

## Minute of Meeting Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board

Date	Time	Venue
Monday, 30 March 2015	10:00	CMR 1, Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1AN

### PRESENT

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

### CHAIR

Councillor Sharkey, Convener, presided.

### IN ATTENDANCE

R Hollywood, Corporate Policy & Performance Manager (Chief Executive's); K Anderson, Amenity Services Manager – Waste, Lead Officer, and D McNab, Transportation Manager (both Community Resources); E MacLean, 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, D Forbes, Finance Manager, E Shields, Operational Services Manager, and D Briggs, Senior Solicitor, Lead Officer (all Finance & Resources)

### APOLOGIES

Councillor Audrey Doig.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor McEwan declared an interest in item 9 of the agenda as she had signed the petition and indicated her intention not to take part in any discussion or voting thereon.

## 1 **AUDIT SCOTLAND REPORT - HOUSING BENEFIT SUBSIDY AUDIT 2013/14**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Audit Scotland Report "Review of auditors' housing benefit subsidy claim reported errors 2013/14" which was appended to the report. The report outlined the key messages from the Audit Scotland report and provided information on Renfrewshire Council's position relative to the issues raised. The report intimated that councils had a legal obligation to administer housing benefit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Councils reclaimed most of the housing benefit that they paid to claimants by submitting subsidy claims to the DWP and these were certified annually by the Council's appointed external auditor, Audit Scotland. The Council received a letter from Audit Scotland on 26th November 2014 which certified the Council's subsidy claim with no errors or qualifications.

**DECIDED:** That the Audit Scotland report "Review of auditors' housing benefit subsidy claim reported errors 2013/14" be noted.

## 2 **ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2015/16**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the Annual Internal Audit Plan 2015/16. The report intimated that, in line with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit standards, a risk-based internal audit plan for 2015/16 had been developed. The plan took account of the outcomes of the internal corporate and service risk identification and evaluation processes, and the current business environment. In addition to undertaking work which would provide assurance on the robustness of key internal controls, the plan sought to reflect the key priorities and challenges for the Council. The report detailed the methods that had been employed to facilitate the production of the plan and the influencing factors that had been considered.

**DECIDED:**

(a) That the risk-based audit plan for 2015/16 be approved; and

(b) That it be noted that progress on the 2015/16 annual audit and summaries of the findings from each audit assignment would be reported to the Board on a quarterly basis;

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

## 3 **AUDIT SCOTLAND ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN 2014/15**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to Audit Scotland's annual audit plan 2014/15 which was appended to the report. The plan outlined Audit Scotland's approach to the audit of the 2014/15 financial statements in order to assess whether they provided a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council and also whether they had been prepared in accordance with proper accounting practice.

The plan outlined the responsibilities of Audit Scotland and the Council, their assessment of key challenges and risks and the approach and timetable for completion of the audit.

**DECIDED:** That the Audit Scotland Annual Audit plan 2014/15 be noted.

4(a) **ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the annual review of the local Code of Corporate Governance.

The Council's local Code of Corporate Governance had come into effect on 1st April 2002 and was updated annually to incorporate required changes and improvements that had been made. The evidence provided in the appendix to the report demonstrated that strong governance arrangements were in place within the Council and that officers were working to lead and manage the Council in order to provide vital services. The Code reflected the increased importance placed by the Council on self assessment and activities involving greater scrutiny of services. It also linked to the best value criteria where governance and accountability were elements against which the Council was assessed.

**DECIDED:**

(i) That the Council's compliance with the local Code of Corporate Governance as set out in the appendix to the report be noted; and

(ii) That it be agreed that the local Code of Corporate Governance be reviewed again in 2016.

4(b) **COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

It was noted that the Director of Finance & Resources had responsibility for reporting annually to the Board in compliance with the Code and any changes to the Code that might be necessary to maintain it and ensure its effectiveness in practice. This report was considered at item 4(a) of this Minute.

In addition the Council's Chief Auditor had responsibility to review independently and report to the Board annually to provide assurance on the adequacy of the Code and the extent of the Council's compliance. The report intimated that Internal Audit had reviewed the Code and confirmed that the Council complied with its requirements and had endorsed that it was evident that the Code had been subject to review and updating. The Director of Finance & Resources had endorsed the Chief Auditor's recommendation that the local Code should continue to be subject to annual review to ensure that it continued to reflect developments and best practice in governance.

**DECIDED:** That the report be noted.

## **5 TRAINING FOR AUDIT, SCRUTINY AND PETITIONS BOARD MEMBERS**

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to training for Board members in line with national 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 on audit and risk related matters was provided to members of the Board. The current briefing related to the Council's annual accounts. The briefing provided an overview of the financial statements including key groups, single entity numerical statements, authority specific elements and group numerical statements. Also highlighted were statements relative to reserves, income and expenditure, including the net cost of services, surplus or deficit on the provision of services, balance sheets, including long term assets, current assets, current liabilities, net assets and total reserves.

**DECIDED:** That the briefing noted.

## **6 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2013/14**

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive relative to the annual complaints report 2013/14. The report intimated that the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 gave the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman the authority to lead the development of a model complaints handling process across the public sector. Councils were asked to implement the SPSO's recommendations from 1st March 2013 and full implementation of the Council's procedure was effective from 1st March, 2013. The key element of the policy was the requirement to monitor and log all complaints coming into the authority and use this information to drive service improvements. The report set out the stages of the complaints process and provided a summary of the numbers and types of complaints received, responded to within timescales, customer satisfaction monitoring and key complaint areas including what was being done to address issues raised.

**DECIDED:**

(a) That the report be noted; and

(b) That it be agreed that a quarterly report on complaints performance be submitted to the Board.

## **7 REVIEW OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TENANTS, ELECTED MEMBERS AND DEVELOPMENT & HOUSING SERVICES**

Under reference to item 12 of page 240 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 the Board's review of communication between tenants, elected members and Development & Housing Services. The report intimated that the purpose of the review had been to evaluate the factual situation between the Council and tenants awaiting repairs and to determine if there was scope for improvement and what this should be. The review would also explore opportunities to improve communication between the Council and those tenants to reduce elected member involvement with tenants and officers through the process of escalation of complaints. The report intimated that there was no empirical evidence that there was currently an issue with communication between tenants, elected members and housing services in relation to housing repairs.

## **DECIDED:**

(a) That it be noted that since the initial proposal for the review, which had first been suggested as part of the 2012/13 programme, housing services had undergone many strategic service improvements including significant customer focused improvements particularly in the use of new technology;

(b) That it be noted that following a request to all elected members to nominate individuals who could be asked to give evidence to the Board on their experience of the Council's housing repairs service, no tenants' names had been suggested and this might indicate that there was no longer a perception that there was an issue with communication between housing services and tenants relating to repairs;

(c) That it be noted that the service had been engaged in a significant planned investment programme of £138m for upgrading its stock to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by April 2015 and as such customer satisfaction levels would be improved due to an increase in property standards. The satisfaction level for repairs for Renfrewshire tenants was 6% better than the Scottish average with the 2013/14 satisfaction levels being 93.5% compared with the Scottish average of 87.6%; and

(d) That it be agreed that there was no empirical evidence to support the view that there was currently an issue with communications between tenants, elected members and housing services in relation to housing repairs.

Prior to consideration of the following item the Convener welcomed to the meeting M Dymond, Maxwellton Court Tenants & Residents Association, S McLean, Glenburn Residents & Tenants Association, H McCrystal, Provosts' Close Tenants & Residents Association and F Collie and A Hampton, Whitehaugh Residents & Tenants Association.

## **8 UPKEEP OF COMMON AREAS WITHIN COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK INCLUDING GARDEN AREAS**

Under reference to item 5 of page 364 of the Minute of the meeting of the Board held on 16th February, 2015 there was submitted a report by the lead officer relative to the Board's review of the terms and conditions of the Renfrewshire housing lease/contract in relation to the upkeep of council property.

The Board heard from the representatives of the tenants and residents associations attending the meeting in relation to their experience of difficulties faced by poor maintenance by tenants of gardens and common areas including stairs and landings

There followed a question and answer session at the end of which the Convener thanked Ms Dymond, Ms McLean, Mr McCrystal, Ms Collie and Ms Hampton, for their contribution to the Board's review.

It was proposed (a) that evidence be provided to a future meeting of the Board relative to River Clyde Homes' practices; (b) that the lead officer determine whether any action could be taken in terms of the private landlord registration scheme to ensure that private tenants maintained common areas and that details be submitted to a future meeting of the Board; and (c) that the lead officer determine whether there were other tenants and residents associations that had not been invited to provide evidence and that they be invited to a future meeting of the Board. This was agreed.

**DECIDED:**

- (a) That the evidence be noted;
- (b) That evidence be provided to a future meeting of the Board relative to River Clyde Homes' practices;
- (c) That the lead officer determine whether any action could be taken in terms of the private landlord registration scheme to ensure that private tenants maintained common areas and that details be submitted to a future meeting of the Board; and
- (d) That the lead officer determine whether there were other tenants and residents associations that had not been invited to provide evidence and that they be invited to a future meeting of the Board.

**DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

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

Prior to consideration of the following item the Convener welcomed to the meeting Ms Quigley and Mr Calder.

**9 PETITION: BUS STOP, RENFREW ROAD**

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

“To move the bus stop from outside of Trident House in the Renfrew Road because of danger 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 fatal accident occurs”.

The report intimated that the Head of Amenity Services had advised that the bus stop was 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. He advised that in terms of the road layout this was a very difficult area to find a suitable location for a bus stop and that 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.

The Board then heard from Ms Quigley, the principal petitioner and Mr Calder in relation to the petition and from the Transportation Manager. The Convener then gave Councillor McEwan as the local member the opportunity to address the Board.

It was proposed (a) that the petition be referred to the Director of Community Resources with the recommendation that a site visit be arranged, to be attended by members of the Board, a representative from SPT, relevant officers, the petitioner and supporter, and the remaining local member who was not a member of the Board, and (b) that consideration of the petition be continued to a future meeting of the Board. This was agreed.

**DECIDED:**

(a) That the petition be referred to the Director of Community Resources with the recommendation that a site visit be arranged, to be attended by members of the Board, a representative from SPT, relevant officers, the petitioner and supporter, and the remaining local member who was not a member of the Board, and

(b) That consideration of the petition be continued to a future meeting of the Board.