

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Committee Room, Fourth Floor, Council Building, 2 High Street, Perth on Wednesday 17 April 2013 at 2.00pm.

Present: Councillors A Stewart, M Barnacle, D Doogan, A Munro (substituting for A MacLellan), B Vaughan and E Maclachlan (substituting for A Younger).

In Attendance: G Taylor, J Symon, D Henderson, S Watson and P Frazer (all Chief Executive's Service); B Atkinson, J Gilchrist, R Goldsmith, J Halawi, R Drummond (all Education and Children's Services); J Mayglothling and A Taylor (both Housing and Community Care) and B Renton (the Environment Service).

Also in Attendance: P Tate, Audit Scotland.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors A MacLellan and A Younger.

Councillor A Stewart, Convener, Presiding

222. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

223. MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of 13 February 2013 was submitted, approved as a correct record and authorised for signature.

224. UPDATE ON SOLACE BENCHMARKING PROJECT

There was submitted a joint report by the Depute Director (Environment Service) and Head of Finance (13/163) providing: (1) a progress update on the SOLACE benchmarking project; (2) the suite of SOLACE indicators; (3) data for Perth and Kinross Council; and (4) comments provided by Council Services. It was noted that Report 13/163 had been considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at a meeting held earlier in the day.

Councillor Maclachlan referred to the apparent discrepancy between how satisfied the public were with street cleaning, and the Council's ranking for overall street cleanliness when compared with other Councils. B Renton reported that some of the data was a year old and there had been changes since its collection; this had resulted in disparities when different sets of data were being compared.

Councillor Cuthbert asked if data for the average or median was available and could be included in future reports. B Renton confirmed that such data could be included in future.

Councillor Cuthbert also referred to indicator 7.1 in respect of costs for looked after children in a residential setting and commented that it would be helpful to have

the number of children involved. B Atkinson reported that the figures were influenced by a small number of high cost placements; whilst there had been 18 placements in total over the two years in question, these were not necessarily the same children at all times.

In addition, Councillor Cuthbert referred to indicator 6.5 in relation to costs per museum visit and noted that although costs were highlighted, income had not been included. He suggested that it would also be helpful to include an indicator for customer services. B Renton responded that the indicators were based on SOLACE benchmarking; however, there was the potential to ensure that more outcome focused indicators were used in the future, including one for customer services. Income had not been included as it was not how the Council interpreted the definition; other Councils may have interpreted the definition differently.

Councillor Doogan referred to indicator 4.1 in respect of days lost through sickness absence and expressed concern that despite improvements in 2011/12, the Council's ranking had gone down in the 3rd quartile. He suggested that perhaps Perth and Kinross could learn from other Councils, which were performing better in this area. Councillor Doogan also noted the increased costs per primary school pupil (indicator 8.1 refers) and asked for more information on how the additional money was being spent. B Atkinson responded that there was a connection between reduced costs for pre-school places and the higher costs in respect of primary school pupils; a breakdown of the costs could be provided outwith the meeting.

In response to questions from Councillor Doogan and Councillor Cuthbert in respect of central support costs, B Renton confirmed that the figure for 2011/12 included all corporate functions, not all of which came under the Chief Executive's Service. Currently, the Council did not know how other councils had assessed their central support costs and any differences in the assessment process could have lead to discrepancies. J Symon confirmed that the Council was required to provide only one figure when compiling the local financial return and it was not known what costs other councils included in their calculations. J Symon would provide further information on central support costs out with the meeting. P Tate, Audit Scotland, confirmed that the indicators to be introduced in 2014, would ensure that local authorities were producing consistent indicators.

Councillor Vaughan commented that indicators 8.6, and 8.7, where the range started at 0%, could be difficult for the public to understand. R Goldsmith confirmed that more information was available on the Improvement Service's website and he would forward a link to members of the Committee.

Councillor Barnacle referred to indicator 16.2 in respect of A class roads maintenance and queried if the Council's ranking was due to budget cuts and if so, could budgets be realigned to address this issue. B Renton responded that the budget would impact on roads over the next two years; however, work would be done to identify priorities and address these issues in the future.

Resolved:

The content of Report 13/163 be noted.

R GOLDSMITH, J SYMON, P TATE AND A TAYLOR LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT.

225. CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT 2011/2012

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) (13/107) providing: (1) an overview of the key findings from the Child Protection Committee's (CPC) inter-agency self evaluation activities; (2) key strengths and areas for further development and/or improvement; (3) a high level summary of the capacity for improvement; and (4) a description of the very ambitious continuous improvement programme for 2012 and beyond. It was noted that Report 13/107 had been considered by the Council at its meeting on 27 February 2013.

Councillor Maclachlan commented on the increasing number of referrals and queried whether this was due to increased awareness and improved reporting, or were the numbers of children at risk increasing. B Atkinson reported the increase in referrals was due to a combination of factors: (i) partners were now more astute at recognising problems; (ii) an improved awareness of substance misuse and domestic violence issues; and (iii) being better at identifying problems before they became critical. In response to a further question from Councillor Maclachlan regarding the impact of parental gender characteristics on children, B Atkinson reported that partners often worked with the mother as main carer. However, although the father may not live in the family home, he might still have an impact on the life of the child particularly where substance misuse was involved. All substance-misuse workers were now required to ask people with drug problems if they had contact with children.

Councillor Vaughan acknowledged there had been a delay in bringing the report to Committee; however, it was important for elected members to see subsequent reports in a timely manner. In response to a further question from Councillor Vaughan regarding progress, R Drummond tabled an update on the CPC Single Improvement Plan 2011 (13/190) and provided a verbal summary of the main points including: (i) the publication of an information and communication strategy; (ii) the piloting of an engagement strategy to build confidence in communities; (iii) a review of all inter-agency training opportunities focusing on key issues identified by staff; (iv) yearly audits to support the benchmarking process; (v) the launch of the GIRFEC website with on-line training and practice guidelines; (vi) the child protection duty team had been provided with more resources to support its work; and (vii) plans were underway to integrate single agency assessments.

Councillor Doogan sought some assurance that appropriate services were in place to deal with the increase in referrals. B Atkinson confirmed that work was ongoing to identify issues through working with communities and by building resilience in children through preventative work in schools.

Resolved:

The content of Report 13/107 be noted.

R DRUMMOND LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT

226. SUMMARY REPORT ON CARE INSPECTORATE AND HMI INSPECTIONS

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) (13/164) (1) providing an overview of the performance of Education and Children's Services inspected over the past year (2012/13) by the Care Inspectorate and Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI); and (2) setting out the Service's approach to implementing improvement actions arising out of inspection.

Councillor Vaughan suggested that it would be more helpful if the HMI information was aggregated over a longer period, perhaps three years, to make it easier to understand. The Committee noted that individual reports were submitted to the Lifelong Learning Executive Sub-Committee. Councillor Vaughan also reported that she had particular concerns in respect of one day care provider and asked for assurance that issues of poor performance would be dealt with quickly. B Atkinson assured the Committee that action was taken as soon as concerns were raised, including the use of unannounced inspections.

Councillor Cuthbert proposed that, for future reports, the assessments could be ranked from top to bottom and include the date when the inspection was carried out. B Atkinson agreed that this could be done in future reports.

Resolved:

The content of Report 13/164 be noted.

227. SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN REPORTS

There was submitted a report by the Head of Legal Services (13/165) providing; (1) information about investigation reports and decision letters published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) regarding the Council from November 2011 to October 2012; and (2) summarised information about the complaints received and determined in total by the SPSO about the Council from 2011-12.

Councillor M Barnacle queried why some complainants felt that the Ombudsman was their only hope of favourable resolution of their complaint; was this because the Council always defended complaints. D Henderson responded that the Council always attempted to resolve complaints based on the available evidence.

Councillor Stewart commented that the public should have confidence in the Council to take complaints seriously and that all complaints were thoroughly investigated. B Renton reassured the Committee that all complaints were fully investigated. In the case of planning, complaints were reviewed in a different area of planning and monitored by a dedicated complaints officer.

Resolved:

- (i) The investigation reports and decision letters published about complaints against the Council be noted.

- (ii) That all of the Ombudsman's recommendations have been accepted by Council officers and that appropriate action has been taken in each case be noted.
- (iii) Complaints received by the Ombudsman about the Council in 2011-2012 and the comparative information about all councils for this period be noted.

