

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 24 April 2024 at 09.30am.

Present: Councillor C Stewart, Bailie A Bailey, K Allan, A Forbes, K Harvey (substituting for Councillor S Carr), M Frampton, I Massie, W Robertson, C Shiers, F Smith, and J Welch.

In Attendance: C Mailer (Director – Strategy, People and Resources); A Williams (Director – Economy, Place and Learning), S Devlin, F Crofts, E Ritchie, A Singh, D Littlejohn, S Skene, S D’All, G Doogan, B Martin-Scott, J Chiles, D Macluskey, F Robertson, K Johnston and H Hope (Economy, Place and Learning); K Ogilvy and M Dickson (HSCP), L Simpson, G Boland, K Molley, A Brown, and M Pasternak (Strategy, People and Resources).

Also in attendance: K McNamara, D McKay, D Kidd and I Strachan (all Tayside Contracts) (up to and including Item 6) and G Dhillon (HM Inspectorate of Education) (for Item 7)

Apology: Councillor S Carr

Councillor C Stewart, Convener, Presiding.

The Convener led discussion on Items 1-6 & 9 and the Vice-Convener led discussion on item 7 & 8.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convener welcomed all those present to the meeting and an apology was noted as 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 31 JANUARY 2024

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny and Performance Committee of 31 January 2024 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. WEATHER EVENTS- IMPROVEMENT PLAN

There was a report submitted by Strategic Lead – Environment and Infrastructure (24/123) providing a brief update on the actions outlined in the Weather Events Improvement Plan.

In response to a question from Councillor A Forbes regarding the actions required to be implemented to reduce the call volume being made to Aberdeen Council, F Crofts advised that there had not been an issue with the way the responses were handled throughout the weather events in October 2023 but for future events, the team are looking to remove as many of the non-emergency calls through the call handling system to allow the focus to be concentrated on emergency calls as they come through.

In response to a question from Councillor K Allan regarding communication with the effected residents, E Ritchie advised that reassurance visits were carried out in hotspot areas, particularly in Invergowrie and Perth City. E Ritchie added that a letter drop had also been undertaken which had led to further contact with residents. E Ritchie confirmed that information continues to be shared with residents and a flooding bulletin would be issued shortly.

In response to a question from Councillor W Robertson regarding reassurance that a change in sudden tide levels would now be tackled differently compared to previous weather events, S D'All reassured members that tide levels would be tackled differently for future weather events. S D'All advised that a standby team are available and referred to the improved communications with SEPA. S D'All added that a few weeks ago there had been high tides and provision had been enhanced to cover, but confirmed there are no weather warnings for the immediate future.

Councillor A Forbes referred to the action on developing a protocol to share vulnerable people lists during emergencies and suggested creating a registration service where vulnerable residents could be sent automatic alerts about weather changes or updates around flood gates, H Hope advised that work had been underway with partners to develop a data sharing arrangement but confirmed that a registration service could be looked at further.

In response to a question from Councillor C Shiers regarding progress made with mobile phone operating companies and resilience for rural communities in weather events, H Hope advised that officers are still waiting to hear back from phone companies but confirmed that a reminder would be issued.

Councillor K Allan requested for an interim report be brought to committee on the findings, actions taken, and the lessons learnt from the weather events in 2023.

The Convener thanked F Crofts and his teams for their ongoing work regarding the actions outlined in the Improvement Plan.

Resolved:

The contents of Report 24/123, be noted.

6. TAYSIDE CONTRACTS

6(i) Tayside Contracts Annual Performance Report 2022/23

6(ii) Supported Self-Assessment of Tayside Contracts – Outcome

K McNamara and colleagues at Tayside Contracts provided a slide-based presentation on Tayside Contracts Annual Performance Report 2022/23 and the Supported Self-Assessment.

In response to a question from Councillor A Forbes regarding the term shared service, K McNamara confirmed that at a high level shared service had been identified by various organisations such as the Scottish Government and the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy as a way by which Councils in a shrinking budget climate can maximise service delivery by having combined services. K McNamara confirmed that the benefits of a shared service include the deployment of staff and if there are temporary or long-term shortages within an area due to sickness absences or recruitment issues then having the bigger workforce would make it easier to deploy staff than it could be for a single Council. K McNamara referred to the Tay Cuisine as a positive example of shared service.

In response to a question from Councillor K Allan regarding ongoing challenges of recruitment and high sickness levels, K McNamara advised that the increasing levels of sickness absences had been a national issue across the UK. K McNamara advised that in terms of their Annual Performance Report, the percentage of working days lost had been higher than the target figure, however the percentage had since started to decrease and would continue to be monitored. K McNamara added that sickness absences are managed through the Sickness Absence Policy. K McNamara confirmed that the statistics showed that the main cause of sickness absences had been stress related. Tayside Contracts have established a Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan which involved training for managers and have rolled out Head Start Awareness Training for all employees. K McNamara added that services such as counselling, occupational health services and physiotherapy could be offered through their occupational health provider. K McNamara confirmed that sickness absence levels are reported to the Joint Committee on an annual basis.

In response to a question from Councillor C Shiers regarding staff recruitment and retention, K McNamara confirmed that several measures had been put in place to increase recruitment and retention such as work with the Employability Teams within the Council areas, work with Job Centre Plus and organisations such as Remploy to support their clients into employment. Employees have also been recruited through Employment Agencies. K McNamara referred to other ongoing work to attract young people into the organisation such as close links with Developing the Young Workforce, the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, Career Events, and work with High Schools across all three areas.

In response to a question from the Vice-Convener regarding the funding for vacancies of school crossing patrollers, K McNamara confirmed that currently there are three vacant positions for school crossing patrollers within Perth and Kinross. K McNamara added that where a vacancy arises there would not be a rebate given to the Council but would look for another employee to temporarily fulfil that role. I Strachan added that in the event of a long-term absence of a school crossing patroller, there would still be a cost to Tayside Contracts. In response to a supplementary question from the Vice-Convener regarding the advertisement of the three posts, K McNamara confirmed that the posts should be advertised and would be picked up by officers.

In response to a question from Councillor A Forbes, I Strachan advised that Tayside Contracts must comply with the Scottish Government School Meal Legislation which can make it very challenging to create menus that are appealing to young people but also meet the nutritional guidelines. I Strachan added that Councils must promote the availability of school lunches and encourage pupils to attend school meals. In response to a supplementary question from Councillor A Forbes regarding the level of complaints of school meals, I Strachan advised that in the last three years there have been 29 complaints in Perth and Kinross relating to school meals.

Councillor I Massie queried if the amount of food wastage in schools are recorded. I Strachan advised that a pilot had been introduced in a couple of schools within Perth and Kinross which involved weighing the plate waste at the end of service. I Strachan confirmed that Tayside Contracts would work with school staff to raise awareness and the environmental impact of food wastage to young people and then reweigh the plate waste to see if there had been an improvement. If successful, I Strachan confirmed that the plan would be to roll out the scheme across all schools.

In response to a question from Councillor F Smith regarding the issue with potholes, D McKay advised that a policy and procedure had been created for how potholes are to be addressed and repaired within Perth and Kinross. D McKay confirmed that over recent years the focus had been to make potholes first time permanent, so they are sealed properly and reduce the number of potholes that need to be revisited. D McKay confirmed that Tayside Contracts are on track of meeting their target of repairing potholes. D McKay added that the main cause of potholes are to do with drainage and the Roads Maintenance Partnership have several measures in place to tackle the issue.

Councillor C Stewart queried if the number of pothole repairs that had been previously dealt with in the last year are recorded. D McKay advised that reporting would be undertaken through an Asset Management System, but previous pothole repairs are currently not picked up through the Roads Maintenance Partnership Board. D McKay confirmed that he would see if the details could be provided.

In response to another question from the Convener, D McKay confirmed that Tayside Contracts are still accredited to the ISO 9001 Quality Management System.

In response to a question from the Vice-Convener regarding the Supported Self-Assessment and the opportunities for further standardisation of service delivery, K McNamara referred to the standardisation of the school meals service through the central production unit in Tayside. K McNamara also mentioned the example of the integration of facilities management services when colleagues transferred from Councils to Tayside Contracts. K McNamara added that the next phase of achieving standardisation and consistency would be in relation to hard facilities management such as minor repairs. K McNamara added that in construction, colleagues are looking at the standardisation of specifications of road construction works, cross border winter maintenance arrangements and the standardisation of salt.

In response to a question from Councillor J Welch regarding the opportunity for Elected Members to experience school meals, K McNamara said that all elected members are welcome to sample a school meal. In response to a supplementary question from Councillor J Welch regarding feedback from young people over school meals, I Strachan advised that Tayside Contracts invite all schools across Perth and Kinross to take part in the menu consultation ahead of the menu every year to allow young people to provide feedback.

In response to a question from Councillor A Forbes regarding what the implications would be of Perth and Kinross's departure from Tayside Contracts on Perth and Kinross, K McNamara advised that it states in the Minute of Agreement that governs the partnership that a Council would have to give 9 months' notice and employees would then transfer back to their withdrawing Council. K McNamara added that in the case of employees not returning to their withdrawing Council it could result in redundancies and the withdrawing Council would have to fund the costs associated with the redundancy. K McNamara advised that there would also be practical issues involved in the service of meal delivery if not accessing the Tay Cuisine model which made revenue savings annually. There would also be a significant capital cost to upgrade kitchens back to the traditional model. K McNamara added the Council's access to the Quarry would be impacted and the availability of staff in a weather emergency would be reduced. K McNamara confirmed that the benefits of the Road Maintenance Partnership involve Tayside Contracts and Council staff working together and if a Council left Tayside Contracts, the withdrawing Council would require a client contractor split which could create an additional cost.

In response to a question from the Convener regarding the framework for improvement plans and business expansion, K McNamara confirmed that Tayside Contracts developed a Change Plan where they undertook an exercise to see what would happen if they were forced into savings and efficiencies and to look at what could be done in terms of service reductions, efficiencies within the organisation and income generation. K McNamara added that in terms of expanding the commercial portfolio, Tayside contracts developed a Commercial and Collaboration Matrix which include a list of prioritised areas to explore or take forward both in terms of external business and collaboration of opportunities within the Councils.

Members thanked K McNamara as his colleagues for their informative presentation and for their attendance at Committee.

Resolved:

The contents of Reports 24/124 and 24/125, be noted.

THERE FOLLOWED A SHORT RECESS AND THE MEETING RECONVENED AT 11.35AM.

7. SUMMARY REPORT ON CARE INSPECTORATE AND EDUCATION SCOTLAND INSPECTIONS

There was submitted a report by Strategic Lead – Education and Learning (24/126) (1) providing an overview of the performance of Education and Children’s services inspected and reported over the past year by the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland, since the previous report of this type in 2023, and (2) setting out the Service’s approach to implementing improvement actions arising out of inspection.

G Dhillon delivered a slide-based presentation on the summary report on the approaches to secondary inspections.

In response to a question from Councillor A Forbes regarding the pre-inspection survey, G Dhillon confirmed that Education Scotland publish the survey results of the four Perth secondary schools on their website and the information would be shared with headteachers so they can identify any common trends. G Dhillon added that there tends to be a higher response rate from young people and teaching staff as young people are encouraged to complete the pre-inspection questionnaires in school. The response rate from parents can be varied across different schools.

In response to a question from Councillor C Shiers regarding the regulatory and frequency of inspections and a timeline for next inspections, G Dhillon confirmed that Education Scotland are prioritising schools that haven’t been inspected in over 10 years. In response to a supplementary question from Councillor C Shiers regarding how we compare to other countries within the UK and elsewhere, G Dhillon confirmed that the UK operate a model of a five-day inspection, whereas other inspectorates across the European Union have much shorter but more frequent inspections. G Dhillon added that due to a change to the qualifications it could be likely that our inspection framework would be relooked at.

In response to a question from Councillor K Allan regarding how schools are chosen to be inspected, G Dhillon advised that a range of factors are considered to generate the Education Scotland’s inspection sample which look at rural schools, urban schools, high levels of affluency, high levels of poverty, levels of ethnicity and denominational and non-denominational schools. As a supplementary question, Councillor K Allan queried how we close the attainment gap if schools aren’t regularly inspected, G Dhillon confirmed that school improvement rests with the Local Authority. S Devlin added that the collective responsibility to provide efficient and adequate education lie with a range of staff from class teachers up to head teachers and Council Officers.

The Convener queried if exams results are included as quantitative data in the methodology of inspections. G Dhillon confirmed that the attainment data would be published on the national system Insight and look at the literacy and numeracy qualifications of young people, tariff scores young people achieve, destination of young people after school and attainment versus deprivation across different schools and compare against the national average.

In response to a question from Councillor I Massie regarding the Care Inspectorate Framework for Early Learning and Childcare, B Martin-Scott advised that the frameworks for primary and secondary schools have a similar process of measuring gradings against quality improvement indicators, but the Care Inspectorate Framework look at the developmental milestone data of children in the classroom setting and through their own experiences.

In response to a question from Councillor J Welch regarding the recruitment and retention of Headteachers and Depute Headteachers across Perth and Kinross, S Devlin confirmed that in the secondary sector, Perth and Kinross Council tend to receive significant applications for Depute Headteacher roles however the statistics of applications received for Headteacher roles are less due to several factors. S Devlin added that recruitment issues tended to be higher in the Primary Sector and often closing date deadlines are extended due to limited number of applications. S Devlin advised that measures such as videos, testimonials from young people and word of mouth through professionals are used to encourage people to work in Perth and Kinross.

In response to a question from Councillor K Allan, S Devlin advised that ongoing contact occur between a Local Authority and colleagues in HMI and Education Scotland. S Devlin confirmed that each Local Authority in Scotland have their own Link Inspector to share relevant information, successes, challenges, and concerns across all sectors. S Devlin confirmed that due to internal restructuring at Education Scotland, G Dhillon had been appointed as Perth and Kinross Council's Link Inspector. In addition, S Devlin advised as well as the core inspections, schools have put themselves forward for recovery inspections and schools have also participated annually in National Thematic Inspections.

In response to a question from the Convener regarding an example of a successfully completed action from the Improvement Plan and when it would be reported to members, S Devlin advised the Raising Attainment Strategy had been submitted to the Learning and Families Committee and regular updates would be provided. S Devlin added that the Education Services Plan and PEF Plan would be submitted to the Learning and Families Committee in November. D Macluskey shared the positive case study of the inspection at Perth Grammar School in 2020 from the secondary sector and G Doogan shared the recent example of a return inspection at St Ninian's Primary School.

In response to a question from the Vice-Convener regarding inspections in Perth and Kinross that have included the assessment of school meals or the nutritional aspect, S Devlin confirmed that nutrition inspectors were involved in Pitlochry and Crieff Primary schools, and nothing came back from either inspections that related to the provision of school meals. In response to a supplementary question from the Vice-Convener, S Devlin confirmed that a list of dates when Perth and Kinross schools were last inspected would be shared with members following Committee.

The Vice-Convener thanked G Dhillon for his informative presentation and for his attendance at Committee.

Resolved:

The contents of the Report 24/126, be scrutinised.

8. ARMS LENGTH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS: UPDATE ON FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AND BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

There was submitted a report by Head of Culture and Community Services (24/127) summarising (1) current live issues and risks for our three arms-length external organisations including an update on their current/projected year end 2023/24 financial positions, and also (2) work underway/planned by the ALEOs and the Council to manage these issues/risks, and future areas of focus for Scrutiny and Performance Committee in 2024/25.

In response to a question from Councillor A Forbes regarding the improvement of the financial position of LAL, F Robertson confirmed that several factors had contributed to the improvement such as the closure of Olympia Pool in Dundee, changes to LAL's marketing and new membership products had been introduced.

In response to a question from Councillor K Allan regarding end of year deficits, F Roberston confirmed that the expectation would be for the three ALEOs to meet their deficits from their general reserves and they are undergoing a review process to see how the deficits had arisen and to try and reduce further overspend in the year to come.

In response to a question from Councillor W Robertson regarding the impact of the closure of Bells Sport Centre, F Robertson confirmed the most significant income stream for Bells would be the gym which currently operates at a reduced level and LAL are currently looking at relocating the gym and group fitness services to the Dewars Centre.

The Convener queried the progress of the Business and Transition Plans of the ALEOs and how the plans would be monitored. F Robertson confirmed that all three ALEOs Transition Plans are underway at different stages. F Robertson added there are four key outcomes from the Transformation Programme for the ALEOs which include corporate savings and efficiencies, the flexible and adaptable staff resource for service delivery, property rationalisation and governance arrangements. F Robertson confirmed that the delivery of improvement actions would be through the quarterly contract monitoring process.

The Convener and Vice-Convener referred to F Robertson's last meeting of the Scrutiny and Performance Committee. They thanked her for all her work in supporting the Committee over the years and wished her well for the future.

Resolved:

- (i) The summary of key issues/risks for each ALEO and the mitigating actions to manage these which are planned/underway, be noted.
- (ii) The current financial position for each ALEO based on latest management accounts, be noted.

9. PERTH AND KINROSS HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP (HSCP) CLINICAL AND CARE GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE REPORT

There was submitted a report by Chief Social Work Officer (24/128) providing assurance to Perth & Kinross Council's Scrutiny and Performance Committee on the Clinical Care and Professional Governance of the Perth and Kinross HSCP.

In response to a question from Bailie A Bailey regarding concerns over GP retention within Carse Medical Practice, K Ogilvy confirmed that in terms of the temporary arrangements work had been underway to harmonise and extend the lease to allow time to identify a longer term solution which currently sit with the Primary Care Premises Strategy Group who are working in conjunction with Angus IJB.

As a supplementary question, Councillor A Forbes queried what could be done as a public body to ensure there continues to be a medical practice in the Carse of Gowrie. K Ogilvy confirmed that as part of the Workforce Plan officers are looking to promote the benefits of working in Perth and Kinross to increase GP recruitment. K Ogilvy added that several GP practices had to close their lists due to a shortage of GP's, but the issue had been resolved and lists have reopened. K Ogilvy advised that an update on timescales from the Primary Care Premises Strategy Group would be shared with members following the meeting. The Convener asked as part of the response for detail on the timetable for the Health Needs Assessment to be circulated.

In response to a question from Councillor C Shiers regarding support available for mental health waiting times within the prison healthcare service, K Ogilvy confirmed that HMP Perth are now fully staffed in the mental health team and the waiting times had reduced significantly. K Ogilvy added that staff are looking at ways to increase efficiency to free up nurses' time for individual and group work within the prison.

Resolved:

- (i) The contents of Report 24/128, be scrutinised.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to the level of Reasonable Assurance provided.

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