

**CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY PLANNING
STANDING SCRUTINY PANEL.**

Minutes of meeting in County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr,
on 28th March 2013 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillors Brian Connolly (Chair), Douglas Campbell, Alec. Clark, Hywel Davies, Ann Galbraith, John Hampton and Brian McGinley.

Apology: Councillor Andy Campbell.

Attending: E. Howat, Acting Chief Executive; V. Andrews, Head of Legal and Democratic Services; K. O'Hagan, Head of Employee and Customer Services; C. Monaghan, Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs; C. Boyd, Corporate Safety Manager; H. McLaughlin, Audit Services Programme Review Manager; and E. Wyllie, Committee Services Officer.

Also Attending: Councillors Bill McIntosh and Robin Reid (Portfolio-holders); and David Richardson, Audit Manager, Audit Scotland.

1. Declaration of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest by Members of the Panel in terms of Council Standing Order No. 17 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

2. Item for Call-in.

The Panel noted that there had been no call-ins for this meeting.

3. Minutes of previous meeting.

Decided: to note the Minutes of the previous meeting of 28th February 2013 (issued).

4. Variation on Order of Business.

The Panel agreed to vary the order of business as hereinafter minuted.

WIDER SCRUTINY PANEL BUSINESS:-

5. Strategic Risk Management.

There was submitted a report (issued) of 19th March 2013 by the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation

- (1) providing an update on the Strategic Risk Register – March 2013 as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report in line with the agreed reporting framework; and
- (2) advising that the revised version of the register included new information on Welfare Reform which did not form part of the previous Members' update.

Comments were made and it was noted that robust systems were in place to manage risk at senior management level, along with scrutiny by Internal and External audit. In relation to assessment processes for setting and achieving risk targets and the fluidity of the Register in terms of emerging and existing risks, it was heard that Officers were encouraged to set realistic achievable targets which also reflected the resources and constraints of the organisation as well as recognising that certain levels of risk had to be accepted. The use of Covalent was also discussed and it was noted that this system was regularly updated by delegated Officers and closely monitored by the Corporate Safety Manager. In relation to the Report 'Raising our Ambition', the Head of Legal and Democratic Services commented that reports to Council and Panel meetings included provision in relation to risk for Members' deliberation.

Thereon, a full discussion took place in relation to various mitigations contained within the Risk Register. The impact of Welfare Reform was discussed in detail and it was noted that, in respect of the community care grants and crisis grants, staff training and public awareness raising had been undertaken with signposting handbooks being prepared (these would also be circulated to Members). As a result of the forthcoming introduction of under occupancy rules and benefit reductions, the impact and the difficult balance between housing services and Benefits and Revenue services was recognised but not quantifiable at this point in time. Homeless issues, the use of temporary accommodation and the impact on individuals was also acknowledged. In this regard, the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation suggested that she could provide monthly updates to all Members on the impact on the Scottish Welfare Fund, the Council tax collections and housing rents and, if decisions were required to be made, these would be submitted to meetings of the Leadership Panel in the first instance.

In terms of financial constraints, a discussion took place in respect of further staff reductions, the impact on employees and delivery of services and how these would be supported. The proposed consideration of budget modelling was welcomed. It was also noted that the Community Planning budget and the Council's budget setting processes required to be aligned and that this was an area being progressed which would involve key Community Planning Partners. The timescales were difficult for the 2014/15 budget process but there would be a clearer alignment after that. A Members' workshop on the SOA, Council Business Plan and Council priorities would inform this process and would take place in due course.

The Corporate Safety Manager undertook to establish from the relevant Officer whether Team Leaders' Peer Auditing (SR005) took place in every case and would provide feedback on this enquiry.

In respect of the management of assets (SR007), it was queried whether there was scope for further mitigation in relation to the delivery of projects and it was noted that this would be included in the report being submitted to the Leadership Panel by cross referring to the Directorate Plans which contained this detail. Further information would be provided to Panel Members in relation to the Conditions survey and the current status with regards to asset management planning and rationalisation. It was further noted that the Leadership Panel at its meeting of 19th March 2013 had requested a corporate review of facilities within locales with this approach being pursued by Officers and the findings reported back to that Panel in the first instance.

A discussion took place in relation to workforce planning (SR008), the measurement of the timescales involved and the Oracle system which was currently being reconfigured due to the revised organisational structure. It was suggested that the Head of Employee and Customer Services could present a report to a future meeting of the Panel in relation to workforce planning.

In relation to public relations (SR010), a discussion took place in respect of:- the identification of the eighteen risks; whether a focus on information management was required; community engagement processes; and working with the media.

Following discussion in relation to the timescales of March 2014 in respect of 'How Good is Our Council' (SR012) and the integration of budget management processes pertaining to the Council and Community Planning, it was noted that the Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs would be requested to provide feedback on this matter.

In terms of Strategic Planning (priorities) (SR013) and the timescales and availability of measured outcomes, it was noted that the corporate business plan would be followed by service planning undertaken in Directorates.

A discussion took place in relation to organisational resilience (SR011) in terms of ICT Business Continuity, the flow of information in the event of a disaster and what constituted a disaster and it was noted that a series of events were tested to ensure robust plans were in place to mitigate such risks.

In terms of environmental targets (SR017) and developments in carbon management, it was noted that the Executive Director – Economy, Neighbourhood and Environment would be requested to provide an update on this matter.

General comments were made in relation to the timeframe and difficulties encountered with the Shared Services agenda (SR015).

After discussion, the Panel

Decided: to agree

- (a) the eighteen key risks and endorse the work currently being undertaken or proposed by risk owners to mitigate these risks; and
- (b) that a report on the management of Strategic Risk incorporating suggestions from this Panel be submitted to the Leadership Panel on 30th April 2013 for endorsement.

AUDIT FUNCTION:-

6. Annual Audit Plan 2012/13.

There was submitted a report (issued) of 19th March 2013 by the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation

- (1) providing background to the presentation by Audit Scotland on its Annual Audit Plan and that Audit Scotland sought to gain assurances on a number of issues as outlined within the report;
- (2) informing that Appendix A of the report provided a summary of Audit Scotland's assessment of the key issues facing the Council and outlined the planned audit action, taking account of management assurances; and

- (3) indicating that the planned outputs of the Audit Team were outlined within the Plan and that Appendix B of the report detailed the financial statements' audit timetable.

The Chair welcomed and invited the Audit Manager to present his report to the Panel. The Audit Manager referred to the summary of planned audit activity and commented on each of the risks identified within the summary assurance plan and also on the financial statements' audit timetable contained within the appendices attached to the report.

In response to a general question in relation to the Council's level of performance in terms of quality assurance, the Audit Manager advised that up to date information was necessary to ensure that services were being delivered effectively and that better use of the performance system and evaluation of indicators would provide the opportunity for Members and CMT to take a view on performance matters. In response to a further question, the Audit Manager commented on efficiencies, the audit fee reduction and the circumstances which might lead to an additional fee.

Comments were made in relation to whether roads maintenance deterioration badly affected tourism as this would have a wider negative impact on the economy, particularly within rural areas. A discussion took place in relation to roads maintenance and other areas of planned maintenance and expenditure as well as capacity issues to undertake work and the impact of budgets on service delivery. The Acting Chief Executive advised that the Council had planned maintenance programmes in place; however, longer term strategies of planned maintenance were required in some programme areas.

A request was made by a Member of the Panel as to whether the presentation of budget information could contain further detail in relation to the impact arising from under/over spends and the Acting Chief Executive suggested that this was an area that the Panel's Budget Monitoring Sub-Group could explore.

Having heard the Chair, on behalf of the Panel, thank the Audit Manager for his presentation, the Panel

Decided: to note the contents of the report and

- (a) to approve the management assurances and planned audit action contained in Appendix A of the report; and
- (b) to request regular updates on progress to future meetings of this Panel.

Councillor Douglas Campbell left and then rejoined the meeting during consideration of the above item.

WIDER SCRUTINY PANEL BUSINESS:-

7. Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOI) / Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIR) – Assessment – Scottish Information Commissioner's Assessment Report.

There was submitted a report (issued) of 19th March 2013 by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services

- (1) advising of the outcome of the Freedom of Information Assessment and subsequent recommendations made by the Scottish Information Commissioner as outlined within the Appendix to the report;

- (2) indicating that since the introduction in September 2012 of the 10 day turnaround time for Officers to provide a response, the Council's performance had improved from 73% to between 90 and 100% of responses being issued within the statutory 20 day period and reporting that it was anticipated that implementation and continued compliance with the Action Plan actions and current procedures should enable the Council to maintain this level of response which would satisfy the Commissioner's requirements in this area;
- (3) informing that a report in similar terms to this one had recently been endorsed by the Corporate Management Team indicating a high level 'buy in' across the organisation to the updated and improved procedures; and
- (4) intimating that as part of the recommendations from the Assessment, it was proposed that regular Quarterly statistical reports would be provided both to the Corporate Management Team and to this Panel, and in August 2013 an update would be provided to this Panel to confirm completion of the Action Plan.

After discussion when it was noted that FOI requests were generally increasing year on year, the Panel

Decided:

- (a) to note the recommendations made by the Commissioner as detailed in Appendix 1 of the Assessment Report, attached as an appendix to the report; and
- (b) to request the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to update the Panel in August 2013 regarding the implementation of the recommendations.

8. Employee Absence Monitoring Report.

There was submitted a report (issued) of 19th March 2013 by the Head of Employee and Customer Services providing details of absence levels for the Council for the period 1st April 2012 to 31st January 2013, advising of the ongoing recording and review arrangements and requesting consideration of other recommendations to monitor and address absence levels across the Council.

A discussion took place and clarification was sought and provided in respect of hospitalisation cases as well as the difference in classification between a short term and a long term absence and whether there were any absence patterns between different work locations. It was noted that managers undertook regular training and focused on both long and short term absences and that referrals were also made to the Council's Occupational Health Service. The Head of Employee and Customer Services advised that she would further explore work location absences to ascertain if there were any particular characteristics and also commented on flexibility within the workforce. It was noted that discussions took place with other local authorities in terms of areas of good practice.

The Panel

Decided: to note the statistics outlined within the report and the ongoing action to review, address and report absence levels.

Councillors Clark and Galbraith left and then rejoined the meeting during consideration of the above item.

9. **Raising our Ambitions: Progress report 2.**

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 19th March 2013 (Page 248, paragraph 22) when that Panel, having considered a joint report of 12th March 2013 by the Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs and the Head of Employee and Customer Services, had decided to note this second progress report on Raising our Ambitions and to agree that this report be referred to the next meeting of this Standing Scrutiny Panel for its consideration.

A comment was made in relation to the recruitment exercise for the Chief Executive and clarification was sought in respect of the current position with 'Your South Ayrshire: Your Priorities' consultations. It was noted that this campaign had received good levels of response and was due to end soon with the results being circulated to Members in due course and a Members' workshop planned for 15th April 2013.

The Panel

Decided: to note the terms of the remit and the second progress report on Raising our Ambitions.

The meeting ended at 12 noon.