

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Committee Room, Fourth Floor, Council Building, 2 High Street, Perth on Wednesday 30 November 2011 at 2.00pm.

Present: Councillors K Baird, I Campbell, W Lumsden, B Vaughan, A Wylie and A Younger.

In Attendance: B Malone (Chief Executive); G Taylor and M Kay (both Chief Executive's Service); B Atkinson, P McAvoy and L Dott (all Education and Children's Services); J Walker, Depute Director (Housing and Community Care), A Taylor and L Brady (both Housing and Community Care); and B Renton, N Brian, A Olejnik and A Clegg (all The Environment Service).

Apologies for Absence: Councillor A Gaunt, Mr I Jackson and Mr D Stewart.

Councillor K Baird, Convener, Presiding

659. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

660. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

(i) Scrutiny Committee

The Minute of Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of 14 September 2011 (Arts. 517-525) was submitted, approved as a correct record and authorised for signature.

(ii) Audit Sub-Committee

The Minute of Meeting of the Audit Sub-Committee of 24 August 2011 was submitted and noted. (*Appendix I*)

IN TERMS OF STANDING ORDER 19 THE COMMITTEE AGREED TO VARY THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

*661. ATTAINMENT IN PERTH AND KINROSS SCHOOLS 2011 (ART. 593)

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) (11/534) presenting a summary analysis of pupil attainment in Perth and Kinross schools in 2010/2011, specifically in relation to key Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and 5-14 attainment measures, and in relation to Curriculum for Excellence progress with learning and achievement. It was noted that Report 11/534 had been accepted by the Lifelong Learning Committee on 2 November 2011.

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P McAvoy, Head of Education (Secondary and Inclusion), gave a brief presentation on the attainment figures and trends that were detailed in the report, and thereafter answered a number of questions from the Committee in relation to (1) performance against comparator authorities in level 5 or better at standard grade; (2) the narrowing of the gap in attainment between girls and boys; (3) variations between schools in particular subjects; (4) the potential benefit of using the virtual learning environment to give smaller schools access to advanced highers in a range of subjects; (5) the appropriateness of the level of examination entry to the individual child; and (6) ensuring that high performing schools maintain their standard.

Resolved:

The contents of Report 11/534 be accepted.

P McAVOY LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT.

662. SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2010/11 (ART. 548)

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive (11/594) providing an overview of how the Perth and Kinross Community Planning Partnership had performed against the Single Outcome Agreement 2009-2011 for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011, as set out in the Community Planning Partnership Annual Performance Report approved at the Council meeting on 28 September 2011 and submitted as required to the Scottish Government.

The Chief Executive explained the continuing importance placed by the Scottish Government on the Single Outcome Agreement, in identifying at a local level areas for improvement in the delivery of outcomes. In response to questions from Councillor Vaughan on (1) the position regarding a move towards shared budgets and operational plans, the Chief Executive referred to the ongoing progress on how the Single Outcome Agreement approach could be further developed to establish a more effective way to streamline joint planning and priorities, and the delivery of improved performance and accountability; whilst there was no comprehensive budgeting process across partners, it was possible to evidence funding allocated by partners to specific priorities which had been determined at a strategic level.; and (2) the reason Perth and Kinross Council did not use the Government's Improvement Framework, the Chief Executive explained that some years previously, prior to the introduction of the Framework, Perth and Kinross Council had developed its own self evaluation tool evidencing strengths and weaknesses, but that consideration may be given to some adjustment to align the model more closely with the Framework.

Councillor Wylie reiterated the concern he had raised at the previous meeting on the non availability of performance data from NHS Tayside relating to pregnancy and breastfeeding in deprivation areas. The Chief Executive pointed to the importance of data being validated and noted that Health Boards were required to report on, and were held accountable for, NHS performance targets which were based on four key ministerial priorities and objectives, Health Improvement, Efficiency, Access and Treatment, and statistics were gathered accordingly. J

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Walker suggested that common indicators could be developed at a local level to meet identified priorities and that this suggestion could be raised at the Strategic Health Partnership.

Resolved:

The Single Outcome Agreement Annual Performance Report 2010/11 as appended to Report 11/594 be noted.

***663. SIX MONTHLY BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN PERFORMANCE EXCEPTION REPORTS**

(i) Chief Executive's Service (Art. 656)

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive (11/595) (1) reviewing the performance of the Chief Executive's Service against its Business Management and Improvement Plan (BMIP) for the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011; and (2) including a review of performance against those indicators from the Chief Executive's BMIP which are relevant to the Corporate Business Change function which sits in Education and Children's Services, as set out in Appendix B to Report 11/595. It was noted that Report 11/595 had been accepted by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee earlier in the day.

In response to Councillor Vaughan's suggestion that the explanation for non-availability of information be included in future six monthly reports, B Malone agreed that this would be helpful. In response to a question from Councillor Vaughan on the possibility of a survey being carried out in relation to the recent Community Council elections, G Taylor, Head of Democratic Services, reported that 48 Community Councils had been re-established with only 4 still to hold their first meeting, and thanked local members for their assistance in this process; she advised that a great deal of feedback had been received to date and that a full evaluation would be carried out once all of the Community Councils were in place.

Councillor Lumsden welcomed the introduction of the new Audit Protocol and looked forward to the noticeable improvement in performance continuing; J Walker advised this had been developed in conjunction with the Head of Legal Services to reinforce the importance of follow-up audit actions.

Resolved:

The contents of the Chief Executive's Service Six Monthly Performance Exception Report 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011 be accepted.

(ii) Education and Children's Services (Art. 595)

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) (11/536) (1) reviewing the performance of Education and Children's Services against the Services' Business

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Management and Improvement Plan for the period 1 April to 30 September 2011; and (2) reviewing performance against those indicators from the Chief Executive's Service Business Management and Improvement Plan 2011-2014 that were relevant to the Corporate Business Change function. It was noted that Report 11/536 had been accepted by the Lifelong Learning Committee on 2 November 2011.

W Atkinson, Depute Director Education and Children's Services noted that the timescales for reporting did not coincide with school terms and that this should be taken into account. In response to a request from Councillor Vaughan for information on the membership of the Cultural Partnership, the Depute Director agreed to provide this information to the Committee following the meeting. In response to a question from Councillor Wylie on the ongoing need to recruit local placements for older children and young people, the Depute Director advised that a report would be submitted to an early meeting of the Lifelong Learning Committee with a proposal which might address the difficulties being faced in meeting the demand for carers at a local level for older children and young people.

In response to a question from Councillor Younger on the increase in reported incidents of aggression in specialist provision schools, the Depute Director advised that this was in relation to a small number of pupils with extremely complex needs which could lead to challenging behaviour and the emphasis on training for staff using approaches designed to assess and understand the underlying needs, which can be addressed through the promotion of alternative, constructive behaviours. In relation to aggression in primary schools, research has shown that a nurture approach in partnership with parents over a period of time was beneficial.

Resolved:

- (i) The contents of the Education and Children's Services Six Monthly Performance Exception Report 1 April to 30 September 2011, attached as Appendix A to Report 11/536, be accepted.
- (ii) The contents of the Corporate Business Change Six Monthly Performance Report 1 April to 30 September 2011, attached as Appendix B to Report 11/536, be accepted.

(iii) The Environment Service (Art. 619)

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Environment) (11/525) reviewing the performance of the Environment Service against its Business Management and Improvement Plan (BMIP) for the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011. It was noted that Report 11/525 had been accepted by the Environment Committee on 23 November 2011.

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In response to a question from Councillor Baird in relation to non availability of some performance information, B Renton, Head of Performance and Resources, explained that these related to statistics gathered annually.

N Brian, Development Quality Manager, Planning and Regeneration, reported in relation to the performance within Development Management (1) that the section had been operating with three vacancies for a three month period, but that two of the vacancies had now been filled, with results improving as a consequence; (2) that figures in the Report 11/525 related to July 2011, with the current position being that 80 per cent of planning applications were now being determined within two months; (3) on the restructuring which was taking place within Development Management to align with the new hierarchy of applications, which, together with increased monitoring and support, by targeting contributory factors which delayed the progress and a more proactive approach should improve performance in meeting target dates, (4) the approach taken to the pre-application process, continuing this service but concentrating resources to best effect; (5) confirming that the same officer would deal with both the pre-application and application stages; (6) on guidance provided to applicants on submission of applications to ensure the inclusion of all relevant information; (7) the approach taken if an application requires to be changed that the applicant is asked to withdraw and resubmit their application with the new information rather than a delay affecting the deadline for determination; and (8) on opportunities for officers to move between teams which would be considered during the review to be carried out at the end of the first year of operation of the new system.

Resolved:

The contents of the Environment Service Six Monthly Performance Exception Report 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011 be accepted.

N BRIAN LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT.

(iv) Housing and Community Care (Art. 586)

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Housing and Community Care) (11/559) reviewing the performance of Housing and Community Care against its Business Management and Improvement Plan (BMIP) for the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011. it was noted that Report 11/559 had been accepted by the Housing and Health Committee on 2 November 2011.

J Walker, Depute Director Housing and Community Care, referred to (1) the related report to be considered on the Audit of Performance of Housing and Council Tax Benefit (see Article 665 below); (2) the rise in rent arrears due to the overall effect of reductions in household income, and the action plan put in place to address this; (3) the new

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indicator in relation to percentage of total procurement spend supported by a contract and the action being taken to improve the recording process to address under-reporting; (4) the emphasis placed on managing sickness absence, noting that 80 per cent related to long term sickness absence in physically demanding roles. In response to a question from Councillor Baird on what action was being taken in relation to tenants who did not pay rent or maintain their gardens, he advised that Improvement Orders were used and referred to a Local Neighbourhood Services open day which had been held and the development of a Neighbourhood Strategy which would assist in improving the environment of housing areas.

Resolved:

The contents of the Housing and Community Care Six Monthly Performance Exception Summary for 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011 be accepted.

***664. REPORT ON SOCIAL CARE AND SOCIAL WORK IMPROVEMENT SCOTLAND INSPECTIONS (Art. 590)**

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Housing and Community Care) (11/545) advising of the key findings of inspections carried out in Perth and Kinross between August 2010 and July 2011 by Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS). It was noted that Report 11/545 had been accepted by the Housing and Health Committee on 2 November 2011.

J Walker, Depute Director, Housing and Community Care, referred to the outcome of the inspections during the year, and reported further on the outcome of the Beechgrove House inspection, that an improvement plan was in place and that improvements required related to management and administration, which were being addressed by the new manager, with the assistance of good practice and expertise of another experienced manager.

W Atkinson, Depute Director Education and Children's Services explained the change to the scrutiny environment and the move to unannounced inspections. The Chief Executive expanded further on this, referring to an announcement anticipated in the next few weeks of a new model of inspection for Children's Services which it was hoped would be rolled out to Adult Services.

Resolved:

The contents of Report 11/545 with regard to SCSWIS inspections carried out between August 2010 and July 2011 be accepted.

***665. AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE OF HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT (ART. 587)**

There was submitted a report by the Executive Director (Housing and Community Care) (11/542) presenting: (1) the findings of the Audit Scotland audit of Perth and Kinross's housing and council tax benefit risk assessment programme which took place in July 2011; and (2) the performance of the Benefits Team for the

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period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2011. Report 11/542 had been accepted by the Housing and Health Committee on 2 November 2011.

J Walker, Depute Director, Housing and Community Care, reported that the previous audit had been carried out in 2008 prior to the restructuring which had amalgamated Housing and Council Tax Benefits. The introduction of a new electronic workflow system, a reduction in Department for Works and Pensions resources, and a number of changes to the welfare system had placed a strain on service performance. A comprehensive review of all processes had led to a significant improvement in performance, with the time taken to process new claims now 22 days and change of circumstance 16 days.

Councillor Vaughan enquired as to the performance compared to other authorities and L Brady, Revenues and Benefits Service Manager, advised that the top three authorities processed new claims in 16 to 19 days, with the average being 26 days.

Resolved:

The findings of Audit Scotland's audit of housing benefit and council tax benefit risk assessment report on Perth and Kinross Council Revenues and Benefits Service as set out in section 3 of Report 11/542 be accepted.

J WALKER, A TAYLOR, L BRADY AND L DOTT LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT.

666. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REVIEW OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE – UPDATE

The Committee heard a presentation by Andy Clegg, Parks Development Manager providing an update on the position with regard to the contract for verge cutting, advising that (1) the responsibility for this function had transferred from Tayside Contracts to Community Greenspace; (2) the tender had been prepared in conjunction with Dundee and Angus Councils through the Tayside Procurement Consortium based on a two year contract, on a per kilometre cost as previously used by the other two authorities rather than the hourly cost previously used in Perth and Kinross, and a reduction in frequency of cuts from twice to once per annum to meet budget savings. The resultant bids had proved not to be as advantageous for Perth and Kinross as had been hoped, and, in areas which had received no bids, it had been necessary to approach the farmers who had previously carried out the activity. The bidding process had therefore delayed the start of the contract, which had led to an increase in complaints, which had been anticipated due to the reduction in frequency of cuts. The benefit was that there was now a transparent procurement process in place and B Renton pointed to the opportunity provided by the two year contract to evaluate both the cost and quality of the service provided.

Councillor Baird referred to the position on verge cutting of minor roads in the area prior to T in the Park on safety grounds and A Clegg confirmed that this would be completed earlier in 2012.

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In response to a request from Councillor Campbell as to the relative cost per kilometre against the cost per hour, A Clegg agreed to provide this information to the members of the Committee following the meeting and that this information would be taken in to account in future tendering exercises. He advised that a report would be prepared in 2012 evaluating the benefits and disadvantages of the new arrangements.

Resolved

The position on the verge cutting contract be noted.

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