

**Corporate and Community Services Department**

Council Headquarters, Eastwood Park, Giffnock, East Renfrewshire, G46 6UG

Phone: 0141 577 3000

website: [www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

Date: 14 January 2022

When calling please ask for: Linda Hutchison (Tel. No 0141 577 8388)

e-mail: [linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

TO: Councillors Stewart Miller (Chair), Barbara Grant (Vice-Chair), Angela Convery, Charlie Gilbert, Annette Ireland, Jim McLean and Jim Swift.

**AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

A meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee will be held on **Thursday, 20 January 2022 at 2.00pm.**

The agenda of business is as listed below.

**Please note this is a virtual meeting.**

**CAROLINE INNES**

C INNES

DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**AGENDA**

1. **Report apologies for absence.**
2. **Declarations of interest.**
3. **Chair's Report.**
4. **Audit and Scrutiny Committee's Investigation on Income Generation and Commercialisation - Update on Implementation of Recommendations Accepted by Cabinet - Report by Chief Executive (copy attached, pages 3 - 14).**
5. **Audit and Scrutiny Committee's Investigation on Climate Change - Update on Implementation of Recommendations Accepted by Cabinet - Report by Head of Strategic Services (copy attached, pages 15 - 28).**

6. **National External Audit Report - Impact of COVID-19 on Scottish Councils' Benefit Services – Report by Clerk (copy attached, pages 29 - 34).**
  
7. **Audit and Scrutiny Committee 2021/22 Work Plan – Update – Report by Clerk (copy attached, pages 35 - 48).**

For information on how to access the virtual meeting please email:-  
[linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

A recording of the meeting will also be available following the meeting on the Council's YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/eastrenfrewshire/videos>

This document can be explained to you in other languages and can be provided in alternative formats such as large print and Braille. For further information, please contact Customer First on 0141 577 3001 or email [customerservices@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE20 January 2022Report by Chief ExecutiveAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION ON INCOME GENERATION  
AND COMMERCIALISATION - UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF  
RECOMMENDATIONS**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide an update on the implementation of recommendations, accepted by Cabinet, arising from the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's Investigation on Income Generation and Commercialisation.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee notes the progress made to date by departments in relation to implementing the recommendations.

**BACKGROUND**

3. On 5 December 2019 the Cabinet considered the Audit and Scrutiny Committee's report on its [Investigation on Income Generation and Commercialisation](#) which had been progressed between July and October that year with support from the former Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer and finalised in November. The committee had considered this work to have potential to generate new income streams; to contribute to the Council achieving future savings targets; to help it meet the strategic priority areas of the Community Plan; and to help deliver the Council's corporate plan 'Vision for the Future'. Other potential benefits were considered to include demonstrating financial responsibility to the local community; helping to deliver Best Value; and sustaining/improving service levels.

4. In total, the committee made 12 recommendations to the Cabinet. One of the key recommendations (*Recommendation 1*) was that the Council establish a new policy on commercialisation, supported by a cross-departmental team with expertise, to implement the key recommendations of the policy and an associated action plan.

5. In December 2019, the Cabinet agreed to support the recommendations in principle and that a response to the Committee's report be submitted to the Cabinet in 6 months. Following a slight delay due to the impact of COVID-19, a formal [response](#) was considered and approved by the Cabinet on 24 September 2020. The report reflected that all 12 of the recommendations made by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee had been agreed by Directors as itemised below; and that despite the challenges of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, work had been started in many of these areas with future work planned in due course. Progress made by that stage by Departments in relation to implementing the recommendations was noted.

No	Recommendation	Cabinet Decision	Lead Contact
1	That the Council establish a new policy on commercialisation.	Agreed	Director of Environment
2	To invite representatives of other councils, with successfully developed approaches to commercialisation, to address a joint grouping of East Renfrewshire Council Members and officers	Agreed	Director of Environment
3	That the Council develop further a programme of staging major events to be held at various venues in East Renfrewshire, building on the commercial success of the Playground Festival held in Rouken Glen Park in August 2019. (Advance planning of future events should focus strongly on community consultation, reinstatement of facilities, liaison with other agencies, and lessons learned from previous events).	Agreed	Director of Environment
4	To agree, in principle, to investigate options for income generation which might be available from the proposed new digital telecare system, through provision of care services on behalf of other local authorities or organisations, and to market the associated business development skills.	Agreed	Director of Corporate & Community Services
5	To support taking a more commercial approach to procurement, to achieve efficiencies and maximise income potential from the council's collaborative framework arrangements, e.g. with Scotland Excel.	Agreed	Chief Executive
6	To maximise the use of local companies through procurement and purchasing activities to help stimulate the economy of East Renfrewshire, in accordance with the existing provisions which enable this through the Council's contract standing orders.	Agreed	Chief Executive
7	To further develop links between schools, the business community and other partners, to create further opportunities for young persons in relation to training; assistance with technology; and other benefits.	Agreed	Director of Education
8	To monitor closely, and to receive regular reports, on the financial implications arising from the expected reduction in levels of income from the Wraparound care service. (This will occur during and after the transition from the provision of 600 hours to 1140 hours of free early learning and childcare by August 2020).	Agreed	Director of Education

9	To keep under review, options to develop income generation opportunities at roundabouts, bus shelters, council vehicles and other locations.	Agreed	Director of Environment
10	To support the ongoing development of proposals (subject to submission of further reports where appropriate) by the Environment Department, to generate new income, or maximise potential from existing arrangements.	Agreed	Director of Environment
11	That the departments involved submit a report on the option to introduce a public car parking policy, to regulate activities better at key pressure points in East Renfrewshire	Agreed	Director of Environment
12	That the Chair of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee extends an invitation to meet the Chair of the Performance and Audit Committee of the Health and Social Care Partnership, to share information and discuss good practices arising from the review	Agreed	Director of Corporate & Community Services

6. In November 2020 the Audit and Scrutiny Committee noted the response approved by the Cabinet to the investigation, including the extent to which the recommendations had been accepted, and agreed then that a further report be submitted to the committee on progress implementing the recommendations as part of its 2021/22 Work Plan.

7. Given the time which has elapsed since these recommendations were initially proposed, and the significant impact and challenges of Covid-19, a brief update on work undertaken to date is included, where available, in Appendix 1 of this report.

## CONCLUSION

8. This review area has the potential to generate new income streams, which may assist the Council in several areas: financial planning now and for the future; demonstrating financial responsibility to the East Renfrewshire community; delivering Best Value; sustaining or improving service levels for local citizens and customers; developing stronger links with businesses and organisations; developing collaborative links with other Councils; and self-awareness of where the Council is positioned, in terms of benchmarking information.

9. All 12 of the recommendations within the Audit and Scrutiny Committee report of 21 November 2019 were agreed by Directors. Despite the challenges of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, work has been started in many of these areas with future work planned in due course.

## RECOMMENDATION

10. It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee notes the progress made to date by Departments in relation to implementing the recommendations.

Chief Executive  
January 2022

Report author:  
Gill Darbyshire Chief Executive's Business Manager  
[gill.darbyshire@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:gill.darbyshire@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

### Background Papers

Report by Chief Executive to Audit and Scrutiny Committee, 20 June 2019: Proposed Guide to Scrutiny and Review

Report by Chief Executive to Audit and Scrutiny Committee, 15 August 2019: Investigation on Income Generation and Commercialisation – Update on Progress

Report by Chief Executive to Audit and Scrutiny Committee, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019: Investigation on Income Generation and Commercialisation – Update on Progress

Report by Chief Executive to Audit and Scrutiny Committee, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2019: Investigation on Income Generation and Commercialisation – Final Draft Report

Report by Chief Executive to Cabinet, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020: Investigation on Income Generation and Commercialisation

## UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendation 1**

That the Council establish a new policy on commercialisation, to include:

- creating action plans, and setting of income/savings targets;
- developing the existing culture of commercialisation within the council, including training for employees and Elected Members;
- formation of a cross-departmental team with commercial expertise;
- including commercialisation skills and experience in the person specification for specific posts which are advertised;
- continued participation in commercialisation workshops e.g. through the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE);
- structured information sharing between departments, and greater collaboration with other councils; and
- requiring all departments of the council to discuss their commercialisation plans with Legal Services for advice, prior to entering into discussions with third parties.

#### Update December 2021

- A policy has been prepared covering the recommended points and will be considered by the Corporate Management Team.
- A cross departmental commercialisation seminar with SOLACE coordinated by the Environment Department is proposed. Arranging this seminar has been put on hold under Covid-19 restrictions to allow it to be held face to face.

### **Recommendation 2**

To invite representatives of other councils, with successfully developed approaches to commercialisation, to address a joint grouping of East Renfrewshire Council Members and officers.

#### Update December 2021

- This recommendation was put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic but will continue to be considered as an option for the future.

### **Recommendation 3**

That the Council develop further a programme of staging major events to be held at various venues in East Renfrewshire, building on the commercial success of the Playground Festival held in Rouken Glen Park in August 2019. (Advance planning of future events should focus strongly on community consultation, reinstatement of facilities, liaison with other agencies, and lessons learned from previous events).

Update December 2021

- Work is ongoing to attract a number of high quality commercial events to East Renfrewshire, incorporating lessons learned and community engagement into planning.

**Recommendation 4**

To agree, in principle, to investigate options for income generation which might be available from the proposed new digital telecare system, through provision of care services on behalf of other local authorities or organisations, and to market the associated business development skills;

Update December 2021

- The revised timeline now in place, following impacts from Covid-19, still requires the new digital system to be in place and embedded before the digital telecare service is marketed to other users. The outlook is that this continues to be a longer term activity which remains some way off and not likely before 2023.

**Recommendation 5**

To support taking a more commercial approach to procurement, to achieve efficiencies and maximise income potential from the council's collaborative framework arrangements, e.g. with Scotland Excel

Update December 2021

- The Council currently receives rebates from Scotland Excel Frameworks on Education Materials, PPE, Electrical Materials, and Purchasing Cards. Rebates returned to the Council for financial year 2020/21 were £27,435. The Procurement Team continue to work with service representatives to deliver savings with improvement programmes underway in categories – ICT and Housing Services.

**Recommendation 6**

To maximise the use of local companies through procurement and purchasing activities to help stimulate the economy of East Renfrewshire, in accordance with the existing provisions which enable this through the Council's contract standing orders;

Update December 2021

- East Renfrewshire Council percentage spend with local small/medium enterprises remains comparably low given factors such as the existing supplier base and size and location of the local authority area. However, as identified in the new Procurement Strategy 2019-2022, the Procurement Team are working together with the Council's Economic Development team to focus on maximising opportunities to encourage local businesses, third sector organisations and supported businesses to do business with

the Council. Data from the Scottish Procurement Information Hub shows in 2020/21 Council spend was £15.6m with businesses which are located in East Renfrewshire which is an increase of £4.1m from 2019/20. Data also shows that 52% of East Renfrewshire Council spend was with SMEs and local spend has increased from 9.6% in 2019/20 to 12% in 2020/21.

- Standing Orders Relating to Contracts has now been permanently updated to support the Council's response to COVID-19 construction recovery by increasing the works Quick Quote threshold from £150,000 to £500,000. This amendment allows flexibility to accelerate delivery of projects that have been adversely affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. The use of Quick Quote up to the threshold of £500,000 reduces both the time and resources required to get contracts into place and supports economic recovery.

### **Recommendation 7**

To further develop links between schools, the business community and other partners, to create further opportunities for young persons in relation to training; assistance with technology; and other benefits.

#### Update December 2021

- Session 2021-22 has seen the introduction of Developing the Young Workforce School Co-ordinators (DYW SCs) in all seven secondary schools and in Isobel Mair Special School. These members of staff are financed through funding from Scottish Government which provides Local Authorities and schools with targeted monies to develop opportunities for young people to improve skills for learning, life and work and help them to secure and sustain positive destinations post school. The role of DYW SCs is to engage with the business community and wider partners to establish improved connections and networks which support young people in exploring their skills development in real life contexts. Work inspiration and simulated environments alongside work related learning continue to be opportunities available to young people, with work placements beginning to emerge once again with appropriate safety mitigations in place. Although early days, the new co-ordinator role has enabled reconnection with the business community as we try to build back better and fairer from the impact of Covid-19. It also creates opportunities for further links between business partners, early learning and childcare settings and primary schools.
- Work with Community Benefits partners ensures that information held by schools and other services in relation to labour market information help to shape community benefits offers to meet the needs and aspirations of our young people. Similarly, the work of the Local Employment Partnership (LEP) in determining best value in terms of project funding, takes cognisance of labour market trends and City Deal expansion with specific reference to growth areas, using information included in the datahub to plan new developments and opportunities.
- The availability of Scottish Government funding in relation to the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) has created further opportunities for young people. In addition to specific developments, YPG funding has been utilised to support our Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme providing training for individual young people in sectors such as childcare and hospitality. Based on labour market information, training is targeted to take cognisance of the national and local skills gap ensuring that

opportunities post training are also available. Further funding available from ERC, the Humanitarian fund, is being used to engage those young people furthest from the job market but intending on leaving school to ensure that appropriate opportunities are available to develop employability skills.

- As a result of the pandemic, young people engaging in vocational options and courses were provided with both the hardware and the skills to ensure that they could continue to access their learning digitally. Following the periods of lockdown, the systems that were put in place to address accessibility, including remote and blended learning, have continued where appropriate to ensure safe engagement in learning. This has been helpful to those young people having to self-isolate, ensuring minimal impact and uninterrupted learning.
- The overall impact of the partnerships with employers and businesses has contributed to ERC attaining the highest national ranking in the Annual Participation Measure (APM) 20-21, recording the participation of young people age 16-19 as 97.2%. This measure demonstrates the consistency and sustainability of our positive destinations and highlights the importance and impact of not only productive business relationships but the identification of appropriate pathways for all young people.

### **Recommendation 8**

To monitor closely, and to receive regular reports, on the financial implications arising from the expected reduction in levels of income from the Wraparound care service. (This will occur during and after the transition from the provision of 600 hours to 1140 hours of free early learning and childcare by August 2020).

#### Update December 2021

- Although 1,140 hours of free early learning and childcare (ELC) was successfully implemented from August 2020, COVID related infrastructure delays meant the ability to offer any 'add-on' options (previously referred to as wraparound) for parents/carers since then has been very limited. From August 2021 the final new setting opened at Overlee Family Centre and the department is now looking to re-introduce the Add-On service where spaces/staffing ratios allow from early 2022.
- Families will be charged in advance of the additional hours being accessed on a monthly basis. The total amount payable will be calculated on the number of add-on sessions the child is due to receive for the forthcoming calendar month. Payment must be made prior to the child starting add-on for that month and should be made through the ParentPay system.
- As part of the annual Charging for Services exercise for 2022/23 approval has been given to increase charges per session from August 2022 with the new pricing model reflecting varying staffing ratios required by Care Inspectorate to provide childcare for under 5s.
- The current flat rate of £2.25 per hour has been in place since August 2017 and the new increased charges are being implemented in the context of the recent expansion of free early year's provision (from 600 hours to 1,140 hours) as well as wider budget pressures. The new equivalent hourly rates for sessions purchased from August 2022 will be as follows :-

- 3-5 year olds - £3.00
  - 2 year olds - £3.75
  - 0-2 year olds - £4.50
- Whilst the charges recommended represent a significant increase they remain below the level charged pre August 2017 which was £4.60 per hour and the service remains significantly subsidised in order to support parents/carers. Benchmarking data suggests that the proposed charges for 3-5 year olds, for example, would still be lower than neighbouring authorities and significantly lower than the funded providers in the private and voluntary sector.
  - Anticipated income from the Add-On service has been factored into the budget setting process for 2022/23 and will continue to be monitored closely and reported via the normal periodic budgetary control reports to Cabinet.

### **Recommendation 9**

To keep under review, options to develop income generation opportunities at roundabouts, bus shelters, council vehicles and other locations.

#### Update December 2021

- These opportunities had been explored previously and were found to be of low value and therefore of low priority but will be kept under review

### **Recommendation 10**

To support the ongoing development of proposals (subject to submission of further reports where appropriate) by the Environment Department, to generate new income, or maximise potential from existing arrangements, through some or all of the following:

- Trade waste and refuse collection;
- Fleet Services;
- Undertaking landscaping and grounds maintenance in new housing developments;
- Leasing of storage units;
- Potential purchase of new commercial units;
- Grazing lets;
- Asset Management and taking a more commercial approach to managing vacant buildings;
- Renewable energy, including options for developing council-owned or shared partnership arrangements, e.g. creation of a biogas facility;
- Burial and Related Services; and
- Annual garden waste collection arrangements.

#### Update December 2021

- Charging for garden waste collections was successfully implemented in July 2021 and has generated £865k.
- Landscaping and grounds maintenance in new housing developments / factoring linked to new-builds. No opportunities have been identified so far, but it will be kept under review
- Potential Biogas facility discussions

### **Recommendation 11**

That the departments involved submit a report on the option to introduce a public car parking policy, to regulate activities better at key pressure points in East Renfrewshire;

#### Update December 2021

- The ongoing directive from the Scottish Government has been to work from home where possible. Normal travel patterns have therefore not yet resumed to allow the necessary surveys to be undertaken in a meaningful way to allow for the development of this policy. To be kept under review.

### **Recommendation 12**

That the Chair of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee extends an invitation to meet the Chair of the Performance and Audit Committee of the Health and Social Care Partnership, to share information and discuss good practices arising from the review.

#### Update December 2021

- An invitation was extended from the Chair of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to the Chair of the Performance and Audit Committee of the IJB to share information and discuss good practices arising from review. That meeting took place on 15 March, with reference made to it at the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 18 March 2021, as part of the Chair's report.

#### Extract from Minute of Meeting on Committee Held on 18 March (Part of Chair's Report)

##### Investigation on Income Generation and Commercialisation

(iii) Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 26 November 2020 (Page 1338, Item 1445 refers), when it had been noted that an invitation would be extended from the Chair of the committee to the Chair of the Performance and Audit Committee of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) to share information and discuss good practices arising from the Income Generation and Commercialisation review completed by the committee, Councillor Miller confirmed that the meeting had taken place on 15 March 2021. He reported that the matters discussed had been wide-ranging and had included why and how the committee's review had been pursued; the outcome and related recommendations; challenges facing the IJB in the delivery of services including in the context of COVID-19; commercial and ethical issues in relation to the provision of

services; and changes in future that could stem from the review of Adult and Social Care in Scotland.

He confirmed that it had been agreed at the meeting that having representation from this committee on the IJB and other related bodies continued to be useful, and that if further discussions on any issue in future would be valuable, that could be arranged.

BLANK PAGE

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE20 January 2022Report by Head of Strategic ServicesINVESTIGATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE REPORT UPDATE**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide the Audit and Scrutiny Committee with a progress report against the recommendations approved in the Investigation on Climate Change Report submitted on 12 March 2020.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that the Committee note the progress to date and future plans for delivery against statutory climate change targets.

**BACKGROUND**

3. At the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2019, the scope and timeline of an investigation on climate change were approved. The final draft report on the investigation, including recommendations, was considered by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 12 March 2020. The report was not submitted to Cabinet until 13 August 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At this time, Cabinet agreed that a response should be prepared.

4. This paper fulfils this requirement and takes each recommendation from the original report (Appendix A) in turn and outlines the progress to date.

**REPORT**Recommendation 1:

5. *To raise awareness levels further on the importance of addressing climate change, across all levels within the Council, and the wider East Renfrewshire community, including maximisation of the potential offered by social media, and the Council's new website once it is launched;*

## Response 1:

5.1 Progress has been made against raising awareness levels on the importance of addressing climate change but perhaps not to as great an extent as might have been expected in 22 months. This has been largely due to the impact of Covid-19 and the focus on maintaining key services from March 2020 until June 2020 and adapting to new working practices.

5.2 In August 2020, a Climate Change Officer was recruited. In 2021 a series of “what does good look like?” workshops took place across 7 key themes: Planning and Place, Transportation, Waste, Fleet, Housing, Estates, and Procurement. These workshops raised awareness levels of the scale and scope of the challenge in tackling climate change by engaging over 60 key officers within services that will be pivotal in the net zero journey.

5.3 A Get to Zero Senior Officers’ Working Group has also been set up which is now beginning to gather pace. It has considered the Council’s ‘Get to Zero ‘Ambition Statement’ and associated high-level action plan and has served to raise awareness levels at a senior management level across the Council.

5.4 In terms of the council’s new website, a dedicated Climate Change page has been created with updated content to include findings from the thematic Citizens’ Panel Survey on Climate Change and links to information sources to help local residents and businesses to take action.

5.5 To date, social media posts have been focused on specific activities i.e. local housing strategy focus on low carbon technology and energy efficiency and the planting of 26 ‘wee woods’ as a COP 26 legacy project.

Future Plan:

5.6 The “what does good look like?” workshops will recommence in early 2022 to move from a high-level to a more detailed action plan with the objective, wherever possible, to quantify the carbon impact of activities and set targets for reduction on the route map to net zero. In doing so, awareness levels will further increase across staff.

5.7 The GTZ Senior Officers’ Working Group will continue to meet on a monthly basis to guide and shape the forthcoming GTZ Action Plan.

5.8 Provision of comprehensive ‘carbon literacy’ training to a wider group of staff, including employees who may not consider that their role is key to delivery of the climate change agenda, would be desirable to raise awareness levels. It would also be beneficial to include ‘carbon literacy’ training as part of future corporate inductions for new employees. Funding has not been identified for this to date.

5.9 In relation to the Council’s website and social media platforms, it is acknowledged that more can be done to engage employees, local residents and businesses but resources are limited.

Recommendation 2:

6. *To support the further promotion of agile working procedures in the Council, including raising awareness through guidance of how employees and departments as a whole, impact upon the Council’s carbon footprint, and steps they can take to reduce this;*

Response 2:

6.1 Covid-19 and the ‘work from home’ mandate from the Scottish Government in March 2020 resulted in a rapid deployment of agile working technology and new procedures. As a result business and commuting mileage was drastically reduced. The potential link between agile working and reducing our carbon footprint and future opportunity has not been made explicit and more efforts to raise awareness of the climate benefits of home working will be made in the forthcoming Get to Zero Action Plan.

Recommendation 3:

7. *That the Council's strategy on climate change is renewed, setting out the Council's future priorities with clear actions, replacing the former Climate Change Strategy and Sustainability Action Plan, and to include the involvement of children and young people in the development of the new strategy;*

Response 3:

7.1 A new detailed Get to Zero Strategy is in development with an 'Ambition Statement' and high-level action plan approved by Cabinet on 25 November 2021. To date this has involved key council officers and services with an initial focus on the council's own emissions and those within its supply chain.

Future Plan:

7.2 In 2022, a more detailed 'Get to Zero' action plan will be developed and will incorporate a broader scope and provide the opportunity to engage with children and young people. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Plan will also be undertaken.

Recommendation 4:

8. *In relation to oversight, it was noted that the Cabinet and the Convener for Environment have responsibility for climate change and sustainability. Notwithstanding, it is suggested that a cross party Elected Member / Officer working group could be established on climate change to make further recommendations to Cabinet;*

Response 4:

8.1 As outlined in para 5.3 above a Senior Officers' Working Group has been established with its inaugural meeting taking place in September 2021.

8.2 Elected members' briefing sessions on climate change were delivered in April and December 2021. The purpose of these cross-party information events is to provide a better understanding of climate change impacts, net-zero objectives and the role of the council and councillors in terms of delivering on this agenda.

Future Plan:

8.3 It is proposed that the establishment of a formal cross-party Member/Officer Working group takes place post-election.

Recommendation 5

9. *That the Corporate Management Team should consider how they can best take forward their leadership role in climate change;*

Response 5:

9.1 The Corporate Management Team have been kept aware of the many challenges facing the Council in relation to climate change.

Future Plan:

9.2 The Director of Environment who has responsibility for coordinating the Council's response to climate change will be submitting regular update reports to the CMT ensuring they maintain an oversight and provide appropriate leadership given the scale, potential costs and cross departmental nature of the issue.

Recommendation 6

10. *That an inter-departmental working group be formed on climate change, supported by the change-management team within the Environment Department, and reporting through the Director of Environment to the Corporate Management Team;*

Response 6:

10.1 The "what does good look like?" workshops (as outlined in para 5.2) that took place in 2021 included officers mainly from the Environment Department but officers from Corporate and Community Services and Education also participated, where appropriate. At a senior level, the GTZ Senior Officers' Working Group has a representative from each department (as outlined in para 5.3). These groups were supported by the Environment Department's Change & Governance team.

Future Plan:

10.2 Once the Get to Zero Action Plan is adopted, progress will be reported to the Corporate Management Team. By approval of the Cabinet Paper submitted on the 25 November 2021, a commitment was made to provide an annual update to Cabinet, in much the same way as the Cabinet is provided with a progress report on health and safety across the Council.

Recommendation 7:

11. *That the Council considers setting a date by which it should be carbon neutral. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee suggest that 2040 could be an option, on the basis that should the Council achieve milestones earlier than planned on climate change, then consideration could be given to revising this date;*

Response 7:

11.1 In August 2020, Cabinet approved the recommendation to "support the ambition for the Council to be 'carbon neutral' by 2040 (as a minimum target)".

Recommendation 8:

12. *That consideration be given to establishing reporting mechanisms to inform the Cabinet on progress being made towards reaching the suggested target date of 2040, subject to baseline figures being agreed for all services, e.g., reductions in paper, printers, vehicle mileage, single-use plastics, to enable better information gathering on the Council's climate change performance;*

Response 8:

12.1 To support this recommendation a carbon baseline has been established. While this work took place in 2021, it has been decided that the baseline year should be 2019/2020 to reflect emissions from pre-Covid Council operations. Baseline figures are not aligned to services but rather categorised as follows:

- Procurement (or supply chain emissions)
- Natural gas supply in council buildings
- Electricity use in council buildings
- Food and garden waste recycling
- Municipal landfill
- Fuel for vehicles

12.2 Whilst the methodology is consistent with other local authorities, the baseline report includes 'Scope 3' or indirect emissions, i.e., emissions arising as a consequence of council activities but not necessarily owned or controlled by them e.g., procurement/supply chain emissions and commuting. This ensures the Council is considering the fullest extent of the emissions it can influence. However, public bodies are free to interpret their 'Scope 3' emissions, including not reporting these at all. By including Scope 3 emissions East Renfrewshire Council is putting itself in a strong position to meet future reporting requirements but it does mean that it is difficult to compare emissions performance against other local authorities.

Future Plan:

12.3 A carbon emissions report will be submitted to Cabinet on 27 January 2022. This report acknowledges the current emissions performance and the need for improvements to data capture and management. The paper also recommends further analysis of the procurement spend.

12.4 A commitment has been made to report performance against the 2040 target in an annual update to Cabinet (see para 10.2 above).

Recommendation 9:

13. *That a full-time post of climate change coordinator is created with Council-wide responsibility, as a matter of urgency, and based within the Environment Department, subject to further discussion on the resource implications;*

Response:

13.1 A Climate Change Officer was appointed in August 2020. The post is based in the Environment Department. To date, the Climate Change Officer has compiled the annual carbon returns to the Scottish Government in 2020 and 2021; commissioned a carbon baseline report for the Council to establish the baseline to track progress to net-zero against; coordinated 16 "what good looks like" workshops to inform the high-level action plan and identify barriers to progress. The Climate Change Officer has also delivered 5 community/schools talks and continues to coordinate the 'wee woods' project which aims to plant 26 mini-woodlands as part of the COP 26 legacy project – engaging over 30 schools in the process.

Recommendation 10:

14. *That the Council's departments give further consideration to the capacity which they have to coordinate climate change activities, especially due to the need for greater inter-departmental working and the likelihood of greater project-based work, through the joint working arrangements proposed at Recommendation 6 above.*

Response:

14.1 The Scottish Government Climate Change Plan Update was published in December 2020. This provided further details for delivery of net-zero which led to an assessment of resources required for the development and ongoing governance of a climate change action plan. As a result of this, a further post of Get to Zero Manager was created and recruited in October 2021. A further exercise was then undertaken which engaged the various council services involved in the climate action groups to identify shortfalls in capacity, skills and knowledge. There is currently a shortfall in the type and number of staffing resources required to deliver this agenda.

Recommendation 11:

15. *To invite the appropriate bodies to consider inclusion of the following wording on the capital projects appraisal form:*

*'Please outline any positive or negative effects for sustainability which the project will have once completed. In terms of carbon reduction for example, impacts could include use of renewable energy sources, reduced energy/fuel consumption, increasing recycling and reduced need for people to travel by private car. In terms of the environment, benefits could include the provision of sustainable drainage, tree-planting, habitat creation and reduced use of plastics.'*

Response 11:

15.1 This has been included in the Capital Project Appraisal Form by the Corporate Asset Management Group (CAMG). The updated form will be included in the Capital Investment Strategy Update paper which will be submitted to Cabinet in February 2022.

Future Plan:

15.2 However further to this, a more comprehensive Climate Change Impact Assessment for all new policies, plans and operations will be proposed to Cabinet in April 2022.

Recommendation 12:

16. *That the Council's Corporate Report Format Guidance is re-issued to all departments, with a request that sustainability and climate change implications are given greater prominence and wider consideration. Further criteria on sustainability and climate change should be developed, led by the Council's renewed climate change strategy, to assist authors in the preparation of reports;*

Response 12:

16.1 As outlined in para 15.2 above, a Climate Change Impact Assessment is being proposed for all new policies, plans and operations. If approved, the findings from any assessment will be incorporated in the Council's corporate report format in order to give climate change implications greater prominence.

Recommendation 13:

17. *To agree that a Council policy is developed, with input and support from the trade unions, on the usage and deployment of single-use plastics throughout the authority, to minimise and eventually eradicate their use;*

Response 13:

17.1 The Council continues to make progress towards reducing and eradicating the use of the single use plastics. The Education Department has made significant progress in eradicating single use plastics by using reusable cutlery and crockery across educational establishments. As a consequence of the impact from Covid and the requirement to ensure social distancing and hygiene standards, there is on occasion the need for catering staff at individual educational establishments to use single use resources. Where this is the case, the department is continuing to avoid the use of plastics by using biodegradable cutlery and crockery.

Future Plan:

17.2 A policy to support the elimination of single-use plastics in all Council operations will form a key action within the Get to Zero Action Plan. The action plan will also promote the reduction and eradication of their use by residents and businesses through appropriate communications and support measures, e.g. sharing best practice and facilitating opportunities for re-use and roll out of 'top up' water taps in public places.

Recommendation 14:

18. *To agree that consultation and engagement takes place with the East Renfrewshire community to establish what their views and priorities are on climate change, to inform the renewal of the Council's climate change strategy, using existing channels such as the East Renfrewshire Citizens' Panel/East Renfrewshire Youth Voice, and through new channels, e.g. the Council's new website once launched;*

Response 14:

18.1 A climate change survey was issued to the Citizens' Panel in March 2020 in order to better understand what people's view and priorities are on climate change. Key findings included:

- 86% agreed that climate change is an urgent and immediate problem
- 76% of respondents indicated that they would like to do a lot more to reduce the effects of climate change
- 96% agreed that the Council should lead by example to communities by taking action on climate change

18.2 The 2022/23 budget consultation included a number of questions on climate change priorities and living locally. The consultation closed on 12 December 2021 and findings are yet to be analysed and shared. Core climate change questions have been devised for inclusion in the 2022 Citizens' Panel to allow us to track attitudinal change in key areas. At the time of writing findings from these surveys have not been compiled.

Future Plan:

18.3 As part of the development of the Get to Zero Action Plan, the East Renfrewshire Youth Voice will be explored as a means of engaging the young people across the area.

18.4 The Climate Emergency Declaration made by East Renfrewshire Council on 25 October 2021, requested that the Council set up a Climate Change Partnership Group, involving Councillors, residents, young citizens, businesses and other relevant parties. The Get to Zero team is progressing this and also looking at digital consultation platforms which might facilitate sustained engagement and ability to capture views from a variety of audiences. It is anticipated that a partnership group will meet in 2022 but this is likely to be post-May local elections.

Recommendation 15:

19. *That the film produced by pupils at the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre on climate change and recycling, should, on the suggestion of a pupil there, be shared via social media links, with other educational establishments in East Renfrewshire;*

Response 15:

19.1 The film, which was shared with members of the audit and scrutiny committee during a visit to the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre in January 2020, was posted on the school's website and shared through social media so that young people and staff from other educational establishments in and beyond East Renfrewshire could learn from this best practice.

Recommendation 16:

20. *To maximise the potential for achieving further ECO schools status and Green Flag awards across educational establishments in East Renfrewshire, building upon the excellent work already taking place;*

Response 16:

20.1 Pupils across East Renfrewshire continue to participate in a wide range of *Learning for Sustainability* activities including award-based programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, John Muir Award and Eco School Green Flag. Thirty educational establishments currently hold an Eco Schools Green Flag Award, which is a higher proportion than in any other local authority. An Eco-coordinator Forum and associated Google Classroom were established in 2021 in order to facilitate further sharing of best practice and resources across our schools and ELC centres.

Recommendation 17:

21. *To investigate the feasibility of reviewing the Council's recent investment of resources in active travel, to assess the impact of more choices for citizens of cycling and walking, and any associated benefits, such as alternative commuting options, increasing access to the countryside, or more generally improving the quality of life of residents.*

Response 17:

21.1 To date investment on active travel measures and assessment of impacts and benefits have been delivered through external funding sources. In 2020/21 temporary measures such as the Giffnock Primary 'School Street' and 10km of cycle lane pilots were undertaken as part of the transport response to Covid-19. Various other measures- including the Better Points scheme which awards people who have walked, cycled or used public transport with points to be spent in local businesses, along with some small-scale walking and cycling projects have been delivered.

21.2 A new Sustainable and Community Travel Officer was appointed in September 2021 and will play a key role in the shaping and delivery of an updated Local Transport Strategy, as well as developing policy and delivery of expanded EV charging infrastructure.

Future Plan:

21.3 Given the Scottish Government target to reduce car kilometres travelled by 20% by 2030 (as outlined in the Scottish Government Climate Change Plan Update Dec 2020) it is

anticipated that forthcoming council budgets will require to be reviewed in terms of both capital & revenue expenditure in respect of promoting active travel within the authority.

Recommendation 18:

22. *That consideration be given to what further action can be taken, such as thorough revisions to the Local Development Plan, and related planning guidance, to promote sustainability and raise awareness of the authority's expectations regarding new housing developments;*

Response 18:

22.1 The requirement to move towards a net zero has been given greater emphasis in Local Development Plan 2. LDP2 sets out a range of policies which contribute to tackling climate change through encouraging sustainable site selection; sustainable design, sustainable travel; integrated green infrastructure, electric vehicles, encouraging renewable energy proposals, reducing waste and pollution; encouraging recycling; promoting sustainable drainage and flood management; and the regeneration of vacant and derelict land.

22.2 This approach will contribute towards reducing the areas carbon footprint, energy consumption and facilitating the transition to a low carbon economy and low carbon living.

Key Policies are provided below:

- Strategic Policy 1: Development Strategy requires proposals to meet the objectives of the Plan in order to create sustainable, well designed, connected, healthy, safe and mixed communities and places. It also requires proposals to contribute to energy reduction and sustainable development in accordance with Policies E1 and E2 (see below)
- Strategic Policy 2: Development Contributions requires new development to be accompanied by the appropriate infrastructure and services required to support new or expanded communities.
- Policy D1: Place-making and Design requires proposals to be assessed against the 6 qualities of a successful place as outlined in SPP and Designing Streets. Proposals must deliver a clear sustainable movement hierarchy, incorporate integrated and enhance existing green infrastructure and incorporate the use of sustainable design and construction methods and materials in the layout and design to support a low carbon economy.
- Policy D8: Sustainable Transport Networks requires proposals to prioritise active travel and to demonstrate a clear sustainable movement hierarchy.
- Policy D11: Electric Charging Infrastructure requires proposals to incorporate charging points and infrastructure as a core component of their proposal.
- Policy E1: Sustainable Design requires major development to provide an energy and carbon footprint assessment to demonstrate their contribution towards achieving sustainable development, reducing energy use and how the proposal will offset the overall carbon footprint of their development, during and post construction.
- Policy E2: Renewable Energy provides criteria for considering low carbon and renewable energy proposals.

Future Plan:

22.3 Although the current LDP provides a strong framework in developing place-based solutions to a zero-carbon future and contains strong policies on climate change adaptation and mitigation, it will be critical to build upon this in the preparation of LDP3.

Recommendation 19:

23. *That a review be undertaken of our approach to public transport to ensure it is sufficiently sustainable, and tailored to residents' current and future needs;*

Response 19:

23.1 To date there has been no review of the Council's approach to public transport. Management and operation of local public transport is delegated to operators and Strathclyde Passenger Transport which makes the recommendation more difficult to fulfil.

Future Plan:

23.2 The Council's Planning Team will refresh the Local Transport Strategy in 2022 and will consider the findings from recent transport studies and provisions contained in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 to help strengthen and improvement partnership plans. The Council will continue to work through the Glasgow City Region Transport & Connectivity Portfolio Group to ensure that opportunities are understood and explored.

Recommendation 20:

24. *That the opportunity is taken through the re-development plans for Eastwood Leisure Centre complex, to consider the option of introducing a district (i.e., linked) heating system for the public buildings located within Eastwood Park;*

Response 20:

24.1 The option of introducing a district heating system for the public buildings located within Eastwood Park was reviewed at high-level by the project team. District heating is most suited to well-insulated new buildings with good air tightness values that are of the same use type and have relatively constant energy demands. Given the mix of different building types and ages at Eastwood Park it was considered, at this stage, that it would be too intrusive to make the significant alterations to the existing buildings required to make them suitable to be plugged into a District Heating system. It was also a concern that a District Heating system may limit the energy performance of the proposed leisure centre and theatre, given its very different energy demands to the other buildings in the park, by needing to create additional top-up systems within the building.

Recommendation 21:

25. *That the implications should be assessed of plans to replace gas boilers with low carbon heating after 2025, for new homes;*

Response 21:

25.1 For new homes, we have considered the Passivhaus building standard which is widely accepted to be the optimum approach to achieving a carbon neutral home. However, it is an expensive build option. Therefore, net zero standards like air source heat pumps and electric storage heaters are being explored at the early stages of new build projects. This looks achievable with additional grants made available by the Government for new

developments. Ground source heat pumps are another option but can only be used where there is ground space.

25.2 The Scottish Government are currently looking at the strategy to introduce a policy for all new buildings from 2024, whereby the primary heating source would be zero emissions with a requirement to meet a higher energy efficiency standard. This may become a regulatory requirement through Building Standards.

25.3 It is worth noting that there are other factors to consider in the move to low carbon heating, which will most likely be electricity. A switch to all electric will require tariff knowledge, possibly increased cost (depending on how Government controls energy cost by 2025) and an understanding of how to use the systems effectively.

Recommendation 22:

26. *To continue the programme of improvements already underway to the Council's housing stock and other public buildings, to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions through the use of innovative new technologies in relation to lighting, heating, and infrastructure;*

Response 22:

26.1 Our investment plan to improve energy efficiency in our housing stock has continued. This includes the installation of new windows; external; internal and cavity wall insulation to properties to reduce heat loss and make homes warmer. Gas boilers are being upgraded to 'A' rated gas boilers to improve energy efficiency in homes.

26.2 This is part of the Council's commitment to meet the Scottish Government's Energy Efficiency in Scottish Social Housing (ESSH) targets, which aims to achieve an energy performance certificate (EPC) rating of band 'B' for all social rented properties in Scotland by 2032, with an interim target of EPC band 'D' by 2025. At present 99% of our tenants' homes achieve EPC band 'D'. We are aiming to improve our homes to achieve EPC band C which is above set target by March 2025.

26.3 In addition to above, the feasibility of new technologies, i.e., installation of Solar Photovoltaic Panels to reduce energy cost to tenants; retrofitting with low carbon heat sources will be explored.

26.4 As with the replacement of gas boilers, this requires research around financial viability and financial implication on tenants, coupled with education on how to use the systems effectively to reduce energy consumption.

26.5 In terms of public buildings' improvements, there has been no further Council funding assigned for energy efficiency projects in the last two years. However, SALIX funding (£70k) has been used for LED replacement lighting in St. Joseph's Primary School (completed in July 2021) and a SALIX-led refurbishment of St. Andrew's House will bring £30k of energy efficiency benefits.

26.6 Net-zero buildings surveys have been completed by expert consultants. Eight Council buildings, including Eastwood HQ, 2 Spiersbridge Way and the Barrhead Main Street office have been assessed in terms of what is required to reduce carbon emissions and the cost of implementing improvements. Findings and recommendations are due to be shared with and considered by in January 2022. Funding is not currently available to undertake similar surveys across the Education and Culture and Leisure Trust buildings' portfolios.

26.7 The Council has also been successful in a funding bid to the Scottish Government as part of the developing approach to Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategies. Between now and end of March 2022, the project will consider the governance required (internal and external stakeholder mapping exercise); and improvement to baseline data using national and local datasets with a focus on the non-domestic buildings sector in order to understand the costs for decarbonisation of heat provision.

Future Plan:

26.9 All local authorities in Scotland are required to assess capacity for delivery of district heat networks under the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021. This recognises the potential that heat networks have to reduce emissions in our homes and buildings. This is a significant undertaking and will form a part of the wider Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) which is to be completed by all councils by the end of 2023. These plans will show how local councils intend to improve the energy efficiency of all buildings and decarbonising heat.

26.9 Following on from the net-zero surveys undertaken in 2021 in council offices and to inform the LHEES, a comprehensive view of the thermal/mechanical energy efficiency measure that will be required in the remainder of the Council's estate, including the Education and Leisure portfolios, will be required. Based on the work already undertaken, it is estimated that further survey work will cost between £200k and 300k.

Recommendation 23:

*27. To continue working with partner organisations and other agencies to ensure the preservation and protection of peatlands in East Renfrewshire, including the exploration of new funding opportunities, to ensure that the huge potential of peat to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> is maintained and increased where possible;*

Response 23:

27.1 Policy E4 of the Local Development Plan 2 seeks to protect soil quality including peatland areas. The 'Spatial Framework for Wind Energy Development' also excludes land of Class 1 nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep-peat and priority peatland habitat from being suitable for development. Policy E4 is provided below.

Policy E4: Protecting Soil Quality

*Proposals will be required to minimise adverse impacts on soil, avoiding the unnecessary disturbance of peat and other carbon rich soils, and minimise the amount of land that is affected.*

*Proposals must be supported by appropriate surveys, assessments and management plans and where necessary provide appropriate mitigation measures.*

*In the case of carbon rich soils, in order that the Council may assess the merits of the proposal, applicants must demonstrate the effect it would have on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as a result of its construction.*

27.2 Policy E2 'Renewable Energy' also has criteria for considering the impact upon carbon rich soils.

Future Plan:

27.3 Identification of peatland protection and restoration will be incorporated in the Get to Zero Action Plan. A better understanding of the current peatland and carbon absorption achieved will be a first step. Peatland also has a role in terms of biodiversity protection and enhancement and will be central to a revised Local Biodiversity Action Plan, in conjunction with relevant partner organisations including Nature Scot.

Recommendation 24:

28. *To protect the environment, and to help the Council reach its suggested objective of reaching carbon neutrality by 2040, a headline project for the new climate change strategy could be considered e.g., a tree being planted for every resident in East Renfrewshire (approx. 95,000).*

Response 24:

28.1 No headline project has been formally considered as yet.

Future Plan:

28.2 The new Get to Zero Action Plan will incorporate a headline project which will either significantly reduce or absorb emissions.

## CONCLUSIONS

29. Clearly much has changed since the Audit and Scrutiny Committee considered their report on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020, just days before the first lockdown. Public awareness of climate change is much greater than it was 22 months ago. However, progress and preparation against the necessary targets has slowed due to the activities associated with Covid. The targets are challenging, both in terms of the solutions and their affordability. This picture is replicated across Scotland and is not unique to East Renfrewshire Council.

30. The council has put in place some of the key foundations necessary to deliver effective change and has plans for more foundations. It is hoped that this report provides a comprehensive summary of these plans and the challenges ahead.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

31. It is recommended that the Committee note the progress to date and future plans for delivery against statutory climate change targets.

## REPORT AUTHOR

Phil Daws  
Head of Environment (Strategic Services)

BLANK PAGE

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE20 January 2022Report by ClerkNATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT  
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SCOTTISH COUNCILS' BENEFIT SERVICES**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide information on the Audit Scotland report *Impact of COVID-19 on Scottish Councils' Benefit Services: A Thematic Study*.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. It is recommended that the committee considers the report.

**BACKGROUND**

3. A copy of the Audit Scotland report [The Impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Councils' Benefit Services: A Thematic Study](#), published on 7 October 2021, has already been circulated to all Audit and Scrutiny Committee Members. Under the committee's specialisation arrangements, the Members leading the review of this particular report are Councillor McLean and Councillor Swift. The Head of Communities, Revenues & Change has provided comments on that report and a copy of those comments is attached (see Appendix A).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

4. It is recommended that the committee considers the report.

Local Government Access to Information Act 1985

Report Author: Linda Hutchison, Clerk to the Committee (Tel.No.0141 577 8388)  
e-mail: [linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

Background Papers:-

1. Audit Scotland Report – *Impact of COVID-19 on Scottish Council's Benefit Services: A Thematic Study*.

BLANK PAGE

External Audit Report – Housing Benefits, the impact of Covid-19

Comments for Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2022

Prepared by Head of Communities, Revenues & Change and Senior Revenues Manager

January 2022

## INTRODUCTION

1. This paper aims to provide high level comments on the Council's position regarding the External Audit report on the topic of Housing Benefits and the impact of Covid-19 by Audit Scotland ([The impact of Covid-19 on Scottish councils' benefit services: A thematic study \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/publications/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-scottish-councils-benefit-services-a-thematic-study)).

## BACKGROUND

2. As one of the smallest Housing Benefit services in Scotland, with an annual caseload of around 2,700, we have been planning for the gradual phasing out of Housing Benefit (HB) as a result of the implementation of Universal Credit. There is an eventual national goal to retain only those of pension age and a few complex or specific cases on HB post Universal Credit (UC). National delays in UC implementation have made the planning of resources in recent years a particular challenge.

3. Audit Scotland have reported on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Scottish Councils' benefits services through responses to a questionnaire which was completed by 29 out of 32 councils, including a response from East Renfrewshire Council.

4. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Audit and Scrutiny Committee with comments on the Covid-19 paper and to update the Committee on progress within East Renfrewshire Council's Housing Benefit Service, building on comments that Elected Members will have seen in regular reports to Cabinet and Council on performance and the impact of Covid-19.

## COMMENTS

### The impact of Covid-19 paper from Audit Scotland

5. The Covid-19 report identified that Scottish councils reacted positively to the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic and were effective in meeting the significant challenges of delivering benefit service remotely, with more than three quarters impacted adversely by absence during 2020/21.

6. The worldwide shortage of IT and office equipment contributed to delays in claims processing times during the early stages of the pandemic. Although the majority of benefit staff worked remotely the accuracy of claims had not been adversely impacted, with 75% maintaining or improving accuracy.

7. The paper makes a number of recommendations, which can be summarised as relating to recording of absence, resourcing, information technology, minimising fraud and error and accuracy.

8. East Renfrewshire was quoted in the report as a positive example of the swift response of the ICT service in providing laptops to enable homeworking, and the training provided on information security and data protection to ensure staff were aware of their responsibilities.

9. 11 of 32 Councils had experienced a decline in processing times, including East Renfrewshire Council. The decline in processing experienced by East Renfrewshire Council was highlighted as being impacted by the implementation of a new Benefits ICT system during the pandemic. Delivery of a significant change project in a remote environment was recognised as being a significant challenge.

#### East Renfrewshire Council – Update on Progress

10. The implementation of the new Council Tax and Benefits system was achieved on time in December 2020, working in a remote environment and with services under pressure as a result of COVID demands. 2021/22 Council Tax bills were issued using the new system in March 2021 and financial year-end procedures were completed successfully. This has been a considerable achievement. It has also been a significant challenge for the teams involved and it has not been without its customer impacts, with longer response times, which have continued into 2021/22. Recovery plans are in place and good progress has been made to work through the backlog caused by the new system. Work has also been undertaken with HR to support our teams with the increased workloads and to improve staff wellbeing and resilience.

11. As has been reported to Members throughout the year, previous good progress in Housing Benefit performance indicators stalled in 2020/21 with a dip in performance. This dip in performance was expected from the implementation of the new system. Rising caseload and time taken to familiarise staff with a new ICT system, which has replaced a significant legacy system and all business processes has had a real impact on the service and also staff morale and wellbeing. The benefits service in particular had a large backlog which affected performance for 2020/21 and into 2021/22. Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grants are up 12%; Community Care Grants by 34% and Council Tax Reduction new cases by 119% for 2020/21 – these cases take significantly longer to process. The service has also had to take on the new workload of Covid Self Isolation Support Grants (SISGs).

12. Various actions have been undertaken to mitigate the impact on customers, such as overtime, support from other teams within the Council, recruitment of agency resource and external contractors to eliminate the backlog of work. This ensured that the processing of claims was brought up to date during 2021.

13. Speed of processing times have been impacted with ERC now ranking 25<sup>th</sup> in Scotland for new Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction claims (13<sup>th</sup> last year, 22<sup>nd</sup> previous year) and 16<sup>th</sup> for change of circumstance for Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction (11<sup>th</sup> last year and 13<sup>th</sup> previous year). The reduction in performance resulted in a review undertaken by the DWP during autumn 2021, with the outcome of that review expected shortly. We will continue to focus on performance and implement improvements, with a new compliance resource resuming focus in this area.

14. Housing Benefit Overpayment recovery was impacted, with in-year recovery 96.4% (previous year 105%) and total recovery 6.6% (previous year 14%). As with other councils, debt recovery was suspended from March to July 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic, to ensure that vulnerable residents within the community were supported. This resulted in reduced collection levels in 2020/21, impacting the good progress made with our performance in the previous year. This impact is expected to continue at least into 2021/22, with the position

beyond that uncertain due to the long term impact of Covid on the economy – other councils will be similarly affected. Various actions are underway to recover the historic HB Overpayment debt, with East Renfrewshire making use of the DWP’s Housing Benefit Debt Service.

15. Historic HB Overpayment data and processes have been reviewed as part of the implementation of the new Council Tax and Benefits system in 2020/21, with all new HB Overpayments subject to recovery via ongoing deductions, being recovered through the new system. Further work will continue for the remainder of 2021/22 and into 2022/23 to ensure all HB Overpayment debt is recovered using the new system. The Debt Recovery Policy will also be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose.

16. Recovery of the backlog; system stability; staff training, wellbeing and confidence; and improved performance have been and continue to be the key focus of management and leadership in the service and we are starting to see some stabilisation in performance, with scope for further improvement into 2022/23.

## CONCLUSIONS

17. Benefits is a complex and frequently-changing area, with a nationally driven landscape and a range of different agencies involved. National delays in UC implementation have meant maintenance of HB caseloads for far longer than predicted. Against a background of reducing DWP funding, wider pressures on council budgets and with the challenges brought by Covid-19 this continues to be a challenging time for service delivery. Audit Scotland’s report on the impact of Covid-19 on councils’ benefit services highlights that this is the picture across the country, with East Renfrewshire’s situation exacerbated by the implementation of the new ICT system.

18. The current Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of the new Council Tax & Benefit System has had substantial impact on the performance results during 2020/21, and this has continued into 2021/22. Service management have taken these issues very seriously and have made significant and sustained efforts to recover backlogs; implement recovery to bring in income; and to improve performance. We are beginning to see a stabilisation in performance but there is some way to go – this will be a key focus as we move towards the financial year-end and into 2022/23. We are working closely with DWP and will seek to implement recommendations arising from their review. The new ICT system, once embedded, will provide a platform which will drive modernisation, automation, process improvement and change, which will allow East Renfrewshire Benefits teams to continue to deliver improved performance and customer/residents expectations.

19. This has been a challenging period. We did not plan or choose to go live with a new ICT system, in a remote environment, during a global pandemic and had to carefully weigh up the costs and benefits. The implementation was successful, but has had a more sustained impact on performance and the wellbeing of our workforce than we would have anticipated, this is largely due to remote training and support and increased demand due to Covid. The teams are to be commended for their resilience and commitment. Recovery and improvement will continue to be a key focus of service management.

**BACKGROUND REPORTS**

- [The impact of Covid-19 on Scottish councils' benefit services: A thematic study \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Recovery – Update, Council 8 September 2021](#)
- [Corporate & Community Services End Year Performance Report 2020/21, Cabinet 26 August 2021](#)
- Audit and Scrutiny Committee Report – Housing Benefits, March 2021

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE20 January 2022Report by ClerkAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2021/22 WORK PLAN UPDATE

1. To provide an update on the implementation of the 2021/22 Audit and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan and related issues.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that the committee:-
  - (a) notes and considers performance against the committee's 2021/22 Annual Work Plan thus far;
  - (b) agrees that a further report on performance against it be submitted to the final meeting of the committee prior to the local government Elections in May 2022; and
  - (c) notes that reports on the committee's 2022/23 Work Plan will be submitted to future meetings of the committee following the local government Elections in May 2022.

**AUDIT AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN**

3. In June 2019, as recommended by the committee, the Council approved a *Guide to Scrutiny and Review* which was distributed to all committees and Members of the Council for their use.
4. Amongst other things, to help the Audit and Scrutiny Committee schedule and prioritise its work over the course of each year, the guide proposed that an annual Work Plan be developed and agreed. This was to help provide transparency, openness and evidence of the Council's ongoing commitment to demonstrating Best Value and continuous improvement in the interests of local residents, customers and service users in accordance with the strategic priorities and outcomes of the Community Plan; Vision for the Future (Corporate Plan); and the Outcome Delivery Plan. As appropriate, the Work Plans prepared include reference to specific areas of investigation identified and agreed by the committee and related timescales to progress these, taking account of selection and rejection criteria for reviews within the *Guide to Scrutiny and Review*, enhanced by a priority rating scale developed to help determine further what work is considered a high, medium or low priority to progress, and if work should be pursued on some suggested issues at all.
5. In April 2021 the committee noted performance against its Annual Work Plan for 2020/21, and approved its 2021/22 Work Plan to the extent it had been developed thus far. It was highlighted that the 2021/22 Work Plan would effectively be a 'live' document, agreed then that development of the Plan should continue, and noted that progress on delivering it would be reviewed in due course, with a progress report submitted to a future meeting. As for the 2020/21 Work Plan, the 2021/22 Plan included reference to recurring reports

considered every year, such as on treasury management, Internal Audit work and risk management.

## **PROGRESS MADE ON 2021/22 WORK PLAN**

6. An updated version of the 2021/22 Work Plan and related notes, referring to progress thus far on various issues and related matters, is attached (see Appendix 1).

7. It was highlighted in April that the 2021/22 Work Plan took account of national and local external audit reports which had been or were to be published during that financial year, to the extent the position on this was known at that point, to allow comments on the local position on issues to be sought from officers for consideration under the committee's specialisation arrangements. It was also highlighted that the Auditor General, the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland were responding to the risks to public services and finances from COVID-19 across the full range of audit work, including annual audits and the performance audit programme; and that in view of the position on COVID-19, Audit Scotland was maintaining a pragmatic and flexible approach which would enable changes to be made to its approach at short notice as new issues emerged or risks changed in significance.

8. Further to the above, it was reported in April that the External Auditor had confirmed that there had been some changes to planned reports for the year and that some dates remained to be finalised. The committee's 2021/22 Work Plan is being updated as required as the position regarding external audit work, related reports and the timescale for their publication is clarified. The External Auditor has confirmed which further reports could be published in the first few months of 2022, subject to which there may be sufficient time for feedback to be sought and prepared for submission to the committee during the first few months of 2022. However, if that is not the case, the committee's 2022/23 Work Plan, which will be considered following the local government Elections in May 2022, will include reference to these as appropriate.

9. Reference continues to be included to potential review areas identified thus far, on which there were plans to pursue some work in due course but on which it has not been agreed to progress any further work thus far. Amongst other things, reference is also included to the Audit Scotland COVID-19 Scrutiny Guide for Audit and Risk Committees published in August 2019 on which the committee received comments at one point. As highlighted to the committee in November 2021 and taking account of other updates Elected Members are receiving on COVID-19, such as the most recent update on COVID-19 submitted to the Council on 15 December 2021, it remains an option for Members to request an update on issues raised in that Guide by exception, should they wish to do so.

10. The committee is invited to note and consider performance thus far against the 2021/22 Work Plan which includes reference to some new issues that have been added to the Plan since it was first approved in April.

11. In view of the forthcoming local government Elections, and as it is anticipated that the meeting on 7 April will be the final one of the committee during this Administration, reference has been included in this report to items it is proposed to consider at that meeting, to the extent this is known at present. This includes the short, focussed report on key aspects of work undertaken by the committee since 2017 and the outcome of the further self-evaluation exercise the committee is completing as part of the 2021/22 Work Plan.

## CONCLUSION

12. In the interests of transparency, openness and to provide evidence of the Council's ongoing commitment to demonstrating Best Value and continuous improvement, this report reflects the range of work progressed by the committee thus far during 2021/22. The 2021/22 Work Plan and previous such Plans have provided the committee with greater oversight regarding the scheduling of its work and consideration of issues. The 2021/22 Work Plan continues to be considered a live document and will be refreshed as required.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

13. It is recommended that the committee:-
- (a) notes and considers performance against the committee's 2021/22 Annual Work Plan thus far;
  - (b) agrees that a further report on performance against it be submitted to the final meeting of the committee prior to the local government Elections in May 2022; and
  - (c) notes that reports on the committee's 2022/23 Work Plan will be submitted to future meetings of the committee following the local government Elections in May 2022.

Report Author: Linda Hutchison, Clerk to the Committee (0141 577 8788)

E-mail address: [linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:linda.hutchison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

### Background Papers

Proposed Guide to Scrutiny and Review - Report by Chief Executive (*Jun 2019*);  
Potential Areas for Scrutiny & Review Investigations - Report by Chief Executive (*Aug 2019*)  
Audit & Scrutiny Committee Work Plan - Report by Clerk (*Sept 2019*)  
Audit & Scrutiny Committee Work Plans 2019/20 and 2020/21 - Reports by Clerk (Jun 2020 and January 2021)  
Audit & Scrutiny Committee Work Plans 2020/21 and 2021/22 - Reports by Clerk (April 2021)

BLANK PAGE

Audit and Scrutiny CommitteeUpdate on Implementation of 2021/22 Work Plan

Planned Report Date	Report Subject	Report by	Date Considered by Audit & Scrutiny Committee
29 April 2021	Consultancy Expenditure and Related Log ( <b>See Note 1 below</b> )	Clerk to the Committee in liaison with Chief Officer - Legal and Procurement	29/4/21
	East Renfrewshire Council – Annual External Audit Plan 2020/21	External Auditor	29/4/21
	National External Audit Report - Local Government in Scotland Financial Overview 2019-20	Clerk in liaison with Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	29/4/21
	Audit and Scrutiny Committee Work Plans 2020/21 and 2021/22	Clerk to the Committee	29/4/21
24 June 2021	Unaudited Annual Accounts 2020/21	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	24/6/21
	Code of Corporate Governance 2021/22	Deputy Chief Executive	24/6/21
	Internal Audit Plan 2020/21 - Implementation Progress – January to March 2021	Chief Auditor	24/6/21
	Internal Audit Strategic Plan 2021/22 – 2025/26		24/6/21
	National External Audit Report - Improving Outcomes for Young People Through School Education	Clerk in liaison with Director of Education	24/6/21
	National External Audit Report - Digital Progress in Local Government	Clerk in liaison with Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Executive	24/6/21

Planned Report Date	Report Subject	Report by	Date Considered by Audit & Scrutiny Committee
24 June 2021 (Cont'd)	National External Audit Report - Self-Directed Support (SDS) - 2017 Progress Report - Impact Report - Future SDS Development Activity	Clerk in liaison with Chief Officer, Health and Social Care Partnership	24/6/21
12 August 2021	Annual Treasury Management Report 2020/21	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	12/8/21
	Internal Audit Annual Report 2020/21	Chief Auditor	23/9/21
	Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 - Implementation Progress - April to June 2021		12/8/21
23 September 2021	Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) Internal Self-Assessment	Chief Auditor	12/8/21
	Strategic Risk Register and Risk Management Progress – Biannual Report	Chief Executive	23/9/21
	Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption - East Renfrewshire Council Annual Fraud Statement 2020/21 (Including Audit Scotland Fraud and Irregularity Report 2020/21)		23/9/21
	National Fraud Initiative – Update	Report by Head of Communities, Revenues & Change	23/9/21
	Managing Absence – 2020/21 Annual Report	Deputy Chief Executive	23/9/21
	Summary of Early Retirement/ Redundancy Costs to 31 March 2021		23/9/21
	Withdrawal from European Union – Update ( <b>See Note 2 below</b> )	Director of Corporate & Community Services and Director of Environment	23/9/21

Planned Report Date	Report Subject	Report by	Date Considered by Audit & Scrutiny Committee
23 September 2021 (Cont'd)	Audit Scotland COVID-19 Guide for Audit and Risk Committees and Related Comments ( <i>If Members Wished to Pursue Further Feedback</i> ) <b>(See Note 3 below)</b>	Clerk to the Committee	25/11/21 ( <i>See Chair's Report</i> )
	National External Audit Report - Local Government Overview (Challenges and Performance)	Clerk in liaison with Deputy Chief Executive	12/8/21
25 November 2021 ( <b>See Note 4 Below</b> )	2020/21 Annual Accounts and Draft Annual Audit Report for East Renfrewshire Council	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) and External Auditor	25/11/21
	2020/21 Annual Accounts for Council's Charitable Trusts and External Audit International Standard on Auditing 260 Report		25/11/21
	Interim Treasury Management Report 2021/22	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	25/11/21
	Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 – Implementation Progress – July to September 2021	Chief Auditor	25/11/21
	Update on Implementation of Recommendations Accepted Regarding Audit and Scrutiny Committee's Investigations on:-  (i) Income Generation and Commercialisation; and  (ii) Climate Change.  <b>(See Note 5 Below)</b>	Chief Executive  Director of Environment	20/1/22
	National External Audit Report - Impact of COVID-19 on Scottish Councils' Benefit Services	Clerk in liaison with Head of Communities, Revenues and Change	20/1/22
	Update on Audit and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2021/22	Clerk to the Committee	20/1/22

Planned Report Date	Report Subject	Report by	Date Considered by Audit & Scrutiny Committee
20 January 2022 <b>(See Note 4 Below)</b>	<i>As of April 2021, when the Work Plan was approved, no items were scheduled to be considered in January 2022 but, as reflected above, various issues originally scheduled for November are now being considered in January 2022</i>	N/A	-
17 February 2022 <b>(See Note 4 Below)</b>	Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 – Implementation Progress October to December 2021	Chief Auditor	
	Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	
	Withdrawal from European Union – Update <b>(See Note 2 below)</b>	Director of Corporate & Community Services and Director of Environment	
7 April 2022 <b>(See Note 4 Below)</b>	East Renfrewshire Council - Annual Audit Plan 2021/22	External Auditor	
	Strategic Risk Register and Risk Management Progress - Biannual Report	Chief Executive	
	Work Progressed by Committee since 2017; Performance Against 2021/22 Work Plan; and Self-Evaluation <b>(See Note 6 Below)</b>	Clerk to the Committee	

## **NOTES ON WORK PLAN**

### **Note 1 (Consultancy Expenditure and Related Log)**

In January 2019 the committee agreed, at the end of the 2019/20 financial year, to review the content of the log the Council had established on the appointment of consultants and related issues. The committee noted a report on this issue in June 2020, and agreed then that further reports on consultancy expenditure, as referred to in the log created for this by the Chief Officer (Legal and Procurement), should be submitted to the committee annually after the end of each financial year. Reference to this was included in the 2021/22 Work Plan and will be included in future Work Plans also.

### **Note 2 (Withdrawal from European Union)**

In February 2019 the committee considered feedback on a National External Audit Report on *Withdrawal from the European Union (EU) - Key Audit Issues for the Public Sector*. A report on the Council's *Treasury Management Strategy for 2019/20*, and the implications which Brexit might have for interest rates, Council borrowing, return on investments etc., had also been considered. Audit Scotland had also indicated that the scope, timing and any performance audit work relating to a further report it proposed to prepare on the *Withdrawal from the EU* would depend on developments.

In August 2019 the committee agreed to carry out a review regarding Brexit and the related financial implications as a medium priority issue, subject to further consideration of the timing of its commencement, having regard to the future outcome of the UK Government's discussions with the EU. It was also agreed then that, in the first instance following the appointment of the Council's Brexit Coordinator, arrangements should be made for the post holder to meet the committee to allow its members to take evidence/gather information on Brexit issues. The post was to help coordinate and monitor progress on all aspects of Brexit, including internal preparedness and external liaison with appropriate bodies (including the Scottish Government and Police Scotland), and involved reporting to Elected Members, the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and other Council officials.

A report on the UK's withdrawal from the EU was to have been submitted in April 2020. However, in liaison with the Chair and taking account of the impact of the COVID-19 emergency and related issues, a report was considered on 13 August 2020 instead. Since then, at the request of the committee, the Brexit Coordinator (who is now the Resilience Coordinator) has provided further updates in November 2020 and March and September 2021. He has also provided clarification subsequently on a range of issues raised at these meetings which has been circulated, including on the EU Settlement Scheme, funding issues and State Aid. The committee agreed to seek a further update in February or March 2022.

### **Note 3 (Audit Scotland COVID-19 Guide for Audit and Risk Committees)**

In September 2020, the committee agreed that a report on issues raised in the new *COVID-19 Guide for Audit and Risk Committees*, published by Audit Scotland in August 2020, be prepared for its meeting in November 2020. The Guide posed questions to assist auditors and public bodies effectively scrutinise and provide challenge in key areas requiring additional focus at present, categorising these under the headings of internal control and assurance; financial management and reporting; governance; and risk management.

When feedback and comments on these issues were submitted in November 2020, the committee agreed that a further update be provided in due course around March or April

2021, and that the Clerk should liaise with members to ascertain the specific issues on which feedback and further assurances were to be sought by exception. It was noted that the Performance and Audit Committee of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) had also been considering issues raised within the Guide.

On 18 March 2021, the Chair reported he had sought and received confirmation that the feedback dated November 2020 on changes to internal controls required due to COVID-19 remained current. Taking account of this and other information the committee already had access to, including reports on risk and Internal Audit's work, it was noted that no other issues had been identified by members of the Committee that they wished followed up at that stage; noted that it remained an option to seek further updates on specific issues at any point; and agreed that it might be useful to review the position later in 2021, perhaps in late summer, to pick up any issues that may be raised from the year end Accounts process or transition to the "new normal" working arrangements which it was hoped would start to be introduced by then.

Thus far no issues have been identified by members of the Committee that they wish followed up, taking account of other information available to them, such as the reports being submitted to the Council on COVID-19 issues. On 25 November 2021 the Chair highlighted, and it was noted, that it remains an option to seek further updates on specific issues at any point through either the Chair or Clerk.

#### **Note 4 (Meeting Dates)**

The dates of some meetings of the Committee were subject to approval of the calendar of meetings by the Council in June 2021 and the position on other issues. The meeting on 18 November was rescheduled to 25 November to allow reports on the 2020/21 Annual Accounts for the Council's Charitable Trusts and External Audit International Standard on Auditing 260 Report; and the 2020/21 Annual Accounts and Draft Annual Audit Report for East Renfrewshire Council to be considered then, following which they were submitted to the full Council. This met the External Auditor's revised requirements regarding the signing of the 2020/21 Annual Accounts by the end of November 2021.

When the 2022 calendar of meetings was approved, it was agreed that meetings of the Committee prior to the local government Elections in May 2022 would take place on 20 January, 17 February and 7 April 2022. The Work Plan now reflects the final dates of meetings approved by the Council.

#### **Note 5 (Cabinet Responses to Audit and Scrutiny Committee Investigations on Income Generation and Commercialisation; and Climate Change)**

Following submission of the report on the committee's investigation on *Income Generation and Commercialisation* to the Cabinet on 5 December 2019, and a slight delay due to the impact of COVID-19, a response to the report was approved by the Cabinet on 24 September 2020. It reflected that all 12 of the committee's recommendations had been agreed and that, despite the challenges of dealing with COVID-19 related issues, work had been started in many of the areas with future work planned in due course.

The final report on the committee's investigation on *Climate Change* was completed early in 2020 but, also due to COVID-19, its submission to the Cabinet was delayed to 13 August. The committee had made 24 recommendations, a key one being that the Council's strategy on climate change be renewed. As the recommendations had been known for some time, the Cabinet considered a report, in response, by the Director of Environment at the same

meeting outlining a proposed approach for the development of a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, particularly in view of the recommendations made by the committee.

In November 2020, having noted the responses approved by the Cabinet to both investigations, including the extent to which the recommendations had been accepted, the committee agreed that reports be submitted on progress on implementation of the recommendations accepted by the Cabinet as part of the committee's 2021/22 Work Plan. The updates are scheduled to be considered by the committee on 20 January 2022.

**Note 6 (Audit and Scrutiny Committee Self-Evaluation and Summary of Work Undertaken Since 2017)**

In April 2021 the committee agreed, as has been the case in the past, that prior to the local government Elections in 2022 a short, focussed report be prepared overviewing work the committee has undertaken during the current Administration; and that a further self-evaluation exercise be completed. It is proposed to submit the final drafts of both to the final meeting of the committee on 7 April.

Self-evaluations are considered useful, such as for analysing performance, enhancing practices and identifying how the committee can support the work of the Internal Audit service for example, but the committee's view is that progressing these as frequently as annually is neither necessary nor an efficient use of its limited time and resources.

**Note 7 (External Audit Reports)**

The External Auditor has confirmed that a number of reports, briefings etc. are due to be published in the first few months of 2022, including on social care; services for children with additional support needs; and the financial overview of local government 2021/22. Subject to when they are published and the content, as appropriate, they may be circulated or there may be sufficient time for feedback to be sought for submission to the committee prior to the local government Elections. If that is not possible, they will be reflected in the committee's 2022/23 Work Plan as appropriate.

The East Renfrewshire Council - Annual Audit Plan 2021/22 may be submitted to the meeting in April 2022, as reflected in the Work Plan.

**Note 8 (Council Website/Communications with the Public)**

In August 2019 the committee agreed to review the issue of the Council Website/Communications with the Public once the Council's new website, which was at that time in the latter stages of development, had been operational for a given period of time. The matter was considered to be a low priority for review.

It was also agreed, prior to considering further when such a review may be appropriate, that in the interim a demonstration of the new website be organised for Elected Members to provide an opportunity for questions to be asked about it and its capabilities. The situation regarding COVID-19 resulted in the launch of the new website being postponed until 7 July 2020, with further improvements having been made to it since then.

In consultation with the Chair, taking into consideration when a range of issues were scheduled to be considered by the committee, it was agreed that a presentation on the Website should be made to the committee on 21 January 2021. Other Members of the

Council were advised that the presentation was being made, with arrangements made to enable them to view it if they wished.

The committee noted the presentation and that any further comments or feedback on the website could be sent to the Communications Manager for consideration. It remains to be discussed if any more detailed work is to be progressed on the Council website/communications with the public.

**Note 9 (Graffiti Removal and Fly-tipping)**

In August 2019 the committee agreed to review (1) graffiti removal; and (2) fly-tipping as medium priority issues. In the first instance it was agreed to undertake site visit(s) in the latter half of 2019/20 to gather information on the latest procedures and equipment being used for this by the Environment Department. However, subsequently, it was suggested that seeking briefings on these issues could be sufficient, at least at that stage.

Taking account of issues relating to COVID-19 and to allow the Environment Department to prioritise matters relating to that, briefings were not requested from the Head of Environment (Operations) until the end of July 2020. They were circulated on receipt in September 2020 at which time Members were invited to advise the Clerk if they wished to pursue any issues at that stage. No issues were identified at that time. It remains to be discussed if any more detailed work is to be progressed.

**Note 10 (Schools Admission Policy and Education Appeals System)**

As agreed in August 2019, the former Director of Education was advised then of the committee's concerns on the potential implications of the proposal under consideration by the Scottish Government to transfer administration of the education appeals system from local authority control to the Scottish Tribunals System. This was to allow her to consider the views expressed when formulating responses to any related consultation. She was also advised of concerns expressed at the meeting on the current criteria for approving school placing requests, specifically the impact the approach had on some East Renfrewshire resident families in terms of siblings not necessarily being able to access the same school when catchment areas are altered.

At the same meeting, the committee agreed that the Education Appeals System was a low priority issue for review, but that the appeals process would continue to be monitored over the next two academic years to ascertain the impact of implementing any changes made to the national education appeals system, and that the committee would consider in 2021/22 any modifications to the appeals process that may be required to improve the focus on customers, including if there was considered to be a need for any representations to be made at a national level. It was noted that this issue would be revisited in due course such as when the committee's 2021/22 Work Plan was considered.

In the interim, it was agreed as part of the committee's 2019/20 Work Plan that a presentation be made to it on the admission policy and the appeals system. That presentation was made and noted by the committee in November 2019. It remains to be discussed if any more detailed work is to be progressed in future.

**Note 11 (Early Years Provision Policy)**

In August 2019 the committee agreed that the new Early Years Provision policy was a low priority for review and that it, including the financial implications of it, be considered for review in the 2022/23 financial year, following completion of the current roll-out of the provision. This review may be considered as part of the committee's 2022/23 Work Plan.

BLANK PAGE