preferences. S Devlin added that results highlighted that secondary young people least preferred the option of a sit-down lunch in a large school hall and favoured the option of a grab and go type facility. S Devlin confirmed that grab and go facilities had increased within schools but with other grab and go facilities available out with the school premises, it had been difficult

to encourage young people who are entitled to a free school meal to take them. S Devlin highlighted the importance in improving the dining experience in line with the feedback received from young people. In response to a supplementary question from Bailie A Bailey regarding the number of pupils in secondary schools who are eligible for free school meals but choose not to take them, S Devlin advised that data would be circulated following Committee.

Members thanked officers for their work in preparing the Education and Children's Services Annual Report.

Resolved:

The contents of the Education and Children's Services Annual Performance report 2022/23, be scrutinised.

9. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

There was submitted a report by Head of Legal and Governance Services (23/182) presenting for scrutiny and review, the draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the financial year 2022/23 which provides assurance as to the effectiveness of the Council's governance framework and, in particular, the system of internal control.

Resolved:

- (i) The contents of the draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2022/23, be scrutinised.
- (ii) The assurance provided as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements including the system of internal control, be noted.

10. PERTH AND KINROSS HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP CLINICAL AND CARE GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE REPORT

There was submitted a report by Chief Officer, Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership providing assurance on the Clinical Care and Professional Governance of the Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership.

Resolved:

The contents of Report 23/179, be noted.

IT WAS AGREED THAT THE PUBLIC AND PRESS SHOULD BE EXCLUDED DURING CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN ORDER TO AVOID THE DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION WHICH IS EXEMPT IN TERMS OF S30 OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (S) ACT 2002

P1. ANNUAL REVIEW OF CYBER SECURITY

There was submitted a report by Head of Legal and Governance Services (23/180) providing an overview of the Council's cyber security arrangements and provide assurance as to the management and mitigation of relevant risks and threats.

Resolved:

- (i) The contents of Report 23/180, be scrutinised.
- (ii) The assurance as regards the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's cyber risk and management arrangements, be noted.