

Audit and Scrutiny Committee
14 November 2023

At a Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 10.00 a.m. involving participation by remote electronic means and physical attendance within the Council Chambers, Irvine.

Present (Physical Participation)

John Bell, Donald Reid, Eleanor Collier, Davina McTiernan, Donald L. Reid and John Sweeney.

Present (Remote Participation)

Tom Marshall.

In Attendance

C. Hatton, Chief Executive; P. Doak, Head of Service (Finance and Transformation) (Health and Social Care Partnership); A. McClelland, Head of Service (Education) (Communities & Education); M. Boyd, Head of Service (Finance), D. Forbes, Senior Manager (Financial Management), A.M. Fenton, Team Manager (Internal Audit) and K. Gray, Team Manager (Corporate Fraud) (Finance), T. Reaney, Head of Service (Neighbourhood Services) (Place); F. Walker, Head of Service and B. Quigley, Senior Manager (People & ICT), and A. Craig, Head of Service (Democratic), I. Hardy, Team Manager (Corporate Policy and Performance), C. Stewart and S. Wilson, Committee Services Officers (Chief Executive's Service).

Also in Attendance

F.M. Knight and D. Jamieson, Audit Scotland.

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of Standing Order 11 and Section 5 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors

2. Minutes

The Minutes of (i) the Ordinary Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2023; and (ii) the Special Meeting held on 12 September 2023 were confirmed and the Minutes signed in accordance with Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

3. Elected Member Development

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Democratic) providing information and seeking views on the development sessions provided to Elected Members over the 13 months from May 2022 to 30 June 2023, and on future planned developments.

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

- the turnout of some of the development sessions, including timing issues, and the suggestion that there should be a number of events on the same day in order to promote/enhance attendance; and
- the request by Strathclyde Fire and Rescue to hold a development session with Elected Members which would be followed up by officers, as appropriate.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the feedback provided on (i) the Elected Member Development sessions held in the period May 2022 to June 2023 (ii) means to support Elected Member attendance, (iii) how future programmes might be improved and (iv) possible additional topics for the next year; and (b) otherwise, to note the content of the report.

Councillor McTiernan joined the meeting during consideration of this item.

4. 2022/23 Elected Member Requests Report

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Democratic) informing of the Council's performance and the volumes and trends of Elected Member requests handled in Financial Year 2022/23.

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

- discussion on the increased number of requests and the reason(s) behind this;
- the nature and resilience of the EM Pro (Lagan) system particularly regarding logging requests, and some issues surrounding reliability and downtime (particularly over weekends);
- clarification on the treatment of multiple requests logged relating to the same issue and whether they were logged as individual and separate request(s); and
- the nature of some requests and the general approach to recording email enquiries some of these, subsequently, becoming Lagan reports (EM Pro) once received.

Noted.

5. 2022/23 Complaint Report

Submitted a report by the Head of Service (Democratic) informing of the Council's complaint performance and the volumes and trends of complaints received in Financial Year 2022/23. The report detailed the volume of complaints received and closed, complaints closed at each stage, complaint outcomes, the average time in working days for a full response at each stage, complaints closed within timescale, complaint timescale extensions, trends identified from upheld/partially upheld complaints and changes or improvements made as a result of complaints and compliments received.

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

- the action plan that had been put in place by Waste Services, in order to be as proactive, as possible, in terms of mitigating the risk of complaints being raised;
- email updates to Elected Members on missed bins; and
- the improved performance of the Waste Service.

Noted.

6. Audit and Scrutiny Committee Self-Evaluation 2023

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Democratic) on the outcome of the annual self-evaluation of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The findings arising from the self-evaluation, together with improvement actions, were detailed in Appendices 1 and 2, respectively, to the report.

Members asked questions and were provided with further information in relation to the more proactive approach being adopted by Members of the Committee and the suggestion that external training for Members could be beneficial to Members in terms of enhancing their audit and scrutiny role.

The Committee agreed to (a) note the findings of the self-evaluation as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; (b) approve the improvement actions identified in Appendix 2 to the report; and (c) to repeat the self-evaluation exercise on an annual basis.

7. External Audit Reports on the 2022/23 Audit and Best Value Thematic Work

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) on the annual audit report and the Best Value Thematic Work reports for 2022/23 and to consider verbal reports by the external auditor. Appendix 1 to the report detailed letters of representation to be signed by the Head of Finance as the responsible officer for North Ayrshire Council. The External Auditor's report, which summarised the findings of their audit, was attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

Fiona Mitchell-Knight and David Jamieson of Audit Scotland provided a verbal report on the appendices to the report, including highlighting key aspects in relation to the findings of their audit.

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

- The timing of the issuing of the audit report;
- the action plans that would be drawn up by Services in relation to the external audit findings including dormant accounts; and
- the accounting arrangements, including consolidation, of North Ayrshire Council Leisure (KA Leisure) accounts, together with an explanation on the heritage assets valuation.

The Committee agreed to (a) note (i) the findings of the 2022/23 audit of the financial statements as contained in the external auditor's annual report at Appendix 2 to the officer's report, (ii) the findings of the external auditor's Best Value Thematic Work report, (iii) the agreed Action Plan as outlined in Appendix 1 to each of the Reports and (iv) that the action plan would be brought to the Committee for review; and (b) approve the audited Annual Accounts for signature.

8. External Audit Report on Best Value Thematic Work 2022-23

Submitted report by Audit Scotland on Best Value Thematic Work 2022-23 which included key messages and information on the scope of the audit.

Noted.

9. Internal Audit Annual Update Report – North Ayrshire Integration Joint Board (IJB)

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) informing of the IJB's annual report for 2022/23 and the approved internal audit plan for 2023/24.

Noted.

10. Internal Audit Plan 2023/24: Mid-year Update

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) providing an update on progress made in delivering the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan. Appendix 1 to the report detailed the approved Audit Plan for 2023/24.

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

- the reasons for the changes being made to the audit plan;
- the learning review of Self-Directed Support; and
- a request for information in terms of how many people were in receipt of Self-Directed Support funding, including how many were currently on the waiting list for Self-Directed Support funding.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the current position with the 2023/24 internal audit plan; (b) to approve the inclusion of one additional audit review in 2023/24; (c) approve the deletion or deferral of four audits for consideration as part of the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan; and (d) that Members of the Committee would be sent information on how many people were in receipt of Self-Directed Support funding including how many were currently on the waiting list for Self-Directed Support funding.

11. Corporate Fraud Team update report

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) on the work of the Corporate Fraud Team between April and September 2023.

Members asked questions and were provided with further information in relation to the very low numbers of Blue Badge misuse and the possible reason(s) behind this, and whether new parking attendants might impact on misuse of Blue Badges.

Noted.

12. Internal Audit Reports Issued

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) on the findings of the Internal Audit work completed between August and October 2023.

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

IJB Community Engagement

- Closure of this action following publication on the HSCP website.

Accounts Payable Transaction Testing Q2

- How invoices were dealt with and whether automation would reduce errors.

Carers (Scotland) Act 2016

- The publication of updated guidance on the website.

Early Years Provision

- The availability of eligibility criteria, which could be shared with Elected Members.

Noted.

13. Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud Action Plans: Quarter 2 update

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) on the progress made by Council Services in implementing the agreed actions from Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud reports as at 30 September 2023. Appendix 1 to the report provided full details of three Internal Audit actions which were not completed within the agreed timescale.

Members asked questions and were provided with further information in relation to the reasons for the slight slippage in respect of the Glow Internal Audit action and the expected completion date of this action.

The Committee agreed to note (i) the current position with the implementation of the Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud actions; and (ii) challenges which were faced by those services which have not implemented actions within the previously agreed timescales.

14. Strategic Risk Register 2023/24: Mid-year Update

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) providing an update on progress with actions related to the Strategic Risk Register. The Strategic Risk Register Report 2023/24, with detailed actions, was provided at Appendix 1 to the report.

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

- the Financial sustainability scoring of the Council and that of the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and the reasons behind the variance in terms of the scoring between the Council and the HSCP;
- the future management structure, including governance arrangements, of the HSCP (National Care Service); and
- Business continuity and resilience.

Noted.

15. Exclusion of the Public – Para 14

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 items of business on the grounds indicated in terms of Paragraph 14 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

16. Briefing on Cyber Security

The Committee received a Briefing on Cyber Security by the Senior Manager (ICT).

Noted.

The meeting ended at 12.30 p.m.