

Scrutiny Committee
22 November 2010

IRVINE, 22 November 2010 - At a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

John Hunter, Anthea Dickson, Andrew Chamberlain, Alex Gallagher, Anthony Gurney, Jean Highgate, Pat McPhee and Alan Munro.

In Attendance

E. Murray, Chief Executive; A. Herbert, Corporate Director and A. Bodie, Head of Infrastructure and Design (Finance and Infrastructure); I. Colvin, Corporate Director (Social Services and Health); C. Kirk, Corporate Director, M. Docherty, Head of Service, J. McKnight, Manager Community and Culture and C. Sharp, Country Parks Manager (Education and Skills); I. Mackay, Solicitor to the Council, J. Barrett, IT and Customer Services Manager and E. Gunn, Customer Services Manager (Corporate Services); B. Borthwick, Area Manager (Building Services); J. M. Macfarlane, Head of Human Resources, J. Montgomery, General Manager, S. Cloete, Policy and Performance Officer and A. Little, Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's Service).

Chair

Councillor Hunter in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Matthew Brown and David Munn.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of Standing Order 16.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 8 November 2010 were signed in accordance with Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

3. External Audit Reports

The Corporate Director (Finance and Infrastructure) provided information on a number of local and national reports prepared by External Audit throughout the year.

The Committee agreed that the Corporate Director (Finance and Infrastructure) (a) present External Audit local reports to future meetings; and (b) advise the Committee of the External Audit national reports.

4. Public Service Improvement Framework - Status Report as at 31 January 2010

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the project status of the implementation of the Public Service Improvement Framework.

At its meeting held on 26 May 2008, the Scrutiny Committee approved the approach being taken to implement the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) across the Council and the project planning methodology, including the scheduling of Service self-assessments to ensure that all Services will have undergone at least one such assessment by March 2011. The Committee agreed at that time to receive progress reports on a quarterly basis.

The project is on target and information on the progression of Services through self-assessments and towards the preparation of Improvement Plans was provided in the appendices to the report.

Infrastructure and Design Services and Education and Skills (Country Parks) have completed their assessments and have prepared Improvement Plans. A series of priority actions have been identified and progress on some of these was highlighted within the report.

A Council-wide PSIF self-assessment has been completed with the Improvement Plan developed and agreed by the Council on 30 June 2010. The Improvement Plan will be monitored using the Covalent performance management system and a progress report will be made to the Committee at a future date.

A review of the PSIF project is planned to take place in early 2011 to assess the overall effectiveness of the project in achieving the agreed outcomes. The review will assess the approach of continuing the use of PSIF as a corporate and service self-assessment tool and examine other approaches to self-assessment.

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

- The potential for more proportionate external audits and inspection activity as a result of rigorous and reliable self-assessment;
- The status of the risk identified in the Risk Register in respect of insufficient senior management support for PSIF;

- The sufficient provision of European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) assessors throughout the Council despite some services without EFQM assessors;
- The range of staff briefings provided as appropriate to services;
- The progression of Human Resources and Economic Development towards the preparation of their Improvement Plans;
- Collective ownership of the project by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Scrutiny Committee;
- Standard governance arrangements in place to manage the PSIF project via the CMT in its role as the Project Board;
- The expected reflection of the value of the PSIF project within the Best Value 2 audit;
- The learning process for staff inexperienced in the principles of Business Excellence and the impact on the scoring rates at the initial stages of the process;
- The specific experiences of Country Parks and Infrastructure and Design Services following their recent PSIF self assessments; and
- The scheduled review of the project in January to March 2011.

Noted.

5. Finance and Infrastructure: Performance Report as at 30 September 2010

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Infrastructure) on the performance of Finance and Infrastructure as at 30 September 2010.

Recommendations and actions arising from a Golden Thread Healthcheck of the Council's performance management arrangements by SOLACE Enterprises have been implemented, resulting in a suite of Service Plans which are more streamlined and focused.

Appendices A, B and C to the report provided updates on the priorities detailed in the Finance and Infrastructure Services Plan 2010/11.

Finance and Infrastructure is assessed as operating satisfactorily. The Service is making good progress against its eleven key priorities for 2011/12 and further work is being carried out to ensure they are achieved as planned.

Noted.

6. Education and Skills: Performance Report to 30 September 2010

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education and Skills) on the performance of Education and Skills as at 30 September 2010.

Appendix A to the report provided updates on the priorities identified in the Education and Skills Service Plan 2010/11. Education and Skills is assessed as operating effectively.

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

- Progress in preparations for the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) and the recent CFE Members' seminar;
- Future provision of information on the innovative and creative ways the CFE preparations are being progressed;
- The inclusive nature of CFE and a range of local programmes that contribute to wider achievement and support young people's transition into employment or further training.
- The commitment on reporting to parents within Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment: Reporting;
- New learning programmes in respect of adult literacy and changes in how the Scottish Government require adult learning to be measured and reported;
- The increase in the number of pupils remaining in school till 5th and 6th year and the potential for further attainment;
- The provision of linear graphs to illustrate more detailed information including fluctuations in attainment within North Ayrshire schools; and
- The overall improvement trend in attainment, balanced against the less positive picture of performance against comparator authorities.

The Committee acknowledged the suitability of the linear graphs to illustrate information in relation to attainment and agreed that the Corporate Director (Education and Skills) ensure that future performance reports include similar provision.

7. Social Services and Health: Performance Report to 30 September 2010

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services and Health) on the performance of Social Services and Health as at 30 September 2010.

Appendices A and B of the report provided updates on priorities as identified in Housing Services and Social Services Service Plans 2010/11. Social Services and Health is assessed as operating satisfactorily.

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

- The requirement and timescale for appropriately qualified staff working within Community Care and Children and Families; and
- A range of options for those who remain unqualified including retraining and redeployment.

Noted.

8. Corporate Services: Performance Report to 30 September 2010

Submitted report by the Solicitor to the Council on the performance of Corporate Services as at 30 September 2010.

Appendices A and B of the report provided updates on priorities as identified in Legal and Protective Services and IT and Customer Services Service Plans 2010/11. Corporate Services is assessed as operating satisfactorily.

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

- The Telephone Contact Centre call queuing system in place and the priority to improve call handling to 90%;
- Arrangements for the Centre to undertake call handling for Building Services, Social Services, Housing and Roads;
- Continuous improvement in IT Services to push beyond the "satisfied" category in respect of customer experience; and
- Reductions in absence levels and progression towards the agreed targets.

Noted.

9. Chief Executive's Services: Performance Report to 30 September 2010

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the performance of the Chief Executive Service as at 30 September 2010.

Appendices A, B and C to the report provided updates on priorities as identified in the Chief Executive's Services Plan 2010/11, in terms of Policy and Service Reform, Human Resources and Economic Development. Chief Executive's Service is assessed as operating satisfactorily.

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

- The delay in the publication of the final BV2 report;
- The full range of services provided by Economic Development to attract business to North Ayrshire;
- The recent Experian report "Business Resilience in Scotland";
- The availability of a full independent evaluation report on the quality and cost effectiveness of the Business Support Team (submitted to the Executive on 12 October 2010);

- The completion of a new Economic Development and Regeneration Strategy by January 2011;
- Recent discussions with Skills Development Scotland and the plans to double the number of modern apprenticeships available in North Ayrshire in future years;
- Work undertaken on renewing the business case for improvements to the A737; and
- Improvements achieved in reducing absence levels in Quarter 1 as compared to the same quarter in 2009/10.

The Chief Executive undertook to provide information to Members on the number of young people interested in participating in the pre-apprenticeship programme.

Noted.

10. Building Services: Performance Report as at 30 September 2010

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the performance of Building Services to 30 September 2010.

Building Services had used the Covalent computerised performance management system to inform the performance report, both as a means of testing its functionality and as a 'pilot' for gauging Elected Members' views on the level of detail provided and on the appropriateness of the format.

Overall the Service is on target to deliver the objectives and priorities contained in its Service Plan 2010/11.

Members asked questions and received information on the undernoted:-

- The high level of call handling achieved by Building Services;
- Arrangements for the Telephone Call Centre to undertake call handling for Building Services and the 95% target agreed in respect of this function;
- The call-forward system in place to remind clients of pre-arranged appointments and the introduction of a text reminder service in December 2010;
- The provision of a progress report on the implementation of the Covalent computerised performance management system; and
- Training provided to Members on the Covalent system.

Noted.

11. Customer Comments Scheme 2009/10

Submitted report by the Solicitor to the Council on the complaints, compliments and suggestions received through the Customer Comments Scheme in 2009/10 and of the improvement actions taken.

Comments received by the Council can be received in a variety of forms, through Contact Us on the Council website, by e-mail, telephone, letter, or on the pre-printed Listening and Learning Customer Comments forms. Most contacts with the Council are made through the Customer Contact Centre.

The Council received 1,092 comments within the last year, of which 516 were complaints. This compares to 1,382 comments in 2008/09 and 1,284 comments in 2007/08. Most comments were dealt with at the informal stage of the procedure and were not reflected within the statistical analysis of the report. The new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool, Lagan, is now in place and will be developed to replace the existing system for logging and monitoring complaints.

The report provided information on the number of comments received by each service and geographical area, the response times achieved at each stage of the procedures, complaints made to Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, and investigations completed and partially upheld in 2009/10.

Members asked questions and received further information on the following:-

- The introduction of the new CRM system and the facility to provide more detailed data including a breakdown of informal comments;
- Work being undertaken to rationalise the classification of complaints and ensure classification consistency across services;
- Use of the CRM system to explore the background to specific data; and
- Customisation of each Service Level Agreement to meet client's requirements.

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation at a future meeting on the capability of the CRM system

The meeting ended at 3.55 p.m.