

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10.00 am Thursday 10 October 2013

Present

Councillors Balfour (Convener), Barrie (Substitute for Orr), Blacklock, Gardner, Howat, Lunn, Main, Munro, Ross, Robson (Substitute for Councillor Keil), Shields, Tymkewycz and Whyte.

Also present for item 8.1

Councillors Burgess, Burns, Cardownie and Rose.

1. Minute

Decision

To approve the minute of the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee of 25 September 2013 as a correct record.

2. Outstanding Actions – October 2013

Details were provided of the outstanding actions arising from decisions taken by the Committee.

Decision

To note the outstanding actions

(Reference – Outstanding Actions October 2013, submitted.)

3. Governance, Risk and Best Value Work Programme October 2013

Approval was sought for the Governance, Risk and Best Value Work Programme for October 2013.

Decision

To note the Work Programme for October 2013.

(Reference – Work Programme October 2013, submitted.)

4. Review of Political Management Arrangements – report by the Director of Corporate Governance

The Council agreed revised political management arrangements on 20 September 2012. The new model was designed to deliver streamlined and high quality decisions with effective accountability and oversight from implementation on 29 October 2012. The Council agreed to review the new arrangements after twelve months operation and to consider a final report with options at the Council meeting in October 2013. The agreed approach involved consultation with the public, elected members and senior officers.

The Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee was asked to consider elements of the consultation findings prior to final reporting to Council, with particular reference to the following key areas: committee model; public protection/community safety; policy development and review; scrutiny; Petitions Committee; and webcasting.

The following party group leaders attended to help inform discussion:

Councillor Steve Burgess, Green Party;
Councillor Andrew Burns, Labour Party;
Councillor Steve Cardownie, SNP Party; and
Councillor Cameron Rose, Conservative Party.

During discussion on Webcasting and public engagement, members raised the following points:

- Webcasting had been very successful in improving accountability and openness.
- There could be a possibility to maximise income by offering webcasting services to external parties.
- Investing in an upgrade to the Dean of Guild Court Room would minimise disruption.
- More information was required relating to upgrade options, including costs and also the feasibility of holding an increased number of committee meetings in the Council Chamber.
- Underspending in the capital budget could be utilised for the capital costs associated with expanding Webcasting.
- Leith Neighbourhood Partnership had a successful model for engagement which resulted in significant public attendance. Defined budgets for Neighbourhood Partnerships would engender public enthusiasm and high levels of public engagement and participation.

During discussion on the committee model and policy development, members raised the following points:

- The current system did not require significant changes; however, it would benefit from being refined.
- The Economy Committee had worked well within the current system; allowing for effective reporting and key policy and strategic decisions.
- Working groups could result in more effective policy development and review.
- Working groups were not open to the public and it could be perceived that transparency was being reduced if that model were to be adopted.
- A set finish time for committees would make it easier to plan and manage time. An exploration into the feasibility of time allocation for individual agenda items would be welcomed.
- The current policy development and review (PD&R) sub-committee model allowed for the development and scrutiny of policy that otherwise could not be effectively scrutinised or discussed at Full Council.
- Policy development and review sub-committees could be adjusted to work more effectively.
- Mixed views existed on the possibility of adopting a cabinet model but overall consensus was to refine the existing model.
- The number of meetings should be reduced, this was impacting on clarity when it came to decision making.
- Flexibility in arrangements for holding a PD&R sub-committee was to be encouraged, such as allowing the executive committee to decide whether they required the sub-committee and when that meeting took place.
- Agenda Planning Meetings should be streamlined to avoid re-running the committee.
- Under the current model the same decision could be made by three different committees. Impacting on efficiency.

During discussion on community safety, members raised the following points:

- The Communities and Neighbourhood Committee should be dissolved; matters should instead be discussed at Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee or the Edinburgh Partnership.
- A standalone community safety committee would be effective.
- Subsuming police & fire scrutiny into an existing committee may lead to a loss of valuable scrutiny.

During discussion on scrutiny, members raised the following points:

- A clarification of the standing orders for Governance, Risk and Best Value could allow the committee to call in reports.
- It was essential that the roles and responsibilities of committees was defined to allow due diligence to be undertaken by policy development and review sub-committees and executive committees followed by the scrutiny thereafter by the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.
- It might be necessary to adjust the remit of the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee to allow for more effective scrutiny at the appropriate time.

- The Economy Committee has a successful scrutiny process; which could be replicated in other committees.
- Scrutiny through the PD&R sub-committees was only effective in some cases.
- There was very little support in favour of maintaining the status quo.

During discussion on the petitions process members raised the following points:

- A Petitions Committee that simply referred on business to executive committees was not worthwhile; a degree of streamlining should exist.
- The Petitions Committee should only be convened when there was business.
- According to consultation results, officers and elected members were not supportive of the petitions process but members of the public were.
- The Petitions Committee was effective at exploring the relevant issues before referring it to an executive committee.
- It would be necessary to be mindful that by referring petitions straight to executive committees a degree of transparency could be lost.
- Neighbourhood Partnerships would be the best place to deal with petitions as local issues stand within their remit.
- Petitions are a useful tool and should not be lost.
- Petitions should be sent directly to PD&R sub committees.

Decision

- 1) To endorse the webcasting of further committees of the Council
- 2) To explore the possibility of codifying guidance for Agenda Planning Meetings.
- 3) To explore the feasibility of setting times for items on committee meeting agendas.
- 4) To attach an extract from the minute of 10 October to the report to Full Council.

(Reference – report by the Director of Corporate Governance, submitted.)

5. Internal Audit Co-Source Update – report by the Director of Corporate Governance

On November 2012, Council approved the appointment of PwC as co-source partners in the delivery of internal audit and risk management services for a three-year period. The contract incorporating the agreed service delivery plan was signed in April, with an effective date of 1 April 2013 to coincide with the beginning of the financial year.

Decision

- 1) To note progress made by the co-sourced internal audit team and the exit strategy for the end of the contract with PwC;
- 2) To provide an update report to Committee in May 2014, in particular including:

- i) Financial details;
 - ii) Overview of objective skills learned by Internal Audit as a result of co-sourcing.
- 3) To report on the Council's powers in regard to appointing its external auditor and how it can ensure best value in that appointment.

(Reference – Act of Council no 7 of 22 November 2012; Governance Risk and Best Value 23 May 2013 (item 8); report by the Director of Corporate Governance, submitted.)

6. Property Care and Conservation – Minimising Future Risks – Report by the Director of Services for Communities

The Council, in terms of Section 50(A)(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, excluded the public from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business for the reason that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 1 of Schedule 7(A) of the Act.

Decision

- 1) To note the report and actions taken to minimise further risk to the Council.
- 2) To request that the Director of Services for Communities clarifies financial information outlined in the June 2013 audit report.
- 3) To request that future report to Finance and Budget Committee address the required resources for this project.

(Reference – report by the Director of Services for Communities, submitted.)

Declaration of Interests

Councillor Blacklock declared a financial interest in the above item as a property owner affected by the statutory notice investigation.