CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY PLANNING STANDING SCRUTINY PANEL.

Minutes of meeting in County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr,
on 5th June 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

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

Apology: Councillor Alec. Clark.

Attending: V. Andrews, Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation; C. Monaghan, Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs; H. McLaughlin, Audit Services Programme Review Manager; Z. Brownlie, Procurement Manager; G. Muir, ICT Strategy Officer; G. Collins, Community Engagement Manager; D. Sherlock, Improvement Manager; D. Robertson, Communications 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 Sarah Lawton, Senior 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 8th May 2014 (issued) (**link attached**).

AUDIT FUNCTION:-

4. Audit Service – Statement on Internal Controls.

There was submitted a report (issued) (**link attached)** of May 2014 by the Audit Services/Programme Review Manager presenting the annual statement on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system of the Council for the year ended 31st March 2014 as contained in Appendix 1 of the report.

A discussion took place in relation to continuous improvement and it was noted that the Council's systems of internal control were continually improving in this regard.

The Panel

Decided: to approve the statement on Internal Controls for financial year 2013/14.

WIDER SCRUTINY PANEL BUSINESS:-

5. **Governance Arrangements for Contract Awards.**

   Reference was made to the Minutes of 27th February 2014 (Page 2, paragraph 5) and there was submitted a report (issued) (**link attached)** of 30th May 2014 by the Executive Director – Resources, Governance and Organisation providing a recommendation to improve the Council's arrangements for communicating details of awarded contracts to Elected Members.

   The Chair referred to the meeting of 27th February 2014 when Members had asked Officers to explore the suggestion of an Elected Members' Panel on Procurement so that Members could be involved throughout the process and it was noted that Members' involvement in procurement was currently undertaken by the Leadership Panel and, at that stage of the process, the Panel were being asked to accept or revert back to market. In terms of scrutiny, clarification was sought in relation to the strategic role of Members at an earlier stage of the procurement process rather than requesting Members' input at the final stages. It was noted that procurement was mainly an operational matter, however and as part of the evolving Service and Improvement Plans, opportunity would be provided for Members to become more involved and to undertake scrutiny through such stages as option appraisal and service delivery.

   The Executive Director - Resources, Governance and Organisation advised of the timing of the forthcoming Procurement (Scotland) Bill which might impact on this Council's threshold levels with any further revisions to current Standing Orders Relating to Contracts as a result, being reported to a future meeting of the Leadership Panel / Council in due course.

   Clarification was sought in relation to Appendix 2 of the report which provided a sample of new contracts added to the Contract Register and it was confirmed that Members would receive regular updates on all Council contracts, if Panel was minded to endorse this recommended approach. A question was raised in relation to some of the high level contracts awarded with little input from a procurement specialist and it was noted that alignments were currently being made to rectify this position.

   A question was asked regarding the length and justification of contracts as well as the management and monitoring of contracts and whether the use of local businesses was maximised. The Procurement Manager referred to the three year renewal plan and the Contract Register as well as the role of the Contract and Supply Manager and commented on current work to develop a policy around central governance for reasons of consistency.

   The Panel

   Decided:

   (1) to endorse the recommendation of a monthly report on the Council's newly awarded contracts to be included in each month's edition of the Members' Bulletin; and

   (2) to agree that an alternative governance arrangement be considered at a future meeting of the Leadership Panel for the approval of all contracts over an appropriate threshold value.

   Due to their attendance at a Special meeting of the Licensing Board which ended at 10.20 a.m., Councillors Andy Campbell, Galbraith and Kilpatrick joined this meeting during consideration of the above item, immediately thereafter.

6. **Service and Improvement Plans 2014-17 – Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs.**

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 29th April 2014 (Page 11, paragraph 16) and there was submitted a report (issued) **(link attached)** of 29th May 2014 by the Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs requesting consideration of the Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs Service and Improvement Plan (SIPs).

The Head of Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs outlined the general observations that had arisen from consideration of the Service and Improvement Plans at the latest round of Scrutiny Panel meetings.

Following discussion and taking account of issues raised by Members of this Panel as well as the Portfolio-holder(s), the undernoted key points were made:-

Generic Comments:-

- recognised that the breakdown of actions into sub-actions was a useful approach;
- discussed whether there was value in setting the context for each SIP by way of a narrative that set out the focus on what areas were to be subject to development and improvement. It was noted that Officers had resisted this approach at present in the absence of robust self evaluation exercises having been undertaken across all services. It was recognised that, going forward, an evidence based evaluation would be built up for each of the SIPs, that would provide this context; and
- agreed that the use of the statement 'ensuring value for money' within actions was not helpful, in that this should underpin everything that is done, and that the use of this phrase would be removed from the final version of the plan.

Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs Service and Improvement Plan:-

- queried how the plan captured the sustainability of employment for those assisted into work. It was noted that further detail would be added into key performance measures pertaining to community planning funded employability programmes;
- queried whether social enterprises receiving start-up support would also have access to further wraparound support given that Business Gateway would be stretched as it provided assistance to projects across the three Ayrshire authorities. It was noted that other support networks and mentoring arrangements were in place to encourage a raft of social enterprise activity;
- clarification was sought in relation to the target for the number of jobs supported by the Ambition Programme, and the importance of also being updated regarding failure and loss of jobs. It was noted that the targets against these measures would require to be revised and that further consideration be given to the measures, to ensure that the data being reported provided a full picture;
- clarification was sought in relation to training and development in community engagement and who this was aimed at. It was noted that this related to capacity building delivered by VASA for community groups via training as well as developing core skills around committee and governance arrangements for community councils. It was recognised that one of the Head of Service remits within the new Chief Officer's structure related to communities, who would ensure that a robust approach to help new community groups as well as established groups would be brought together;
- clarification was sought in relation to the seemingly low number of reported anti-social behaviour complaints. It was clarified that these figures related to those dealt with by community safety and that the figures relating to the housing service were in their SIP;

- queried whether 'inequalities are reduced' should be a SIP outcome on its own right or it was an overarching theme that cut across all of the SIPs. It was noted whilst some specific
- actions related to this service, it was an outcome that cuts across the Council, and that this was an area for further development as to how the broader range of activity should be captured and reported upon;
- clarification was sought and provided in relation to the membership of the Welfare Reform Group led by the Chief Executive and involving a number of services;
- recognised the importance of further development of performance management, so that Members are provided with accurate data around key issues to support robust decision-making;
- suggested the need for a robust analysis of socio-economic data. It was noted that the Single Outcome Agreement contained this information and had directly informed the development of the Council Plan. Further work would be undertaken to help inform locality planning;
- clarification was sought in relation to self-evaluation processes to drive improvement. It was noted that this was based on 'How Good is Our Council'; included feedback obtained from customers and staff; would have a role for a 'critical friend'; and would ultimately include validation. The roll out at service level is being supported by the Head of Educational Services, reflecting the expertise developed using this methodology within that service, to help ensure its successful transfer to other service areas;
- queried the tracking mechanisms for strategies, plans and policies in place across the Council and heard that Covalent would provide a corporate overview in this regard;
- clarification was sought in relation to the targets for ICT systems uptime availability and assurance was given it was felt that these were generally being achieved. In the absence of precisely matching historic data to prove this, it was noted that there was opportunity for selective footnotes to be inserted into the SIP to provide context for Members;
- clarity was requested around the ICT sub-actions and lengthy due dates. Assurance was provided that the sub-actions incorporate a range of critical elements which were delivered on an on-going basis, and the end dates reflected the end date of the plan;
- queried the lengthy timescales around the review of ICT Systems. It was noted that the plan required to take cognisance of the report on this matter considered by the Leadership Panel at a recent meeting, and that new due dates would be inserted;
- assurances were sought and provided in relation to ICT change control processes. The testing of controls and the robust plans that were in place to mitigate risk were explained, although it was noted that system failures could occur due to the complexities involved no matter how robust processes were;
- clarification was sought in relation to the percentage of uptake on news releases and whether the Council were taking a proactive approach in this regard. It was recognised that a variety of media platforms were used and were being explored to actively engage with the public, including the expanded use of social media, in accordance with the previously approved policy guidelines;
- comments were made in relation to the Council's corporate identity and the use of signage to clearly present the Council and its services;
- queried the absence of a specific focus on innovation. It was noted that it was difficult to capture innovation on its own within the SIPs. It was recognised that the pursuit of COSLA and other national awards reflected innovation and that there was an opportunity to do more as a Council to recognise and encourage such work;
- suggested we could promote the work of the Council via short videos on the Council's website. It was noted that the redesign of the website would look to address this; and

- queried the low percentage of staff members who felt effectively communicated with. It was noted that this was a common finding across large organisations where employees always feel they should know more. Internal communication channels are currently being reviewed to improve their effectiveness, and this will include capturing the views of staff experiencing limited communication due to their work locations.

The Panel, having reviewed the Policy, Community Planning and Public Affairs Service and Improvement Plan and having identified issues including those of the Portfolio-holder(s),

Decided: to request that the Chief Executive make recommendations to the Council on 3rd July 2014 in line with the discussion of the Panel, to assist in finalisation of the Service and Improvement Plans.

The meeting ended at 11.50 a.m.