

Audit and Scrutiny Committee  
21 March 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, Donald L. Reid and John Sweeney.

**Present (Remote Participation)**

Tom Marshall and Davina McTiernan.

**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); P. Doak, Head of Service (Finance and Transformation) (Health and Social Care Partnership); T. Reaney, Head of Service (Neighbourhood Services) (Place); M. Boyd, Head of Service, L. Miller, Senior Manager (Audit, Fraud, Safety and Risk) and D. Forbes, Strategic Business Partner (Financial Management and Revenues) (Finance); A. Elliot, Senior Manager (Housing Operations) (Place); E. Nixon, Senior Manager (Customer Service) (People and ICT); and A. Craig, Head of Service, I. Hardy, Team Manager (Policy, Performance and Elections), M. Anderson, Senior Manager (Committee and Member Services) and H. Clancy, Committee Services Officer (Democratic Services) (Chief Executive's Service).

**Also In Attendance (Physical Participation)**

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 accuracy of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 January 2024 was confirmed and the Minutes signed in accordance with Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

**3. Participatory Budgeting**

Submitted a report by the Executive Director (Communities and Education) on the ongoing development of small grants Participatory Budgeting (PB). Appendix 1 to the report provided the Participatory Budgeting 2023-24 Review report.

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

- mechanisms to encourage a wider range of groups to apply for funding;
- issues around the submission deadline for the previous round of funding applications and IT difficulties which were outwith the control of the Council and which had arisen in relation to voting, as well as recording feedback on such matters;
- the need to encourage greater competition for funding in future, particularly with regard to Youth Participatory Budgeting projects;
- the timing of future deadlines for the submission of funding applications, to better meet the needs of prospective applicants;
- actions to address technical issues in respect of voting;
- the Council's approach and policy on the use of animals for entertainment from Council owned land and premises and how that was reflected in funding decisions as part of the Participatory Budgeting process; and
- strategies to increase the number of members of the public participating in the voting process for Participatory Budgeting

The Head of Service (Democratic), having clarified there was no bye-law in place, undertook to provide further clarification of any current policy position on the use of animals for entertainment from Council land and premises.

Having duly reviewed the adaptations made to the small grants Participatory Budgeting process and provided feedback, the Committee agreed to note the progress made in developing the programme within Localities.

#### **4. Council Plan Mid-Year Progress Report**

Submitted a report by the Head of Service (Democratic) on the Council Plan Mid-Year Progress Report 2023-24. The progress report itself was attached as an appendix to the report.

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

- the timing in bringing the mid-year progress report to the committee;
- issues which could arise when a Council supplier/contractor changed its name and the delays associated with meeting procurement rules around this;
- the extent to which current solar roof projects were generating power; and
- the application of the Council's policy on community benefit from renewable energy development.

The Head of Service (Finance) undertook to look into the particular case raised by a Member with regard to delays in service delivery following a change of name by a contractor.

The Head of Service (Democratic Services) undertook to liaise with the Head of Service (Sustainability, Transport and Corporate Property) with regard to the provision of further information on the delivery of community benefits associated with solar farm projects.

Noted.

## **5. 2023/2024 Half-Yearly Complaint Report**

Submitted a report by the Head of Service (Democratic) on the Council's complaint performance and the volumes and trends of complaints received in the first six months of financial year 2023/24. The progress report itself was attached as an appendix to the report.

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

- whether the "working days" referred to in the report excluded weekends;
- the varying delivery timescales associated with the different colours of household waste bin due to supply chain issues;
- the perceived impact on litter levels of an identified issue affecting the lids of purple household waste bins;
- the reputational damage to the Council of service failures in respect of household waste collections;
- the impact of staff absence and vehicle faults on the waste collection service and measures to manage these factors;
- the need for better communication with the public around missed/delayed household waste collections, including whether it was possible to identify alternative mechanisms to reach those who did not use social media;
- the categorisation of concerns as "service requests", rather than "complaints";
- the benefits of conducting a detailed review of the household waste collection service, with a view to improving resilience, and the timescales for a planned review;
- the high-profile nature of the household waste collection service and the reasons for possible variance in performance in different parts of North Ayrshire;
- the potential impact on levels of fly tipping as a result of unscheduled closure of waste recycling centres due to staff absence;
- the particular circumstances relating to household waste collection in rural areas;
- the feasibility of introducing a 'status dashboard' which would allow residents to check on household waste collection issues in real time,
- poor parking on some residential streets, which impeded access by bin lorries, and measures to address this;
- the circumstances which would lead to the categorisation of an issue as a service request, stage 1 complaint or stage 2 complaint, and perceived inconsistencies in categorisation;
- the planned reporting cycle for future Complaints reports; and
- factors contributing to absence levels within the Waste team and the level of absence within this Service compared with overall levels of absence across the Council.

The Head of Service (Neighbourhood Services) undertook to provide information to Members on the comparative levels of staff absence within the Waste team and the Council overall.

Noted.

## **6. External Audit Plan 2023/24**

Submitted a report by the Head of Service (Finance) on the External Audit Plan for 2023/24. Audit Scotland's Annual Audit Plan for the 2023/24 audit was attached as an appendix to the report.

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

- the fee structure of external audit services and the 6% uplift in audit fees;
- the terminology used in the audit report, with regard to "materiality levels"; and
- the Council's current debt level and financial sustainability.

Noted.

## **7. Internal Audit Plan 2024/25**

Submitted a report by the Head of Service (Finance) on the proposed internal audit plan for 2024/25. Appendix A to the report provided the internal audit plan for Quarters 1 and 2 of 2024/25. A list of potential audit areas was set out at Appendix B to the report.

The Chair asked a question, and received further information, on the potential for slippage of less pressing matters as a result of implementing a dynamic plan approach.

The Committee agreed to approve the internal audit plan.

## **8. Internal Audit Reports Issued**

Submitted a report by the Head of Service (Finance) on the findings of Internal Audit work completed between January and February 2024. The findings from four audit assignments were detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, together with the respective executive summaries and action plans.

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

- the rectification of an oversight which had resulted in a small number of actions in respect of IJB Workforce Planning not being assigned to an officer(s); and
- whether IJBs were more certain about their future over the next three years following changes to proposals around a National Care Service;

Noted.

## **9. Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud Action Plans: Quarter 3 Update**

Submitted a 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 31 December 2023.

Noted.

## **10. Standing Item of Business: Consideration of Future Business for Scrutiny**

The Head of Service (Democratic) referred to the self-evaluation exercise conducted by the Committee earlier in the year and, arising from this, to the addition of this standing Agenda item.

Members were invited to consider potential items of scrutiny business for future meetings.

The Executive Director (Communities and Education) undertook to ensure her Service liaised directly with relevant Members on issues relating to specific Community Asset Transfer applications, including in respect of Largs Tennis Club.

The Committee agreed (a) to receive reports to future meetings on (i) the Community Asset Transfer process and (ii) the Council's Climate Change target and associated policies; and (b) that it be remitted to officers to determine the appropriate reporting timescales for these matters, based on available resources.

## **11. Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

## **12. 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.

## **13. Investigation Reports Issued (Exempt Item)**

Submitted a report by the Head of Service (Housing and Public Protection) updating the Committee on the timeline surrounding a matter reported to the last meeting of the Committee as part of an investigation report.

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

- the lessons learned from this case and safeguards now in place; and
- the feasibility of more frequent checking and cross-checking of data.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 11.55 a.m.