

THE MORAY COUNCIL

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2008

COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN

PRESENT

Councillors G McDonald (Chairman), G Coull, J Cree, J Hogg, B Jarvis, F Murdoch, P Paul, D Ross, M Shand, R Shepherd, I Young and G McIntyre (Ex-officio)

IN ATTENDANCE

The Director of Community Services, the Director of Educational Services, the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Legal Officer, the Head of Development Services, the Head of Direct Services, the Chief Housing Officer, the Head of Community Care, the Head of Children & Families & Criminal Justice, the Head of Educational Development Services, the Team Leader Internal Audit, the Corporate Policy Unit Manager and the Principal Committee Services Officer, Clerk to the Meeting.

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors L Bell (Chairman (Remit 2) Education and Social Services Committee), Councillor J Hamilton (Chairman (Remit 1) Educational and Social Services Committee), Councillor A Wright (Chairman (Remit 1) Environmental Services Committee and (Chairman (Remit 1) Policy Committee), Councillor J Russell (Chairman (Remit 2) Environmental Services Committee), Councillor McGillivray (Chairman (Remit 2) Policy Committee).

APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Councillor J MacKay.

1. DECLARATION OF GROUP DECISIONS:-

In terms of the relevant Standing Order 20 and the Councillor's Code of Conduct the meeting noted that there were no declarations from Group Leaders or spokespersons in regard to any prior decisions taken on how members will vote on any item on the agenda.

2. EDUCATIONAL SERVICES – CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ON SERVICE PERFORMANCE

There was submitted the Chairman's report on service performance for Educational Services covering key performance indicators for the third reporting period between 1 October 2007 and December 2007.

During discussion, the Chairman sought clarification regarding a recent news report, which stated that children with special needs made up a large part of the exclusions figures and asked if this was a similar picture in Moray as it is in the rest of the UK. In response the Director of Educational Services advised that he was unaware of this but would investigate the matter and report back.

In regard to Indicator 2 relating to the increase in the uptake of free school meals, the Chairman commended the Department on this.

Following further discussion Councillor Young asked whether it would be possible to see numbers rather than percentage figures relating to targets, the Head of Educational Development Services advised that he would provide the numbers to Councillor Young.

Thereafter the Committee noted the report.

3. COMMUNITY CARE – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT ON SERVICE PERFORMANCE

There was submitted the Chairman’s reports on service performance for Community Care covering key performance indicators for the third reporting period between 1 October 2007 and December 2007.

During discussion Councillor Coull commented on the lack of information contained within the report relating to the Occupational Therapy and stated that he was of the opinion that if the information sought had been included within the report there would have been no need for Members to raise questions at the Committee.

In response to Councillor Young’s query regarding the appointment of a Contracts Officer, the Director of Community Services advised that an appointment had been made and the officer would be in post next month. He further advised that the Education and Social Services Committee have approved a further contracts officer post and recruitment will commence shortly.

In response to the Chairman’s query regarding how long would it be before this Committee would be provided with accurate information in regard to the Carefirst IT System, the Director of Community Services advised that it would take approximately 4 – 6 months.

The Meeting also noted Councillor Cree’s comments, regarding the use of percentages and that whilst he was mindful of the request not to overload reports with detail, he stated that it would be helpful if more detailed information could be included within the reports.

Thereafter the Meeting noted the report.

4. CHILDREN, FAMILIES & CRIMINAL JUSTICE – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT ON SERVICE PERFORMANCE

There was submitted the Chairman’s reports on service performance for Children, Families & Criminal Justice covering key performance indicators for the third reporting period between 1 October 2007 and December 2007.

Following discussion Members queried the lack of provision of information from Moray Carers and sought clarification on what guidance was available to local authorities in regard to Service Level Agreements. In response the Chief Legal Officer advised that most of the guidance comes from bodies such as Audit Scotland and a number of other professional bodies such as CIPFA and that the Council follows this advice as best as it can in the circumstances. He further stated that what has changed in terms of service delivery in his opinion is that many of the existing Agreements are of a number of years standing and were entered into at the time as more of a partnership arrangement and the Council is now moving to more of a contractual relationship. Where the providers see themselves as ‘partners’ they are now being treated as ‘contractors’ and this is where some of the tensions arise. He further advised that officers are working on this and information will be reported back to Members as the process is worked through.

Following further discussion, Councillor Coull sought an assurance that those indicators highlighted as ‘amber’ would not only be closely monitored but that action would be taken as they equate to 50% of the performance indicators.

Thereafter the Committee noted the report.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT ON SERVICE PERFORMANCE

There was submitted the Chairman’s reports on service performance for Environmental Services covering key performance indicators for the third reporting period between 1 October 2007 and December 2007.

During discussion the Meeting noted the staffing difficulties being faced within Environmental Services and the authority as a whole and noted the Chief Legal Officers comments regarding the steps being taken by Personnel Services in looking at the issue.

The Meeting joined the Chairman in commending the work being undertaken by the staff in the current circumstances.

The Meeting agreed that in regard to the processing of planning applications and building warrants the Head of Development Services look to make the acceptance criteria of applications being submitted by applicants and agents more robust.

Thereafter the Meeting noted the report.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S OFFICE – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT ON SERVICE PERFORMANCE

There was submitted the Chairman’s reports on service performance for Chief Executive’s Office covering key performance indicators for the third reporting period between 1 October 2007 and December 2007.

Following discussion the Meeting agreed to allow a longer period of data collection in respect of Indicator 3 ‘Freedom of Information Requests’ relating to the percentage acknowledged within three working days to accurately gauge service performance.

7. CENTRAL SERVICES (COMMITTEE, ESTATES, LEGAL, PERSONNEL & REGISTRARS) – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT ON SERVICE

There was submitted and noted the Chairman’s reports on service performance for Central Services (Committee, Estates, Legal, Personnel & Registrars) covering key performance indicators for the third reporting period between 1 October 2007 and December 2007.

8. FINANCE & ICT SERVICES – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT ON SERVICE PERFORMANCE

There was submitted and noted the Chairman’s reports on service performance for Finance & ICT Services covering key performance indicators for the third reporting period between 1 October 2007 and December 2007.

9. HOUSING SERVICES – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT ON SERVICE PERFORMANCE

There was submitted and noted the Chairman’s reports on service performance for Housing Services covering key performance indicators for the third reporting period between 1 October 2007 and December 2007.

10. AUDIT SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Educational Services to highlight areas of the Moray Council Performance that have been ranked within the bottom quartile of all Scottish Councils, and to provide an explanation of how this performance can be improved.

Following consideration the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to approve the areas for improvement as identified by the service;
- (ii) that the Director of Educational Services would investigate the origin of the statement referring to the Moray Leisure Centre as being one of the busiest in the UK per head of population;
- (iii) that 3 years figures be included for comparison in future reports, and
- (iv) in response to comments made by Members regarding the usage of other council facilities that in terms of future reporting this information would be included.

11. AUDIT SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – COMMUNITY SERVICES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Community Services highlighting areas of the Moray Council performance that have been ranked within the bottom quartile of all Scottish Councils, and to provide an explanation of how this performance can be improved.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to approve the areas for improvement as identified by the service.

In response to the Chairman's query regarding the apparent lack of progress relating to Residential Accommodation, the Head of Community Care stated that she would wish to check the accuracy of the figures and further stated that the service was actively working on issues albeit the report may not reflect this.

Following further discussion the Committee agreed that all future reports should be dated at the time of writing

12. AUDIT SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Environmental Services highlighting areas of the Moray Council performance that have been ranked within the bottom quartile of all Scottish Councils, and to provide an explanation of how this performance can be improved.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to approve the areas for improvement as identified by the service and that the Head of Direct Services revisit the figures relating to disposal of waste to landfill.

13. AUDIT SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – CENTRAL SERVICES

There was submitted a report by the Director of Central Services highlighting areas of the Moray Council performance that have been ranked within the bottom quartile of all Scottish Councils, and to provide an explanation of how this performance can be improved.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to approve the areas for improvement as identified by the service.

It was further agreed that the Chief Legal Officer raise with the Chief Executive the suggestion made by Members that the Audit Scotland Performance Indicator Reports be combined into one single covering report with each of the Service Areas being attached as appendices which will be signed by the relevant Director.

14. AUDIT SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – FINANCE & ICT

There was submitted a report by the Chief Financial Officer highlighting areas of the Moray Council performance that have been ranked within the bottom quartile of all Scottish Councils, and to provide an explanation of how this performance can be improved.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to approve the areas for improvement as identified by the service and that the Chief Financial Officer is to provide a schedule of overall costs per housing benefit or council tax benefit application relevant to other rural authorities.

15. REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE INTERNAL AUDIT SECTION IN THE PERIOD FROM 1ST OCTOBER 2007 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2007

There was submitted a report by the Chief Financial Officer advising of the work of the Audit section for the period 1st October 2007 to 31st December 2007.

During discussion of the report the Chairman highlighted that a further workshop session for Members of this Committee covering audit principles, governance, risk management and Members' responsibilities in this regard was due to be held and encouraged all Members of this Committee to attend.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to note the report.

16. PROGRESS AGAINST ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN

There was submitted a report by the Chief Financial Officer advising on the progress made against the annual Audit Plan for the nine-month period to 31st December 2007.

Following discussion, the Chairman asked whether the service will be able to catch up in regard to the agreed plan, and in response Mr Scott stated that this would be unlikely before the end of this financial year on 31 March 2008 but that a report will be brought to the next meeting of this Committee as part of the annual planning process which will indicate where he sees the priorities.

Following further discussion, Councillor Cree raised his concern relating to the follow up work of all audit reports and in response Mr Scott, assured the Meeting that this work would be carried out but that due to staffing shortages it would not be done as timeously as it normally would.

Thereafter the Committee noted the progress made towards completion of the approved annual audit plan during the nine-month period to 31st December 2007, and the actions being taken to ensure the performance monitoring framework is improved for the 2008/09 financial year.

17. QUESTION TIME

Councillor Cree, having heard the various pleas during the meeting regarding the staffing shortages currently being experienced, re-iterated the call for a report to be provided on why staff are leaving the employment of the Council. It was agreed that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee.

In response to Councillor Jarvis' query regarding an update on the Employee Benefit Scheme it was agreed that a report would be submitted to the Policy Committee.