

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

30 January 2018

At a Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 10.00 a.m.

Present

Marie Burns, Margaret George, Joy Brahim, Alan Hill, Tom Marshall, Donald Reid and John Sweeney.

In Attendance

L. Friel, Executive Director, P. Doak, Senior Manager (Internal Audit, Risk and Performance) and D. Miller, Complaint and Feedback Manager (Finance and Corporate Support); C. Hatton, Executive Director and T. Reaney, Senior Manager (Streetscene) (Place); S. Brown, Interim Director North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership; J. Butcher, Executive Director (Education and Youth Employment); C. McAuley, Head of Service (Economic Growth); A. Fraser, Head of Democratic Services, M. Davison, Senior Manager (Democratic Services), A Todd, Senior Policy and Performance Officer and A. Little, Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Burns in the Chair.

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 Committee held on 14 November 2017 and special meeting held on 9 January 2018 were confirmed and the Minutes signed in accordance with Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

3. Quarter Two 2017/18 Progress Report - Directorate Plan Performance

Submitted report by the Chief Executive which provided an update on the performance of all Directorates against the priorities outlined in the Directorate Plans 2015/18 as at 30 September 2017.

The reports for each Directorate were set out in Appendices 1 - 6 to the report and an overview of the performance of Directorates compared against the same time last year was illustrated in the charts at section 2.9 of the report. The percentage of indicators which are on target has decreased slightly from 77.4% in 2016/17 to 73.7% in 2017/18 and the percentage of quarterly indicators significantly adrift of target has increased from 17.2% to 22.1%.

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

Democratic Services

- Processes and procedures in place within services to manage absence triggers where the Manager is also absent from work in order to ensure the employee's health and well-being;
- The increasing role of digital and social media by services and the role of Communications in support this and of ensuring corporate branding.

Finance and Corporate Support

- A range of supports that are offered to employees on long term absence to assist their return to work, such as Occupational Health referrals and Livewell initiatives;
- Information that will be provided to Members on the interface between the Council webpage and the Committees and Meetings webpage, the calendar of meetings and the search facility;
- The creation of a Digital Adviser post in the Contact Centre to promote and support customers on the use of digital services.

Education and Youth Employment

- Work on reducing the attainment gap and the development of a new numeracy framework to a focus on this area;
- The use of the Pupil Equity Fund to reduce the impact of poverty on educational outcomes;
- Review meetings with Head Teachers to encourage the use of the Pupil Equity Funds, the roll-over of any underspends to the next financial year;
- The use of Early Years Practitioners and the purchase of additional resources that has been required as a result of a shortfall of teachers in the Ayrshire area;
- Further information that will be provided to Members on attainment in respect of the top 20% and the bottom 20% and the Pupil Equity Fund spend across schools;
- Approval by Cabinet of the first draft of the Regional Improvement Collaborative that aims to deliver improvement through collaboration in line with the National Improvement Framework priorities;
- Information in respect of the Pupil Equity Fund, the regional attainment gap and the Regional Improvement Collaborative that will be included in future Directorate Plan reports; and
- The Active Lives initiative that supports the work being done on healthy eating and nutrition, lunchtime clubs and increasing the take up of school meals.

Economy and Communities

- Community Participatory Budgeting (CPB) events that were held in the Three Towns areas that were not very well attended as a result of inclement weather;
- Positive feedback from the Three Towns CPB events on grounds maintenance services and work by officers that is being undertaken on the good quality responses received from the these events on the future use of funds for the local areas; and
- A response that has been provided to the feedback from the Scottish and UK government on the Council's Ayrshire Growth Deal.

North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

- The pressures on primary care as a result of difficulties in recruiting General Practitioners that contributes to increased presentations to Crosshouse Hospital;
- Redirections to primary care that are put in place by Crosshouse Hospital when appropriate; and
- Support to primary care by multi-disciplinary teams, community link workers and community connectors who provide valuable advice to local people on alternative opportunities and services to support their health and well-being.

The Committee agreed (a) the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Support) provide information to Members on the interface between the Council webpage and the Committees and Meetings webpage, the calendar of meetings and the search facility; (b) the Executive Director (Education and Youth Employment) provide further information to Members on attainment in respect of the top 20% and the bottom 20% and the Pupil Equity Fund spend across schools; and (c) to otherwise note the report.

4. Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) 2015/16

Submitted report by the Chief Executive which set out (a) the Directorates' priorities identified through work undertaken following the publication of the latest LGBF report; and (b) highlighted the Improvement Service's areas for development that will enable the Council to make further use of the Framework. Appendix 1 to the report provided an explanation and details of improvement activity in terms of the LGBF measures, focusing in particular on the priority measures.

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

- A review of how the street cleaning indicator is calculated which is underway to ensure a consistent interpretation between Councils; and
- The influence of a range of factors on the financial information in respect of the cost per school pupil.

Noted.

5. Internal Audit Reports Issued

Submitted report by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on the findings of Internal Audit work completed between 1 November and 31 December 2017. Appendix 1 to the report provided information on the three separate audit assignments completed together with an executive summary and action plan from each audit.

Noted.

6. Internal Audit Charter

Submitted report by Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on the updated Internal Audit Charter, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and was attached as an appendix to the report.

Members asked questions and were provided with further information in relation to the role of External Audit in undertaking an annual assessment of the Internal Audit function and the regular oversight by the Chief Executive and Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Support) of this area.

The Committee agreed to approve the Internal Audit Charter as set out in the appendix to the report.

7. Q2 2017 YTD Complaint Report

Submitted report by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on (a) the Council's complaint performance; (b) the volumes and trends of complaints received in the first 6 months of Financial Year 2017/18; (c) comparative data for the first six months of 2016 and 2015; and (d) that the Executive Directors will provide a report to the next meeting on details of upheld and partially upheld complaints. Appendix 1 to the report provided statistical data and information on the range and volume of complaints at all stages of the complaints process.

Noted.

8. Exclusion of the Public

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.

8.1 Corporate Fraud Reports Issued

Submitted report by the Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Support) on the findings of Corporate Fraud investigations completed between 1 November and 31 December 2017.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 12 noon.

Audit and Scrutiny Committee
6 March 2018

Present

Marie Burns, Alan Hill and John Sweeney.

Also Present

Ronnie McNicol and Joe Cullinane.

In Attendance

A. Sutton, Head of Service (Connected Communities) (Economy and Communities); A. Fraser, Head of Democratic Services, H. Clancy, Committee Services Officer and M. Anderson, Committee Services Team Leader (Chief Executive's Service).

Chair

Councillor Burns in the Chair.

Apologies

Tom Marshall and Donald Reid.

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. Call In: Communities – Short Life Working Group

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a Call In Request received in respect of the decision taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 20 February 2018 in relation to the report on the Communities Short Life Working Group. A copy of the Cabinet report was provided at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 20 February 2018, considered a report by the Executive Director (Economy and Communities) on the reconvening of a short life working group, from 1 March 2018, comprising North Ayrshire Council and the North Ayrshire Federation of Community Associations (NAFCO) to address financial challenges faced by the public and voluntary sector in relation to the role of community associations and how they provide services to our communities.

The Cabinet agreed to (a) reconvene the short life working group from 1 March 2018 comprising North Ayrshire Council and the North Ayrshire Federation of Community Organisations and that the format of the Group should be:- • 3 x NAFCO • 3 x NAC Officer • 3 x Elected member (Chair - Cllr McPhater, 1 x SNP; 1 x Scottish Conservative and Unionist - with an Independent Member being offered a place if none of the Conservatives take up the place).; (b) that the Clerk contact the SNP and Conservative and Unionist Group Leaders asking for their nominations to the Working Group; and

(c) receive future reports in relation to themes which may emerge from the recommendations of the working group.

A Call In Request, signed by Councillors Barr, McNicol and Donald L. Reid, and referring in particular to (b) and (c) of the above decision, was in the following terms:-

“Reason for Call In

The recommendations of the working group Working group should have cross party elected membership and that the format of the group should be: 3 NAFCO/3 NAC officers/3 Elected Members (Cllr McPhater, 1 x SNP, 1 Conservative and Unionist — with an Independent Member being offered a place if none of the Conservatives take up the place. Why as an Independent Member not invited to attend the working group?

Desired Outcome

Referred back to Cabinet to reconsider decision and we recommend that all future reports in relation to themes which may emerge from the recommendations of the working group be reported to future meeting of the full Council.”

The Head of Democratic Services summarised the procedure for considering the Call In Request and set out the circumstances surrounding the Cabinet decision.

Thereafter, Councillor McNicol was invited to speak on behalf of the Members who had requested the Call In. Councillor McNicol expressed the view that the Independent Members should also be invited to serve on the working group, rather than being offered a place only in the circumstances set out in the Cabinet Minute. Councillor McNicol also intimated that, given the importance of community centres to Elected Members and the communities they serve, any recommendations arising from the working group should be considered by the full Council.

The Chair then invited Councillor Cullinane, on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Communities, to address the meeting. Councillor Cullinane advised that it had been the intention of the Cabinet to extend the invitation to Independent Members and the Conservative and Unionist Group collectively. He intimated that he was not averse to an additional place being offered to allow an Independent Member to serve on the working group, albeit that NAFCO may also wish an additional place in the interests of parity. Councillor Cullinane indicated that he had no objection to the suggestion that the working group report to the Council rather than to the Cabinet.

The Head of Service (Connected Communities) (Economy and Communities) invited Members to consider the importance of parity of esteem in the Council’s work with NAFCO, as well as the issue of manageability given the work to be carried out by the working group within a short timescale.

Members discussed the need for parity between Elected Member and NAFCO representation and considered the implications in terms of timing of the working group reporting to Council rather than to the Cabinet.

Councillor Hill, seconded by Councillor Burns, moved to accept, in part, the terms of the Call In and recommend to the Cabinet that the Elected Member representation on the working group be increased to four to allow the appointment of an Independent Member, with a further place also offered to NAFCO in the interests of parity, but that no change be made to the decision that the working group report to the Cabinet.

Councillor Sweeney moved to accept in part the terms of the Call In and recommend to the Cabinet that the Elected Member representation on the Working Group remain at three, with the Conservative Group and Independent Members being offered one place between them. There being no seconder and no further amendment, the motion was carried.

The meeting ended at 10.10 a.m.