

Scrutiny Committee
30 August 2010

ARDROSSAN, 30 August 2010 - At a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 10.00 a.m.

Present

John Hunter, Anthea Dickson, Andrew Chamberlain, Alex Gallagher and Anthony Gurney.

In Attendance

E. Murray, Chief Executive; C. Kirk, Corporate Director and J. Leckie, Head of Community and Culture (Education and Skills); I. Colvin, Corporate Director and O. Clayton, Head of Community Care and Housing (Social Services and Health); D. Nibloe, Head of Finance, D. Wilson, Streetscene Manager and M. McNeil, Area Officer Streetscene, Environment and Related Services (Finance and Infrastructure); J. M. Macfarlane, Head of Human Resources, J. Montgomery, General Manager and A. Little, Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's Service).

Also In Attendance

L. Cairns and C. Glencourse, KA Leisure, T. Yule and K. Forrester, Audit Scotland.

Chair

Councillor Hunter in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Matthew Brown, Jean Highgate, Pat McPhee, David Munn and Alan Munro.

1. Declarations of Interest

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

2. Litter Around Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Finance and Infrastructure) on the location and servicing of litter bins on routes to schools in North Ayrshire.

At its meeting on 8 March 2010, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the progress made by schools in regard to the Eco-schools programme. The Committee requested that information regarding the location and frequency of emptying of litter-bins on routes to schools be provided.

The Council provides and services approximately 850 litter-bins within North Ayrshire to try and prevent the depositing of litter in public places. Details of the location of litter-bins on routes to schools in North Ayrshire and the emptying frequency undertaken of these bins were provided as an appendix to the report.

Support is provided to local schools in taking forward litter and waste minimisation activities through visits to deliver presentations, the provision of litter-pickers, recycling lorry visits and participation in Eco Committee meetings. An integrated delivery unit, 'Streetscene' has been created to maintain the cleanliness of public areas and a Litter and Cleansing Strategy is currently being formulated to set down how the Council can improve the cleanliness of the area.

Information was provided on the Council's participation in the Local Environmental Audit Management System (LEAMS) managed by Keep Scotland Beautiful. This requires a range of audits and sample surveys to be undertaken throughout the year and an external validation survey to be undertaken on an annual basis.

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

- The number and level of fines issued in respect of fly-tipping and dog fouling;
- The number and timetabling of patrols undertaken in 2009;
- The creation of an integrated 'Streetscene' delivery unit to maintain the cleanliness of public areas;
- The development of a Litter and Cleansing Strategy, which should be available in draft form in December 2010;
- Inclusion of some primary schools within secondary school litter patrol areas;
- On-site assessments undertaken by local officers to ascertain where litter patrols are required and the identification of specific primary schools requiring this service;
- The impact of the Eco Schools programme and the work undertaken in schools by Environment and Related Services in partnership with Strathclyde Police;
- A number of local clean-up initiatives, including Holm Plantation and Spiers School;
- Support provided to local groups and organisations undertaking clean-ups; and
- The Council's statutory duty to maintain levels of appropriate cleanliness within public areas and the definitions of these levels provided by the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Corporate Director (Finance and Infrastructure) report to a future meeting on (i) the costs of litter patrols in and around schools in North Ayrshire, (ii) the requirement for work carried out at schools, and (iii) the targets associated with litter; and (b) otherwise to note the report.

3. Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) 2009/10

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on performance against the Council's Statutory Performance Indicators for the year ended 31 March 2010.

As a result of the new national performance framework focusing on Single Outcome Agreements, 25 specified Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) were required for 2009/10, compared with 57 in the previous year. The external auditors have registered their satisfaction with the completeness and accuracy of the 2009/10 SPI information.

Appendix A to the report detailed the Council's performance against 51 key measures for 2009/10, and where available, the comparable performance and performance ranking amongst the 32 Scottish Councils for 2008/09.

Councils are required to place the SPIs in the public domain by 30 September each year. The availability of a summary of the SPIs will be advertised via a public notice in the local press and posters within public offices and libraries. The complete set of SPI returns provided to Audit Scotland will also be posted on the Council's website.

As part of the Council's performance management framework, SPIs are incorporated where appropriate into the service performance reports submitted for scrutiny. The report set out explanations for changes in performance levels for:-

- Teachers sickness absence;
- Home care; and
- Swimming pools usage.

Members asked questions, and received further information, on:-

- Work with Headteachers to effect swift absence reporting practices and robust absence management;
- The reasons for teaching staff absences and support available to mitigate these;
- The changing nature of the home care service and the development of a re-ablement service;
- The value of SPIs as a tool for comparison of performance across Councils in the context of wider developments in public performance reporting;
- The impact of the closure of the Bailey Bridge and major maintenance on attendance at the Magnum Leisure Centre;
- The range of initiatives and improvements underway in leisure facilities throughout North Ayrshire;
- The forthcoming review of leisure, sports and recreational provision in North Ayrshire by consultants, Grant Thornton;
- The growing variety of services provided by libraries, evidenced by the increase in visits to libraries and the decrease in borrowers;
- The impact on benefits administration costs of changes in capital accounting rules resulting in building improvement costs being set against one financial year; and
- The value of longer term SPI trend information.

The Committee agreed to (a) approve the arrangements for the public reporting of the SPIs; and (b) note (i) the summary position regarding SPIs for 2009/10; and (ii) that the external auditors have registered their satisfaction with the completeness and accuracy of the 2009/10 information.

4. North Ayrshire Women's Aid: Monitoring Report

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services and Health) on the utilisation, of the Council's grant to North Ayrshire Women's Aid (NAWA).

NAWA is a registered charity that provides support and assistance to women affected by domestic abuse. The main aims and objectives of NAWA are to offer safe accommodation to women and children fleeing domestic violence, support and counselling services, support to women in relation to addiction issues, and training and awareness raising of domestic abuse issues.

NAWA received grant funding from Housing Services totalling £794,430 and a breakdown of this funding was provided in the report.

NAWA supported approximately 111 women in safe accommodation throughout 2009/10. 115 service users were provided with a total of 4515 hours of outreach support, and the Counselling and Support service provided 3993 hours to 483 service users. The average weekly cost of refuge accommodation was £236 per week.

In 2009/10 the refuge in Kilbirnie experienced a high void level, adversely impacting on the average void level for all NAWA refuge accommodation. Women's Aid reviewed their client group and widened the eligibility criteria resulting in considerable reduced void levels since the beginning of 2010.

Housing Services will continue to monitor and develop services with the organisation on a contractual funding basis. A higher level of scrutiny has been introduced and this will continue to be monitored via the performance management framework.

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

- The lower demand for refuge provision in the Garnock Valley; and
- The changing nature of women presenting to Women's Aid and the inclusion of more vulnerable women, including those with addictions, within the eligibility criteria.

Noted.

5. Urgent Items

The Chair agreed that the following item of business be considered as a matter of urgency to advise Members of a proposed future topic for investigation.

5.1 Future Topic for Investigation

The Council's Scheme of Administration provides for the Scrutiny Committee to set its own work programme, including undertaking reviews/investigations and setting up short-term working groups for review work.

The Chair advised that an investigation brief on the extent and effect of the Council's internal and external Service Level Agreements will be made to a future meeting of the Committee.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 11.45 a.m.