

Audit and Scrutiny Committee
12 January 2021

At a Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 10.00 a.m. involving participation by remote electronic means.

Present

Marie Burns, Margaret George, Alan Hill, Tom Marshall and Donald Reid.

In Attendance

A. Sutton, Executive Director and L. Taylor, Senior Manager (Communities and Education); J. Miller, Chief Planning Officer, Economic Development and Regeneration (Place); E. Currie, Interim Section 95 Officer (IJB)/Principal Manager (Finance) (Health and Social Care Partnership); and M. Boyd, Head of Finance and P. Doak, Senior Manager (Internal Audit, Risk and Fraud) (Finance and Corporate Support), A. Fraser, Head of Democratic Services, B. Quigley, Senior Manager (People and ICT) and E. Gray and D. McCaw, Committee Services Officers (Chief Executive's Service).

Chair

Councillor Burns in the Chair.

Apologies

Joy Brahim and John Sweeney.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of Standing Order 10 and Section 5 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 November 2020 were confirmed and the Minutes signed in accordance with Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

3. UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) Update Report

Submitted report by the Head of Democratic Services on the current position regarding the UK's withdrawal from the European Union on 31 December 2020, detailing information on the agreed deal and risks in relation to the service sector and long-term economic impact.

Members asked a question in terms of the Scottish Government approach to Brexit funding and received information of the requirement for Councils to evidence where spending had been required and where there had been extra costs.

The Committee agreed to (a) note the current position in respect of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union; and (b) receive further information, either as a report to the next meeting of the Committee or as a Briefing for Members.

4. Public Performance Reporting 2019-20

Submitted report by the Head of Democratic Services on the 2019-20 public performance reporting and the draft Annual Public Performance Report 2019-20. Appendix 1 detailed the full set of performance indicators, showing 3 years of performance data, with Appendix 2 providing information on underperforming indicators. The full draft Annual Performance Report was attached at Appendix 3 to the report.

Members asked questions and were provided with further information in relation to:-

- the provision of additional narrative around the meaning of tariff scores;
- the drop in tariff score from 2017/18 to 2018/19 being attributed to the reduction in the number of subjects studied across North Ayrshire schools to 6;
- reversing the trend which will allow 7 subjects and additional learning opportunities to feed into future tariff scores; and
- a report being provided on the impact of the current cancellation of exams and ongoing assessment and moderation of subjects, once clarification is received from the SQA on how this would work locally and nationally.

The Committee agreed to (a) receive a report to a future meeting on the impact of the current cancellation of exams and ongoing assessment and moderation of subjects once clarity was received from the SQA; and (b) note (i) the status of the Council's performance indicators at Appendices 1 and 2 to the report and (ii) the draft Annual Public Performance Report 2019-20 set out at Appendix 3.

5. Planning Services Update: Former Seafield School, Eglinton Road, Ardrossan

Submitted report by the Executive Director (Place) updating on the position regarding the former Seafield School, Ardrossan.

The requirements of the Notice under Section 179 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 were met in September 2020. The boarding on the windows was further vandalised and broken by 12 September 2020 with further reports of vandalism and unauthorised entry since that date. Planning Services advised of this and further steps to secure the property.

Discussions in relation to bricking up the windows have also taken place with the landowners verbally stating they planned to start such works in the New Year. To date this work has not commenced on site.

Members asked questions and were provided with further information in relation to:-

- the feasibility of protecting the building if it could be so easily vandalised; and
- other steps which could be taken through Planning legislation to address amenity issues.

The Committee agreed to (a) note (i) the Planning Services actions to date in respect of the property; (ii) the owner's compliance with the terms of the Notice; and (b) receive a further update to a future meeting.

6. Health and Social Care Partnership: Budget Monitoring Report

Submitted report by the Director, Health and Social Care Partnership on the financial position for the partnership and outlining the projected financial outturn position for the financial year as at October 2020. The budget monitoring report and Appendices, which were presented to the IJB on 17 December 2020, were attached as an Appendix to the report.

Members asked questions and were provided with further information in relation to:-

- the pressures which would be put on the NHS in the next couple of months;
- current staff absence numbers resulting in a limited workforce and the resultant use of bank staff;
- claims to the Scottish Government in terms of significant additional costs as part of the Covid return; and
- lessons learned from the pressures in March 2020.

The Committee agreed to note (i) the overall integrated financial performance report for the financial year 2020-21 and the overall projected year-end underspend of £0,807m at Period 7, (ii) the updated estimated costs of the Covid mobilisation plan of £8.5m, including savings delays, and the associated funding received to date and (iii) the financial risks for 2020-21, including the impact of Covid-19 and the fact that there was no recommendation at this time to implement a formal Financial Recovery Plan for the IJB.

7. Internal Audit Plan 2021-2022

Submitted report by the Head of Finance on the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2021-22. The Appendix to the report contained the detailed audit plan including intended commencement dates for each audit.

Members asked questions and were provided with further information in relation to:-

- the reserve audit list showing areas where no activity had been undertaken due to Covid restrictions; and
- the external audit of local community council accounts to ensure they had been properly prepared.

The Committee agreed to (a) approve the Internal Audit Plan for 2021-22 in line with the indicators and targets detailed at section 2.8 of the report.

8. Internal Audit Reports Issued

Submitted report by the Head of Finance on the findings of Internal Audit work completed during November and December 2020. The findings from one audit assignment were detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, together with the respective executive summary and action plan.

Members asked questions and were provided with further detail in relation to:-

- ipads and laptops within schools on Airwatch, the mobile device management system;
- the auditing process developed for decommissioning ipads in the future;
- historical reasons regarding weak password controls;
- continuing issues around cloning when transferring equipment from one person to another;
- action plan assurances and how these plans would be maintained in future;
- the recognised need for ICT training and development across schools;
- communications which had already been issued to Head Teachers and ICT Technicians to quickly address some actions;
- the initiation of a review of education ICT policies and procedures around longer-term actions; and
- information to be issued to Members on ipad and laptop numbers and locations within the core structure, including a comparison between January 2020 and January 2021, which figures would not include digital deprivation devices as these were treated differently.

The Committee agreed to (a) note the outcomes from the Internal Audit work completed as set out in the report; and (b) receive an update report on progress with actions to a future meeting.

9. Exclusion of the Public – Para 1

The Committee resolved in terms of Section 50(A)4 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude from the Meeting the press and the public for the following item of business on the grounds indicated in terms of Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

10. Community Investment Fund Application: Radio City Association

Submitted report by the Executive Director (Communities and Education) on the findings of an Internal Audit review of the Radio City Association Community Investment Fund application.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 11.35 a.m.