ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL - 27 JUNE 2013
SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

1 Recommendations

1.1 Council is recommended to formally consider the annual report of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee.

2 Background / Discussion

2.1 At Council on 30 June, 2011, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee’s investigation report No. 19, “Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee” was considered. Amongst its recommendations, approved by Council, was one that an annual report be prepared to inform members of the work of the Committee. This is the second such report, presented in an updated format, intended to be viewed primarily online. A black and white copy is attached as an appendix to this report; the online version, which will be available in the Ward Pages Library, is in full colour.

2.2 The first annual report was considered and approved at the meeting of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee of 28 March, 2012 and formally acknowledged and endorsed by Council on 26 April, 2012.

2.3 The 2013 draft report was considered by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee on 16 May, 2013, with powers delegated to the Chair and Vice-Chair to approve it in a finalised format.

2.4 The Head of Finance and the Monitoring Officer within Corporate Services have been consulted on this report and had no comments to make.

3 Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications

3.1 An equalities impact is not required because this report records the work of the Committee since May 2012, and does not impact on any of the protected groups. Any further actions or recommendations which might impact on these groups in terms of service delivery will have been considered by officers and reported to the relevant Policy Committee.

3.2 This report has no adverse staffing or financial implications. It supports the Council’s policy to have an effective scrutiny and audit function, makes the work of the Committee more transparent and will help make the Committee’s work more sustainable.

Christine Gore
Director of Corporate Service

Report author: Jan McRobbie, Support Officer (Scrutiny and Audit)
SAC/A 3 June, 2013
Members of the Committee

Cllr Gillian Owen, (Chairman)
Cllr Richard Thomson, (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Nan Cullinane
Cllr Sandy Duncan
Cllr Katrina Farquhar
Cllr Jim Ingram
Cllr John Latham
Cllr Stuart Pratt
Cllr Alastair Ross
Cllr Cryle Shand
Cllr Ian Tait
Cllr Michael Watt

Scrutiny and Audit Officers

Christine Gore   Tel: 01224 665510
Director of Corporate Services
Email christine.gore@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

David Hughes   Tel: 01224 664184
Chief internal Auditor
Email david.hughes@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Victoria McCaskill   Tel: 01224 665103
Committee Officer
Email Victoria.mccaskill@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Martin Ingram   Tel: 01224 665142
Principal Solicitor, (Legal Monitor)
Email martin.ingram@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Alex Stephen   Tel: 01224 664230
Corporate Finance Manager (Section 94 Officer)
Email alex.stephen@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Jan McRobbie   Tel: 01224 664617
Support Officer, Scrutiny and Audit
Email jan.mcrobbie@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Fiona Tweedie   Tel: 01224 665147
Assistant Committee Officer
Email Fiona.tweedie@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
Welcome to the Annual Report of the Aberdeenshire Council Scrutiny and Audit Committee

Since the elections of May 2012, the Committee has undertaken a review of business carried over from the previous session, as well as instigating a programme of new investigatory work across a wide range of the Council’s activities.

The Committee has been innovative in its approach, through the adoption of new recording equipment to support its function, as well as in terms of how it investigates matters of wider interest and concern. It has made significant changes in terms of the way it schedules business, placing a renewed emphasis on the importance of Internal Audit in its scrutiny of Council’s controls, processes and attitudes to risk.

The Committee has also challenged itself to improve its level of performance, with members undertaking a programme of internal and external training to support their understanding of best practice in the scrutiny function and the key role which it has in the governance and effective performance of the Council.

We would like to place on record our gratitude for the assistance we have had from officers in the operation of the Committee, as well as to the many witnesses who have helped the Committee in its investigations to date.

Cllr Gillian Owen
Committee Chairman

Cllr Richard Thomson
Vice Chairman of the Committee
What do we do?

Roles and Remit of the Committee

Overall, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee has four main functions:

1. To be a traditional audit committee with a focus on risk, control and assurance and financial reporting.
2. To maintain an overview of service savings.
3. To exercise scrutiny over the Treasury function.
4. To examine the effectiveness of council policy implementation and service delivery through a self-determined programme of investigations.

The role of the committee is defined fully in the Aberdeenshire Council Scheme of Delegation, which can be viewed online at www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/councillors.
Work of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee in 2012-13

To determine the Committee’s work plan for the year ahead, last August members considered 36 subjects which had been suggested by other councillors or council officers as possible investigation topics. In providing supporting evidence for their submissions, Councillors and officers were asked to consider:

- Residents and Employee Surveys;
- Internal and external audit reports;
- Issues raised by residents, local community groups and external organisations;
- Government policies and priorities;
- Council policies and priorities;
- Feedback on the Council’s performance from other agencies;
- Previous Scrutiny and Audit investigations; and
- Performance Management information.

A topic scoring exercise was undertaken over 23 and 30 August to narrow these down, with Senior Management Team input sought on the topics suggested. The Committee decided not to proceed where this would duplicate work already being undertaken, internally or externally; or if the matter had recently been subject to a change in policy. In the same way, the Committee decided not to proceed with a review if there was legislation pending which would impact on the service delivery, or if it was a matter over which the Council has no direct control.
The range of topics suggested in 2012 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You suggested…</th>
<th>We did…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Transport in rural Aberdeenshire.</td>
<td>A workshop was held on 4 February 2013 which focused on social isolation, dial a bus, the removal of Youth Transport Awards from Area Committees, health transport needs and integration with other services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Monitoring/ Response to challenging financial environment</td>
<td>A workshop was held on 21 November 2012. This focused on budget management, the details of the reporting timetable and reasons for reported budget underspends, including consideration of spending flexibility, unexpected revenues, vacancies and recurring underspends. A follow up session will be held on the year end position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind turbine policy/ &quot;Taking stock&quot; exercise on wind turbines and wind farms.</td>
<td>No action was taken this year, as the Committee was aware of on-going work by the Infrastructure Services Committee in pursuing national guidance and further consideration of the matter by the Scottish Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of road patching.</td>
<td>A workshop was held on 16 January 2013 focusing on policy regarding temporary fixes and costs comparison. A site visit was held on 13 May 2013 to see new machinery which is being piloted in action and will be reported to Committee on 4 July 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape Services/Maintenance – are they currently best value for the corporate client?</td>
<td>An initial report was considered at full Committee on 20 March 2013. A workshop was held to explore the matter in further detail on 23 May 2013 and will be reported to Committee on 4 July 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit on landlord registration.</td>
<td>The Committee widened this topic to include Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMIO) registration. As the Committee was aware of the intention to relocate the service to Housing &amp; Social Work, an interim report was considered on 31 January 2013 with an update requested for September 2013. The Committee agreed to keep this under consideration as a potential full investigation topic in 2013/14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Efficiency of council payment of invoices.</td>
<td>A report was requested by the Committee on 13 December 2012. After receipt of the report, the Committee agreed no further consideration was required for now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering More Value for Money.</td>
<td>A joint workshop was held with the Central Purchasing Unit and Property &amp; Facilities Management 16 January 2013. A report on Post Project Review was presented to the January 2013 Policy &amp; Resources Committee meeting for Property Related Construction Projects, while a report on “Procurement Capability Assessment” was presented to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee in March 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the Educational Needs of all children educated in Aberdeenshire/ Equality of opportunity across schools in Aberdeenshire/ Education of looked after children.</td>
<td>A workshop was held on 9 January 2013, which included consideration of the education of looked after children and the availability of curricular/extra-curricular opportunities across Aberdeenshire's schools. A school visit to hear directly from pupils of their assessment of the opportunities open to them was held on May 2013 and will be reported to Committee on 4 July 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking performance against other Councils and Public bodies to improve performance/ Performance Management/ Challenge and Improvement – How Good is our Council?/ Use of resources and competitiveness/ Benchmarking/ Best value - how it's reported to Councillors and informs budget decision/ Benchmarking – and How Good is Our Council.</td>
<td>These topics were grouped together and have formed a major Committee investigation titled “Benchmarking – do we have the tools in place for effective assessment?” Evidence gathering is on-going with investigations scheduled to be concluded by the end of June 2013, for report to Full Council on 26 September 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can Communities Help Themselves?</td>
<td>To be reported in the context of an update report on the Community Asset Transfer strategy as it beds in.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To examine the efficient carrying out of localised minor works.

A report on the procedures and processes involved in dealing with minor repairs was requested and considered as part of an update report on Property and Facilities Management on 1 November 2012.

Leadership and Culture in staff.

A workshop session was held with Human Resources and Organisational Development on 14 January 2013. This was formally reported to Committee on 31 January 2013. A follow-up workshop on recruitment was held on 28 March 2013, which was formally reported to Committee on 16 May 2013. A follow-up report on recruitment will be submitted in Spring 2014.

Protection and Welfare of Vulnerable People.

An initial workshop session was held with Housing & Social Work on 10 January 2013 and reported to Committee on 31 January 2013. A follow-up session to focus on the vulnerable elderly is to be held, which will also cover four topics suggested for consideration in 2013/2014.

Waste contract for residual household waste – is this value for money?

No action taken – a new waste contract has recently been implemented, while a previous SAC investigation was concluded into this topic in 2012.

Community Asset Transfers – possibilities for the future.

To be considered in an update report as part of the scheduled review of the existing strategy for 2010-13 to be reviewed by Council with consultation held at the end of 2012.

Council communications strategy.

No action – the existing Council communications strategy is already set to be reviewed by the existing SAC.

Any review of the LRB process would be a matter for the Scottish Government.

No action – the body is too recently established to make investigation worthwhile.

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Tenants’ Newsletter.

No action taken. Newsletters are produced by Aberdeenshire Council Tenant Participation Team, which is supported as part of the Council’s Tenants’ Participation policy. Tenants’ satisfaction surveys suggest that 72% considered the newsletter very or quite useful, with positive comments by the Housing Regulator in an assessment of housing management.

Classroom Support in Primary and Secondary Schools.

Deferred for consideration as a topic in 2013/14.

Sheltered Housing Provision.

Already under review elsewhere – a report was received by Committee on 31 January 2013, following its consideration by the Social Work & Housing Committee December 2012. It was decided to defer this topic for possible consideration in future.

In addition to the usual formal investigation process being employed into benchmarking, this year the Committee implemented ‘Workshop’ sessions as a means of gathering further information on a topic before deciding whether a full investigation or any further scrutiny is warranted.

The sessions, which operate outwith the regular committee cycle, allow officers and members the opportunity to share information and to discuss the relevant issues in a depth which would not be possible when considering a written report as an agenda item at a full meeting of the Committee. Although many workshops have taken place as precursors to possible further investigations, they have also been held in response to matters raised at full committee, in order to allow members to seek further assurance and to allow for lengthier and more detailed questioning.

In addition to the workshops agreed in response to the topics suggested, Full Council referred the issue of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs), to the Committee for consideration. An initial session was held with officers of the Education, Learning and Leisure service on 12 November 2012. Although the service had already scheduled a review of PSAs for 2013, the Committee was given the opportunity to contribute to the scoping of the proposed review. This was initially reported to Committee on 20 March, 2013 and considered in detail at a follow up workshop on 15 April 2013. A further report on the consultation is expected to come to Committee in late 2013.
A smaller number of topics have been suggested for investigation in 2013/14. These were considered by the Committee at a topic scoring session on 1 May 2013, where the undernoted actions were agreed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You suggested…</th>
<th>We plan…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dog fouling – staff training options.</td>
<td>No action at present – this is already under review by Infrastructure Services Committee, with a report on new approaches to be considered in June and implemented by December, 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Meals.</td>
<td>An investigation into school meals has been carried out by the Committee previously. A decision on how to proceed has been deferred for an update report on the outcomes of recommendations from this previous investigation¹.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Staff in schools - Are they getting enough hours to complete the work assigned to them and all the extra work they have to do complete?</td>
<td>Defer - assurances have been given that this is already being reviewed and is to be considered in terms of the Options4Admin review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction Training including Health and Safety Training.</td>
<td>Defer – a report has already been requested for September 2013 on the uptake of corporate induction training across services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess demand responsive transport solutions for rural areas.</td>
<td>No action – a similar topic led to a workshop which was held on 16 January 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding of local community groups.</td>
<td>Defer - pending demonstration of the database which was created following a previous SAC investigation (2007 ².) If this topic is to be pursued, it may focus on Area Top Up funding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Footnotes)

¹ The 2006 report may be found at http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/scrutiny.asp
² The 2007 report may be found at http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/scrutiny.asp
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring of Elderly Residents in Residential Homes and in Nursing Homes. Role of Volunteer Visitors/Demographic Time Bomb of Care for the Elderly. Short fall in the Number of Home Carers/Sheltered Housing v Very Sheltered Housing Policy/Sheltered Housing Provision. (Deferred from 2012)</td>
<td>A workshop session on the vulnerable elderly is to be held which will allow members to consider these matters in greater depth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape Services.</td>
<td>Defer pending scheduled workshop (23 May 2013) from 2012 topics. Workshop held on 23 May 2013 - outcomes to be reported to Committee on 4 July 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle of outsourcing Human Resources, IT, Legal Services</td>
<td>No action – it was felt that this was not appropriate for SAC consideration as the principle of either doing so or not would be essentially a political one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Diary Management</td>
<td>Defer for future consideration when new room booking/diary system is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Aids/OT Equipment</td>
<td>Workshop to be held 24 June 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Learning and Development Budget Commissioning and Delivery</td>
<td>Investigate – terms of reference to be considered in September 2013 on receipt of report already instructed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit on Landlord Registration. (deferred from 2012)</td>
<td>Update report already commissioned for September 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Review Body. (deferred from 2012)</td>
<td>No action – the body is too recently established to make investigation worthwhile. Any review of the LRB process would be a matter for the Scottish Government.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monitoring of Previous Investigations

Since inception, the Committee has undertaken 22 investigations. From 2007, the Committee has also received formal reports on how its recommendations arising from investigations and subsequently endorsed by full Council are being applied.

Some recommendations are simple changes in processes and can be observed in action within a reasonably short time; others are more cultural in their application and may take a considerable time to establish and demonstrate their effectiveness.

Every six months, a report collates updates on progress with the recommendations, giving members the opportunity to consider any barriers to implementation. The Committee may also dismiss matters from consideration if it is felt that the recommendations are no longer valid or have been overtaken by events. In this way, since May 2012, the recommendations relating to the undernoted investigations have been dismissed:

- Processing of Planning Applications, (Investigation 6, 2005);
- Community Learning and Development (Investigation 12, 2007);
- The Management of Public Toilets (Investigation 14, 2007);
- The Equity of Sports and Leisure Provision in Aberdeenshire (Investigation 16, 2009); and
**Internal Audit**

A key responsibility of the Committee is to ensure that the Council’s Internal Audit function is properly resourced and has appropriate standing within the Council. It also reviews the activities of Internal Audit, including its annual work programme.

Each formal meeting of the Committee receives the reports from the Chief Internal Auditor which have been presented to policy committees. To highlight the importance which members attach to this aspect of their role, these reports are now taken first on the agenda.

A particular area of focus for the Committee over the past year has been the number of agreed recommendations arising from Internal Audit investigations which services have not implemented successfully by the agreed date. In June 2012, some 49 recommendations had not been fully completed by the original due date of 30 April, 2012. By March 2013, this had reduced to 19. The Committee is pleased to see this and will continue to monitor progress on this front.

Following receipt of these internal audit reports, members have on occasion requested follow-up meetings with officers to discuss any areas of concern which remain. This is a new process for the Committee, but is one which it will continue to employ in the exercise of its scrutiny function where it is felt appropriate to do so.

**External Audit**

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee is responsible for managing all aspects of the Council’s relationship with its external auditors, including the review of annual work programmes and strategic risk analysis. The Committee is also charged with monitoring progress of any actions agreed by the Council in response to external audit concerns, and ensuring that implementation is carried out as agreed.

Deloitte have now been appointed as the Council’s external auditors, taking over responsibility for this role from Audit Scotland. Deloitte report both on their own assessments of the council’s operations, as well as on follow-up matters arising from national work undertaken by Audit Scotland.

Deloitte representatives regularly attend Committee meetings and, in turn, consider the Committee’s operation as part of their assessment of the Council’s governance and scrutiny.

At the September meeting, Members considered in detail the annual report by auditors which identifies any major matters of concern or weakness identified. Deloitte has also reported to Committee on progress with the current audit.
**Financial monitoring**

The Committee has responsibility for overview of budget monitoring, considering update reports on service savings. This year, it has also been given oversight of progress on the 100 Day Pledge works.

At the November budget workshop, Aberdeenshire Council's use of Year End Flexibility was discussed by the Committee and senior officers. Concerns were expressed by the Committee that there were some instances where the time being taken to spend these monies risked blurring the proper demarcation between year end flexibility and future budgets.

A recommendation was made by the Committee that any project seeking such flexibility should be carried out within a defined and reasonable period of time following the year end. If this is not possible, Members feel that a new budget bid should be made and the money made available for other works. The Committee welcomes the application of this approach in the process for the current financial year.

The Committee recognises that financial monitoring is an important part of its role within the council's governance structures and is keen to discharge its responsibilities fully and effectively. With the assistance of senior officers and external audit, this is an area where the Committee will be seeking to enhance its effectiveness in the months ahead.
**Risk Management**

Aberdeenshire Council has delegated authority to the Scrutiny and Audit Committee to review, in conjunction with Council managers, the adequacy of risk assessment arrangements and procedures.

An introductory briefing on risk management, risk registers and Aberdeenshire’s approach to risk was held for committee members in Stonehaven on 20 September 2012. The Committee also considered in December 2012 the annual report on Risk. As part of its role in this area, the Committee will continue to monitor the progress of transferring the risk registers to the Covalent system.

**Treasury Management**

In April 2012, the Committee was given powers to review the treasury management policy within the context of the Risk Management Strategy, as well as to make any appropriate recommendations to the Policy & Resources Committee.

Following a training session in January 2013 on Treasury Management led by Alan George of Sector, a report, “Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Prudential Indicators - 2013/14” was submitted for the Committee’s consideration.

Members agreed to approve the proposed policies and procedures and to recommend them to the Policy and Resources Committee.
Training and self assessment:

Post-election, the Committee undertook a series of detailed induction briefings on the subjects which fall under its remit. Sessions were held with Alan George of Sector on Treasury Management; with the Council’s own finance officers, Alan Wood and Alex Stephen concerning budgets and budget monitoring; and with Norrie Crichton, the Council’s Risk Manager, on the Council’s Risk Register and Risk Management.

As part of its improvement plans, committee members have worked both collectively and on an individual basis with Angela Scott, Head of CIPFA in Scotland. This work has involved assessment of how the Committee and its members perform in their role, as well as suggestions of where and how performance could be further strengthened.

While acknowledging that effective scrutiny is a responsibility of all elected members, the Committee continues to seek further training and development opportunities to enable it to carry out the particular functions expected of it.
**Scrutiny and Audit in Aberdeenshire**

The members of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee are keen to involve a wide range of stakeholders in our work and would be happy to arrange meetings at venues that are convenient to you.

If you have an issue which you think the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should explore, do let us know. For advice, please call the Council Headquarters and speak to Jan McRobbie, Support Officer, Scrutiny and Audit on 01224 664617, or email her at jan.mcrobbie@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Our meeting dates are on the Aberdeenshire Council website: www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk - or you could call our support office and request an agenda and meeting papers.

Formal meetings of the Committee are open to the public and you will be welcome to join us.

**Work Programme Suggestions**

We would also like to receive your views for work programme items on issues that affect the way Aberdeenshire Council delivers its services to you, or carries out its operations. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee is not a complaints system, nor does it make policy. The Committee’s role is to challenge and scrutinise the way the Council and its committees carry out their functions in delivering services to the people of Aberdeenshire. Any specific complaints should be directed to the Council officers or service responsible.

You can e-mail your suggestion to jan.mcrobbie@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

In the first instance we only need a few details from you – we will contact you for more information and let you know what will happen to your suggestion.

Or you can use the form below: send it to Aberdeenshire Council, Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen, AB16 5GB
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your name:</th>
<th>Email:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your address:</td>
<td>Telephone number:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When is the best time to contact you:</td>
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</table>

**Title of Investigation Topic:**

**Why this topic should be considered for investigation:**

**Key questions that should be considered as part of the investigation:**

**Source of the proposed topic:**

*Please continue overleaf if necessary*
| Title of Investigation Topic: | Why this topic should be considered for investigation: | Key questions that should be considered as part of the investigation: | Source of the proposed topic: |