

To: Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board

On: 28 August 2017

Report by: Director of Finance & Resources

Heading: **AUDIT, RISK AND SCRUTINY BOARD - ANNUAL PROGRAMME - 2017/18**

1. Summary

- 1.1 In terms of the guidelines for its operation, the Audit, Risk & Scrutiny Board prepares an annual programme which may include consideration of routine reports, as well as areas of specific investigation. A lead officer is appointed by the Chief Executive for each investigation.
- 1.2 Each year it has been the practice that members of the Board are asked to suggest topics for investigation and to provide information in relation to why the investigation should be undertaken and the anticipated outcome. A report is thereafter submitted to the Board outlining the suggestions received in order that the Board can agree its annual programme. To date members have not been asked to identify areas for investigation for the 2017/18 programme.
- 1.3 This report highlights the issues in terms of the number of reviews the Board can reasonably undertake and makes recommendations in relation to the outstanding reviews.
- 1.4 The former Audit, Scrutiny & Petitions Board agreed to undertake two investigations as part of its 2016/17 annual programme and also agreed a reserve item. These topics had been continued from the Board's 2015/16 annual programme. Neither of these two investigations started in 2016/17, and have been continued into this year's programme. The reserve item is referred to at paragraph 3.4 below and again did not start during the previous year's programme.
- Fly tipping in the countryside and known fly tipping spots
 - Housing repairs by the Council and outside contractors
 - Japanese knotweed in our landscapes and gardens (reserve)

- 1.5 The former Board also agreed to recommend for consideration by this Board a further five investigations as follows:
- Listing of Council Tax exemptions and reductions available to residents when issuing council tax notices.
 - Bus deregulation and its effect on transport services in Renfrewshire
 - The newly-introduced speed limit in Brookfield (A761)
 - Maintenance of multi-occupancy accommodation
 - The effectiveness of Fair Trade
- 1.6 It is proposed that these investigations are not taken forward in the current year but are addressed as detailed in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of this report. Realistically no more than two investigations can be undertaken within the Board's annual cycle of five/six meetings.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That consideration is given to the 2017/18 programme comprising only those investigations continued from the 2016/17 annual programme namely:
- Fly tipping in the countryside and known fly tipping spots; and
 - Housing repairs by Council and outside contractors; and that this is the order of priority in which they are undertaken;
- 2.2 That it be agreed that in relation to the reserve topic of Japanese knotweed in our gardens and landscapes a full investigation is not required but that a report be included in the programme as detailed in paragraph 3.4 below;
- 2.3 That it be agreed that in relation to the proposed topic of Council Tax exemptions that a full investigation is not required but that a report be included in the programme as detailed in paragraph 3.6 below;
- 2.4 That, given the amount of business before the Board, it be agreed that the remaining four investigations submitted for consideration by the previous Board be not taken forward at this time but be continued for consideration by the Board either as reserve items in this programme or as part of the 2018/19 programme, namely:
- Bus deregulation and its effect on transport services in Renfrewshire;
 - The newly-introduced speed limit in Brookfield (A761);
 - Maintenance of multi-occupancy accommodation; and
 - The effectiveness of Fair Trade.
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3. Background

- 3.1 The guidelines for the Board's operation suggest that in relation to (a) scrutiny of service delivery and performance and (b) monitoring and reviewing service delivery, performance, policies and practices, the Board may select particular areas for investigation as part of its annual programme, thereafter making recommendations to the Council. In relation to the Council's role in community leadership, the guidelines recognise that this is not clear cut and requires to be considered carefully to ensure

that the respective functions and responsibilities of other public bodies are not compromised but that the Board allows the Council to provide a forum for an informed public debate on these issues.

3.2 Where the Board has agreed to conduct investigations, generally each topic is scheduled to be considered over at least five meetings but this is dependent upon the availability of witnesses and whether the Board wishes to hear further evidence. The Board previously agreed that, given the level of business before it, there be no more than two investigations on an agenda to allow sufficient consideration to be given to each and to prevent meetings continuing into the afternoon. Realistically no more than two investigations can be undertaken within the Board's annual cycle of five/six meetings, although additional meetings can be held in terms of the Council's procedural standing orders.

3.3 The following investigations were agreed in both the 2015/16 and 2016/17 annual programmes but have not progressed:

- Fly tipping in the countryside and known fly tipping spots
- Housing repairs by Council and outside contractors

Accordingly, rather than members suggesting additional topics for investigation, it is proposed that the 2017/18 programme comprise only these two continued investigations

3.4 The former Board also agreed that there be a reserve investigation as part of its 2016/17 programme - the infestation of Japanese knotweed in our landscapes and gardens. A number of reasons for the investigation were provided, including damage to Council and private properties if left untreated, and costs to the Council. The expected outcomes of the review were suggested as: the Council working more closely with SEPA, SNH and the Forestry Commission to inform whenever an occurrence of this weed is reported; Council offering advice to residents and private landowners on how best to eradicate it; providing a list of specialist Japanese knotweed contractors; identifying any occurrence of this weed and have a strategy of removal; enforcement measures to force others to control this weed; introducing a separate waste stream at amenity sites for disposal of contaminated earth. However, it is considered that there is insufficient depth in this topic for a full investigation and that a report would give members of the Board the opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions, but would not use up a significant amount of their time.

3.5 Five topics were proposed by members for consideration in the former Board's 2016/17 annual programme which were not taken forward, see below. The former Board agreed to recommend to this Board that these topics be considered as part of its 2017/18 annual programme,

- Bus deregulation and its effect on transport services in Renfrewshire;
- The newly-introduced speed limit in Brookfield (A761);
- Maintenance of multi-occupancy accommodation; and
- The effectiveness of Fair Trade.
- Listing of Council Tax exemptions

3.6 In relation to the proposal that as the Council does not list all Council Tax exemptions and reductions available to residents when issuing Council Tax notices a review be undertaken because a number of exemptions are not known or readily available. For example, many carers are not aware of possible exemptions and can end up paying many years of tax which is not refundable by back dated application, before they are

told about any possible exemption. However, as this proposal is much more to do with information available for Council Tax payers than a review of how a process or administration arrangement operates, it is unlikely to have sufficient depth to merit an investigation and it is suggested that a report would be more helpful as it would allow officers to outline how Council Tax payers are made aware of the Council Tax scheme as a whole, including exemptions and discounts and also highlight the new ways of providing customers with information, including the new customer portal. The report option would allow members of the Board the opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions, but would not use up a significant amount of Members' time. Also, as the application of discounts and exemptions is based on legislation (with limited discretion in some areas) the scope to make changes is limited.

3.7 It is suggested that the remaining four investigations proposed by the former Board for consideration by this Board be not taken forward at this time but be continued for consideration either as reserve items or as part of the 2018/19 programme, namely:

- Bus deregulation and its effect on transport services in Renfrewshire
- The newly-introduced speed limit in Brookfield (A761)
- Maintenance of multi-occupancy accommodation
- The effectiveness of Fair Trade

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – none
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community Planning** – none
4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets** – none
6. **Information Technology** – none

7. Equality & Human Rights

- (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety** – none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **Cosla Policy Position** – not applicable

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