

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE2 March 2017Report by ClerkNATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORTROLES AND WORKING RELATIONSHIPS IN COUNCILS - ARE YOU
STILL GETTING IT RIGHT?**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide information on the Accounts Commission report *Roles and Working Relationships in Councils - Are You Still Getting it Right?*

RECOMMENDATION

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

BACKGROUND

3. Copies of the Accounts Commission report *Roles and Working Relationships in Councils - Are You Still Getting it Right?*, published in November 2016, have already been circulated to all Audit and Scrutiny Committee Members. Under the Committee's specialisation arrangements, the Members who are leading the review of the report are Councillor Wallace and Councillor Grant. In accordance with arrangements established by the Committee for dealing with such reports, the Head of Democratic and Partnership Services has provided comments on it. A copy of the feedback is attached (see Appendix 1).

RECOMMENDATION

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

Local Government Access to Information Act 1985

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Background Papers:-

1. Accounts Commission report *Roles and Working Relationships in Councils - Are You Still Getting it Right?*

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EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL**AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****2 March 2017****Prepared by Head of Democratic & Partnership Services****ACCOUNTS COMMISSION REPORT – ROLES AND WORKING RELATIONSHIPS IN COUNCILS – ARE YOU STILL GETTING IT RIGHT?**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This paper aims to provide comments on how the Council is placed in relation to:
 - Accounts Commission's report- Roles and working relationships in councils - Are you still getting it right published in November 2016

BACKGROUND

2. In 2010 the Accounts Commission report entitled - How councils work - Roles and working relationships: are you getting it right? set out the importance of good governance in Councils. It highlighted the need for good working relationships between officers and members with both being clear about their roles and responsibilities.
3. In addition to highlighting the demanding roles that councillors have in representing their constituents, providing strategic direction for councils and in scrutiny of performance it also drew attention to the increasing role of councillors on external bodies and partnerships.

REPORT

4. Whilst continuing on the above themes the Accounts Commission's current report – Roles and working relationships in councils - are you still getting it right?, recognises that the context in which local councils operate has changed since 2010 and its report is designed to support councils and to assist preparations for the new intake of councillors following the May 2017 elections.
5. The messages highlighted in the Accounts Commission report highlights, in particular three themes:
 - clear roles and responsibilities and arrangements for governance that are up to date
 - effective working relationships, with councillors and officers demonstrating appropriate behaviours and,
 - councillors having the skills and tools to carry out their complex and evolving role.

6. The accounts Commission report highlights a series of checklists for councillors and officers to consider concerned with; governance, clarity of roles, effective scrutiny, partnerships and arm's-length bodies, the role of statutory officers and conduct and working relationships.

COMMENTS

Governance

7. The Council adopted a Code of Governance in 2002 which is consistent with the requirements of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework and provides structures and processes that govern internal policy-making, community leadership, partnership working and mechanisms to ensure proper control and accountability. The Audit & Scrutiny Committee annually considers updates on the Council's Corporate Code of Governance.

Clarity of roles

8. As stated in the Audit Commission report the full Council is the governing body that determines policy and ultimately is responsible for the quality of service. Councillors are elected to determine policy and not directly engage in the operational management of services and officers advise and serve the whole Council. East Renfrewshire's Scheme of Delegated Functions revised in November 2016 sets out the roles of the Council, limitations on delegation to committees and sub-committees and delegation to officers including all statutory functions of the Council. The Scheme is regularly reviewed and updated and provides full clarity of roles and responsibilities.

9. In addition to the role of Leader of the Council there are 7 Convener roles and 1 Vice-convener role held by councillors highlighting a range of roles under each department of the Council. In order to support members in their roles departments provide member briefing sessions on developing or new service initiatives. Information and Consultation sessions take place 3 or 4 times per year with community planning partner representation and input, these are designed to inform elected members on key issues and to provide member engagement and consultation.

10. At the commencement of each newly elected Council an induction programme is available to assist, in particular, members who may be new to their role. This programme provides members with a sense of the breadth of Council activity and responsibility as well as partner engagement and information on how the Council operates. Training and development takes place based on member needs expressed during the year and is designed to assist members in their roles.

Effective Scrutiny

11. It is accepted that good governance involves Councils being accountable and accessible and operating in a transparent way. East Renfrewshire Council is open to scrutiny and actively encourages debate and discussion at Council meetings. It has in place the Audit and Scrutiny Committee which provides effective scrutiny and challenge. Since the establishment of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service a Cabinet (Police & Fire) was established with cross-party representation to scrutinise Police and Fire & Rescue performance and provide challenge.

12. In 2015 the Council introduced webcasting of its Council meetings which now provides the opportunity to the wider public to view meetings of the Council in real time further demonstrating the Council's willingness to operate in a transparent and open way. It is suggested that Scrutiny arrangements work well in East Renfrewshire and provide members with an opportunity to discuss and debate issues of importance to the community whether service or policy related.

Partnerships and arm's-length bodies

13. The Council is represented on a range of Boards and Trusts and members who may be represented on these understand their role as representing the interests and objectives of the Trust or Board. Members, as democratically elected representatives are well placed to participate on Boards as they bring the perspective of their knowledge of the Council and the aspirations of the communities it serves. A key example of positive working is the Health and Social Care Partnership Serving East Renfrewshire which brings together Key Senior personnel of the NHS together with Chief Officers of the Council and elected members working towards the common goals of improving access to health and social work services across the area.

The role of Statutory Officers

14. The earlier referred Accounts Commission report of 2010 illustrated the need to ensure clarity on the roles of Statutory Officers – Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Social Work Officer and Chief Education Officer and for the responsibilities of each to be clearly understood. The Scheme of Delegated Functions of the Council provides for this.

Conduct and working relationships

15. Previous best value audits have commented positively on the good working relationships which exist across the Council. Codes of Conduct for officers and members exist. It is regarded that there is an atmosphere of trust across the Council and any further improvements the Audit & Scrutiny Committee considers relevant are welcomed.

Councillors need the skills and tools to carry out their role

16. To support members training is available for those members who are engaged in quasi-judicial roles such as planning and licensing. As previously mentioned departments hold briefing sessions for members from time to time to facilitate members knowledge of particular functions, initiatives or activities of the Council. In addition members are asked to consider individual learning needs annually which leads to attendances at conferences or events and/or training delivered internally or externally and are offered the chance to develop their own personal development plan. There is evidence of members taking responsibility for own development and good evidence of opportunities for learning being taken by members.

CONCLUSION

17. There is good evidence of progress across the checklist areas commented on above. The Council and its officers demonstrate a clear commitment to delivering the best possible services to local people and understand the value of good governance and accountability, positive working relationships and investment through learning and training opportunities.

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Background papers: Accounts Commission External Audit Report "Roles and Working Relationships: Are you getting it right?" East Renfrewshire Council Scheme of Delegated Functions (November 2016)