

MORAY COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 13 November 2019

Council Chambers, Council Office, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX

PRESENT

Councillor James Allan, Councillor Frank Brown, Councillor John Cowe, Councillor Lorna Creswell, Councillor Tim Eagle, Councillor Claire Feaver, Councillor Donald Gatt, Councillor Aaron McLean, Councillor Derek Ross

APOLOGIES

Councillor Theresa Coull, Councillor Ryan Edwards, Councillor Marc Macrae, Councillor Amy Taylor

IN ATTENDANCE

The Chief Executive, the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development); the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance; the Audit Manager; Ms M Bruce, Audit Scotland and Mrs C Howie as clerk to the meeting.

Also Present

Councillor Shona Morrison (Ex-officio)

1 Chair of Meeting

The meeting was Chaired by Councillor D Gatt.

2 Declaration of Group Decisions and Members Interests *

In terms of Standing Order 20 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct, 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.

3 Minute of Meeting dated 19 June 2019

The Minute of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee dated 19 June 2019 was submitted and approved.

4 Written Questions **

The Committee noted that no written questions had been submitted.

5 Accounts Commission Paper - Safeguarding Public Money

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) provided Committee with the second in a series of four reports considering the issues raised in a recent Accounts Commission publication relating to the roles of councillors and officers in safeguarding public money.

Councillor Feaver was of the opinion seven years since the last review of the Policy to Combat Fraud, Theft, Bribery and Corruption was too long between reviews and sought the opinion of the Committee on a more regular review.

The Audit Manager agreed seven years was too long for bringing this to Committee however advised there had been only minor changes since the last review. He advised three years was a standard timescale in the Council for reviewing policies.

As no one was otherwise minded the Committee agreed to seek a review of the Policy in three years.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to note the:

- i. further two aspects of the Accounts Commission report on 'How councils work' entitled 'Safeguarding public money: are you getting it right?'
- ii. questions in the two checklists covering Fraud and Corruption, and Partnership Working';
- iii. council has taken a proportionate approach to achieving good governance by seeking to secure appropriate arrangements at optimal cost; and
- iv. Policy to Combat Fraud, Theft, Bribery and Corruption will be reviewed every three years.

6 Scrutiny Remit of the Committee

Under reference to paragraph 7 of the Minute of the meeting dated 4 December 2018 a report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) provided interim information on discussions that had taken place relating to the scrutiny role of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Eagle stated he was of the opinion Elected Members should have had more involvement in drawing up the Scrutiny Handbook and moved the Committee not agree the recommendations as written and set up a working group, consisting of the Chair of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, one further Councillor from the Conservative and Unionist party, one Councillor from the Scottish National party and one Councillor from within the independent Councillors, along with relevant officers, to review and amend the draft Scrutiny Handbook.

Councillor Brown seconded the motion.

Councillor A McLean stated he would support Councillor Eagle's motion if he would include the recommendations at 2.1 i) and ii) of the report as he was of the opinion it was important to note the work already undertaken and sought clarification from Councillor Eagle as to the inclusion of recommendations 2.1 i) and iv) of the report in his motion.

As Councillor Eagle stated he wanted his motion to stand as it was Councillor A McLean moved as an amendment to set up a working group as moved by Councillor Eagle and to agree the recommendations at 2.1 i) and ii) as set down in the report.

Councillor Morrison stated she would second the amendment but was advised that as she was attending in an ex-officio capacity it was permissible for her to take part in discussions but not any votes that may arise.

Thereafter Councillor Cowe seconded Councillor A McLean's amendment.

On a division there voted

For the Motion (7)	Councillors Eagle, Brown, Allan, Creswell, Feaver, Gatt and Ross
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For the Amendment (2)	Councillors A McLean and Cowe
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Abstentions (0)

Thereafter the Committee agreed to the establishment of a working group consisting of the Chair of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, one further Councillor from the Conservative and Unionist party, one Councillor from the Scottish National party and one Councillor from within the independent Councillors, along with relevant officers, to review and amend the draft Scrutiny Handbook.

7 Work of the Internal Audit Section in the Period 1 April 2019 to 30 September 2019

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) advised Committee on the work of the Internal Audit Section for the period from 1 April 2019 to 30 September 2019.

In response to a query from the Chair the Audit Manager advised a programme of stock taking was carried out throughout the year within the relevant areas and that the year end stocktaking referred to in the report was an audit review undertaken by the audit team.

Thereafter the Committee joined the Chair in thanking the Audit Manager and his team for the work they undertake on behalf of the Council.

Councillor Creswell sought clarification on the review of the effectiveness of risk management arrangements carried out by the Council's insurers and queried that this had been at no additional cost to the Council.

In response the Audit Manager advised the insurers provided the review as part of the contracted insurance premium.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to:

- i. note the report; and

- ii. join the Chair in thanking the Audit Manager and his team for the work they undertake on behalf of the Council.

8 Local Outcomes Improvement Plan Annual Report

Under reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of the meeting of the Community Planning Board (CPB) dated 13 February 2018 a report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) informed the Committee of the progress made to the Partnership's first Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) and the lessons learned.

Councillor Brown sought clarification on how the CPB could measure success or otherwise of the LOIP if the Partnership could not identify objectives.

In response the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) advised high level objectives were in place e.g. how long people live, income levels etc.; however it would be inappropriate to wait several years to ensure the plan was on track. The Partnership had therefore looked at setting interim objectives but there had been obstacles and this was still being worked upon.

Councillor Brown stated there was nothing in the report to identify what the issues were in relation to school exclusions and sought clarification on why the decision had been taken to re-write the school exclusions policy. He was of the opinion it was inappropriate to change the policy so less pupils would be excluded rather than addressing the behaviour of pupils who would now remain in class and be disruptive to others.

In response the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) advised she would have to seek further information on what the issues were in relation to school exclusions and further advised that getting a policy correct was a good starting point for dealing with any issues there may be.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to note the:

- i. progress made on the Partnership's first Local Outcomes Improvement Plan; and
- ii. lessons learned.

9 Statement of Outstanding Business at November 2019

A report by the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance asked the Committee to consider progress and timescales in relation to follow-up reports and actions requested by the Committee at previous meetings.

Councillor Creswell sought clarification on why some of the dates in the completed column had passed.

In response the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance advised these were shown to give information to the Committee as they had been completed since the previous Committee; he advised they would be removed from the list prior to the next Committee.

Thereafter the Committee agreed to note progress and timescales in relation to follow-up reports requested by the Committee.

10 Question Time ***

There were no questions raised.