

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

Minutes of meeting in County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr,  
on 27th March 2014 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, Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation; K. O'Hagan, Head of Employee and Customer Services; D. Gillies, Head of Corporate Resources; K. Leinster, Head of Community Care and Housing; H. McLaughlin, Audit Services Programme Review Manager; W. Phillips, Revenue and Benefits Manager; C. Boyd, Corporate Safety Manager; C. Gardner, Senior Strategic Planning and Performance Management Officer; and E. Wyllie, Committee Services Officer.

Also Attending: Councillors Bill McIntosh and Robin Reid (Portfolio-holders); and Alan MacKenzie, 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**

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

**3. Minutes of previous meeting.**

**Decided:** to approve the Minutes of the previous meeting of 27th February 2014 (issued) ([link attached](#)).

**AUDIT FUNCTION:-**

**4. Audit Scotland: Review of Recovery of Benefits Subsidy in 2012/13.**

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of 21st March 2014 by the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation advising of the review of benefits subsidy in 2012/13 conducted by Audit Scotland.

In terms of the performance of the service, it was noted that these findings were based on 2012/13 and that new challenges faced during 2013/14 included increased demand for housing benefit as a result of welfare reform. The percentage of recovery was discussed in terms of management and resources and the Revenue and Benefits Manager provided an explanation of the processes involved and commented on staff training, software functionality, the role of the Customer Contact Centre and the proposed introduction of a triage arrangement to meet the demand from new claimants.

Clarification was sought in relation to this Council's reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people compared to the other two Ayrshire Authorities and it was noted that the other two authorities had no demand for this type of accommodation due to levels of housing stock. Also, as this Council had limited housing stock to address homeless presentations, this was an area being actively addressed by Housing Services with the development and implementation of an interim temporary accommodation plan for 2014-16.

Clarification was sought and provided in relation to council tax benefit subsidy. Also, the Revenue and Benefits Manager outlined the steps in place to actively recover overpayments of benefits bearing in mind that the service was dealing with people with limited funds.

Clarification was sought in relation to those families affected by the benefits cap and the Revenue and Benefits Manager commented on the type of engagement taking place with affected householders. On a similar note, clarification was sought as to whether some 'at risk' individuals could fall through the net and it was noted that this could not be ruled out and mention was made of the availability of the Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grant to assist in this regard. In terms of wider health and financial issues facing some individuals, ongoing work across the three Ayrshire local authorities and Dumfries and Galloway Council, the DWP and NHS Ayrshire and Arran could mitigate that risk through the active development of a Local Support Service framework. In terms of the work of the Council and a corporate solution, a provision map was being developed which would incorporate Third Sector provision with the intention being to support and signpost the individual to the services that they might require.

The Panel, having thanked all staff involved with the important work dealing with the most vulnerable within South Ayrshire's communities

**Decided:**

- (1) to note the contents of the report together with the actions of the Council's Benefits Service to minimise subsidy losses; and
- (2) to request the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation to provide a report in respect of the 2013/14 subsidy claim to this Panel in March 2015.

**WIDER SCRUTINY PANEL BUSINESS:-**

**5. Update on Progress against the Council's Strategic Outcomes.**

Reference was made to the Minutes of 5th September 2013 (Page 5, paragraph 11) and there was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of 18th March 2014 by the Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs providing an update on the progress against the Council's strategic outcomes that fell within this Panel's remit which were reported as 'not on target' to that meeting on 5th September 2013 as undernoted:-

- improved community engagement;
- leaders drive a strong corporate culture of continuous improvement; and
- the Council works effectively through partnership to deliver sustained improvements for our citizens.

In relation to strategic outcome *'improved community engagement'* comments were made on the good seminar which had recently taken place. It was suggested that the evolving engagement strategy should incorporate an action plan to monitor progress. The requirement for linkages with other developing areas such as the forthcoming Adult Health and Social Care Integration and locality planning were also recognised. It was suggested that communities should have an active role in the development of this strategy and it was noted that such a process would be undertaken following discussion by the Leadership Panel on the report taking this work forward.

The Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation commented on the principle of consultation being a two way process with expectations and differing viewpoints requiring to be managed in an open and transparent way with the public from the outset. Although a flexible approach to engagement was required to take cognisance of the different communities, it was recognised that a level of consistency was needed within the methods of engagement being utilised. In terms of seeking the views of communities, it was felt that there was no benefit to this exercise if the Council then failed to deliver on what it said it would do. There also required to be clarity around when the Council was providing information and when it was seeking to empower communities.

Clarification was sought in relation to previous discussions on the 2009 Best Value report and the response at that time in terms of the subsequent improvement strand on a communication and engagement strategy between customers, partners and staff. The question was asked whether these commitments were still relevant and would form part of the Strategy or if they required to be revisited. In light of the recent Best Value audit and the forthcoming Special meeting of the Council, the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation indicated that this would be clarified as part of that process.

With regard to the strategic outcome *'leaders drive a strong corporate culture of continuous improvement'*, comments were made in relation to the availability of leadership training following the 2012 Elections as well as further opportunities for scrutiny training. The Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation advised that she would explore training options as well as circulate a list of training provided by Improvement Service and commented on a forthcoming session on roles and responsibilities being delivered by that organisation. The Chair suggested that the Audit Committee handbook should be re-circulated to Panel Members as part of a training refresh.

In terms of strategic outcome *'the Council works effectively through partnership to deliver sustained improvements for our citizens'*, clarification was sought in relation to the brief for Quick Quote which did not produce a viable tender. The Panel heard from the Portfolio-holder for Corporate, Strategic and Community Planning who indicated that, following a further exercise, a tender had now been accepted.

The Panel, having reviewed the subsequent progress that had been achieved against the strategic outcomes as outlined within Appendix 1 of the report

**Decided:** to note the current position.

## **6. Strategic Risk Management.**

There was submitted a report (issued) ([link attached](#)) of 21st March 2014 by the Head of Corporate Resources providing an update on the reviewed Strategic Risk Register – March 2014, attached as Appendix 1 of the report, in line with the agreed reporting framework.

Following general comments, the Corporate Safety Manager explained the numerical values on the matrix and the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation clarified that the risk register would be aligned with the Council Plan and Service and Improvement Plans (including budgets) as that work has developed.

The Chair referred to the risk areas contained within the document and invited comments from Members of the Panel. He also asked if an update could be provided to Members on the impact of the Customer Services Centre following the opening of the Wallace Tower, Ayr.

In terms of the Welfare Reform Act (SR018) which was also mentioned earlier on the agenda, clarification was sought as to how staff training could alleviate pressures on the need for housing. The Revenue and Benefits Manager outlined that staff training would assist with the processing of discretionary payments which would keep numerous families in their homes. It was noted that alternative housing options were also being pursued through Housing Services to mitigate risk as there were insufficient numbers of one bedroomed properties resulting from previous government policy spanning thirty years and, more recently, the new build project had been reduced from 130 to 58 properties. Clarification was sought in terms of hardship to children that this position could cause and the Head of Community Care and Housing highlighted the role of the corporate parent with the responsibility for the welfare of children across Council services as well as Members and how they decided to address such issues.

In respect of financial restraints (SR001), it was noted that the revised reserves strategy was currently being worked on and would be presented to Members prior to summer recess.

With regard to Strategic Planning (Demographic) (SR003) and the knowledge that South Ayrshire had an above average ratio of older people, risk mitigation took the form of a joint strategy for older people with NHS Ayrshire and Arran and the voluntary sector to ensure a continuum of care. It was noted that this was an area that Members would be kept fully informed of. In terms of the various options associated with supported care at home and a care home environment, it was noted that this was a balancing act to meet the needs of the individual and to maintain their independence and safeguard their wellbeing. Clarification was sought as to how supported care at home could be sustained within rural areas and it was noted that the forthcoming implementation of the integration of Adult Health and Social Care would support such arrangements.

In relation to strategic planning (financial) (SR002), it was noted that Service and Improvement Plans would be presented to Leadership Panel and then for scrutiny at forthcoming meetings of Standing Scrutiny Panels and would contain performance measures to track outcomes.

In terms of maintaining the safety, welfare and protection of the public – child and adult protection (SR005), the arrangements for child and adult protection were explained by the Head of Community Care and Housing. It was noted that Members requested a briefing on the role of Elected Members as Corporate Parents and the Council's responsibilities in relation to protecting vulnerable people.

A discussion took place in relation to the management of assets (SR007) with regard to project slippage, improvements within capital programme and HRA budgets, staff recruitment and the development of a structure to support the programme. Timescales and reporting mechanisms were noted in this regard. Clarification was sought in relation to previous slippage over a number of years equating to around a lost year of work and whether this could be fully recovered and the Head of Corporate Resources commented on the intention that all slippage projects would be completed. It was also noted that an update report on asset management would be forthcoming to a future meeting of the Council.

Discussion took place in relation to workforce and capacity planning (SR008). A comment was made on the welcome introduction of the multi-skilled team to undertake housing repairs and whether there was scope for similar joint working to be adopted in other service areas. In terms of budget efficiencies and workforce reductions, concerns were raised in relation to retaining knowledge and expertise and it was noted that the implementation of revised staffing structures, informed by the Council Plan, should address such concerns.

Concerns were expressed in relation to public relations (SR010) and how this was currently undertaken. It was suggested that there were opportunities for the work of the Council to be promoted and displayed in public buildings through the use of video technology and involving schools pupils.

Clarification was sought in relation to the introduction of the new policy to maximise attendance at work (Workforce attendance, SR020) and whether there was an early indication of improvement. The Head of Employee and Customer Services provided an update on this matter in terms of staff training, management action and cultural changes. She also commented on the general acceptance of this policy by managers as well as the progress being made with PDR targets.

A general comment was made in relation to organisational culture (SR014) and how this change was being managed. It was suggested that more detail should be incorporated within this risk.

The Panel

**Decided:**

- (1) to agree the eighteen key risks and endorsed the work currently being undertaken or proposed by risk owners to mitigate these risks;
- (2) to agree that a report on the management of Strategic Risk be submitted to the Leadership Panel of 29th April 2014 for endorsement; and
- (3) to note that the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation would arrange for a briefing paper to be circulated to all Members providing an update on the impact of the Customer Services Centre following the opening of the Wallace Tower, Ayr.

The meeting ended at 12.20 p.m.