



Internal Audit Report
Chief Executive's Service
08/008- Committee Services
November 2009

Final Report

Corporate Services
Perth & Kinross Council
2 High Street
Perth PH1 5PH

Internal Audit Report

Background and Introduction

This audit was carried out as part of the approved audit plan for 2008/2009.

The Committee Services team forms part of the Chief Executive's Service and is managed by the Democratic Manager (Committee).

The team's activities concern members as they operate within the committee structure rather than on their roles and responsibilities as individuals. The main functions of the team include the efficient administration of Council committees and sub-committees, community planning partnerships, member/officer working groups and other meetings with elected member representation. Committee Services staff also compile agendas for these meetings and prepare and publish meeting minutes. They are also involved with matters of company administration in respect of certain trusts. An important part of the role is provision of procedural advice to elected members and senior officers of the Council. The team also ensures that the meetings are managed in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders and Scheme of Administration or equivalent, and relevant statutory practices.

The audit reviewed control over the key processes within Committee Services.

Acknowledgements

Internal Audit acknowledges with thanks the co-operation of Committee Services staff and management during this audit.

Control Objectives and Opinions

This section describes the purpose of the audit and summarises the results. A 'control objective' is a management objective that requires the maintenance of adequate and effective internal controls to ensure that it is achieved. Each control objective has been given a rating describing, on the basis of the audit work done, the actual strength of the internal controls found to be in place. Areas of good or poor practice are described where appropriate.

Control Objective: to ensure that the Service has clear and appropriate management objectives and adequate documented policies and procedures to meet those objectives.	
Auditor's Comments: While management objectives are generally clear and appropriate, there is scope for enhancing the provision of procedural guidance to Committee Services staff, to Committee Services contacts in the Services and to the public. The need to document the relative roles and responsibilities of Committee Services staff and relevant staff in the services in the development and submission of reports to committees is important in this regard.	
Strength of Internal Controls:	Moderately Strong

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Control Objective: to ensure there is an adequate and appropriate planning process and organisational structure to meet Service requirements.	
Auditor's Comments: There is scope for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ascertaining the resource requirements for the efficient provision of core Committee Services functions; • aligning the preparation of the Committee Services Team Plan with the Council's Team Planning Guidelines. 	
Strength of Internal Controls:	Moderate

Control Objective: to ensure staff have relevant training and experience to deliver an effective service	
Auditor's Comments: While there are no specific professional qualification requirements, staff are required, on recruitment, to be of graduate level. Training is largely on the job supplemented by a limited availability of training courses. The current staff have considerable experience in the execution of their duties.	
Strength of Internal Controls:	Strong

Control Objective: to ensure there is an adequate and effective performance management and reporting system in place.	
Auditor's Comments: There is little evidence that Committee Services staff performance for operational time-driven tasks is monitored against agreed targets to ensure an appropriate quality of service is achieved.	
There are, however, initiatives currently being progressed with members of other authorities towards establishing a method of benchmarking team performance against Committee Services in other local authorities to ensure that the Council Committee Services team provides good value for money in the services it provides.	
Strength of Internal Controls:	Moderate

Management Action and Follow-Up

Responsibility for the maintenance of adequate and effective internal controls rests with management.

Where the audit has identified areas where a response by management is required, these are listed in Appendix 1, along with an indication of the importance of each 'action point'. Appendix 2 describes these action points in more detail, and records the action plan that has been developed by management in response to each point.

It is management's responsibility to ensure that the action plan presented in this report is achievable and appropriate to the circumstances. Where a decision is taken not to act in response to this report, it is the responsibility of management to assess and accept the risks arising from non-implementation.

Achievement of the action plan is monitored through Internal Audit's 'follow up' arrangements.

Management should ensure that the relevant risk profiles are reviewed and updated where necessary to take account of the contents of Internal Audit reports. The completeness of risk profiles will be examined as part of Internal Audit's normal planned work.

Feedback

Internal Audit welcomes feedback from management, in connection with this audit or with the Internal Audit service in general.

Distribution

This report has been distributed to:

B Malone, Chief Executive

G Taylor, Head of Democratic Services

A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committee)

I Hall, Democratic Manager (Administration)

P Dickson, Complaints & Governance Officer

M Kay, Senior Committee Officer

External Audit

Authorisation

The auditor for this assignment was D Farquhar .The supervising auditor was K Woolard.

This report is authorised for issue:

J Clark
Acting Chief Internal Auditor
Date: 11 November 2009

Appendix 1: Summary of Action Points

No.	Action Point	Risk/Importance
1	Committee Services Kaizen Progress	Low
2	Team Planning	Low
3	Scheme of Admin. as recorded on the Website	Low
4	Quality of Reports	Medium
5	Procedural Guidance	Medium
6	Committee Management System	Low
7	Resource Requirement	Medium
8	Performance Measurement	Medium

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Appendix 2: Action Plan

Action Point 1 - Committee Services Kaizen Progress

The Project Task List arising from the Committee Services Kaizen, undertaken in 2008, was in the course of being updated at the time of the audit. A combination of other priorities and the need for familiarisation with the new version of software on which the project plan is held, had prevented the List being updated for several months. While many of the tasks have been completed, it is important that the List is kept up to date to ensure that those yet to be commenced and those on hold pending further action can be readily identified and action taken at the appropriate time

Management Action Plan

The Project Task List will be fully updated to represent the current status of the actions arising from Committee Services

Importance:	Low
Responsible Officer(s):	A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committee)
Lead Service:	Chief Executive's Service
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	Complete
Required Evidence of Completion:	Updated Project Task List

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 2 - Team Planning

The 2009/10 Team Plan has not yet been prepared. The Team Plan for 2008/2009 was prepared, with input from the staff of Committee Services, in September 2008. The auditor noted the Team Plan was not in a form which conforms with Team Planning Guidelines given in the "Service Guide to Business Management & Improvement Planning". In particular, it lacks objectives and actions which are specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and timetabled. While the contents to some extent mirror Action and Improvement plans in the BMIP, they are not "a mechanism which will help to link individual objectives as set out in individual work plans or Employee Review and Development Action Plans to actions and performance measures in the BMIP" as per the Introduction to Team Planning.

The Democratic Manager (Committee) confirmed that the form of the Project Task List arising from the Committee Services Kaizen, undertaken in 2008, conforms more closely with Team Planning Guidelines and will provide the basis of the 2009/10 Team Plan.

Management Action Plan

The 2009/10 Team Plan will be prepared using the Kaizen Project Task List as a basis, taking account of the requirements of the Team Planning Guidelines given in the "Service Guide to Business Management & Improvement Planning" and input from the Strategic Planning and Improvement Team.

Importance:	Low
Responsible Officer(s):	A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committee)
Lead Service:	Chief Executive's Service
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	December 2009
Required Evidence of Completion:	Team Plan 2009/2010

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 3 - Scheme of Admin. as recorded on the website

The auditor noted that the wording of the summarised remits of committees in the Council website varies from that in the Scheme of Administration. The Senior Committee Officer has since made the necessary amendments as part of the routine update of the Scheme of Administration entries on the website.

In addition, it was noted, in respect of one committee, that details of committee membership recorded in elected member personal profiles in the Council website varies from the membership of the committee recorded under “Minutes, Agendas and Reports”.

Management Action Plan

(1) Arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the contents of the Scheme of Administration are accurately reflected on the Council’s website.

(2) Committee membership details in elected member personal profiles on the Council website, will be reviewed and updated.

Importance:	Low
Responsible Officer(s):	(1) A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committee) (2) I Hall, Democratic Manager (Administration)
Lead Service:	Chief Executive’s Service
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	(1) Complete (2) Complete
Required Evidence of Completion:	(1) Details of arrangements made (2) Corrected membership profiles

Auditor’s Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 4 - Quality of Reports

The auditor noted several inaccuracies contained in reports which had been submitted to Committee meetings. The Democratic Manager (Committee) stated that it is the responsibility of the Service submitting the report to ensure the operational details are correct. He added that Committee Services do offer governance and procedural guidance and advice on the process of report preparation and that reports on occasion are returned by Committee Services to the relevant service for amendment owing to lack of clarity or their being incomplete e.g. lacking evidence in support of proposals or failing to provide details of the statutory authority for proposed actions.

The Democratic Manager (Committee) said that this issue had been recognised during the Kaizen of Committee Services.

Management Action Plan

Committee Services will establish a protocol which will clarify the respective roles of Committee Officers and contacts in the Services ensuring that the latter are aware of their responsibility to have reports approved by management teams for accuracy clarity and completeness, before submission to Committee Services.

Importance:	Medium
Responsible Officer(s):	A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committee)
Lead Service:	Chief Executive's Service
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	December 2009
Required Evidence of Completion:	Protocol

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 5 - Procedural Guidance

Some Committee Service procedures have been documented to provide guidance to Committee Services staff, and, where appropriate, staff in the Services and members of the public. The guidance is partly manual and partly electronic in format and lacks a standard layout and version control.

These “draft” procedures are in the process of being reviewed by the Democratic Manager (Committee) with the aim of establishing comprehensive guidelines for staff and members of the public, incorporating standard layouts and version control. It is anticipated this action will also assist in raising awareness of the Committee Services function, an agreed action from the Committee Services Kaizen.

Also, while reviewing guidance on consultation documents, the auditor noted the Corporate Consultation Register has not been updated for papers received in 2008 and 2009

Management Action Plan

(1) Following a review by the Democratic Manager (Committee), a comprehensive set of operational procedures and guidance notes will be developed for Committee Services staff, Service contacts and members of the public. These will be in a standard format and subject to version control.

(2)The Corporate Consultation Register will be updated.

Importance:	Medium
Responsible Officer(s):	A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committees)
Lead Service:	Chief Executive’s Service
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	(1) March 2010 (2) December 2009
Required Evidence of Completion:	(1) Copies of procedures for staff and members of the public. (2) Update of the Corporate Consultation Register in ERIC

Auditor’s Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 6 - Committee Management System

The system used to manage the work involved with the Committee cycle, which ensures the efficient storage and management of all documents regarding relevant meetings, maintaining information on meeting dates, councillor membership, councillor contact details, and the Council's operational rules etc., is partially manual and partially electronic. The auditor noted Committee Services staff are occasionally required to carry out time consuming manual searches of meeting minutes on behalf of Elected Members and Services for references to particular topics.

Management Action Plan

A business case will be prepared for the acquisition and implementation of a robust and comprehensive electronic Committee Management System which will include appropriate text retrieval software to assist Committee Services staff to quickly respond to queries from Elected Members and Services' staff and to enable them to access the required information directly.

Importance:	Low
Responsible Officer(s):	A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committee)
Lead Service:	Chief Executive's Service
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	March 2010
Required Evidence of Completion:	Business case for enhanced Committee Management System

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 7 - Resource Requirement

Committee Officers provide services to an increasing number of committees and member /officer working groups. The age profile of Committee Officers is predominantly over 50, and the availability staff with appropriate experience to carry out the Committee Services function is acknowledged workforce planning issue which requires to be addressed

A workforce planning exercise is being carried out comparing workload to resource availability and the resultant report will be submitted to management for consideration.

Management Action Plan

Following a review of core Committee Services functions, a paper demonstrating the resources needed to deliver these functions will be submitted to senior management for appropriate action.

Importance:	Medium
Responsible Officer(s):	A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committee)
Lead Service:	Chief Executive's Service
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	December 2009
Required Evidence of Completion:	Resource report

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 8 - Performance Measurement

There is little evidence of the establishment (where not statutorily defined) of internal 'service standards' for time critical operations within Committee Services, and the monitoring of staff performance. Monitoring arrangements would typically encompass time taken to circulate agendas, minutes and action sheets.

In addition, there are currently no arrangements in place for benchmarking team performance against Committee Services in other local authorities to ensure that the Council's Committee Services team is providing good value for money in the services it provides. The Democratic Manager (Committee) confirmed that this has been recognised as an important issue and is currently being addressed by the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland (SOLAR) Administrative Services Best Practice Group, which involves a number of local authorities.

Management Action Plan

Consideration will be given, against the background of prevailing priorities, to the establishment of appropriate and realistic internal 'service standards' against which staff performance will be measured and benchmarked against other local authorities.

Importance:	Medium
Responsible Officer(s):	A Wilson, Democratic Manager (Committee)
Lead Service:	Chief Executive's Service
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	March 2010
Required Evidence of Completion:	(1) Agreed Service Standards (2) Comparator local authority details

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory