

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES STANDING SCRUTINY PANEL.**

Minutes of meeting in County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr,  
4th September 2013 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillors Ian Cavana (Chair), Kirsty Darwent, Hugh Hunter, William J. Grant and Corri Wilson.

Apologies: Councillors Hywel Davies, John Hampton and Brian McGinley.

Attending: H. Garland, Executive Director – Care, Learning and Wellbeing; V. Andrews, Acting Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation; H. Carswell, Head of Children's Services; M. Alexander, Housing Operations Manager; W. Andrew, Property, Repairs and Maintenance Manager; C. Monaghan, Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs; C. Gardner, Senior Strategic Planning and Performance and Communications Officer; and D. Knight, Democratic Services Administrator.

### **1. Chair.**

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Cavana, Vice-Chair took the Chair.

### **2. Chair's Remarks.**

The Chair advised that reports on the progress being made by the Sub-Groups on the Review on Instrumental Music Service and the Review on Day Care Services would be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel on 2nd October 2013.

### **3. Declarations of Interest.**

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

### **4. Item for Call-in.**

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

### **5. Minutes of previous meeting.**

**Decided:** to note the Minutes of the previous meeting of 5th June 2013 (issued) (link attached).

6. **Remit from Leadership Panel – Social Work Complaints Annual Report 2012/13.**

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 27th August 2013 (Page 000, paragraph 5) when that Panel, having considered a report of 7th August 2013 ([link attached](#)) by the Executive Director – Care, Learning and Wellbeing in relation to the Social Work Complaints Annual Report for 2012/13, had agreed

- (1) to note the contents of the report and the improvement actions identified through the management of complaints processes; and
- (2) to refer the report to this Scrutiny Panel for that Panel to decide whether to give further consideration of the statistics relating to Complaints based on “Reliability” as recorded in Appendix 1 of the report.

The Panel gave detailed consideration to the terms of the Social Work Complaints Annual Report 2012/13 which advised that the statutory social work complaints procedure allowed individual service users, and authorised representatives, to raise concerns about the quality of service delivered to them by, or on behalf of, social work.

In relation to the Social Work Complaints Annual Report 2012/13, particular issues were raised and discussed as follows:-

The response time for formal stage 2 complaints either being met or exceeding 28 days; the differences between a complaint being **refused** and **not upheld**; the procedures in place to ensure that all information was recorded in the case file and that the complainant was kept informed of all matters; the accessibility of the complaints process and support for the complainant; the steps that were taken to implement any actions and changes to procedures and ensuring that development and training was in place for employees.

The Panel sought information about how this authority compared with other local authorities in Scotland and the Officers gave an undertaking to provide this information.

**Decided:** having thanked the Officers for their responses, to note the contents of the report and the improvement actions identified through the management of complaints processes.

## 7. Annual Performance Report to 31st March 2013.

There was submitted a report (issued) of 27th August 2013 ([link attached](#)) by the Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs outlining the Council's progress against the Corporate Plan to 31st March 2013 in relation to those corporate aims and objectives which fall within the remit of this Panel.

A full discussion took place and various points were made by Members of the Panel as follows:-

### **Aim 03 - People in South Ayrshire have housing that meets their needs.**

The Panel

- enquired whether data was available on the number of private sector houses that were likely to be completed during 2013/14 and Officers gave an undertaking to provide details of this information, it being commented that whilst the decline from 2008 levels was lessening, dramatic reductions were continuing to put pressure on the social and private rented sectors;
- enquired whether data could be made available concerning the numbers of people on the Council's waiting list for housing and the length of time people were waiting for a house, to help evaluate the Council's performance and Officers gave an undertaking to provide details of this information;
- noted the increase in current tenants' arrears and queried the support that the Council gave to maintain tenancies and Officers gave an undertaking to provide details of this information and advised of the work that was being carried out with tenants to help them to pay off debts, before pursuing legal action;
- enquired about the extremely large increase in the percentage of arrears owed by former tenants that had been either written-off or collected during the year (389.5% during 2012/13) and asked for an explanation about statistics that were greater than 100% and Officers explained that during 2012/13, following guidance from Financial Services, there had been a very significant historical write-off, to reflect debts that it was unlikely would ever be recovered, however, all these debts remained on file, and if contact with the debtors was re-established, then the opportunity to pursue them would be taken;
- enquired about why the removal of asbestos had had such an impact on the void times for properties and Officers explained that testing requirements for asbestos had altered, requiring more thorough invasive testing of each property which had led to significant delays before work could be undertaken on properties and that procedures had now been streamlined and a new contractor was being used with a five day turnaround between testing and the receipt of results which had improved performance in this area; and

- requested details about the repair teams working in geographic areas and the impact of this on the performance of the service and Officers explained that the teams were based in Girvan (also covering Maybole), Ayr North, Ayr South and Troon; that the supervisors of the teams were now multi-skilled; and that the main trades carried stocks in their own vans with the target being to achieve 95% performance against the repairs targets, similar to that currently being achieved in relation to voids. The Panel responded positively to the news of these developments and looked forward to these being reflected in a six monthly update.

**Aim 04 - People in South Ayrshire are confident, qualified and equipped to access better job opportunities.**

The Panel made no comments with regard to this aim;

**Aim 05 - Our children and young people are inspired, motivated and ambitious.**

The Panel

- noted the excellent examination performance, but asked if statistics could be made available about the proportion of pupils who had not been put forward for examinations and Officers gave an undertaking to provide details of this information;
- enquired about the impact of Curriculum for Excellence on reading levels in primary schools and whether a greater improvement would have been expected by Primary 7 and Officers explained that the need to have competent numeracy and literacy strategies was a matter that was currently being addressed within the Validated Self Evaluation and that they were also examining measures to maintain improvement in attainment between Primary 7 and Secondary 2;
- enquired about what steps were being taken to improve pupil satisfaction levels and Officers explained that the results of the annual pupil survey were used both strategically to identify overall issues that could be tackled across the authority with the assistance of the quality assurance teams and at a local level in individual schools, where Head Teachers were able to call on the assistance of partner services if there were specific local issues that required to be tackled;
- enquired about the reasons for the large difference in the proportion of pupils, when questioned, reporting that they were becoming effective contributors, between primary (91%) and secondary (65%) school and Officers gave an undertaking to provide details of this information;

- expressed concerns about the decrease in attendance levels in primary and secondary schools and what was being done to tackle this serious issue and Officers explained that this was also being examined as part of the Validated Self Evaluation, that this decrease had also arisen from a combination of personal and home circumstances and that pupils were also being withdrawn from school for family holidays. It was noted that ways to improve this were under discussion at joint management meetings between Education and Children's Services, to maximise pupils' overall attainment and overall achievement, and to address the gaps that absence could contribute to. This would require a targeted approach to tackle those absences that were having most impact rather than a blanket approach. A discussion also took place about the perception that the last few days of term were seen as "a waste of time" and the fact that under Curriculum for Excellence, the full term time should be used constructively.

**Aim 07 - All vulnerable individuals and families at risk are protected.**

The Panel

- enquired why performance figures for 2012/13 were not available when the report had been circulated in respect of looked after children and Officers confirmed that these figures should have been available, the confusion having arisen in relation to reporting timescales from the Scottish Government rather than the Council's own internal reporting; and
- enquired about what was being done to improve the proportion of looked after children leaving school for a positive destination and Officers explained that a range of initiatives including More Choices, More Chances, the Skills Towards Employment Project and the work in Children's Services and Education were all being co-ordinated and evaluated to better understand how this could be improved, the best possible support to maximise the numbers achieving positive destinations was being targeted and that the Community Planning partners were also directing efforts to offer work opportunities to young people.

**Aim 08 - People in south Ayrshire enjoy the best possible health throughout their lives.**

The Panel made no comments with regard to this aim.

**Aim 09 - South Ayrshire is a safe place in which to live, work and visit.**

The Panel

- praised the work of the Community Safety team in relation to diversionary activities and the excellent impact that this was having;
- enquired whether figures were available around the numbers of clients who failed to comply with their Community Payback Orders and Officers advised that data on breach rates had been included on Page 15 of the report with an 8% breach on offender supervision and 12% breach on unpaid work / other activity; and

- enquired why the number of community alarm calls had risen so significantly during 2012/13 to 5,700 a month and Officers gave an undertaking to provide an explanation, outlined the continuing increase in the number of people being supported in the community being likely to have contributed to this increase and noted that the complexity of needs being catered for, the frailty of some individuals and that the impact of the aging population were all combining to make heavier demands resources across a range of Council and public sector services.

**Aim 11 - South Ayrshire has sustainable and accessible amenities and services to meet the needs of all communities.**

The Panel queried what data was available to help Members assess the performance of the Customer Services Centres to date and Officers explained that a report that was being prepared for the CMT prior to submission to the Leadership Panel, however, it appeared that the Centres were proving to be popular, particularly in terms of the usage of the Wallace Tower facility.

**Decided:**

- (1) to note that information would be provided to Elected Members on:-
  - the number of private sector houses that were likely to be completed during 2013/14;
  - the number of people on the Council's waiting list for housing and the length of time people were waiting for a house;
  - why the proportion of arrears owed by former tenants that was either written off or collected during the year was reported as greater than 100%;
  - the support that being given to tenants facing arrears to help maintain their tenancies;
  - the proportion of pupils that were not put forward for examinations; and
  - the decline in the proportion of pupils, when questioned, reporting that they were becoming effective contributors, and
  - the significant increase in number of community alarm calls answered each month;
- (2) to agree that the performance information that was now available for looked after children be circulated to Members as a briefing note; and
- (3) to agree to recommend to the Leadership Panel that a six month interim report should be provided on the four outcomes within this report that were evaluated as being '**not on target - some concerns**' so that Members could subsequently see whether the reported improvement actions were proving to be effective.

The meeting ended at 11.25 a.m.