

Minute of Meeting Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board

Date	Time	Venue
Monday, 01 June 2015	10:00	CMR 1, Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1AN

PRESENT

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

CHAIR

Councillor J Sharkey, Convener, presided.

IN ATTENDANCE

N Irvine Brown, Senior Policy Officer (Chief Executive's); D McNab, Transportation Manager and J P Wallace, Traffic, Street Lighting & Asset Manager (both Community Resources); M Beacom, Neighbourhood Services Coordinator and C Purves, Assistant Manager, Development Standards (both Development & Housing Services); and K Graham, Head of Corporate Governance, A MacArthur, Acting Head of Corporate Finance, M Armstrong, Senior HR Adviser L Belshaw, Democratic Services Manager, A McMahon, Chief Auditor and F Naylor, Business Planning & Finance Manager (all Finance & Resources).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor McEwan declared an interest in item 12 of the agenda as she had signed the petition and indicated her intention not to take part in any discussion or voting thereon.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the Convener welcomed A McGregor, Senior Audit Manager, Audit Scotland, to the meeting.

1 **AN OVERVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND 2015**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Audit Scotland overview report which was produced on an annual basis and which provided an independent view on how councils across Scotland performed and were managed. The report outlined the main findings of the report and issues raised, including the context within which councils operated, the overall financial position and pressures on budgets and how councils managed these financial challenges. The report highlighted increased demand pressures and noted the tough decisions faced by councils in balancing their budgets and considered the long-term need for comprehensive and accessible financial information and long-term financial planning to help members understand the financial position of the Council, support the decision-making process and enhance performance scrutiny. An extract of the key messages contained within the Audit Scotland report were summarised together with information on the Renfrewshire Council position on each.

In relation to succession planning, it was proposed that members be provided with details of annual expenditure on staff training. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

2 **AUDIT SCOTLAND REPORT - BORROWING AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT IN COUNCILS**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Audit Scotland report 'Borrowing and Treasury Management in Councils' the overall aim of which was to assess how councils showed best value in borrowing and treasury management decisions.

The audit examined borrowing and treasury management in councils, the extent to which councils' borrowing and treasury management strategies met good practice and contributed to corporate plans and priorities, how councils demonstrated affordability and sustainability of borrowing decisions and how effective were the governance arrangements for borrowing and treasury management. The report provided a summary of the key messages and recommendations presented in the Audit Scotland report and considered these in the context of how Renfrewshire Council managed its borrowing and treasury management function.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

3 **LOCAL SCRUTINY PLAN 2015/16 FOR RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL**

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive relative to the Local Scrutiny Plan (the Plan) 2015/16 which was appended to the report. It was noted that the Plan was prepared each year by the local area network which consisted of representatives from all the major scrutiny bodies that engaged with the Council being - Audit Scotland, the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland and the Scottish Housing Regulator. The local area network met annually to carry out a shared risk assessment and decide whether the Council needed external scrutiny in any specific areas for the year ahead.

The report intimated that the conclusion of the local area network at the end of this year's shared risk assessment was that no risks had been identified which required specific scrutiny. However, audit and inspection work would continue to take place such as ongoing inspection of schools and care establishments. The Council would also be subject to a range of scrutiny which was part of national activity such as the validated self-evaluation of educational psychology services across all councils. A table setting out the planned external scrutiny for Renfrewshire Council was included in the report. It was noted that the dates on which certain scrutiny engagements would be undertaken had still to be determined.

DECIDED:

(a) That it be noted that no scrutiny risks had been identified for 2015/16 which required specific scrutiny by the local area network; and

(b) That the planned external scrutiny activity for 2015/16 set out in the appendix to the Plan be noted, including that dates on which certain scrutiny engagements would be undertaken had still to be determined.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK INDICATOR PROFILE FOR 2013/14

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive relative to the local government benchmarking framework indicator profile for 2013/14. It was noted that the Accounts Commission published an annual direction which set out the performance information that councils must report in each financial year. The direction for 2013/14 performance data covered three categories being corporate management, service performance and the local government benchmarking framework (LGBF). The report intimated that during the year the Council published local performance information in board reports, key publications and on the website to demonstrate the delivery of best value in service arrangements. The validated LGBF data for 2013/14 was published by the Improvement Service on 31 March, 2015. The report provided an analysis of the Council's LGBF data for 2013/14, compared the Council's performance to other councils, highlighted improvements in performance data and identified areas for further improvement. Of the 55 national indicators, since 2012/13, the Council's ranking in 25 had improved, had remained the same in nine, had declined in 17, and in four no trend information was available.

The report considered why certain indicators were ranked in the bottom quartile and where there was declining performance and detailed planned actions to improve performance, including learning from best practice in other authorities. Detailed analysis of the indicator suite was contained in the appendix to the report. It was noted that sample data, where used, was gathered at a Scotland level, and it was acknowledged that there were limitations at council level in relation to the very small sample sizes. It was proposed that where possible further reports should include local satisfaction levels if these were available. This was agreed.

DECIDED:

(a) That the report and improvement actions now being implemented be noted; and

(b) That, where possible, further reports should include local satisfaction levels if these were available.

5 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to the annual report on the activities of the Council's Internal Audit Section. The report intimated that the public sector internal audit standards (PSIAS) required that the Chief Auditor prepare a report at least annually to senior management and the Board on internal audit's activity, purpose, authority and responsibility as well as performance relative to its plan. The annual report must also provide an annual audit opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control environment and include details of any significant risk exposures and control issues including fraud risks, governance issues and other matters that could be used to inform the governance statement. The annual report for 2014/15 was appended to the report and outlined the role and performance of internal audit, the strategic and operational issues which influenced the nature of the work carried out, key findings and contained the annual audit assurance statement.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

6 SUMMARY OF INTERNAL AUDIT FINDINGS FOR QUARTER TO 31 MARCH, 2015

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to the requirements of the PSIAS that internal audit must communicate the results of each engagement to the Board. Accordingly the Chief Auditor submitted regular reports which summarised internal audit findings in relation to final reports issued. The report outlined those engagements completed during the period 1 January to 31 March, 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, provision of regular advice to officers, provision of internal audit services 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 benefit investigation and insurance teams.

DECIDED: That the report be noted.

7 ABSENCE STATISTICS

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Council's absence statistics for the period 24 March, 2014 to 23 March, 2015. The report provided information in relation to absence targets and how services and categories of staff had performed against them. An analysis of the reasons for absence was also included in the report. In addition, information was provided on managing absence activity levels by service and the costs of sick pay. The overall number of days lost during 2014/15 and for the equivalent quarters in the previous year were shown.

It was proposed that, where possible, analysis of the age profile of teaching staff in relation to rates of absence be provided. This was agreed.

DECIDED:

(a) That the report be noted; and

(b) That, where possible, analysis of the age profile of teaching staff in relation to rates of absence be provided.

8 RISK MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Risk Management Annual Report 2014/15 which described the risk management activity that had taken place during the year in relation to the Council's risk management arrangements and strategic risk management objectives. The report intimated that in exceptionally challenging times and with diminishing resources the Council had applied an appropriate level of risk management to prevent or mitigate the effects of loss or harm. In recognition that good risk management contributed to the delivery of better financial outcomes, business objectives, better project success rates, achievement of targets and fewer unexpected problems, the report highlighted that the Council promoted an environment that was risk aware rather than risk averse and strove to place risk management information as part of key policy decisions that the Council made. This meant that an effective approach to managing risk was taken in a way that both addressed significant challenges and enabled innovation.

DECIDED: That the Annual Report 2014/15, the continued effectiveness of the risk management framework and the significant contribution that it made to the Council's corporate governance arrangements be noted.

9 CONFERENCE REQUEST

There was submitted an invitation to attend the Scrutiny Seminar series to be held in Birmingham on 26th June 2015.

Councillor J Sharkey, seconded by Councillor Grady moved that two members attend the conference being Councillors J Sharkey and J MacLaren.

Councillor McEwan, seconded by Councillor Audrey Doig, moved as an amendment that the possibility of holding a seminar with a similar programme in Scotland be investigated.

On the roll being called the following members voted for the amendment: Councillor Audrey Doig and Councillor McEwan.

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

2 members having voted for the amendment and 6 members having voted for the motion, the motion was accordingly declared carried.

DECIDED: That the Council be represented by two members, being Councillors J Sharkey and J MacLaren.

10 **AUDIT, SCRUTINY & PETITIONS BOARD - ANNUAL PROGRAMME OF REVIEWS 2015/16**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Board's 2015/16 annual programme. It was noted that, in terms of the guidelines for its operation, each year the Board gave consideration to an annual programme of reviews. The Board then determined which reviews would be taken forward and the order of priority in which they would be progressed.

The report provided an update on the 2014/15 programme and it was noted that the review of the terms and conditions of a Renfrewshire Housing lease/contract in relation to the upkeep of Council property was ongoing; and that the reviews of Ward 15 (Children's Ward) Royal Alexandra Hospital and bus deregulation and its effect on transport services in Renfrewshire had yet to commence. The report proposed that the review of the Invest in Renfrewshire programme fall as the original purpose of this review had been overtaken and was no longer required.

The report intimated that generally each review took five meetings to conclude but this was dependent upon the availability of witnesses and whether the Board wished to hear further evidence. It had been agreed at an earlier meeting that given the level of business before the Board no more than two reviews would be considered at each meeting to allow members to give each sufficient consideration. The report proposed that, unless members had any other areas they wished to submit for the Board's consideration, the 2015/16 programme comprise the reviews agreed as part of the 2014/15 programme which had not as yet commenced being Ward 15 (Children's Ward), Royal Alexandra Hospital; and bus de-regulation and its effect on transport services in Renfrewshire.

Councillor J MacLaren proposed that reviews be undertaken in relation to: the newly-introduced speed limit in Brookfield (A761); restricting access to the Council's cycle to work scheme; fly tipping in the countryside and at known fly-tipping spots; housing repairs by Council and outside contractors; and Japanese knotweed in our landscapes and gardens; and maintenance of multi-occupancy accommodation; and Councillor J Sharkey proposed that a review be undertaken of the effectiveness of Fair Trade.

It was proposed that the 2015/16 programme of reviews include (a) Ward 15 (Children's Ward), Royal Alexandra Hospital; (b) bus de-regulation and its effect on transport services in Renfrewshire; (c) the newly-introduced speed limit in Brookfield (A761); (d) restricting access to the Council's cycle to work scheme; (e) fly tipping in the countryside and at known fly-tipping spots; (f) housing repairs by Council and outside contractors; (g) Japanese knotweed in our landscapes and gardens; (h) maintenance of multi-occupancy accommodation; and (i) the effectiveness of Fair Trade, and that these be the order in which the reviews were undertaken. This was agreed.

DECIDED:

(a) That the 2015/16 programme of reviews include (i) Ward 15 (Children's Ward), Royal Alexandra Hospital; (ii) bus de-regulation and its effect on transport services in Renfrewshire; (iii) the newly-introduced speed limit in Brookfield (A761); (iv) restricting access to the Council's cycle to work scheme; (v) fly tipping in the countryside and at known fly-tipping spots; (vi) housing repairs by Council and outside contractors; (vii) Japanese knotweed in our landscapes and gardens; (viii) maintenance of multi-occupancy accommodation; and (ix) the effectiveness of Fair Trade, and that these be the order in which the reviews were undertaken;

(b) That lead officers be appointed to consider all of the topics and prepare reports outlining the possible scope and terms of reference of specific reviews and suggest individuals, agencies and organisations who might be invited to contribute; and

(c) That in relation to the review of the Invest in Renfrewshire programme, it be agreed that this fell within the remit of the Economy & Jobs Policy Board and that a review of this topic was no longer required in terms of the Board's annual programme.

11 PETITION: SANDY ROAD, RENFREW

Under reference to item 6 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board held on 26 February, 2015, there was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the petition which had been submitted in the undernoted terms:

"This petition is for something to be done to prevent further accidents at corner of Sandy Road and Newmains Road and also Broadloan/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 and 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 he was about to commence a review of the phasing of the signals on Paisley Road 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 over the summer.

The principal petitioner together with her supporter had been invited to this meeting of the Board in order that the Board could give further consideration to the petition. The petitioner was not available and it was proposed that consideration of the petition be continued to the next meeting of the Board to be held on 21 September, 2015 to give the petitioner a further opportunity to attend. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That consideration of the petition be continued to the next meeting of the Board to be held on 21 September, 2015 to give the petitioner a further opportunity to attend.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor McEwan, having previously declared an interest in relation to the following item, did not take part in the discussion thereon.

12 PETITION: BUS STOP, TRIDENT HOUSE, RENFREW

Under reference to item 9 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board held on 30 March, 2015 there was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to 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 of the M8 motorway in order to access the Abbotsinch Estate or either crossing the exits 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”.

It was noted that consideration of the petition had been continued to enable a site visit to take place. The site visit had 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.

The principal petitioner together with her supporter had been invited to this meeting of the Board in order that the Board could give further consideration to the petition. The petitioner was not available and it was proposed that consideration of the petition be continued to the next meeting of the Board to be held on 21 September, 2015 to give the petitioner a further opportunity to attend. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That consideration of the petition be continued to the next meeting of the Board to be held on 21 September, 2015 to give the petitioner a further opportunity to attend.

13 **PETITION: FELLING OF TREES, HOUSTON**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to a petition which had been received in the undernoted terms.

“Petition regarding the proposed removal of trees from the south bank of Houston burn in Houston village centre between Main Street and Bogstonhill Road.

We, riparian owners of the properties adjacent to the strip of Council land on which these trees are growing, request the relevant departments of Renfrewshire Council, including Housing and Planning, to take our views into consideration before deciding on any action to take with these trees including any decision to fell them.

These trees are an integral part of the character of Houston village which is designated as a conservation area. The Scottish Government’s Guide to Conservation Areas states that local Councils have a responsibility to preserve and enhance Conservation Areas by among other things, the protection of trees. The complete removal of these trees would have a serious negative impact on the character of our historic village centre.

We also ask that Renfrewshire Council abides by the terms of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, sections 160(6)(a) and 167. This states that because the trees in question are subject to a tree preservation order, the Council is required to replace any trees felled on the grounds of safety with others of an appropriate size and species at the same place as soon as they reasonably can”.

The report intimated that the Head of Corporate Governance considered that the petition was not valid in terms of paragraph 3(b)(ii) of the procedures - petitions about individual planning licensing or other applications (including decisions already taken where there were already procedures). The Head of Planning & Development had advised that a treeworks application for a site at 15-29 South Street, Houston, for the removal of five trees was currently being considered by the Council as Planning Authority. Accordingly there were already procedures in place within the Council to deal with representations in relation to tree works applications. The Head of Planning & Development had indicated that representations received in relation to the proposed treeworks would be recorded in the Report of Handling and would be taken into consideration. It was noted that, if the application for treeworks were approved, it remained a matter for the Council as owners of the land and trees whether or not to act on the permission and implement the works. The application had been submitted as a result of safety concerns based on the erosion of tree root plates by the adjacent Houston burn.

The report intimated that it was for the Board to determine the validity of the petition and whether they wished to hear it. The convener proposed that the Board hear the petition. This was agreed.

The Board then welcomed Mr McEvoy, petitioner, together with Mr Jones, and heard from them in support of their petition. The Board then heard from the Neighbourhood Services Coordinator and the Assistant Manager, Development Standards.

It was proposed that the petition be referred to the Director of Development & Housing Services with the recommendations (a) that the matters contained in the petition be taken into account in terms of the officers' deliberations on the treeworks application; and (b) that if the treeworks application were to be granted, that the matters contained in the petition be taken into account prior to any decision being taken to act on the permission and implement the works. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That the petition be referred to the Director of Development & Housing Services with the recommendations (a) that the matters contained in the petition be taken into account in terms of the officers' deliberations on the treeworks application; and (b) that if the treeworks application were to be granted, that the matters contained in the petition be taken into account prior to any decision being taken to act on the permission and implement the works.