

## Minute of Meeting

### Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board

Date	Time	Venue
Monday, 21 March 2022	10:00	Remotely via Microsoft Teams,

**Present:** Councillor Tom Begg, Councillor Bill Binks, Councillor Stephen Burns, Councillor Michelle Campbell, Councillor John Hood, Councillor Jim Sharkey, Councillor Jane Strang

### Chair

Councillor Bill Binks, Convener, presided.

### In Attendance

S Quinn, Director of Children's Services; L McIntyre, Head of Policy & Commissioning, L Fingland, Service Planning & Policy Development Manager and D Christie, Senior Communications Officer (all Chief Executive's); F Carlin, Head of Housing Services, C Dalrymple, Communities & Regulatory Manager, K Waters, Programme Manager & Lead Officer and J Mackie, Placement Team Leader and Lead Officer, (all Communities & Housing Services); G Hutton, Head of Operations & Infrastructure, and G Hannah, Strategic Change Manager, (both Environment & Infrastructure); M Boyd, Head of People & Organisational Development, C McCourt, Acting Head of Finance & Business Services, K Campbell, Assistant Chief Auditor, G Innes, Customer Services Manager, D Pole, End User Technician, and E Gray, P Shiach and C MacDonald, all Senior Committee Services Officers, and D Cunningham, Assistant Committee Services Officer (all Finance & Resources), and F Naylor, Head of Finance & Corporate Services (OneRen).

### Also in Attendance

J Cornett, Audit Director and M Ferris, Senior Audit Manager, (both Audit Scotland).

### Recording

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Convener intimated that this meeting of the Board would be webcast live and would be available to view on the Council's website.

## **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Sharkey declared an interest in respect of Item 9 - Review of Bus Deregulation and Effect on Transport Services in Renfrewshire - as he was currently in dispute with McGill's Bus Company and intimated that it was his intention to remain in the meeting and to take part in any discussion or voting thereon.

Councillor Hood declared an interest in respect of Item 9 - Review of Bus Deregulation and Effect on Transport Services in Renfrewshire - as he was currently in dispute with McGill's Bus Company and intimated that it was his intention to remain in the meeting and to take part in any discussion or voting thereon.

### **1 Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Progress and Performance for Period to 30 December 2021**

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to Internal Audit and Counter Fraud performance between 1 April and 30 December 2021 in terms of the delivery of the Audit Plan for the year and outlining actual performance against targets set by the Director of Finance & Resources.

No formal performance targets for fraud investigation had been established as a major part of the team's work involved being the single point of contact for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Single Fraud Investigation Service and the Service Level Agreement for the work contained time targets for completing this work. It was noted that the focus over the last year had been on increasing fraud awareness amongst employees to prevent fraud from occurring against the Council. The types of fraud referrals received to date were wide-ranging and the team's objective was to concentrate on investigating those referrals considered to contain the greatest fraud risk.

The report also detailed the progress made against local and national initiatives involving Internal Audit and the Counter Fraud Team in the period.

The report advised that as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic joint working with the DWP's Single Fraud Investigation Service had ceased. However, during this quarter some of their fraud investigators had now recommenced fraud duties and had been in contact regarding ongoing cases. It was noted that the Counter Fraud Team were still currently working from home and only any essential site/home visits were being undertaken. The Internal Audit team were also working from home for the majority of the time and going into the office when required. Any site visits which were required to fulfil audit reviews were also now being undertaken. The Team also provided advice and support where necessary to Council services.

**DECIDED:** That the Internal Audit and Counter Fraud Team progress and performance from 1 April to 31 December 2021 be noted.

## 2 **Audit Scotland Annual Audit Plan 2021/22**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to Audit Scotland's Annual Audit Plan 2021/22, a copy of which was appended to the report.

The report intimated that the audit plan outlined Audit Scotland's approach to the audit of the 2021/22 financial statements of the Council and the charities it controlled 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.

J Cornett, Audit Director, Audit Scotland advised that typographical errors had been made on page 5 of the Appendix at Exhibit 1. Planning materiality should have read £8.7 million and the Performance materiality should have read £5.7 million.

**DECIDED:** That the report and Audit Scotland's Annual Audit Plan 2021/22 be noted.

## 3 **Local Government in Scotland Financial Overview 2020/21**

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to Audit Scotland's Local Government in Scotland – Financial Overview 2020/21, a copy of which was appended to the report.

The report indicated that Audit Scotland, as appointed external auditors, had provided a high-level independent analysis of the financial performance of councils during 2020/21 and their financial position at the end of that year. It also looked ahead and commented on the financial outlook for councils in the medium and longer terms.

The key findings of Audit Scotland were highlighted within the report and the key messages, alongside the associated Renfrewshire position, were attached for information at Appendix 1.

**DECIDED:** That the contents of the report and the appendices be noted.

## 4 **Internal Audit Review of Compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance**

There was submitted a report by the Chief Auditor relative to Internal Audit's review of the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance (the Code) which was based on the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework": The Framework set the standard for local authority governance in the UK and was revised by CIPFA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) in 2016 to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

The report advised that Internal Audit had reviewed the adequacy and effectiveness of the revised Code and confirmed that the Council complied with the requirements of the Local Code of Corporate Governance.

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

## 5 **Annual Review of Compliance with the Local Code of Corporate Governance 2021**

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive relative to the annual review of the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance (the Code) which was based on the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: The Framework which set the standard for local authority governance in the UK and which was revised by CIPFA and SOLACE in 2016 to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

Evidence of how the Council complied with the updated Code was attached as an appendix to the report. It was noted that the evidence presented in the appendix reflected the impact of Covid-19, demonstrated that strong governance arrangements had remained in place within the Council, and the Councillors and Officers worked together to lead and manage the Council in order to provide vital public services.

**DECIDED:** That the Council's compliance with the Local Code of Corporate Governance as set out in the appendix to the report be noted.

## 6 **Local Government Benchmarking Framework – 2020/21 Report**

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive relative to the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) performance data for all Scottish local authorities.

The report advised that the Framework was a high-level benchmarking tool which allowed local authorities to compare their performance across a wide range of key service areas such as education, housing, and adult social care.

The Council had participated in the development of the LGBF since its inception in 2010, with the Framework now expanded to 101 indicators. The purpose of the Framework was to support evidence-based comparisons and encourage shared learning and improvement.

The report provided an overview of Renfrewshire's performance for 2020/21, and outlined the wider context and trends for local authorities across Scotland. This data reflected the first year of the pandemic, including the initial national lockdown, and most service areas in local authorities were impacted by this. This may have been due to services being paused, or resources being temporarily focused on supporting residents through direct activities such as delivering food parcels or administering business grants. It was important that performance, both absolute and relative, was considered in this context. The duration of the pandemic meant that the impact would be evident in data for 2021/22 and beyond.

The report also detailed information relating to the performance of similar councils which had been placed into a 'family group' with Renfrewshire Council and further context on performance across the broad service areas was contained in the appendix to the report.

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

## **Sederunt**

Councillor Burns left the meeting during consideration of the following item of business.

### **7 Blue Badge Process Review – Progress Update**

Under reference to Item 13 – Notice of Motion 4 of the meeting of the Council held on 30 September 2021, there was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to the motion concerning Blue Badge Qualifications.

Four main areas of concern were highlighted within the report: eligibility criteria; applications for unseen illnesses; automatic refusal of badges; and the online application process.

The report advised that a recent end-to-end review had highlighted several process improvements which the Council could make to ensure the Blue Badge application process was clearer, and more customer focussed. The changes were currently being progressed by the Customer Development and Technology teams.

It was noted that the review into Blue Badge processes would continue, with the team planning to make improvements to the current, paper-based, application process for unseen illnesses. This would aim to make the process available online and over the telephone, greatly improving the customer experience and reducing the time it would take for customers to complete an application.

Councillor Binks, seconded by Councillor Begg, moved:

(a) That the limitations placed on the Council to alter the eligibility criteria for Blue Badges be noted;

(b) That the use of a national application form supported by the gov.uk platform which the Council was unable to change be noted; and

(c) That the additional work being carried out as a result of the review to provide a more efficient and customer-focussed application process be noted.

Councillor Sharkey seconded by Councillor Hood, moved as an amendment that the word "note" within paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 be changed to "condemn".

On the roll being called, the following members voted for the amendment: Councillors Sharkey and Hood.

The following members voted for the motion: Councillors Begg, Binks, Campbell and Strang.

Four members having voted for the motion and two members having voted for the amendment, the motion was accordingly declared carried.

**DECIDED:**

(a) That the limitations placed on the Council to alter the eligibility criteria for Blue Badges be noted;

(b) That the use of a national application form supported by the gov.uk platform which the Council was unable to change be noted; and

(c) That the additional work being carried out as a result of the review to provide a more efficient and customer-focussed application process be noted.

**8 Linking the National Cycle Route 7 with Howwood - Lead Officer Kevin Waters**

Under reference to Item 7 – Audit, Risk & Scrutiny Annual Programme 2021/22 – Request for Review of the Minute of the meeting of this Board held on 15 November 2020, there was submitted a report by the Lead Officer relative to the proposed purpose, scope and terms of reference and witnesses to be called for the review of linking the National Cycle Route 7 with Howwood.

The report detailed an update on progress of the review since the meeting of this Board held on 24 January 2022.

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

**Declaration of Interest**

Councillors Hood and Sharkey, having previously declared an interest in the following item of business remained in the meeting.

**9 Review of Bus Deregulation and Effect on Transport Services in Renfrewshire - Lead Officer Jamie Mackie**

Under reference to Item 8 - Bus Deregulation and the Effect on Transport Services in Renfrewshire - of the Minute of the meeting of this Board held on 24 August 2020, there was submitted a report by the Lead Officer relative to the review of bus deregulation and the effect on transport services in Renfrewshire.

The report detailed the findings and overall conclusions and a copy of the report to be submitted to Council on 28 April 2022 was attached as an appendix to the report.

Councillor Sharkey, seconded by Councillor Hood, moved as an addition:

Amend 6.5 (v) page 194 of the report to read: "Commit, in partnership with SPT to using all of the regulatory power within the Transport (Scotland Act 2019) to prioritize municipal operation."

This was agreed unanimously.

**DECIDED:** That the review outcomes and recommendations be noted.