

# MINUTE

# A & B

**Audit and Scrutiny Committee**  
**Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lerwick**  
**Wednesday 27 August 2008 at 10am**

**Present:**

|              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| F B Grains   | A T Doull     |
| A G L Duncan | R S Henderson |
| C H J Miller | J W G Wills   |

**Apologies:**

A J Hughson

**In attendance (Officers):**

G Johnston, Head of Finance  
C Medley, Head of Housing and Capital Programmes  
V Simpson, Housing and Property Manager  
J Grant, Waste Services Manager  
M Lisk, Environmental Management Officer  
P Peterson, Performance Management Co-ordinator  
S Pearson, Safety and Risk Manager  
L Adamson, Committee Officer

**Chairperson**

Mrs F B Grains, Chairperson of the Committee, presided.

**Circular**

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

**Declarations of Interest**

None.

**Minute**

The minute of the meeting held on 11 June 2008, was confirmed on the motion of Mrs C H J Miller, seconded by Mrs F B Grains.

Mrs Miller provided the Committee with a synopsis of her recent attendance, with Cllr A G L Duncan, at Audit Committee training in Edinburgh. She reported that the training had been very interesting, and she highlighted the main points raised. Mr Duncan endorsed Mrs Miller's report from the training, and suggested that the trainer be invited to Shetland to give a presentation to this Committee.

In response to a question from the Chairperson, the Performance Management Co-ordinator agreed to check progress with the signs to advise on the alternative to disabled toilet facilities at Grutness Pier.

| Min. Ref. | Subject  | Action/Info |
|-----------|--|-------------|
| 25/08     | <p><b><u>Risk Health Checks</u></b></p> <p>The Committee noted a report by the Safety and Risk Manager (Appendix 1).</p> <p>The Safety and Risk Manager summarised the main terms of the report. She advised that the work involved in carrying out the Risk Health Checks on Services Areas was done in consultation with Service Managers and explores and agrees solutions before they are written into the Action Plan to ensure they are sustainable and achievable. She added that Internal Audit receive a copy of the Action Plan to monitor that the actions are implemented.</p> <p>Mr A G L Duncan congratulated the Safety and Risk Manager on the work being undertaken by the Service.</p> <p>In response to a question, the Safety and Risk Manager advised that the Risk Health Checks carried out to date had not highlighted any recurring key areas of risk, and although it is not always possible to eliminate risks completely, action is taken to reduce risks. She added that solutions could be short, medium or long-term and are staggered in terms of implementation, according to level of importance but also to avoid over burdening the Service Managers.</p> <p>The Safety and Risk Manager provided the Committee with an update on progress with the Safety and Risk Computer system, advising that following training for nominated staff within Departments planned for October, the system should be up and running.</p> |             |
| 26/08     | <p><b><u>Housing Voids Investigation – Update Report</u></b></p> <p>The Committee considered a report by the Performance Management Co-ordinator (Appendix 2).</p> <p>The Performance Management Co-ordinator introduced the report.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mrs C H J Miller, the Housing and Property Manager provided an explanation of “high demand Council houses” which were houses with waiting lists for the properties, and “low demand houses” were properties that had little or no waiting list or had received more than 3 refusals.</p> <p>Dr J W G Wills advised that he frequently receives complaints from the public regarding Council houses being left vacant, and he was pleased to note the dramatic improvement in the time taken to re-let properties. The Housing and Property Manager explained that some of the improvements introduced would</p>   |             |

only realise benefits through time. One of the measures included in the New Void Policy was the means to identify and carry out only essential repairs prior to houses being re-let, and the new tenant survey has concluded that tenants are satisfied with the standard of their properties.

In response to questions, the Housing and Property Manager advised that the target to re-let properties in 2 weeks could be achievable, should there be a demand for the property. The vast majority of tenants return properties in a satisfactory condition, however properties left in a poor condition, which take significantly longer to repair and re-let, can drastically skew the figures.

Mr A G L Duncan congratulated the Housing Service for the dramatic improvements outlined in Table 1 of the report, and asked if further improvements could be made, comparing the figure with the average time the Housing Association take to re-let properties.

The Head of Housing and Capital Programmes circulated photographs showing instances when Council properties had been left in appalling conditions. He stated that the Council's re-letting figures were not comparable to that of the Housing Association as the Council had much older stock, and the class of tenant was different with the Council having to house people on the margins of society, as the landlord of last resort. He asked Members to recognise that it was not possible for the Council to achieve the same results when dealing with tenants who leave their houses in such shocking states. He explained that the Service could not evict tenants who gravely disregard their properties, however if Housing Service are aware of a property in an unacceptable condition the Service would work with Environmental Health to address the situation, relocating the tenant, and cleaning the property before the tenant moves back in. He added that this course of action involves colossal resources and significant costs.

During the discussion, Mrs C H J Miller questioned whether it would be beneficial for Monitoring and Inspection Officers to visit all Council properties to check for unacceptable standards, however the Head of Housing and Capital Programmes advised that this proposal could be intrusive to tenants who take care of their properties.

Following suggestions from some Members, it was agreed that the Housing Service should provide re-letting figures, advising on the general turnover figures, then separately on difficult cases. The Head of Housing and Capital Programmes said that the Service would continue to work to improve the re-letting figures, however the situation was not solely a Housing solution, but a social multi-agency issue.

During the discussion the Head of Housing and Capital

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <p>Programmes advised that strategies were in place to deal with the changes in legislation that all homeless people would be entitled to permanent accommodation by 2012, and he could see no solution to the housing situation in Shetland without external resources. Mr Duncan stated that the Allocations Policy Monitoring Group would be considering this strategic issue and its link to the allocation policy at their meetings.</p> <p>In response to a question, the Head of Housing and Capital Programmes advised that work was ongoing to identify the number of additional houses required in Shetland and the associated costs.</p> |  |
|--|---|--|

|       |   |  |
|-------|---|--|
| 27/08 | <p><b><u>Environmental Management System: Update on Baseline Audit of Council Services</u></b></p> <p>The Committee noted a report by the Waste Services Manager (Appendix 3). Graphs illustrating the differences in Resource Use throughout the Council were circulated at the meeting (copies attached as Appendix 3A).</p> <p>The Waste Services Manager summarised the main terms of the report and advised that the next phase to further reduce the use of resources and waste was to train staff and change habits to bring about long-term savings to the Council. The Environmental Management Officer advised that the environmental scoping audit found that establishments and sectors within the Council were using significantly different amounts of resources to deliver the same agendas, and it was proposed that good performers should share their good practises with other service areas.</p> <p>During the discussion Mr A G L Duncan suggested that savings could be made through only using duplex facilities when copying documents, and also through utilising one of the canteen facilities to cater for the three care complexes at Seafield Road.</p> <p>In response to questions, the Waste Services Manager advised that a report would be presented to the Council meeting in September outlining proposals for corporate procurement, and would include the centralised purchase of paper. There could also be significant savings achieved by purchasing commodities through Scotland Excel, a procurement organisation for Local Authorities. He added that central procurement could affect local business, however there would be opportunities arising from new contracts, with local businesses being encouraged and trained to take advantage of corporate procurement.</p> <p>The Waste Services Manager explained that information on the reduction in the use of waste and resources would be relevant to a number of Performance Indicators and in Service Plans, and would be reported fully to Council.</p> |  |
|-------|---|--|

|       |   |  |
|-------|---|--|
|       | Members commended the Service on the work done to date, and would recommend to Council the findings provided in the report to support the realisation of further savings.   |  |
| 28/08 | <p><b><u>Audit and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2008-09</u></b></p> <p>The Committee noted a report by the Performance Management Co-ordinator (Appendix 4).</p>   |  |
| 29/08 | <p><b><u>Annual Efficiency Statement</u></b></p> <p>The Committee considered a report by the Performance Management Co-ordinator (Appendix 5).</p> <p>The Performance Management Co-ordinator summarised the main terms of report, and offered to provide further detail on the efficiencies outlined in Appendix B, or to follow up any particular issues raised.</p> <p>During the discussion Dr J W G Wills stated that he was very much opposed to the proposal for there to be slightly less quality of street cleansing at weekends, and said that as Saturdays and Sundays were in fact the days with the most litter on the street, he proposed that the weekend service should be sustained. The Performance Management Co-ordinator agreed to feed this back to the service.</p> <p>In response to a question, it was reported that the efficiency gains contained in the appendix were the ones that met the Scottish Government's definition of an "efficiency". It was not a comprehensive list of savings the Council had made.</p> <p>Mr A G L Duncan referred to the indication from the Performance Indicator data that the Council's sickness rate has increased, and requested that Human Resources provide a report to the next meeting of the Committee, outlining the exact figure and to provide further detail on the measures being taken to improve absenteeism. The Performance Management Co-ordinator confirmed that this would be included in the report on SPIs that was on the agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p>During the discussion, and in response to questions from Members, the Performance Management Co-ordinator agreed to seek further detail from the relevant Service Manager in relation to the complaints received in regards to the Environmental Health Service, and Efficiency Gains PR4, AM2, AM3, SB5 and SB6.</p> <p>In response to questions, the Waste Service Manager explained that the District Heating Scheme was reaching its capacity in terms of heat supply from the Waste to Energy</p> |  |

Plant, and it was anticipated that in two years time there would be no additional connections unless another source of heat can be found. The Waste Services Manager reported that a programme of work was ongoing to seek alternative sources of heat. The provision of heat from the Lerwick Power Station has been investigated, however a connection would need to be installed from the Power Station to connect to the scheme, and the Power Station are also seeking assurance on the investment for the connection in terms of heat sales. Dr J W G Wills moved that a report on the proposals to utilise waste heat from the Lerwick Power Station should be presented to Infrastructure Committee. Mrs C H J Miller seconded. The Waste Services Manager advised that a joint report would be prepared, in conjunction with SHEAP.

During the discussion Dr Wills proposed that Efficiency SB5 could include utilising one ferry as a shuttle service on some routes where two ferries are currently used. Mr R Henderson advised that Members had previously discussed this proposal, and he considered that a one-month experiment would be worthwhile, with essential users getting priority on the ferry. Dr Wills moved that the Committee agree that the Inter Island Ferry Board consider implementing an experimental ferry shuttle service. Mrs F B Grains seconded.

Mr Duncan referred to the reduction in the car allowance budget across the Sport and Leisure Service and suggested that this could be implemented in other departments. The Performance Management Co-ordinator agreed that other services could be encouraged to reduce their car allowance budget, and he would highlight this to other service areas.

Some discussion took place on the Use of Council Vehicles Policy and insurance implications associated with carrying non-Council employees in Council vehicles. The Chairperson requested that an information report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

In response to a suggestion from Mr Duncan that the Council and NHS Shetland could share payroll services, the Head of Finance explained that this had previously been considered, however the organisations follow separate terms and conditions, with the NHS adhering to NHS Scotland arrangements, and therefore it would be unlikely to achieve efficiencies. He added that the other issues with shared services would be the danger of exporting jobs outside Shetland and the quality of the service.

In response to a question, it was noted that a report to Infrastructure Committee on 7 October would include the review of ferry timetables and usage to eliminate or make under-used voyages bookings only.

|       |  |  |
|-------|--|--|
| 30/08 | <b><u>Items for Future Discussion</u></b><br><br>Dr J W G Wills suggested that the Conduct of Meetings could be discussed at a future meeting of this Committee. |  |
|-------|--|--|

The meeting concluded at 11.45am.

.....  
 F B Grains  
 Chairperson