

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE PANEL.

Minutes of a remote meeting on 3 November 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillors Martin Dowey (Chair), Laura Brennan-Whitefield, Douglas Campbell, Alec Clark, Hugh Hunter, Lee Lyons, Helen Moonie and Arthur Spurling.

Attending: E. Howat, Chief Executive; M. Newall, Assistant Director – People; T. Baulk, Head of Finance and ICT; W. Carlaw, Service Lead – Democratic Governance; N. Gemmell, Service Lead – Revenues and Benefits; M. Leonard, Senior Auditor; L. Kerr, Co-ordinator (Destination, Promotion and Inclusive Participation); S. Mulholland, Quality Improvement Manager- ASN; and J. McClure, Committee Services Lead Officer.

Opening Remarks.

The Chair

- (1) welcomed everyone to the meeting;
- (2) took the sederunt and intimated that no apologies had been received; and
- (3) outlined the procedures for conducting this meeting and advised that this meeting would be broadcast live.

Update from Chief Executive

The Chief Executive advised the Panel that the recruitment process for the post of Chief Internal Auditor had now been completed, the process was moving forward and it was hoped that the successful candidate would be taking up post before the end of this year.

Additionally a further member of staff had been appointed in Internal Audit Service and would be taking up post shortly.

1. 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.

2. Call-ins from Leadership Panel.

The Panel noted that there were no call-ins from the Leadership Panel of 26 October 2021.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting.

The Minutes of the meeting of [29 September 2021](#) (issued) were submitted and approved.

4. **Action Log and Work Programme.**

There was submitted an update of the [Action Log and Work Programme](#) for this Panel (issued).

The Head of Finance and ICT provided the Panel with an update on the status of the Action Log and Work Programme and various officers provided the Panel with verbal updates in relation to the outstanding actions.

In relation to Action 1 on the Action Log, the Head of Finance and ICT advised that the Head of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services had issued an update to Panel Members on 18 October 2021 and this matter had now been completed.

In relation to Action 2 on the Action Log relating to “ensuring that all Young Carers were identified and received support”, the Quality Improvement Manager -ASN advised

- (1) that he could reassure Panel Members that support was in place within schools for Young Carers; and that, as part of the wider work, a Young Carers Action Group from across various services was ensuring that schools and other services were equipped to identify Young Carers and offer support;
- (2) that Young Carer Statements were in place and Young Carers could choose not to take part, however, it was ensured that their needs and their family’s needs were identified; and
- (3) that work was ongoing with schools to raise awareness of Young Carers.

Questions were raised by Panel Members on Action Point 2, in relation to:-

- (a) how the Education Service was assisting those Young Carers transitioning to further education to ensure the University or College was aware of their caring commitments; and the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN advised that he was currently carrying out work to ensure that Young Carers were confident in outlining their needs; and that the Action Group was investigating young people transitioning to further education to ensure they had the opportunity to access help, however, not all Young Carers wished to seek help or advice;
- (b) those Young Carers who did not wish to be identified and whether a general talk was given to schools to distribute information to pupils; and the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN advised that work was currently underway to ensure that Young Carers had the correct support, however for those who did not wish to be identified as a Young Carer, they were advised that help and assistance was available if required;
- (c) those young people who did not realise they were a Young Carer as they were caring for a loved one and whether various channels were open to them for obtaining advice and assistance; and the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN advised that there should be a choice of who to speak with; that there were around 36 young people with Young Carer Statements; and that every Young Carer identified would be given the opportunity to prepare a Young Carer Statement;

- (d) the number of Young Carers who had requested the Young Carers Card; and the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN advised that he would obtain this information and issue this to Panel Members following this meeting;
- (e) whether those Young Carers who had built a relationship with a teacher at their secondary school could return to seek advice from this person once they had left school; and the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN advised that this could occur and they could return to their secondary school to seek advice ;
- (f) the mental health problems faced by some Young Carers and what help was available to them; and the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN advised that within the Education Service there was community mental health support which was not targeted at Young Carers, however, was available to all Young Carers;
- (g) the collation of feedback from Young Carers; and the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN advised that the views of Young Carers were very important and that there was an Action Plan created by the Action Group which placed importance on speaking to Young Carers through schools and colleges; and that the type of support available was through access to leisure facilities, access to their peers, etc which was built into the Action Plan and Young Carer Statements; and
- (h) teachers' understanding of the responsibilities of Young Carers; and the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN advised that work had been undertaken over the last few years to raise awareness in schools and that guidance had been given to school staff on how to identify signs that a young person was a carer; and that there was ongoing training for staff in schools on how to support these young people.

The Panel then commended the Quality Improvement Manager – ASN for his work on this matter.

In relation to Action 3 on the Action Log relating to “who was responsible for the artefacts outwith the Museum collection being established and recorded and how this would be managed”, the Co-ordinator (Destination, Promotion and Inclusive Participation) advised

- (1) that there were many artefacts outwith the Museums Collection which had not been managed by Museums and Galleries Section, however, following discussion with the Service Lead – Asset Management and Community Asset Transfer, it had been agreed that these would now be transferred to the Museums and Galleries Section;
- (2) that a Graduate Intern would shortly be employed for a 12 month period within the Museums and Galleries Team to log all artefacts and manage them; and
- (3) that a database called Vital would be used to manage the collection, the location of each artefact, when they were moved to an alternative location and the appropriate storage conditions for each artefact.

A question was raised by a Panel Member on Action Point 3, in relation to the artefacts collection within schools and whether an inventory was being carried out across the school estate; and the Co-ordinator advised that the full Council estate would be examined, including schools and a decision would be taken on how to best manage these artefacts.

The Panel then thanked the Co-ordinator (Destination, Promotion and Inclusive Participation) for the excellent progress made on this matter.

In relation to Action 4 on the Action Log relating to the Internal Audit Progress Report and “whether those actions with 0% progress were now on track”, the Assistant Director – People advised that the majority of these actions were now in progress with many already completed.

Questions were raised by Panel Members on Action Point 4, in relation to:-

- (1) Pentana not being updated timeously; and the Chief Executive advised that she would issue a reminder to Officers to ensure that they were regularly updating Pentana to ensure that reports were as accurate as possible;
- (2) Panel reports being as up-to-date as possible and the Head of Finance and ICT advised that, again that was for Officers to make updates timeously to ensure that reports were as up-to-date as possible prior to the report being run for Panel consideration;
- (3) whether Pentana not being updated regularly was a process issue or a staffing resource issue; and the Head of Finance and ICT advised that this was a combination of both, it was a capacity issue and also related to Officers’ priorities, however, despite there not being resources at times within Departments to carry out this task within the timescales, this was still being completed; and
- (4) whether it could be included within reports where there was a staffing resource issue to enable Members to have an understanding of why Pentana was not being updated; and the Head of Finance and ICT advised that he would consider this inclusion.

The Panel

Decided: to note the current status of the Action Log and Work Programme.

External Audit Report

5. Audit Scotland : The Impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Council's Benefits Services.

There was submitted a [report](#) (issued) of 27 October 2021 by the Head of Finance and ICT advising Members of the findings from the Audit Scotland report 'The Impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Councils' Benefits Services'.

The Head of Finance and ICT updated the Panel on the findings of the Audit Scotland report and highlighted the key messages within the report.

Questions were raised by Panel Members in relation to:-

- (1) whether all Small Business grants had now been issued; and the Service Lead – Revenues and Benefits advised that all small business grants had been dealt with and the process had concluded and that Economy and Regeneration were now dealing with the latest grants scheme; and
- (2) whether the Benefits Service was agile enough to respond to staff shortages; and the Service Lead – Revenues and Benefits advised that there was an ongoing Service Review which had been delayed due to the pandemic and that she was endeavouring to put the right resources in place during this Review; and that this report would be considered at a future Leadership Panel.

The Panel thanked the Service Lead – Revenues and Benefits and her staff for the excellent work they had undertaken during the pandemic. Additionally the Panel thanked the ICT Service for providing the equipment and advice for all Council Services to continue during the pandemic.

The Panel, having considered the findings outlined in the Audit Scotland report 'The Impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Councils' Benefits Services (attached as [Appendix 1](#)) and the arrangements in place with this Council,

Decided: to note the report.

Internal Audit Report

6. Internal Audit - Progress Report (i) Progress of Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 (ii) Implementation of Internal Audit Action Plans (iii) Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme.

There was submitted a [report](#) (issued) of 27 October 2021 by the Senior Internal Auditor advising of internal audit's progress regarding the 2021/22 internal audit plan, directorate progress regarding the implementation of action plans and the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme.

The Assistant Director – People advised the Panel in relation to the staffing changes which had resulted in a reduction in the number of audit days available and referred to the Chief Executive's update at the start of this Panel.

Questions and comments were raised by Members in relation to:-

- (1) the external assessment which had been due to take place by North Ayrshire Council but could not now take place due to a conflict of interest; and the Assistant Director – People advised that this would now be undertaken by Inverclyde Council in 2022;
- (2) the staffing issues within the Internal Audit Service; and the Chief Executive advised that a range of circumstances had resulted in there being a staff shortage in this Section including sickness, maternity leave, a retiral and a member of staff attaining an alternative job; that she had liaised with External Audit on this matter; that new members of staff would shortly be joining the Internal Audit Service and that she would continue to monitor this and report back to this Panel; and
- (3) the importance of the Internal Audit Service and how a high standard of work had consistently been delivered by this Service, however, staffing issues were challenging across the Council Services for a variety of reasons and that the Panel required to be aware of capacity issues and how these were being addressed

The Panel, having considered the contents of the report and the actions being taken to address the shortfall in staff resources,

Decided: to note the report.

The meeting ended at 11.05 a.m.