

Minute of Meeting

Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board

Date	Time	Venue
Monday, 21 September 2015	10:00	CMR 1, Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1AN

PRESENT

Councillors B Brown, Caldwell, McEwan, Grady, Provost Hall, Councillors J MacLaren, Perrie and J Sharkey.

CHAIR

Councillor J Sharkey, Convener, presided.

IN ATTENDANCE

O Reid, Head of Public Protection and D McNab, Transportation Manager (both Community Resources); P McLean, Senior Performance Review Officer (Development & Housing Services) A MacArthur, Head of Finance, R McGrath, Head of Business Services, A McMahon, Chief Auditor, L Belshaw, Democratic Services Manager, D Campbell, Assistant Managing Solicitor (Licensing) and D Briggs, Senior Solicitor (lead officer) (all Finance & Resources).

APOLOGIES

Councillor M Brown.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor McEwan declared an interest in item 8a of the agenda as she had signed the petition and indicated that it was her intention not to take part in any discussion or voting thereon.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the Convener welcomed B Howarth, Assistant Director and A McGregor, Senior Audit Manager, both Audit Scotland, to the meeting.

1 **AUDIT OF ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2014/15**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the report to members and the Controller of Audit on the audit of the Council's 2014/15 accounts. The report intimated that the audit process had been completed in accordance with international auditing standards, in terms of which Audit Scotland were obliged to report to those charged with the governance of the organisation matters which had arisen in the course of the audit. The report outlined Audit Scotland's findings from the audit of the 2014/15 Council, Common Good and Charitable Trust financial statements. Under the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014, which came into force on 10 October 2014, the Council must meet to consider the annual accounts and aim to approve those accounts for signature no later than 30 September. In order to comply with these requirements the audited financial statements would be presented to the Council for approval at its meeting to be held on 24 September 2015.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

2 **SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR - RISK ASSESSMENT SUMMARY OUTCOME**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Development & Housing Services relative to feedback from the Scottish Housing Regulator following their assessment of the Council's Scottish Social Housing Charter return for 2013/14. The report intimated that all local authorities' housing services and registered social landlords were required to submit their annual return on the Scottish Social Housing Charter to the Scottish Housing Regulator. The Regulator wrote to the Council in May 2015 and concluded that the Council demonstrated a high level of commitment to delivering the requirements of the Charter; that the Council used the Charter to determine and monitor its performance and report this information to members and tenants. In July 2015 the Scottish Housing Regulator published its risk assessment summary outcome for local authorities and Renfrewshire Council was one of only nine local authorities where the Regulator had sufficient assurance about performance that monitoring of the delivery of Housing and Homelessness Services would be conducted through the annual return.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

3 **AUDIT SCOTLAND REPORT: AUDIT OF HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT RISK**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the requirement that the Council's external auditor, Audit Scotland, as part of their remit carried out Housing Benefit Audit Risk Assessments across all 32 Scottish local authorities. The main objective of the benefit performance audit was to help councils improve their benefit services but it also held councils to account for any failing services. During May 2015 Audit Scotland carried out a follow-up Housing Benefit Risk Assessment for Renfrewshire and provided a report to the Council's Chief Executive which overall was very positive, noting improvements in key areas. Two risks to continuous improvement had been identified and the report intimated that these were already being addressed. An improvement plan had been developed in response to the risks and this had been approved by Audit Scotland.

One of the risks identified was the Council not being routinely notified of the outcomes of prosecutions by the Procurator Fiscal and as a result not routinely publicising successful outcomes of fraud. It was proposed that the Chief Auditor discuss with the Council's communications team the best way of dealing with publication of relevant information in relation to fraud activity. This was agreed.

DECIDED:

(a) That the Audit of Housing and Council Tax Benefit Risk Assessment Report, as appended to the report, and the improvement plan submitted in response be noted; and

(b) That the Chief Auditor discuss with the Council's communications team the best way of dealing with publication of relevant information in relation to fraud activity.

4 AUDIT SCOTLAND REPORT – BENEFITS PERFORMANCE AUDIT ANNUAL UPDATE

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the requirement that the Council's external auditor, Audit Scotland, carry out Housing Benefit Audit Risk Assessments. The main objective of the benefit performance audit was to help councils improve their benefit services but it also held councils to account for any failing services. The appendix to the report provided a summary of the performance audit work carried out by Audit Scotland and the Scottish Councils Housing Benefit Services during 2014/15. The report highlighted key issues from the Risk Assessments carried out and identified good practice. The Risk Assessment carried out at Renfrewshire was not covered by the annual report as it was part of the 2015/16 programme, as detailed in item 3 of this Minute.

DECIDED: That the Audit Scotland report 'Benefits Performance Audit Annual Update 2014/15', as appended to the report, be noted.

5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS 1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2015

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to the requirements in terms of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) that Internal Audit communicated the results of each engagement to the Board. The appendix to the report provided a summary of findings in relation to final reports issued for those engagements completed during the period 1 April to 30 June 2015.

The report intimated that, in addition to the reports listed in the appendix, Internal Audit had an ongoing commitment to a range of corporate and service initiatives, progressing of information security matters in partnership with ICT and Legal Services, providing regular advice to the associated bodies for which Renfrewshire Council was the lead authority and to Renfrewshire Leisure Limited, co-ordination of the Council's corporate risk management activity and management of the counter fraud and risk management and insurance teams.

DECIDED: That the summary of audit findings reported during the quarter 1 April to 30 June 2015, be noted.

6 INTERNAL AUDIT AND COUNTER FRAUD PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE FOR PERIOD TO 30 JUNE 2015

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to Internal Audit and Counter Fraud progress and performance for the period 1 April to 30 June 2015, in terms of the delivery of the audit plan. The report compared the percentage of audit work completed against targets, within time and the percentage of audit reports issued within three weeks of completion of audit fieldwork. It was noted that performance was ahead of target in all areas. The number of overpayments identified by the Counter Fraud Team during the period was also detailed as was progress against local and national initiatives involving Internal Audit and the Counter Fraud Team including the National Fraud Initiative and the Scottish Local Authorities Chief Internal Auditors Group.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

7 TRAINING FOR AUDIT, SCRUTINY AND PETITIONS BOARD MEMBERS

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to training for Board members undertaken in line with guidance produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy on the implementation of Audit Committee principles in Scottish Local Authorities in terms of which training in audit and risk related matters was provided to members of the Board. The current briefing, by the Head of Public Protection, related to serious and organised crime (SOC). The briefing outlined the scale and nature of SOC, strategic links and levels of activity, the national agenda to disrupt the activities of SOC groups, to divert individuals from engaging in or using the products of SOC, to deter SOC through measures to protect communities, business and the public sector from SOC and to detect SOC by boosting capacity and improving coordination. Types of SOC were highlighted including alcohol and drugs, child sexual exploitation, people trafficking/slavery, fraud, data theft, metal theft, money laundering and cash businesses. Insider threat was also identified, by contractors and staff, including details of how this could be recognised and addressed.

It was proposed that the Head of Corporate Governance be asked to give consideration to publication of the chief officers' registers of interests. This was agreed.

DECIDED:

(a) That the briefing be noted; and

(b) That the Head of Corporate Governance be asked to give consideration to publication of the chief officers' registers of interests.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor McEwan, having previously declared an interest in the following item, indicated that it was her intention to stay in the meeting as local member and to act as supporter to the petitioner if required.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the Convener welcomed Mrs Quigley and her son, acting as her supporter, to the meeting.

8 PETITION: BUS STOP, TRIDENT HOUSE, RENFREW

Under reference to Item 12 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board held on 1 June 2015, there was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Board's continued consideration of the petition which had been submitted in the undernoted terms:

"To move the bus stop from outside Trident House in the Renfrew Road because of dangers to passengers alighting from buses at this stop and then having to either cross at the entrance to the M8 Motorway in order to access the Abbotsinch Estate or either crossing the exit from the M8 Motorway to access the bottom end of Gallowhill. Residents of Gallowhill want the bus stop put back to where it was previously sited before a serious injury or a fatal accident occurs."

The report intimated that at its meeting held on 30 March, 2015 the Head of Amenity Services had advised that the bus stop had been moved to make way for the access road for the new retail development on Renfrew Road so it could not go back to its original position. In terms of the road layout this was a very difficult area to find a suitable location for a bus stop and there was no other place to put it except at Trident House, where it had been operating safely for the past 10 months. He further advised that a pedestrian survey had been undertaken to determine the routes people used near the stop including the roundabout to the retail park and the slip roads to the M8 motorway. At that meeting it had been agreed that consideration of the petition be continued to enable a site visit to take place. The site visit had subsequently taken place on 15 May 2015, and the report intimated that the Head of Amenity Services had indicated that arising from the site visit there appeared to be confusion relating to where the petitioners wanted the stop to be moved and had provided a plan for clarification. The report noted that a survey of pedestrian movements had been carried out in the vicinity of the current location outside Trident House and would be further assessed to establish pedestrian desire lines over the Renfrew Road between the roundabout and the retail park and the roundabout at Arkleston. This work would be ongoing in the current financial year.

Councillor J Sharkey, seconded by Councillor Caldwell, moved that the petition be referred to the Director of Community Resources with the recommendation that no action be taken on moving the bus stop and that the survey to determine the routes people used near the stop including the roundabout to the retail park and the slip roads to the M8 motorway continue to be progressed. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That the petition be referred to the Director of Community Resources with the recommendation that no action be taken on moving the bus stop and that the survey to determine the routes people used near the stop including the roundabout to the retail park and the slip roads to the M8 motorway continue to be progressed.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the Convener welcomed Mrs Park and her supporter Mrs Gallagher, to the meeting.

9 **PETITION: SANDY ROAD, RENFREW**

Under reference to Item 11 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board held on 1 June 2015 there was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Board's continued consideration of the petition which had been submitted in the undernoted terms.

“This petition is for something to be done to prevent further accidents at the corner of Sandy Road and Newmains Road and also Broadloan Road/Sandy Road (both Renfrew). I realise traffic lights could be the only answer before someone is killed or badly injured”.

It was noted that the Board at its meeting held on 16 February 2015 having heard from the principal petitioner and her supporter agreed that the matters contained in the petition be referred to the Director of Community Resources for further investigation and that a report on the outcome be submitted to a future meeting of the Board to which the petitioner would be invited. The report provided information on the outcome of the further investigations which had been undertaken and it was noted that the Head of Amenity Services had indicated that a review of the phasing of the signals on Paisley Road had been undertaken with a view to making this road more efficient thus negating the need for drivers to use alternative routes. Alternations to the signals were likely to commence during summer, 2015.

Councillor McEwan, seconded by Councillor B Brown, moved that the the petition be referred to the Director of Community Resources with the recommendation that consideration be given to converting the two existing zebra crossings on Sandy Road at Broadloan and Sandy Road at Newmains Road to pedestrian controlled traffic lights. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That the the petition be referred to the Director of Community Resources with the recommendation that consideration be given to converting the two existing zebra crossings on Sandy Road at Broadloan and Sandy Road at Newmains Road to pedestrian controlled traffic lights.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the Convener welcomed Ms Campbell and her supporter, Mr McGuigan, to the meeting.

10 **PETITION: SPEED BUMPS, TIREE AVENUE, RENFREW**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to a petition comprising around 40 signatures which had been received from Ms J Campbell in the undernoted terms.

“Renfrewshire Council: agree to place speed bumps in Tiree Avenue for the safety of local children and drivers”.

The principal petitioner together with her supporter had been invited to this meeting of the Board to speak to the petition.

The report intimated that the Head of Amenity Services had advised that the Council was unaware of speeding instances in Tiree Avenue Renfrew. However any injury accidents history in this street would be investigated and a meeting with Police Scotland would be arranged to discuss the issues in detail. It was indicated that further supporting information from the petitioners would be helpful.

The Board heard from the principal petitioner and her supporter and from the Transportation Manager in relation to matters raised in the petition. The principal petitioner indicated that over 100 people had now signed the petition.

It was proposed that consideration of the petition be continued to allow a site meeting to take place to establish the extent of the problem, attended by the Transportation Manager, other officers as appropriate, Police Scotland, the principal petitioner and supporter, and the Convener and Depute Convener of the Board. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That consideration of the petition be continued to allow a site meeting to take place to establish the extent of the problem, attended by the Transportation Manager, other officers as appropriate, Police Scotland, the principal petitioner and supporter, and the Convener and Depute Convener of the Board.

11 **PETITION: COUNCIL TENANT**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to a petition which had been received and which the Head of Corporate Governance considered not to be valid in terms of the Council's procedures for dealing with petitions mainly paragraphs 3(b)(i) "petitions about complaints or issues that should go through normal procedures"; (vi) "petitions which could be defamatory or discriminatory" and (vii) "petitions which accuse someone of breaking the law or codes of practice". The petition was seeking the removal of a tenant from their council property. It was noted that the Director of Development & Housing Services had advised that the local housing officer had visited the principal petitioner to discuss her concerns and what assistance if any could be offered.

It was proposed that the petition be not heard as it was invalid in terms of the Council's procedures and that the matter be referred to the Director of Development & Housing Services. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That the petition be not heard as it was invalid in terms of the Council's procedures for dealing with petitions and that the matter be referred to the Director of Development & Housing Services.

12 **PETITION: EMPLOYEE**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to a petition which had been received and which the Head of Corporate Governance considered not to be valid in terms of the Council's procedures for dealing with petitions namely Paragraph 3(b)(v) of the procedures "petitions about an employee's terms and conditions of employment".

It was proposed that the petition be not heard as it was invalid in terms of the Council's procedures for dealing with petitions and that the matter be referred to the Director of Children's Services. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That the petition be not heard as it was invalid in terms of the Council's procedures for dealing with petitions and that the matter be referred to the Director of Children's Services.

SEDERUNT

Provost Hall left the meeting during consideration of the following item of business and prior to the vote being taken.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the Convener welcomed Mr Smith, Cleaner, Greener Neighbourhoods Manager, River Clyde Homes, to the meeting.

13 THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF A RENFREWSHIRE HOUSING LEASE/CONTRACT IN RELATION TO THE UPKEEP OF COUNCIL PROPERTY

Under reference to item 7 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board held on 30 March 2015, there was submitted a report by the Lead Officer.

The report intimated that the Council did not provide the majority of housing within the Renfrewshire Council area and dwelling stock by tenure was outlined. It was noted that owner occupiers represented the highest dwelling stock by tenure, with figures for 2013 being 55,144 owner occupier, 12,728 local authority; 8,286 private rented accommodation and 7,775 housing association. The number of properties available for private rent had increased significantly during the period 2006 to 2013 from 3,748 to 8,286. The statutory position in relation to the registration of private landlords was detailed.

Mr Smith provided information regarding the practise in River Clyde Homes, the organisation to which Inverclyde Council had transferred their housing stock. He referred to neighbourhood walkabouts, how tenants were made aware of and could participate; provided copies of inspection templates and the pictorial guide to cleaner, greener neighbourhoods, which set out objectives, standards and responsibilities for cleaner, greener neighbourhoods, including the gold, silver, bronze rating system for communal entrances; floors, stairwells and landings; walls and doors, glass and windows, bin and chute rooms; car parks; open spaces; lighting; lifts and garages; common paths, laundries and drying areas.

There followed a question and answer session at the end of which the Convener thanked Mr Smith for his contribution to the Board's review.

Councillor J Sharkey, seconded by Councillor Caldwell, moved that the evidence presented by the representative from River Clyde Homes be noted; that the evidence presented in relation to private landlord registration be noted; that the information provided by Development & Housing Services in relation to the breakdown of housing stock within Renfrewshire be noted; and that the Board had heard sufficient evidence to allow the Lead Officer to submit the Board's draft final report to a future meeting of the Board.

Councillor McEwan, seconded by Councillor Perrie, moved as an amendment that councillors contact tenants with a view to them attending a future meeting of the Board to give evidence.

On the roll being called, the following members voted for the amendment: Councillors McEwan and Perrie.

The following members voted for the motion: Councillors B Brown, Caldwell, Grady, J MacLaren and J Sharkey.

2 members having voted for the amendment and 5 members having voted for the motion, the motion was accordingly declared carried.

DECIDED:

- (a) That the evidence presented by the representative from River Clyde Homes be noted;
- (b) That the evidence presented in relation to private landlord registration be noted;
- (c) That the information provided by Development & Housing Services in relation to the breakdown of housing stock within Renfrewshire be noted; and
- (d) That the Board had heard sufficient evidence to allow the Lead Officer to submit the Board's draft final report to a future meeting of the Board.

14 AUDIT, SCRUTINY AND PETITIONS BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Board's 2014/15 annual report which was prepared in terms of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance. The report highlighted those issues considered by the Board during the period September 2014 to June 2015 when the Board met on five occasions.

The report intimated that during the course of the year members had considered many different subjects including those agreed in terms of their annual programme, annual reports by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland; a number of audit related matters including the audit of accounts and strategic internal audit plan, internal and external audit findings, corporate governance and risk. Members had also undertaken a comprehensive training programme in terms of their audit committee role. In addition the Board had considered a number of petitions during the course of the period covered by the report and details of petitions received and their outcomes were provided in the appendix to the report.

DECIDED: That the Audit Scrutiny and Petitions Board's annual report 2014/15, including the report on petitions received and their outcomes, be noted.