

Audit and Scrutiny Committee
25 January 2024

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, Cameron Inglis, Matthew McLean and John Sweeney.

Present (Remote Participation)

Tom Marshall and Donald L. Reid.

In Attendance (Physical Participation)

A. Sutton, Executive Director, R. Leith, Head of Service (Connected Communities) and A. McClelland, Head of Service (Education) (Communities and Education); R. McCutcheon, Executive Director, Y. Baulk, Head of Service (Housing & Public Protection) and T. Reaney, Head of Service (Neighbourhood Services) (Place); P. Doak, Head of Service (Finance and Transformation) (Health and Social Care Partnership); M. Boyd, Head of Service and L. Miller, Senior Manager (Audit, Fraud, Safety and Risk) (Finance), B. Quigley, Senior Manager (ICT) (People and ICT), and A. Craig, Head of Service, C. Stewart and S. Wilson, Committee Services Officers (Democratic Services) (Chief Executive's Service).

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Apologies

Davina McTiernan.

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 the Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 November 2023 were confirmed and the Minutes signed in accordance with Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

3. Chair's remarks

The Chair, in terms of Standing Order 10.5, agreed to vary the order of business to allow consideration of item 5 (HMIE Progress Review of Community Learning and Development) before item 3 on the Agenda.

4. HMIE Progress Review of Community Learning and Development

Submitted report by the Executive Director (Communities & Education) informing of the outcomes of the recent Progress Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) by HMIE. The Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report North Ayrshire Council was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The dedication and commitment of the Community Learning and Development team, in respect of the work that they were doing for local communities in North Ayrshire, was acknowledged by the Committee.

The Committee agreed to (a) note the recent Progress Review carried out by HMIE against the CLD Strategic Plan and the positive feedback from this; (b) approve the actions planned as a result of the outcome of the review; and (c) note that the progress review had been presented to the Cabinet at its meeting in December 2023.

5. Annual Report – School and Early Learning and Childcare Inspections 2022-23

Submitted report by the Executive Director (Communities & Education) informing of the performance of North Ayrshire schools and early learning and childcare settings in external inspections, with a focus on those published during session 2022-23. The Education Scotland inspection reports which highlighted a number of key strengths common to several of the establishments they visited in North Ayrshire in 2022-23 were attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

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

- the methodology and criteria behind what type of inspection might be carried out by Education Scotland, particularly when it concerned a full inspection;
- the improvement actions that would be put in place by the Service to address any areas of concern, following due consideration of the inspection reports;
- support provided to partner nurseries;
- the inspection frequency for Treetops Nursery; and
- the good working relationship between the Service and Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate, in terms of addressing any areas of anxiety and/or concern amongst Head Teachers and staff, during inspection of schools and Early Learning and Childcare settings.

The Committee agreed to (a) note the contents of the report; and (b) commend the performance of schools and Early Learning and Childcare settings in inspections conducted by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate.

6. Education Authority Annual Plan 2023-24

Submitted report by the Executive Director (Communities & Education) informing of the content and requirement for publication of the Education Authority Annual Plan for 2023-24.

The draft Education Authority annual plan for 2023-24 was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

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

- the use of some of the language contained in the report and whether this represented a material change in terms of the previous reporting style;
- measures to improve attendance, which was one of the 5 priorities in the NAC Education Service Improvement Plan 2023-26; and
- whether any analysis or evaluation had been undertaken on changing the school week to make it shorter, which had been undertaken by a number of other Education Authorities, but which was not proposed to be taken in North Ayrshire.

The Committee agreed to note the content of the Education Authority Annual Plan for 2023-24 and its publication as required by the Education (Scotland) Act 2016.

7. North Ayrshire Council's Performance Strategy 2023-28

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Democratic) advising of the Council's Performance Strategy 2023-28, including a new approach to self-assessment. 'Our Performance Management Strategy 2023-28', which combined learning from the previous strategy with the Best Value Thematic Approach and initial draft results of the audit, was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

A member asked a question and was provided with further information in relation to the differences between the new strategy and the previous strategy.

The Committee agreed to note (i) 'Our Performance Management Strategy 2023-28' and (ii) that it formed the basis of performance management within North Ayrshire Council.

8. Year End Performance Reporting: Council Plan Year End Progress Report 2022-23; and Local Government Benchmarking Framework Analysis of 2023 Data Release

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Democratic) advising on progress of the Council Plan priorities. The Council Plan Year End Progress Report and supporting performance measures were attached at Appendices 1, 2 and 3, respectively, to the report. Appendix 4 detailed the Council Plan Annual Performance Report with Appendix Five, providing the status of the Council's performance indicators within the LGBF Analysis of 2023 Data Release.

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

- the new hybrid way of working of the Council and whether there had been any adverse or improved performance trends amongst staff arising from this changed model of working; and
- actions that were significantly adrift of target and the reasons for underperformance within each action including efforts being made to rectify it.

The Committee agreed to note (i) the Council Plan Year End Progress Report and supporting performance measures as set out at Appendix One, Two and Three to the report; (ii) the Council Plan Annual Performance Report as set out in Appendix Four to the report; (iii) the status of the Council's performance indicators within the LGBF Analysis of 2023 Data Release at Appendix Five to the report; and (iv) that officers would review the timescales involved in terms of performance reporting, with a view to seeing whether they could be reduced in any way.

9. North Ayrshire Council Plan 2023-28: Performance Management Framework

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Democratic) on the Council Plan 2023-28 Performance Management Framework, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Noted.

10. Internal Audit Reports Issued

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) on the findings of Internal Audit work completed between November and December 2023. The findings from two audit assignments were detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, together with the respective executive summaries and action plans.

In response to a question by a Member concerning assurance of a contract already let and constructed, and the management of such, it was agreed, having heard the Chair, that a report on the subject matter, in general, would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee for Members' consideration.

Noted.

11. 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.

12. Investigation Reports Issued (Exempt Item)

Submitted report by the Head of Service (Finance) informing of investigation reports finalised since the last meeting of the Committee.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 11.40 a.m.