

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY PLANNING
STANDING SCRUTINY PANEL.

Minutes of meeting in County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr,
on 14th November 2013 at 10.00 a.m.

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

Attending: V. Andrews, Acting Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation; L. Bloomer, Executive Director – Economy, Neighbourhood and Environment; Claire Monaghan, Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs; G. Muir, ICT Strategy Officer; H. McLaughlin, Audit Services Programme Review Manager; B. Mulgrew, Auditor, Internal Audit; J. Rodden, Facilities Manager; T. Baulk, Chief Accounting Officer; B. Phillips, Revenues and Benefits Manager; A. Aird, Senior Accountant; Z. Brownie, Acting Procurement Manager; and D. Knight, Democratic Services Administrator.

Also Attending: Councillors John McDowall, Bill McIntosh and Robin Reid (Portfolio-holders); Councillors Nan McFarlane (for call-in); and Sarah Lawton, Senior Auditor; Alan MacKenzie, Auditor, Anne Cairns, Auditor, Neil Robb, Auditor and Tom Reid, Auditor; 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 – Review of Public Conveniences.

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 5th November 2013 (Page 12, paragraph 25) when that Panel, having considered a report of 24th October 2013 by the Executive Director – Economy, Neighbourhood and Environment, had agreed

- (1) the proposals contained within paragraph 6.1 of the report for a number of the existing public conveniences in South Ayrshire;
- (2) the development of schemes for current and potential additional facilities listed in paragraph 6.2 of the report and that firm proposals on this matter would be submitted to a future meeting of this Panel;
- (3) the introduction of charging for use of public conveniences, the estimated annual income from which (£30,000) would be incorporated into the 2014/15 budget; and
- (4) the draw from Repairs and Renewals Fund in the sum of £210,500 towards the costs of works of introducing paddle gates to control entry into certain public toilets.

The Panel was advised that the report had been the subject of a call-in (issued) ([link attached](#)) details of which, together with the written responses circulated in advance of the meeting are outlined below.

Question 1

What is the estimated cost of Securicor (or similar agency) for cash collection at each facility?

Answer 1

Approximately £10 per uplift, with the recommended uplift being once per month in winter (6 uplifts x 14 conveniences) and once every two weeks in summer (13 uplifts x 14 conveniences), the total cost being £10 x 266 = £2,600 per annum. The intention would be for the cash collection and banking to be done internally rather than outsource given the expected level of income from the cash machine may be low value.

Question 2

What budget provision will be estimated for repairs to paddlegates in the next financial year?

Answer 2

No budget provision has been estimated for 2014/15 as the supply and installation costs have allowed for service and maintenance.

Question 3

What is the estimated lifespan of a paddlegate?

Answer 3

Minimum 10 to 15 years.

Question 4

To recover the cost of £30,000 paddlegates at each facility will require 100,000 paying visitors at each location, at static prices, and without oncost described above. The report indicates estimated income due to usage. How were these estimates calculated?

Answer 4

The Council does not have the facility to calculate actual usage currently, therefore, the figures used are estimates based mainly on geographical location, traffic routes and attendant information. Usage also fluctuates considerably depending on the weather i.e. on a warm and sunny day, 100 people may use the facilities at St. Meddans, Troon but on a wet and windy day there may be less than 10 users.

It is anticipated that it will take between 5 to 7 years before the introduction of charging generates enough income to offset the cost of the paddlegates but again this will be dependent on usage which cannot be determined at this time.

The Chair invited Councillor Douglas Campbell to explain his reasons for the call-in and heard him express his concerns regarding

- the costs of £210,500 to introduce paddlegates;
- the estimated number of years that it would take to recover these costs by introducing a charge of 30 pence in some facilities;
- the estimated annual income of £30,000 for charging for the use of public conveniences;
- cash collection issues;
- that the estimated numbers of people using public toilets; and
- the position with regard to toilet attendants.

The Executive Director – Economy, Neighbourhood and Environment responded to these issues and the Panel noted

- the estimated time it would take to recover the cost of £30,000 of installing paddlegates at each facility as outlined in the report;
- the estimated annual income generated of £30,000;
- the estimated costs in relation to cash collection;
- the proposals for employees working within public conveniences; and
- the need to provide toilets for visitors and tourists to use within South Ayrshire.

A full discussion then took place and a number of concerns were raised by members of the Panel, particularly in relation to disabled provision, the costs of installing paddlegates in a number of facilities and the estimated level of income and cost of provision and generation of facilities.

The Executive Director – Economy, Neighbourhood and Environment advised that user numbers could only be estimated at present as there were no existing means of measuring usage before progressing the proposals. The proposed charge was equivalent to charges in other authorities and expectation was that the costs of installation of paddlegates would be recovered over a 5-7 year period.

In response to a query relating to staffing of facilities, the Executive Director – Economy, Neighbourhood and Environment confirmed the existing arrangements and proposals.

Clarification was also sought and provided in relation to arrangements, existing and proposed, for the uplift of cash collected.

The Panel then heard from Councillor McDowall (Portfolio-holder for Sustainability and Environment) who stated that the need for the provision of public conveniences was recognised, however, this was currently a free non-statutory service and that other local authorities had introduced charges to off-set some of the costs and make the provision more cost effective.

The Panel

Decided: following discussion and review, to refer this matter back to the Leadership Panel with the recommendation that before progressing the proposals, a detailed Business Case should be prepared in relation to the review of public conveniences specifically in relation to the level of charges proposed with reference to the costs of installing paddlegates in a number of facilities as detailed in the report to the Leadership Panel.

3. Minutes of previous meeting.

Decided: to approve the Minutes of the previous meeting of 3rd October 2013 (issued) ([link attached](#)).

AUDIT FUNCTION:-

4. Audit Scotland – ICT Service Review Follow-up 2012/13.

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of 5th November 2013 by Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs advising of the findings and recommendations of Audit Scotland's follow-up review of the Council's ICT Service.

Neil Robb, Auditor introduced the report by Audit Scotland on the ICT Service Review follow-up to the Panel.

Clarification was sought in relation to the progress being made in order to connect to the Public Services Network (PSN), accessing older data, PSN compliance for the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board, the financial burden on local authorities and progress being made on disaster recovery and the Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs advised that the Leadership Panel had recently approved two reports in respect of PSN compliance, that a number of options were currently being considered in relation to the Valuation Board, the position with regard to PSN compliance in schools, the progress being made with the existing disaster recovery plans, and that an analysis of prospective PSN users had been undertaken with good progress being made in building a separate PSN network completely separate to the existing Council network. The Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs reported that the Cabinet Office had confirmed that all staff using PSN applications must meet the Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) which would be covered by a Basic Disclosure Check.

The Panel

Decided:

- (1) to note the contents of the report;
- (2) to agree the action plan proposed at Appendix B of the Audit Scotland report attached as an Appendix to the report to address any outstanding recommendations; and
- (3) to agree that progress in implementing the action plan would be reported to the Corporate and Community Planning Standing Scrutiny Panel as part of the review of External Audit reports.

5. **Audit of Housing and Council Tax Benefit.**

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of 5th November 2013 by the Acting Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation advising of the risk assessment conducted by Audit Scotland of the Council's Benefits service.

Anne Cairns, Auditor introduced the report by Audit Scotland on the Audit of Housing and Council Tax Benefit to the Panel and advised that this Council's speed of processing performance had been consistently strong and that over the last three years up to March 2013 it had been in the top three Scottish performers for processing new claims.

The Revenue and Benefits Manager outlined the position with regard to transfer of five members of staff to the Welfare Fund and training required for new employees, the benefits to be gained from proposed combination of processes, the potential implications of the benefit cap on families and the migration of Housing Benefits to Universal Credit.

Clarification was sought in relation to the overpayments being carried forward and the Revenue and Benefits Manager outlined the steps being taken to minimise overpayments and maximise recovery, and the Panel

Decided:

- (1) to approve the contents of the report, together with the Council's action plan as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report to address and to reduce the risks identified during the performance audit; and
- (2) to request the Acting Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation to provide further update reports to future meetings of the Panel.

6. **Audit Scotland – Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the Challenges – Targeted Follow-up.**

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of 5th November 2013 by the Acting Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation advising of the findings and recommendations of Audit Scotland's follow-up review of their report 'Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the Challenges'.

Sarah Lawton, Auditor introduced the report by Audit Scotland on Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the Challenges – Targeted Follow-up to the Panel and advised that Audit Scotland were preparing a separate report on workforce planning which would be available soon.

Clarification was sought and provided in respect of impact assessments on each planned efficiency saving that was being introduced for 2014/15 to 2016/17, that the new SOA for 2013-2023 and the Council Plan for 2013-16 would ensure that the budgetary process was informed, the development of an agreed service review toolkit, the development of a more priority based approach with fundamental budget review and the links with the Community Planning process, and the Panel

Decided:

- (1) to note the contents of the report;
- (2) to agree the action plan proposed at Appendix 1 of the Audit Scotland report attached as Appendix of the report to address any outstanding identified risks; and
- (3) to agree that progress in implementing the action plan will be reported to the Corporate and Community Planning Standing Scrutiny Panel as part of the review of External Audit reports.

7. Follow-up of External Audit Reports – Progress to 30th September 2013.

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of 6th November 2013 by the Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs providing an update on the progress being made in relation to external audit improvement actions.

Clarification was sought and provided in respect of the Best Value Improvement Agenda and the linkages between the service plans and the strategic plans and that detailed reporting timescales and that mechanisms would be considered at the forthcoming Elected Members' Briefings relating to the Council Plan, and the implications of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill and the Panel

Decided: following review, to note the progress being made against the Council's external audit improvement actions as presented in this report.

8. Internal Audit Service – Annual Report 2012/13.

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of October 2013 by the Audit Services Programme Review Manager advising of the work being carried out by the Internal Audit Service during 2012/13.

Clarification was sought and provided in relation to unplanned investigations and how these investigations were being carried out and the extent of reliance by External Audit on Internal Audit compliance work in future, and the Panel

Decided:

- (1) to note the contents of the report; and
- (2) to request the Audit Services Programme Review Manager to ensure that Internal Audit report on matters arising from work on the 2013/2014 Annual Audit Plan in due course.

9. Internal Audit Service – Annual Audit Plan 2013/14 – Progress Report.

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of October 2013 by the Audit Services Programme Review Manager advising of the progress and current position of the annual audit plan as approved at the meeting of the Corporate and Community Planning Standing Scrutiny Panel meeting on 6th May 2013.

The Panel

Decided:

- (1) following review, to note the progress being made against the Council's annual audit plan; and
- (2) to request the Audit Services Programme Review Manager to incorporate this information and the follow-up information in a single report to future meeting of this Panel.

10. Internal Audit Service – Follow-up of Internal Audit Reports – Progress Report.

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of October 2013 by the Audit Services Programme Review Manager advising of the current status of Directorates' progress in regard to the implementation of action plans contained in internal audit reports.

Clarification was sought and provided in respect of security of staff and the arrangements for cash collection within Customer Services Centres, and the Panel

Decided:

- (1) to note the progress of Directorates in the implementation of agreed action plan findings as outlined in paragraph 4.2 of the report; and
- (2) to request the Audit Services Programme Review Manager to submit agreed reports to future meetings of this Standing Scrutiny Panel.

11. Exclusion of press and public.

The Panel resolved, in terms of Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, that the press and public be excluded during consideration of the remaining item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information in terms of paragraph 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

12. Internal Audit Service – Follow-up of Internal Audit Reports – Progress Report.

Reference was made to item 10 and there was submitted an Action Plan (issued to Members only) advising of the current status of a Directorate's progress in regard to the implementation of an action plan contained in internal audit report.

The Audit Services Programme Review Manager and the Acting Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation outlined the background in relation to this matter, and the procedures that had now been put in place to avoid any reoccurrence and advised that training had now been rolled out across the Council.

The Panel expressed its concerns about this situation and thereafter, discussed at length the nine actions within the action plan.

The Panel

Decided:

- (1) to note the progress of the Directorate in the implementation of agreed action plan finding as outlined in paragraph 4.2 of the report; and
- (2) to request the Audit Services Programme Review Manager to submit agreed reports to future meetings of this Standing Scrutiny Panel.

The meeting ended at 12.50 p.m.