

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE PANEL.

Minutes of a hybrid webcast meeting on 4 October 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

Present in
County Hall: Councillors Julie Dettbarn (Chair), Mary Kilpatrick, Brian McGinley, Gavin Scott and George Weir.

Present
Remotely: Councillors Chris Cullen and Cameron Ramsay.

Apology: Councillor Kenneth Bell.

Attending in
County Hall: E. Howat, Chief Executive; M. Newall, Depute Chief Executive and Director of Housing, Operations and Development; J. Bradley, Director of Strategic Change and Communities; T. Baulk, Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement; W. Carlaw, Service Lead – Democratic Governance; K. Anderson, Service Lead – Policy, Performance and Community Planning; C. McGhee, Chief Internal Auditor; A Gibson, Committee Services Officer; and E. Moore, Clerical Assistant.

Opening Remarks.

The Chair

- (1) welcomed everyone to the meeting; and
- (2) outlined the procedures for conducting this meeting and advised that this meeting would be broadcast live.

1. Sederunt and Declarations of Interest.

The Chair called the Sederunt for the meeting and, having called the roll, confirmed that there were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of Council Standing Order No. 17 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

2. Call-ins from Cabinet.

The Panel noted that there were no call-ins from Cabinet of 26 September 2023.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting.

The Minutes of the meeting of 6 September 2023 ([issued](#)) were submitted and approved.

4. Action Log and Work Programme.

There was submitted an update of the Action Log and Work Programme for this Panel ([issued](#)).

Having heard the Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement in explanation and a Member of the Panel intimate that it was helpful that the Work Programme was laid out in a manner to show the items that would be considered in the forthcoming year, the Panel

Decided: to note the current status of the Action Log and Work Programme.

External Audit Reports.

5. Accounts Commission Annual Report 2022/23.

There was submitted a report ([issued](#)) of 20 September 2023 by the Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement advising of the Accounts Commission Annual Report 2022/23.

In relation to paragraph 3.2.3 of the report and having heard a Member of the Panel ask to what extent other Councils Annual Audit reports were useful to this Council, the Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement advised that they were very useful in identifying learning opportunities from reports on other councils. The Chief Executive advised that this Council's Best Value report would be presented to the Accounts Commission on 12 October 2023 and reiterated the previous comment that it was indeed helpful to look at other Council's Audit reports.

A Member of the Panel advised that the Accounts Commission Annual report was a helpful report and as it was easy to read, asked if the layout of this report could be adopted by this Council in their presentation of financial reports. The Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement advised that he would consider this suggestion.

Having heard a Member of the Panel enquire if officers could dissect national reports and report matters which were relevant to this Panel, the Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement advised that this was already undertaken and is included in the contents section of the covering report for each national report presented.

The Chief Executive advised that Audit Scotland were always willing to discuss with Members the contents of their reports.

Having considered the findings outlined in the Accounts Commission Annual Report 2022/23, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, the Panel

Decided: to note the contents of the report.

6. **Audit Scotland: Fraud and Irregularity 2022/23.**

There was submitted a report ([issued](#)) of 20 September 2023 by the Head of Finance, ICT and Procurement advising of the Audit Scotland report "Fraud and Irregularity 2022/23".

Following a question from a member of the Panel, it was noted that the report published by Audit Scotland entitled "Fraud and Irregularity 2022/23" covered all local authorities in Scotland.

A Member of the Panel asked where this Council's Fraud Team were in relation to Audit Scotland's recommendations and the Head of Finance, IT and Procurement advised that while the Chief Internal Auditor would review the recommendations, he could not answer on her behalf.

Following a question from a Member of the Panel, it was noted that all fraud was taken seriously by this Council but each case had to be looked at on its merits.

Having considered the findings outlined in the Audit Scotland Report 'Fraud and Irregularity 2022/23', attached as Appendix 1 to the report, the Panel

Decided: to note the contents of the report.

7. **Audit Scotland: Local Government in Scotland Overview 2023.**

There was submitted a report ([issued](#)) of 20 September 2023 by the Director of Strategic Change and Communities advising of the findings from the Audit Scotland Local Government Overview Report 2023.

A Member of the Panel advised that a Members' Briefing would be helpful in relation to this subject matter and the Service Lead – Policy, Performance and Community Planning advised that this was currently being considered and this would allow Audit Scotland to attend and talk around their expectations of Members around Best Value.

Having heard a Member of the Panel raise the five key messages, as detailed within the report, and ask questions relating to each particular message, various officers responded.

Having heard a Member of the Panel raise the matter of digital exclusion, it was noted that although work was being carried out in this area, more work was required.

The Panel, having considered the findings outlined in the Audit Scotland report 'Local Government in Scotland Overview 2023', attached as Appendix 1 to the report; and having considered Supplement 2 (Questions/Checklist for Elected Members), as highlighted in paragraph 4.6 of the report, the Panel

Decided: to note the contents of the report.

8. **Best Value Action Plan 2023.**

There was submitted a report ([issued](#)) of 20 September 2023 by the Director of Strategic Change and Communities seeking approval for an expanded Best Value Action Plan.

A Member of the Panel raised the issue of making performance reports more accessible to the public. The Service Lead – Policy, Performance and Community Planning advised that these reports were already made available online to allow scrutiny of performance and progress on accessibility would continue to be made.

Following a Member of the Panel asking when results would begin to be seen, the Service Lead – Policy, Performance and Community Planning advised that a definitive date could not be given but changes would begin to be seen shortly and that this would be an ongoing process. It was also noted that reporting would be more focussed on performance rather than narrative of what was happening.

Having heard a Member of the Panel raise if there was a requirement for this Panel to consider Key Performance Indicators, the Service Lead – Policy, Performance and Community Planning advised that he would raise the matter at the Executive Leadership Team.

Having considered the response to the comments made by the Audit and Governance Panel in June 2023, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report, the Panel

Decided: to agree the augmented action plan, noting the additional improvement activity identified through the Best Value Thematic Work in South Ayrshire Council 2022/23 report.

9. **Concluding Remarks.**

Having noted that this was the last meeting of this Panel that the Chief Executive would attend prior to her retirement, the Chair thanked her for the work she had done relating to this Panel over the years. The Chief Executive responded in suitable terms.

The meeting ended at 10.45 a.m.