

**MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE AUDIT, SCRUTINY & PETITIONS BOARD
HELD ON 16th FEBRUARY, 2015**

PRESENT

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

Councillor J Sharkey, Convener, presided.

IN ATTENDANCE

O Reid, Acting Head of Public Protection and J Wallace, Traffic, Street Lighting & Asset Manager (both Community Resources); E McLean, Head of Housing Services and A Bennett, Housing Services Manager (both Development & Housing Services); A MacArthur, Acting Head of Corporate Finance, A McMahon, Chief Auditor, L Belshaw, Democratic Services Manager and D Briggs, Senior Solicitor, Lead Officer (all Finance & Resources)

APOLOGY

Provost Hall.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Audrey Doig declared a financial interest in item 4 of the agenda as she was an employee of Renfrewshire Leisure Limited and indicated her intention to leave the meeting during consideration of the item and not to take part in any discussion or voting thereon.

SEDERUNT

Councillor McEwan entered the meeting prior to consideration of the following item.

1. AUDIT SCOTLAND REPORT: SCOTLAND'S PUBLIC FINANCES. A FOLLOW-UP AUDIT: PROGRESS IN MEETING THE CHALLENGES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the follow-up report by Audit Scotland to their 2011 report 'Scotland's Public Finances: Addressing the Challenges'. The report provided an update on the financial position and how the 67 public bodies examined were meeting the challenges of budget constraints. The report outlined the findings of the Audit Scotland report and provided information on the Renfrewshire Council position with regard to the issues raised. The auditors assessed whether public bodies had sustainable financial plans that reflected a strategic approach to their finances. They also considered the role of councillors and non-executive directors in approving budgets and in holding staff to account for delivering budgets.

Audit Scotland recommended that public bodies should implement an approach to budgeting that focussed more on priorities and linked planned spending more closely with the outcomes they wanted to achieve; develop a longer-term approach to financial planning that took account of priorities, risks and liabilities and provided assurances on long-term affordability; and support effective scrutiny by ensuring that good quality information was available and that councillors and non-executive directors had the right skills to carry out their scrutiny roles.

DECIDED: That the Audit Scotland report 'Scotland's Public Finances. A Follow-up Audit: Progress in Meeting the Challenges' be noted.

2. AUDIT SCOTLAND REPORT: THE IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORMS ON COUNCIL RENT ARREARS IN SCOTLAND

There was submitted a report by the Director of Development & Housing Services relative to the Audit Scotland report 'The Impact of Welfare Reforms on Council Rent Arrears in Scotland' which considered the impact of the removal of the spare room subsidy and other welfare reforms on rent arrears in Scotland.

The report considered the impact that additional Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) have had on the reported arrears position and highlighted initiatives implemented by councils to help mitigate the impact of welfare reform on rent arrears.

Councillor Sharkey, seconded by Councillor B Brown, moved that the Audit Scotland report on the impact of welfare reforms on council rent arrears in Scotland be noted; and that the rent arrears position reported for Renfrewshire Council and how this compared with the Scottish average be noted.

Councillor McEwan, seconded by Councillor Nicolson, moved as an amendment that the Board be provided with a breakdown of arrears, including what element was bedroom tax and how these were accommodated within the Discretionary Housing Payment system.

The amendment was accepted by the mover and seconder of the motion and the motion, as amended, was carried unanimously.

In addition, it was noted that a number of monitoring reports were submitted on a regular basis to the Housing & Community Safety and Finance & Resources Policy Boards in relation to, among other things, arrears and DHP. It was proposed that members be provided with a breakdown of how DHP was spent, in addition to details on the number of tenants who were eligible for but did not access DHP and, in relation to Appendix A to the Audit Scotland report, the value of the 3% DHP spend that had not been taken up. This was agreed."

DECIDED:

- (a) That the Audit Scotland report on the impact of welfare reforms on council rent arrears in Scotland be noted;
- (b) That the rent arrears position reported for Renfrewshire Council and how this compared with the Scottish average be noted;
- (c) That the Board be provided with a breakdown of arrears, including what element was bedroom tax and how these were accommodated within the Discretionary Housing Payment system; and
- (d) That members be provided with a breakdown of how DHP was spent, in addition to details on the number of tenants who were eligible for but did not access DHP and, in relation to Appendix A to the Audit Scotland report, the value of the 3% DHP spend that had not been taken up.

3. INTERNAL AUDIT AND COUNTER-FRAUD PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE FOR PERIOD TO 31ST DECEMBER, 2014

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to internal audit and counter-fraud progress and performance for the period 1st October to 31st December, 2014 in terms of the delivery of the audit plan. The report compared the percentage of audit work completed against target, within time and the percentage of audit reports issued within three weeks of completion of audit field work. It was noted that, in all but one area performance was ahead of target. The report intimated that since approval of the 2014/15 audit plan, some of the planned audit work required to be cancelled or deferred and details of the proposed amendments were provided within the report.

The number of sanctions and level of overpayments identified by the Counter Fraud Team during the period were also detailed. The report also detailed progress against local and national initiatives involving Internal Audit and the Counter Fraud, including the National Fraud Initiative and the Scottish Local Authorities' Chief Internal Auditors Group (SLACIAG).

DECIDED:

- (a) That the proposed revisions to the 2014/15 audit plan be approved; and
- (b) That the report be otherwise noted.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Audrey Doig having declared an interest in relation to the following item of business, left the meeting.

4. SUMMARY OF INTERNAL AUDIT FINDINGS FOR PERIOD TO 31ST DECEMBER, 2014

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to the requirement, 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 1st October to 31st December, 2014.

The report intimated that, in addition to the reports listed in the appendix, Internal Audit had an ongoing commitment to arrange corporate and service initiatives, progress information security matters in partnership with ICT and Legal Services, provide regular advice to officers and 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 summary of audit findings, reported during the quarter 1st October to 31st December, 2014 be noted.

SEDERUNT

Councillor Audrey Doig returned to the meeting prior to consideration of the following item.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the Convener welcomed Ms Mary Logan to the meeting.

5 THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF A RENFREWSHIRE HOUSING LEASE/CONTRACT IN RELATION TO THE UPKEEP OF COUNCIL PROPERTY (LEAD OFFICER – DOROTHY BRIGGS)

(a) Upkeep of Common Areas within Council Housing Stock including Garden Areas

Under reference to item 11 of 239 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board held on 1st December, 2014, there was submitted a report by the Lead Officer relative to evidence from residents in connection with their own experiences and from local housing associations in connection with their experiences of maintaining common areas within their stock including garden areas. Housing Associations were, in addition, asked to provide answers to a series of questions posed and were also asked whether they would be willing to attend this meeting of the Board. A copy of the letter which was sent to Linstone, Williamsburgh, Ferguslie Park and Paisley South Housing Associations was appended to the report together with the response by Ferguslie Park Housing Association.

Ms Logan referred to her own experience of living within a high flat and difficulties she faced with some tenants refusing to clean communal areas, including landings, stairs and bin chutes, sharing of laundrette facilities, and problems with unlocked communal bins.

There followed a question and answer session at the end of which the Convener thanked Ms Logan for her contribution to the Board's review.

DECIDED: That the evidence be noted.

(b) Next Steps

It was proposed that for future meetings of the Board (i) representatives of tenants' and residents' associations be invited to give evidence; (ii) that evidence be obtained from Community Resources in relation to the upkeep of common landscaped areas, to the locking of communal bins, and in relation to private lets in flatted properties where the Council was a minority tenant; (iii) that further contact be made with Housing Associations in relation to their participation in the Board's review, including extending an invitation to future meetings; (iv) that a copy of the Council's tenancy/good neighbourhood agreements be provided to the Board and (v) that the number of tenants who had signed up to the model tenancy agreement be obtained. This was agreed.

DECIDED: That, for the next and future meetings, the Lead Officer make the necessary arrangements in relation to the next steps as agreed.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the Convener welcomed Ms Ellen Gallagher and Mr Ian Laurenson to the meeting. Ms Gallagher was there on behalf of Ms Park, the petitioner who had indicated that she was unable to attend the meeting.

6. PETITION – SANDY ROAD, RENFREW

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to a petition which had been received from Ms Park in the undernoted terms. It was noted that the petition had received around 150 signatures.

"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 some-one is killed or badly injured."

The Board then heard from Ms Gallagher and Mr Laurenson and from the Acting Head of Public Protection and the Traffic, Street Lighting & Asset Manager.

The report intimated that Sandy Road was a distributor road within a residential area; it was a bus route and provided access to Newmains and Renfrew Primary Schools and Tesco Supermarket, and it had traffic calming at the junctions identified in the petition. In addition zebra crossings were installed at these junctions to assist pedestrians. In the three-year period 2011/13, there had been one reported injury accident which was at the junction of Sandy Road and Broadloan and involved two vehicles. General issues were raised from time to time by Renfrew Community Council.

Councillor Sharkey, seconded by Councillor Grady, moved 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, if possible, to the next meeting of this Board to be held on 30th March, 2015.

Councillor McEwan, seconded by Councillor Nicolson, moved an amendment which, in terms of Standing Order 25, the Convener required be reduced to writing, in the following terms: "that the recommendation put forward by the Board re the petition heard on 16th February, 2015 be consideration of traffic lights at junction; pedestrian traffic control on zebra crossings; zebra crossing moved away from junctions of Newmains and Broadloan."

On the roll being called the following members voted for the amendment: Councillors McEwan, Audrey Doig, J MacLaren, and Nicolson

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

4 members having voted for the amendment and 4 members having voted for the motion, the convener used his second and casting vote in favour of the motion which was accordingly declared carried.

DECIDED: 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, if possible, to the next meeting of this Board to be held on 30th March, 2015.