

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE23 June 2022Report by ClerkAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN, OUTCOME OF
SELF-EVALUATION AND RELATED ISSUES**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To comment on the operation of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, its Work Plans and related issues; refer to a recent self-evaluation undertaken by the committee; and seek views on observations and recommendations arising from that review.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the committee:-

(a) considers:-

(i) the proposals made regarding the specialisation arrangements operated by the committee for dealing with internal and external audit reports and inspection reports; and

(ii) otherwise, the recommendations and observations made arising from the self-evaluation recently completed by the committee;

(b) agrees that a special meeting of the committee takes place at 2.00pm on Wednesday, 26 October to allow the 2021/22 Annual Accounts, draft Annual Audit Report and related documents to be considered prior to their submission to the Council later that day;

(c) approves the draft 2022/23 Annual Work Plan, to the extent it has been developed thus far;

(d) agrees that the development of the 2022/23 Work Plan continue, with an update submitted to a future meeting;

(e) notes, further to (c) and (d) above, that Members of the committee will be invited, in due course, to consider issues on which they might wish the committee to progress work and provide related feedback to the Clerk with a view to proposals being considered at a future meeting;

(f) notes that progress made delivering the 2022/23 Work Plan will be reviewed and reported on in due course; and

(g) otherwise, notes the report.

BACKGROUND

3. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee operates within the context of guidance published by various bodies, including the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) which sets out basic requirements for such committees. The effectiveness of internal audit is considered to be enhanced by a properly functioning committee of this type and local authorities are expected to demonstrate compliance with audit committee principles to meet the requirements of good corporate governance. Members serving on the committee previously have acknowledged the importance of ensuring that it scrutinise issues objectively, independently and in a non-confrontational manner; focuses on improvement; adopts a 'critical friend' approach; and operates in the best interests of the Council as a whole as an important part of the control environment and in a way that satisfies Audit Scotland and other requirements.

4. The Council first established an Audit Committee in May 1999 when it approved new political management arrangements. Although the committee's work has been ongoing since then, in 2001 the Council considered if additional scrutiny mechanisms were necessary. Arising from that review an additional scrutiny body, the Policy Review Committee, was established to look primarily at policy related issues, meetings of which were convened until 2007. Following the local government Elections in 2007 a decision was taken not to reconvene that committee, following which the Council approved revised Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee, taking account of that decision and some views expressed by the committee itself. Following the 2012 local government Elections the committee recommended, and the Council agreed, that its name be changed to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to better portray the extent of its role and its focus on both financial and non-financial matters.

5. Since 2017 there have been a range of more recent developments and issues the committee has dealt with as outlined below:-

Scrutiny Training

6. An Audit of Best Value in East Renfrewshire Council took place in 2017, the overall outcome of which was very positive. Following the 2017 Elections a range of induction training and development opportunities were made available to all Elected Members. Linked to that and a 2017 Best Value Assurance Review (BVAR) recommendation that Elected Members in the Council should take a more transparent and active role in scrutiny, a scrutiny training programme was also developed and offered in 2018 to all Elected Members, not just those serving on the committee. This included sessions on essential scrutiny skills, risk management, treasury management and the roles of internal and external audit.

7. Arising from a recent self-assessment the committee undertook earlier this year, which will be referred to in more depth later, the committee in place prior to the Elections encouraged those serving on it in future to take full advantage of such training and development opportunities. The committee, and some other Elected Members surveyed on induction arrangements, requested that the scrutiny programme commence earlier than after the 2017 Elections, which was fed back to the Members Induction Working Group and is already planned. Such a programme is being put in place again in the months ahead as part of the 2022/23 induction programme for all councillors, not only those serving on the committee, to help them discharge their responsibilities effectively.

Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer

8. A further development linked to the BVAR report and recommendation referred to above was that a Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer was appointed in 2019, following identification of some limited funding for this, who was in post for one year only until 31 March 2020. That Officer's remit included supporting the committee to undertake detailed reviews of

issues it agreed to pursue itself in a way that would not have been possible otherwise in view of the limited resources at the committee's disposal.

Guide to Scrutiny and Review

9. In advance of supporting two such detailed reviews which the committee pursued, the Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer supported, in consultation with others including the Chief Executive, the preparation of a *Guide to Scrutiny and Review* within the overall context of Best Value.

10. The Guide includes advice on good practice; what could be within and out with 'scope' for scrutiny reviews; questioning techniques; and selection and rejection criteria for reviews amongst other things. Following approval by the committee and subsequently the full Council in 2019, the *Guide* was distributed widely, including to all Elected Members. A copy of the current Guide is attached to this report (see **Appendix A**), having been reviewed recently just to ensure it and links within it remain fully up to date, including because in 2019 there were some further developments following its initial publication on how the committee might wish to prioritise issues for review as high, medium and low, reference to which is now included.

Annual Work Plans

11. The *Guide to Scrutiny and Review* proposed the development of annual Work Plans for the committee which have been prepared since 2019/20. These plans, which are considered live documents and evolve over the course of each year, such as to take account of decisions made by the committee, include reference to a range of recurring reports considered each year as referred to later in this report. Importantly, they assist the committee schedule and prioritise work, and 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. Progress made is reviewed periodically by the committee. Copies of the completed Work Plans for 2019/20 to 2021/22 have already been circulated to members of the committee as part of a range of briefing material circulated by the Clerk.

12. Arising from the committee's self-evaluation, it was recommended that each year a copy of the Work Plan, on its completion, be put on the internet. Discussions on achieving this are underway.

Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)

13. A further recent development is that, since January 2019, the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) has attended meetings of the committee as an advisor, which also provides a useful link to the Corporate Management Team. Like her, the Clerk to the Committee (the Senior Committee Services Officer) and Chief Internal Auditor attend all meetings or are represented at them.

COVID-19

14. COVID-19 has impacted on various aspects of the committee's work. Following the start of the related lock down in March 2020, which led to the cancellation of various formal meetings, the committee was amongst the first to be reconvened virtually using Teams prior to the summer recess that year. It continued to meet virtually after that, with some meeting dates rescheduled as required. Recordings of all the virtual meetings since then are available to view on the Council's YouTube Channel. The committee took interest in the Council's response to the pandemic following the publication of a related Guide by Audit Scotland, requesting feedback on a range of issues raised within it.

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RELATED ISSUES

15. As approved by the Council in June 2021, during the remainder of 2022 the committee is scheduled to be convened at 2.00pm on the following dates:-

11 August
27 September
10 November

16. The Annual Accounts for both the Council's Charitable Trusts and the Council together with related external audit reports, including the draft Annual Audit Report for the Council, are normally considered by the committee in September before being considered by the full Council later the same day. Due to COVID-19, the statutory deadline for dealing with these issues and allowing the Accounts to be signed changed to the end of November in 2020 and 2021.

17. Regarding the 2021/22 Accounts etc., the external auditor has confirmed that the statutory deadline for these to be signed will be the end of October 2022, with the aim of local government audits returning to the normal September timeline from next year onwards. Taking account of this, it is proposed that this year these reports are considered at a special meeting of the committee at 2.00pm on Wednesday, 26 October following which they would be considered by the full Council meeting which is already scheduled to take place at 7.00pm that evening.

18. A report seeking approval of the full 2023 meetings calendar is to be prepared and submitted, if possible, to the full Council on 29 June this year. Although the exact dates the committee will be convened in 2023 remain to be confirmed, it is likely that prior to the summer 2023 recess these will be set in January, February, March, April and June.

Terms of Reference

19. The committee's Terms of Reference are listed in **Appendix 1** of the *Guide to Scrutiny and Review* (see **Appendix A**). Recommendations/observations (2) and (3) and some others, arising from the committee's recent self-evaluation (see **Appendix B**) reflect that the committee continues to value these highly. However it has been recommended that they be reviewed, including because they have not changed for some time.

Routine Issues

20. As reflected in its annual Work Plans, the committee considers many reports, arguably routinely, in accordance with its Terms of Reference. Although many are considered around the same time each year, the exact time can vary subject to circumstances. For example, COVID-19 impacted on this to a degree.

21. Reports considered annually include the following:-

- Internal Audit Strategic Plan
- Internal Audit Annual Report
- External Audit Annual Plan for East Renfrewshire
- Unaudited Annual Accounts
- East Renfrewshire Council Management Report (External Audit Report)
- Annual Accounts and a related Annual Audit Report to the Council
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Interim Treasury Management Report
- Annual Treasury Management Report

- Early retirement and redundancy costs
- Code of Corporate Governance
- Consultancy Expenditure and Related Log
- Managing Absence
- Fraud Response Statement – Managing Risk of Fraud and Corruption

22. Examples of other routine reports considered more frequently throughout the year include:-

- Chair's reports
- Quarterly progress reports on the implementation of the Internal Audit Plan
- Biannual reports on risk management and the Strategic Risk Register
- Reports on national external audit reports published on various issues

External and Internal Audit Reports etc. and Related Specialisation Arrangements

23. For information, the [East Renfrewshire External Audit Plan 2021/22](#), including the timetable for publishing related documents such as the Annual Audit Report for the Council for 2021/22, was noted by the committee in April 2022. Also for information, it has just been confirmed that the Auditor General and Accounts Commission have approved the appointments for audits for the financial years 2022/23 to 2026/27, securing the services of six firms to conduct audits alongside Audit Scotland. The external auditor for the Council for the audits for that period of time will be Ernst & Young, taking over from Audit Scotland.

24. The committee's recent report summarising its work from 2017-2022, which was circulated to Members recently, includes comments on its approach to dealing with national external audit reports such as those published by Audit Scotland; local ones prepared by the Council's external auditor; and internal audit reports prepared by the Council's Chief Auditor. A wide range of such reports are discussed by the committee during each year, at times leading to further scrutiny and/or assurances being sought.

25. The committee has always had access to internal audit reports, but detailed reports on specific audits have generally only been circulated or submitted to the committee on the request of its members, one exception being summary follow up audit reports prepared on each department which focus on outstanding recommendations across a number of audits which are always circulated. As for external audit reports, an area of particular interest has been the extent to which internal audit recommendations have been accepted and implemented or otherwise. However, the committee has adopted a risk-managed approach to this because it has regarded the Chief Auditor's regular progress reports, which overview the position on and outcome of a range of audits, and annual reports on the implementation of the Internal Audit Plan to be sufficient. Additional detail provided in these reports since 2018, on the findings of individual audits and the acceptance of related recommendations, has been welcomed.

26. This approach also reflects the strong confidence the committee had stated it has continued to have in internal audit, the fact that the Chief Auditor proactively draws attention to issues of note on specific work, and a conscious decision made by the committee for many years to focus its limited time where it feels it is needed most.

27. Regarding external audit reports and extending a practice established in 2005, during the most recent 5 years the committee has continued to receive reports on these, including related recommendations made within them, and the associated management response to them within the authority. The Clerk sends all members of the committee copies of the external audit reports of relevance to local government when published. More specifically, when the Chief Executive receives any such report, the Chief Auditor and Clerk are notified of this and which director is leading on consideration of it. This allows the Clerk to ask the

director concerned to prepare and submit to the committee detailed comments on how the Council is placed against the national picture.

28. In the past, by exception when considered necessary, senior officers have been invited to attend the committee when the feedback on such external audit reports is discussed. However self-evaluation Recommendation/Observation (43)(see **Appendix B**) recommends that the new committee consider if they wish to invite appropriate senior officers to attend more of its meetings, at least more than before, to answer questions on external audit issues etc. when local feedback is considered.

29. To enable the committee's workload to be managed efficiently, effectively and fairly by its members, since June 2010 the committee has had in place its own specialisation arrangements and procedures for dealing with internal and external audit reports. Since then members of the committee, working in pairs and specialising in specific service areas as agreed by the committee, have reviewed various reports in detail, including implementation of related action plans. This is done in discussion with officers to the extent they consider appropriate.

30. Although very few changes have been made to these arrangements they remained subject to review if necessary and were largely based on departmental (and associated director) responsibilities, with arrangements having also been put in place to deal with reports on corporate issues and those regarded as having a more Council-wide focus. More specifically, when a report relates to a corporate issue which cuts across several departments and lead responsibility for that lies with a specific director (e.g. equality issues), responsibility for reviewing the document has fallen to the members of the committee who usually dealt with the department with which corporate responsibility for the issue rested. Reports regarded as more Council-wide in focus (e.g. Audit Scotland reports on an *Overview of Local Government in Scotland*) have been dealt with by the Chair and Vice-Chair in liaison with other committee members as they consider appropriate. Administrative arrangements to enable Members to provide feedback to the Clerk on action they considered required on reports are in place.

31. The arrangements in place prior to the 2022 Elections are reflected in the Table below

2017-22 SPECIALISATION ARRANGEMENTS

	Reports with Council-Wide Focus	Business Partnerships and Operations Dept.	Chief Exec's Office	Environ't Dept.	HSCP	Educ'n Dept.
Chair	√			√		
Vice-Chair	√			√		
Member 3		√				√
Member 4		√				√
Member 5			√		√	
Member 6			√			
Member 7					√	

32. For a number of years the committee has also welcomed reviewing, under its specialisation arrangements, some external inspection reports prepared on Council services. These would be the subject of a report to the committee, by exception, if felt necessary by its members. Self-evaluation Recommendation/Observation (44)(see **Appendix B**) comments that notification of the publication of these to the Clerk can be sporadic, and that it is not fully clear therefore if the Clerk has been alerted to the publication of all such reports. To address this, it is suggested that the Clerk email departments, on a 6-monthly basis routinely,

requesting notification of all inspection reports published in the previous 6 months to help ensure all are received and to allow them to be reviewed more timeously.

33. Self-evaluation Recommendation/Observation (41)(see **Appendix B**) suggests it may be worth considering specialisation responsibilities resting with individual members of the committee, rather than pairs, to help ensure no dubiety exists about who is responsible for leading a review of a report or providing feedback. It is suggested that the committee consider its general view on this proposal at its first meeting in June and, subject to the outcome of discussions and further consultation with Members on which remits they would be interested in pursuing, specific remits be agreed in August.

34 Other recommendations made on such reports (See **Appendix B (40)-(46)**) include asking the Clerk to highlight more clearly potential questions on issues provided in some national external audit reports; and encouraging Elected Members to complete and return any related pro-formas they are requested to complete to the Clerk sooner than they have been.

Cabinet Decisions Called-In for Consideration by Committee Prior to Implementation

35. Under the most recent call-in arrangements approved by the Council in 2009, the committee deals with the scrutiny of some Cabinet decisions which are called-in for consideration prior to implementation, other than those where a valid request is made for delegated powers not to be exercised by the Cabinet and for a Cabinet decision to be deferred to the full Council for determination. The most recent arrangements were approved following a review of the timing of the provision of information on Cabinet reports to all Elected Members to try to facilitate ways of resolving issues prior to them becoming the subject of the lengthy and resource intensive call-in process. Unlike prior to 2009, reasons for decisions being called-in, and an alternative proposal to that agreed by the Cabinet, now have to be specified by Members from the outset, and only the lead signatory of the call-in is invited to attend the Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting to put forward the case for calling-in a decision.

36. Appropriate officers and the Convener with responsibility for the Cabinet report in question continue to be invited to attend the committee meeting when called-in decisions are being considered and discussed. Sometimes these discussions take place at scheduled meetings, but special meetings can require to be convened at other times.

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE SELF-EVALUATION

37. The committee has always aimed to ensure it performs a valuable scrutiny function within the Council and has therefore completed a self-evaluation periodically, including in late 2021/early 2022. It is recommended that audit committees review their effectiveness as often as annually. The committee's view has always been that periodic self-evaluations are useful, such as for analysing performance, enhancing practices, and identifying how the work of the internal audit service can be supported for example. However doing this as frequently as annually has never been considered by it a necessary or efficient use of its limited time.

38. For the most recent review, instead of using a self-assessment tool developed by the Audit Committee Institute (ACI) as in 2012 and 2017, tools made available by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) were used instead on what is accepted as best practice for local authority audit committees. A copy of the detailed report prepared on the self-evaluation, completed over a number of months, is accessible through this link [Self-Evaluation etc.](#) More detailed information on the assessment is available from the Clerk.

39. On the basis of the outcome of the self-evaluation, a list of observations, and recommendations on matters where room for some improvement was considered to exist, in the previous committee's view (O/Rs), listed under various categories as follows, was prepared:-

- General issues, Committee's Terms of Reference and Related Matters, Including its Approach and Understanding of its Role in the Council (O/Rs (1)-(8))
- Call-in Arrangements (O/R (9))
- Learning and Development and Related Issues (O/R (10)-(15))
- Guide to Scrutiny and Review (O/Rs (16)-(17))
- Committee's Annual Work Plans and Annual Report (O/Rs (18)-(20))
- Detailed Investigations Undertaken by Committee (O/Rs (21)-(23))
- Governance and Control (O/Rs (24)-(30))
- Role of Chair and Related Knowledge and Skills (O/Rs (31)-(33))
- Sources of Guidance and Support (O/Rs (34)-(39))
- Committee's Specialisation Arrangements – Audit Reports Etc. (O/Rs (40)-(46))
- Ethical Issues (O/Rs (47)-(50))
- Scrutiny Effectiveness (O/Rs (51)-(53))
- Performance of Committee - Self-Assessment and Holding Committee to Account Etc. (O/Rs (54)-(57))
- Communication (O/Rs (58)-(60))

40. Some of these have already been commented on in a little detail in this report. As it was hoped that future Members of the committee and officers would reflect on these, the committee is invited to discuss the recommendations and observations made. More specifically, where recommendations or suggestions have been made, the committee is invited to confirm if there are any that are not supported. Given the nature of some of those made, some have been, or are already in the process of being, acted upon.

2022/23 WORK PLAN AND RELATED ISSUES

41. Further to previous comments on the committee's Work Plans and related issues, in April the committee considered a report which included reference to performance against its [2021-22 Work Plan](#). As stated before, amongst other things, such Plans help the committee to schedule and prioritise work, and provide transparency, openness and evidence of the Council's ongoing commitment to demonstrating Best Value and continuous improvement.

42. This report presents a draft Work Plan for 2022/23 for consideration, to the extent it has been possible to develop it thus far (see **Appendix C**). As usual, it includes reference to the various recurring reports routinely submitted and takes account of national and local external audit reports which have been or are being published to the extent the position is clear at present. It will be updated further, in due course, as appropriate. As for previous Plans, it should be regarded as a 'live' document. Therefore, moving forward, it and future Plans will include reference to specific areas on which the committee wishes to focus a little or more of its time, including any more detailed work which may be pursued in due course. It is also proposed that the committee agrees that its development be kept under review, taking account, amongst other things, that the Scrutiny and Evaluation Officer who supported the delivery of some in-depth work which formed part of the committee's 2019/20 Work Plan is a resource that is no longer available.

43. Notes at the end of the Plan, provide an update on a few issues that remained outstanding at the end of the previous Administration or may be of interest. These can be discussed further when appropriate.

44. This report and related ones, including the one circulated on the committee's work between 2017 and 2022, demonstrate that opportunities for the committee to consider, in-depth or otherwise, issues and performance are wide-ranging. It is important to emphasise that the work of the Council's scrutiny committee, which operates independently of specific front line services and has a role to challenge issues constructively, should ideally be driven by Members themselves. Whilst officers can support and assist, the committee gives Members opportunities to suggest and prioritise which issues are of particular interest or require particular attention, scrutiny and examination in their view, taking account of the advice within the *Guide to Scrutiny and Review*.

45. Regarding issues explored in more depth, as the *Guide* reflects, key challenges are considering information and evidence from a variety of internal or external sources to help prepare comments and draw conclusions together coherently in a report, and presenting reasoned arguments and realistic and achievable recommendations. Copies of reports prepared on previous more in-depth work are available from the Clerk on request. It is worth noting that it remains an option at any time for the committee to review the outcome of a previous investigation, such as to establish the extent to which recommendations made and approved by the Cabinet were implemented and/or are operating as intended, this being one issue commented on in the committee's self-evaluation findings attached to this report (see **Appendix C (21)-(23)**).

46. Regarding the committee's relationship with the Cabinet, the committee has concluded in the past that generally there is no need to invite the Cabinet Convener with responsibility for a service under detailed examination to attend its meetings or to ask the Convener concerned to comment on proceedings, but that this could be merited on occasion. However the committee's view has always been that it is courteous to inform the relevant Convener(s) that an issue is being investigated in-depth and that they may attend the committee should they wish. More generally, given the extensive distribution of committee papers and Minutes to Elected Members and as the committee submits recommendations to the Cabinet following any detailed investigation, it has not generally been felt that any additional action is required to apprise the Cabinet of the committee's deliberations.

47. In due course with a view to a report being prepared and submitted to a future meeting, the Clerk will invite Members to reflect on the comments above and start to consider their views on potential issues they may wish to examine in-depth or otherwise. Particularly regarding in-depth work, taking account of the committee's overall workload and resources, as in the past, investigations would require to be limited in number and undertaken sequentially.

CONCLUSION

48. This reports comments on the operation of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, its Work Plans and related issues. It also refers to the outcome of the recent self-evaluation undertaken by the committee, seeking views on issues as specified in the observations and recommendations arising from that work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

49. It is recommended that the committee:-

(a) considers:-

(i) the proposals made regarding the specialisation arrangements operated by the committee for dealing with internal and external audit reports and inspection reports; and

- (ii) otherwise, the recommendations and observations made arising from the self-evaluation recently completed by the committee;
- (b) agrees that a special meeting of the committee takes place at 2.00pm on Wednesday, 26 October to allow the 2021/22 Annual Accounts, draft Annual Audit Report and related documents to be considered prior to their submission to the Council later that day;
- (c) approves the draft 2022/23 Annual Work Plan, to the extent it has been developed thus far;
- (d) agrees that the development of the 2022/23 Work Plan continue, with an update submitted to a future meeting;
- (e) notes, further to (c) and (d) above, that Members of the committee will be invited, in due course, to consider issues on which they might wish the committee to progress work and provide related feedback to the Clerk with a view to proposals being considered at a future meeting;
- (f) notes that progress made delivering the 2022/23 Work Plan will be reviewed and reported on in due course; and
- (g) otherwise, notes the report.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

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Background Papers:-

1. Reports on Work Progressed by Audit and Scrutiny Committee between 2017 and 2022 and Related Self-Evaluation
2. Reports on Guide to Scrutiny and Review
3. External Audit Plan



EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Guide to Scrutiny and Review

Updated June 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The advice provided in this *Guide to Scrutiny and Review* is primarily for members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to help them undertake robust scrutiny, but will also be useful to all Elected Members whose role as a Council, Cabinet or Committee member involves scrutiny.

Good scrutiny plays an important part in demonstrating good governance and ensuring public confidence in Scotland's councils. As highlighted by the Improvement Service (IS), "*the overall objective of scrutiny is improvement*" and it is "*less about the activities that services undertake than it is about the outcomes they deliver.*" The IS highlights the importance of this function in the face of reducing resources, considering it an investment in improvement.

Scrutiny can be undertaken as part of the ongoing operations of the Council, through meetings of the Council, Cabinet, and the Committees and Boards which have a scrutiny function e.g. scrutiny of performance, scrutiny of proposed policies, and scrutiny of the effectiveness of policies. The convention which has been followed within East Renfrewshire Council is for reports on investigations by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to be recommended for consideration and approval to the Cabinet. This helps to ensure that there is separation of roles between the two bodies and minimises the risk of any overlap in terms of scrutiny. An area of scrutiny could also include an integrated team, and as a result, may involve wider scrutiny and engagement with another body such as the Health Board.

The Council's Scheme of Administration specifies issues for which each of the Council's main bodies, including the Council itself, are responsible. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee has an audit and scrutiny role and its full remit (see Appendix 1) covers both financial and non-financial performance. In relation to financial controls, these are covered by the role of the Chief Auditor. The committee's remit includes for example: promoting internal controls; reviewing the control environment; developing an anti-fraud culture; promoting good financial practice; agreeing the internal audit strategy; reviewing internal and external audit reports; and considering some decisions made by the Cabinet that are called in for scrutiny. Its remit also includes other aspects of scrutiny i.e. "*to review the performance of the Council in terms of:-*

- *service delivery*
- *the processes by which policy decisions have been taken*
- *the substance of a particular policy and how it fits in with the overall objectives of the Council*
- *the effectiveness of a policy in terms of implementation*"

When conducting reviews, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee may refer to concerns which they have about performance in the reports that they prepare and submit to Cabinet. Scrutiny can also be undertaken externally. For Scottish councils, the work of external scrutiny bodies is coordinated and results in an annual Local Scrutiny Plan. The plan is based on a Shared Risk Assessment undertaken by the Local Area Network (LAN) of external scrutiny bodies, such as Audit Scotland, the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland and the Scottish Housing Regulator. The LAN brings together such bodies with the aim of improving the coordination of strategic scrutiny activity amongst them.

This *Guide to Scrutiny and Review* has been prepared in the overall context of Best Value in the Council. It complements the wide range of guidance already available to all Members on scrutiny, including documents published by the IS. These documents are accessible on the Councillors' intranet pages but are also available through the following link ([Improvement Service Guide on Scrutiny](#)).

The *Guide* includes advice on good practice on scrutiny; what could be within and outwith 'scope' for scrutiny reviews; questioning techniques, and considers selection and rejection criteria for reviews. It also comments on critical success factors as well as providing links to other documents that already exist, such as on performance. Finally, it refers to the preparation of an annual work plan for the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

1. WHY IS SCRUTINY IMPORTANT

Under the Local Government (Scotland Act) 2003, Councils have a statutory duty to make arrangements to secure Best Value, which requires them to:-

- Work with their partners to identify a clear set of priorities that respond to the needs of their local communities
- Make arrangements to deliver those priorities
- Demonstrate they are meeting their community's needs
- Operate in a way that drives continuous improvement in its activities

To be successful, the approach adopted to scrutiny should take all such issues into account, and help embed the principles of Best Value and related good practice criteria set out by Audit Scotland, including, for example, Best Value 'Toolkits'.

Four principles have been developed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny which it argues should underpin Councils' approaches to scrutiny. It should:-

- Provide a 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision makers
- Reflect the voice and concerns of the public
- Be carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny role
- Drive improvement in public services

Critical success factors of effective scrutiny in the Council, such as those to be used by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, include that:-

- Reviews should be undertaken within the overall context of Best Value
- Reviews should demonstrate clear links to the strategic priority areas of the Community Plan and the Council's strategy Vision for the Future
- Reviews should be undertaken in a spirit of mutual respect

Objectives for scrutiny would include:-

- Management of risk
- Improved working practices
- Improved service delivery
- Securing financial savings and other efficiencies
- Identifying opportunities for further exploration

2. WHAT SHOULD BE SCRUTINISED

This guidance, which is meant to be advisory and not prescriptive, has been produced to help Elected Members initially identify topics, and progress related work, which could be the subject of scrutiny and review evaluations.

The selection of topics for review by the committee is an ongoing matter. Examples of the types of initial questions Elected Members may wish to ask themselves, when considering what might be useful to look at in more depth, are as follows:-

How would scrutiny benefit East Renfrewshire residents?

Do performance indicators suggest an area should be reviewed?

How would scrutiny add value (e.g. improve service delivery)?

Would scrutiny help deliver savings or efficiencies?

Would work the Council does in partnership with other organisations merit review?

Has a risk or issue been highlighted in an audit report?

Potential Selection/Rejection Criteria

To avoid poor topic selection, an objective and structured approach to determining which potential topics should be subject to detailed scrutiny and review can help. Potential selection and rejection criteria are provided in the following table. The selection criteria is not a check-list requiring all of the selection criteria having to be met for a single investigation:-

Selection Criteria	Rejection Criteria
Policy to be reviewed has been implemented for at least one year	Policy to be reviewed has been implemented within the last year
A policy gap has been identified	Policy is in place or is planned for a service
To help focus on all areas of service, preferably the area concerned has not been the subject of a scrutiny review in the past year	The area of service concerned has been the subject of a scrutiny review in the past year, or scrutiny has been carried out by another committee
Area of review would add value to one or more of the 5 strategic outcomes of the Community Plan	Review would not meet the Community Plan outcomes
The review will benefit residents of East Renfrewshire, customers & service users	The review will impact upon too few residents, customers & service users
Performance data suggests the need for a review	Performance data suggests that the service is being delivered well
Scrutiny could add value to how the Council conducts its operations	The subject has too narrow a focus and would have limited impact
Scrutiny could deliver savings/efficiencies	Anticipated savings/efficiencies are not of a sufficient level to justify selection
There is scope for a revised service delivery model	The topic is already under review
The review is in response to concerns of residents or stakeholders (e.g. through public consultations, representative groups and forums, Council surgeries and the complaints process)	The issue has already been responded to in the recent past
It would be a valid topic for detailed review by Elected Members	It would be more appropriate for scrutiny of the issue to be done by another body aligned to the Council
The issue is in response to an identified risk (e.g. from the Strategic Risk Register, or the Local Scrutiny Plan)	The risk is already being addressed, or is programmed for attention
The selection of the area of review has been made on a non-partisan basis	The area of review selected may be regarded as overtly political

As a further aid to elected Members, where a review area meets the selection criteria, a priority rating can be used to allow for scheduling of review work, using the following scale:-

Priority 1: High (A review is required: work to be scheduled to commence following completion of latest review on list)

Priority 2: Medium (A review is required: timing of commencement of work to be considered to achieve optimum outcomes)

Priority 3: Low (Area suitable for a review, although not in the immediate future: however, area to remain under observation)

Potential Topics

To help the committee determine what detailed scrutiny and evaluation work it wishes to include in its annual work plan, a list of examples of potential topics has been prepared (See Appendix 2). The list includes policy areas discussed previously by the Cabinet, Council etc. over the past 5 years or so. A further list has also been provided (See Appendix 3) of topics which have been the subject of audit/scrutiny reviews by some selected local authorities in Scotland and England, the majority of which also have Cabinet systems.

Performance Information

When topics for detailed scrutiny and evaluation reviews are being selected and carried out, a review of performance information can be valuable. In general terms though, performance information is provided as one of a number of ways to assess how well, or how efficiently, a service is being delivered. Comparing performance or financial information about a service from one period or year to another can then be used as a basis for asking further questions.

The Annual Public Performance Report provides a summary of Council and Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Performance, and is closely linked to the *Council's Strategy – Vision for the Future*, which sets out the vision to be “a modern, ambitious council creating a fairer future with all”. Key activities covered include Early years; Learning health and wellbeing; Employment and training; Economy and environment; Living in East Renfrewshire; Safe supportive communities; Older years; Customer efficiency; People; and Looking ahead to the future. The performance reports can be viewed by year, and by service area, through the following link: www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/performance

The Cabinet also receives strategic mid-year and end of year performance reports, which provide a summary of CPP and Council performance as set out in the Outcome Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024 (ODP) (www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/programmes-and-plans) highlighting performance that is both good and off-target. Access to a wide range of performance data available is accessible through the following link: www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/performance

The performance of the Council can be compared to that of other similar councils (our family group) using the Local Government Benchmarking Framework. Further information on the Local Government Benchmarking Framework can be found on the Improvement Service website: www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/

The Citizens Panel is another way in which the Council listens to the views of local residents to help make decisions on how best to improve services and to inform policies. Self-awareness of the Council's performance is an important part of scrutiny and evaluation.

Developing the Committee’s Work Plan

To help the Audit and Scrutiny Committee schedule and prioritise its scrutiny and evaluation review work over the course of each year, an annual work plan should be developed and agreed. This will help to 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 ODP 2021-2024

The work plan would effectively be a ‘live’ document, as items could be moved, or added as appropriate. It is intended that the work plan will be extended to include specific areas identified by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee for a scrutiny and evaluation investigation. The format of the committee’s work plan, and related updates on progress, should follow the same model adopted for the Cabinet work plan, a template for which is provided below:-

**Audit and Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny and Evaluation Work Plan**

Planned Report Date (Month)	Report Subject	Report by	Date Considered by Audit & Scrutiny Committee

4. HOW DO WE CARRY OUT SCRUTINY

General Comments

A scrutiny and review evaluation might assess a Council policy or service activity to determine how well the policy is being implemented, the effectiveness of the service being delivered, or if value for money is being achieved. Alternatively, the evaluation could focus on the delivery of a specific project.

Arguably the more information sources that are used and reviewed the better equipped Members will be to form a more rounded picture of the issue under scrutiny. Irrespective of the extent to which that is pursued, a well-planned and structured approach is essential.

Timescale of Reviews

An individual review is likely to involve a number of stages. After the topic is selected and the scope of the work is determined, evidence requirements will need to be identified and related discussions will be required to allow conclusions to be drawn, and a related report and recommendations to be prepared on the committee's behalf such as for the Cabinet.

Ideally, reviews should be conducted over a set timescale, which would usually be 2 to 3 formal meetings of the committee to allow detailed discussions to take place and information to be requested and provided. However to ensure this timescale is met, a lot of the detailed work is likely to take place between formal meetings. A flowchart diagram is provided as Appendix 4 to the Guide, showing the different stages of a scrutiny and review investigation.

Gathering Information

In terms of the detailed work progressed and the gathering of evidence, techniques for gathering information that could form part of the scrutiny and review evaluation could include:-

- Discussion with partner organisations, other stakeholders and customers
- Visits to facilities to gain 'first hand' experience of the policy or service under review
- Interviews with officers and others and taking of evidence from them
- Gathering information from other sources external to the authority, such as from other local authorities directly, or through the Local Government Benchmarking Framework, the Improvement Service, or the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) for example

Detailed Framework for Review

Initially a topic may be quite loosely defined and to enable it to be prioritised appropriately, it may need to be defined more tightly. However, if it is selected for detailed review, further clarification is likely to be needed on a range of issues, not least of all what is within and outwith scope. Appendix 5 to this Guide suggests a framework that could be followed for agreeing the precise scope and terms of reference for a scrutiny and evaluation review, and how it could be carried out, which Elected Members may like to consider following.

It includes:-

- Considering the background to a review
- Setting objectives
- Defining the scope of work

- Outlining the precise approach to be adopted
- Considering evidence requirements
- Determining with whom discussions should take place
- Confirming the timescale for the whole review and related aspects of work

Conduct at Scrutiny Meetings

Following on from comments at the start of this guide on the principles of effective scrutiny, it is considered essential that all parties involved in reviews approach them from a standpoint of mutual respect and on a non-partisan basis from the outset. This has been highlighted by the committee itself on more than one occasion since its establishment since 1999. Key points which the Audit and Scrutiny Committee itself has highlighted as important before, are summarised below:-

- Conduct at meetings, including when detailed investigations are being progressed, is governed by the Council's Standing Orders
- Members and officers attending meetings are always expected to ensure that they are adhering to their Code of Conduct
- Everyone attending a meeting is expected to respect the Chair's direction and to act in a proper and reasonable manner
- It is considered important that the committee establishes as informal an atmosphere as possible, pursuing questioning which is fair and impersonal
- Before attending any meetings, whether formal or informal, those invited to attend will be advised of the subject, purpose and direction of any enquiry in progress and how they may be expected to assist
- The committee has no powers to censure or discipline; the committee's primary interest is not to apportion blame but, through its endeavours, to seek improvement in the Council's quest for Best Value, minimisation of risk and demonstration of continuous improvement
- The committee will be happy for those attending meetings to ask appropriate questions if they feel that any matter needs to be expanded on or explained further
- Where appropriate, any individual invited to attend a meeting (such as when a detailed investigation is being progressed) may be accompanied by an adviser or supporter to assist them with their responses to questions
- Those attending meetings may bring with them any reference materials, overheads or printed information they consider necessary to present, subject to discussion with the Clerk beforehand

The Chair has a key role in ensuring that the above principles are adhered to; that the committee undertakes its role as fairly as possible; that evidence and everyone's contributions are heard, considered and respected; that all meetings operate in a courteous and constructive manner; and ensuring that the committee operates on a non-partisan basis.

Getting Value from Questions

It is almost inevitable that at least some of those who engage with the Audit and Scrutiny Committee during a detailed review, or more generally, may be doing so for the first time. Some could find that prospect daunting, even if that is not intended to be the case.

The IS guidance emphasises the importance, not only of putting people at ease who are engaging with such committees and ensuring their views are fully understood, but also of approaching questioning in a way that is sensitive and enables information to be drawn out as intended.

As well as emphasising the importance of balancing good rapport with the need to discuss issues and receive required answers, the IS guide on scrutiny also suggests that it is prudent, before any questions are asked, to do some research to help ensure questions are targeted effectively and then gauge if answers provided are sufficiently informative.

It also highlights that, if there is a wish to secure useful information, it is counterproductive for questions to be confrontational.

Whatever approach is adopted, it would be good practice to ensure that all those who interface with the committee are made aware of the scope of the review, why it is considered important to speak to them, and to ensure that they are given sufficient notice of the date and time of any meeting they are invited to attend.

Examples and guidance are provided below.

- Some forms of questions (e.g. open questions) can be more useful to use than others which are better avoided
- Repeating key words can encourage fuller replies
- Allow respondents time to consider their reply
- Use plain language rather than jargon whenever possible
- Considering what questions are to be asked before meetings, what order they should be asked in, and who should ask them, is useful
- Letting people know in advance the main questions to be posed (it is acknowledged that this may not necessarily be a restrictive list) and the outline of the issues the review is intended to cover, helps ensure they can both prepare for and answer them

Useful Types of Questions

Open and Probing Questions

Such questions:-

- Start with what, how, why, when etc.,
- Encourage people to provide more detail
- Are useful for seeking detailed feedback
- Can be useful to seek verifiable data

Examples

What impact has the new legislation had?

How are you intending to?

Can you explain what happens when.....?

You said that your service had not done (A) in the past, could you tell me more about that?

Behavioural Questions

Such questions:-

- Can be useful when seeking evidence on how a task might be done in future using examples of what has been done in the past
- Can be useful to seek verifiable data

Examples

What have you done in the past that worked well?

How do you know that worked well before?

Hypothetical Questions

Such questions:-

- Are useful for testing ideas
- Can be useful for seeking evidence

Examples

If it was possible to (A), how would that impact on the way the service is delivered?

If you had another type of vehicle, could you.....?

Less Useful Types of Questions

Closed Questions

Such questions:-

- May be useful when a short, factual answer is required
- Are not good to use when more detail is being sought

Examples

When did the service end?

How long has the policy been in place?

When was the (A) policy last reviewed?

Leading Questions

Such questions:-

- Suggest that a question is expected to be answered a particular way
- Are unlikely to yield genuine answers
- Make it harder for a respondent to answer candidly and honestly

Examples

It is already known that (A) is the most successful approach, what do you think?

It is obvious that there is only one option going forward, do you agree?

I support Option A, as it seem the only sensible thing to do, what are your thoughts?

Double Headed Questions

Such questions:-

- Ask more than one question at a time
- Can be confusing
- May result in only one part of a question being answered, when all parts of it are valid

Examples

If your service was given responsibility for (A), how many staff would be required and what would it cost?

Could (A) be done through Customer First, what impact would that have, would there be any problems with that and are there any reasons why that cannot be done?

Multiple Choice Questions

Such questions:-

- Suggest a number of answers are possible
- Do not really ask for any real explanation

Examples

Do you think A, B or C is the best approach in future?

7. CONCLUSION

This guide is intended to be a helpful aid to Elected Members, particularly members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee who are involved in reviewing aspects of policy or service. As a matter of good practice, it also comments that it would be useful for the committee to consider and agree an annual work plan. The guide can be updated as required, including in the light of practical experience of review work, such as that progressed by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, and any other relevant developments, including the publication of any new advice on scrutiny.

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Audit and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference

- (a) to promote internal controls, financial and otherwise, in order to provide reasonable assurance of effective and efficient operations and compliance with laws and regulations;
- (b) to review the control environment and make an annual statement to the Council on its evaluation of internal controls;
- (c) to develop an anti-fraud culture within the Council to ensure the highest standards of probity and public accountability;
- (d) to promote good financial practice within the Council;
- (e) to agree the internal audit strategy and plan;
- (f) to receive internal audit progress reports;
- (g) to oversee and review action taken on internal audit recommendations and assist in responding to any criticisms made;
- (h) to review the internal audit annual report;
- (i) to be consulted on the external audit strategy and plan;
- (j) to review all external audit material, in particular the annual report and management letters relative to the audit opinion of the Council's financial statements;
- (k) to oversee and review action on external audit recommendations;
- (l) to review financial procedures including the effective operation of financial regulations;
- (m) to review the Council's financial performance as contained in the Annual Accounts;
- (n) to examine the activities and accounts of the Council in order to ensure that (a) the expenditure approved by the Council has been incurred for the purposes intended, (b) services are being provided efficiently and effectively and (c) value for money is being obtained;
- (o) to consider those decisions of the Cabinet "called in" in terms of agreed procedure;
- (p) to make recommendations to the Cabinet on the introduction and development of appropriate risk management arrangements across the Council;
- (q) to review the performance of the Council in terms of:-
 - service delivery
 - the processes by which policy decisions have been taken
 - the substance of a particular policy and how it fits in with the overall objectives of the Council
 - the effectiveness of a policy in terms of implementation
- (r) to undertake whatever research and consultation is required in support of the analysis being undertaken on any particular issue.

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Examples of Policies/Strategies Discussed in Past 5 Years by Cabinet/Council etc.

<p><i>Policy/Strategy Areas (General)</i> Anti-fraud and Bribery Strategy Community Choices Budgeting Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 Community Plan (including Fairer East Ren) Community Transport Corporate Debt and Rent Arrears Policies Framework for Participation Requests Funding for Community & Voluntary Groups Procurement Strategy and Improvement Plan Unacceptable Actions by Customers Policy Vision for the Future</p>
<p><i>Operational</i> Anti-Money Laundering Plan Benchmarking Charging for Services Data Protection Policy Mobile Device Policy</p>
<p><i>Partnerships</i> City Deal Review East Renfrewshire Renewable Energy Fund SPT/Bus Deregulation</p>
<p><i>Asset Management</i> Corporate Asset Management & Planning Environment Asset Management Fleet Asset Management Plan Housing Asset Management ICT Asset Management Plan Open Space Asset Management Plan Property Asset Management</p>
<p><i>Workforce Management</i> Equality Mainstreaming, Human Rights & Fulfilling Equality Duties Modern Apprenticeships (Council Employees) Workforce Planning</p>

Environmental/Energy Efficiency

Employability Strategy & Action Plan
 Environment Sustainability Strategy & Action Plan
 Local Transport Strategy & Active Travel Plan for East Renfrewshire
 Energy Efficiency Measures – Capital Investment
 Kerbside Recycling Service
 Roads Revenue Works Programme
 Winter Maintenance Arrangements

Education

Advancing Excellence & Equity in Education in East Renfrewshire
 Anti-bullying Policy
 Community Learning and Development
 Devolved School Management Carry Forward Arrangements
 Developing Young Workforce in East Renfrewshire
 Early Learning and Childcare Strategy
 Language Learning Policy in East Renfrewshire based on A 1+2 Approach
 Literacy Strategy
 Vocational Education in East Renfrewshire Schools
 Young Persons Services

Housing

Discretionary Housing Payments
 Homeless Households (e.g. Leasing Temporary Accommodation in Private Sector,
 Elimination of Use of Bed & Breakfast Accommodation & Rough Sleeping)
 Housing Allocation Policy & Implementation of Choice Based Letting
 Housing - Delivering Improvement to East Renfrewshire
 Housing - Local Strategy & Investment
 Housing Services - Customer Engagement Strategy
 Rent Arrears and Write-off Policy
 Sheltered Housing Issues

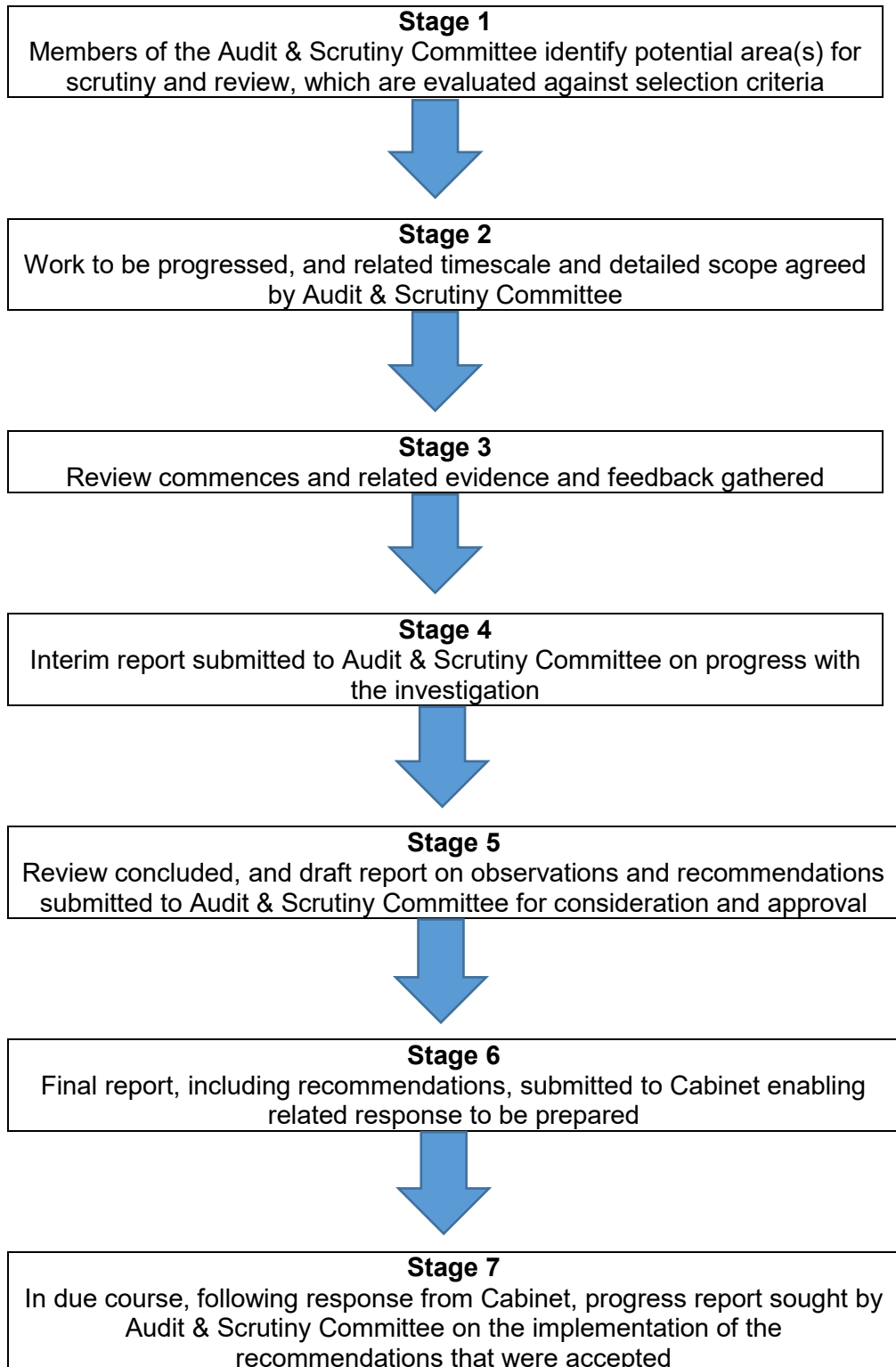
Health and Social Care

Chief Social Work Officer's Annual Report on social work issues are now delegated to the East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership Integration Joint Board

Sample List of Audit and Scrutiny Review Areas Conducted by Other Local Authorities in Scotland and England

<p><i>Policy/Strategy Areas (General)</i> Brexit Digital Strategy Effectiveness of Fair Trade Income Generation and Commercialisation</p>
<p><i>Operational</i> Benchmarking Corporate Fraud Customer Experience Disaster Recovery Information Governance</p>
<p><i>Partnerships</i> Bus Deregulation and its Impact on Transport Services Scrutiny of External Organisations Shared Digital Services</p>
<p><i>Asset Management</i> Accommodation Strategy Data Security registers</p>
<p><i>Environmental/Energy Efficiency</i> Conversion of Grassed Areas to Parking Flood Risks Fly-tipping in the Countryside Japanese Knotweed Newly Introduced Speed Limits Waste Strategy</p>
<p><i>Education</i> Children with High Needs Early Years Provision Effective Home Education School Meals Youth Employment/Youth Services</p>
<p><i>Housing</i> Homelessness Housing repairs by Council and outside contractors Maintenance of Multi-occupancy Accommodation</p>
<p><i>Health and Social Care</i> Child poverty Homecare Occupational Therapy Safeguarding of Children</p>

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Stages for Conducting a Scrutiny Review and Evaluation Investigation

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Scoping and Progressing a Scrutiny and Evaluation Review

Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the background to the review • Confirm that the topic has been prioritised against the agreed selection criteria
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm what the main aim of the review is • Propose objectives covering the various aspects to be examined as part of the review
Scope & Exclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define in detail what areas will be covered <i>For example, is the focus a whole service or part of it; is a particular timeframe to be looked at; is there to be a focus on a particular geographical area</i> • Highlight any aspects that will not be covered by the review <i>For example, are some things excluded due to time or resource constraints; or because they have recently been or to be examined such as by internal or external audit</i> <p><u>Note</u></p> <p><i>It is already considered good practice to advise the Chair and Director with responsibility for a service/policy under review that work is progressing on a matter relating to them and what is within the scope of the review</i></p>
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the approach to be taken to the review <p><i>Depending on what is being reviewed, there may be a range of approaches that are appropriate to complete the work. Determining what lines of enquiry are appropriate from the outset is useful as this informs timescales, resources, involvement of various key stakeholders etc.</i></p> <p><i>Approaches may include:-</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Reviewing local performance data and trends</i> ○ <i>Reviewing financial data and trends</i> ○ <i>Benchmarking and determining what is good practice</i> ○ <i>Discussions with appropriate council officers</i> ○ <i>Local site visits</i> ○ <i>Visits to other service providers or partners, such as other local authorities</i> ○ <i>Meeting with external partners (e.g. representatives of community groups)</i> ○ <i>Inviting internal and external stakeholders to provide evidence</i> ○ <i>Determining which members of the committee may be involved in any of the above</i>

<p>Consider Evidence Requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what evidence (both written and oral) would be useful to gather and review and the preferred format of it <p><i>Depending on the nature of the review, this may include:-</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Reports, plans and strategies</i> ○ <i>Identifying background reading (e.g. research articles)</i> ○ <i>Recording interviews</i> ○ <i>Seeking written evidence</i> ○ <i>Collecting benchmarking data</i> ○ <i>Preparing a survey/questionnaire</i> ○ <i>Writing up comments from site visits</i> ○ <i>Research and analysis</i> ○ <i>Equalities Impact Assessments</i> ○ <i>Options Appraisals</i>
<p>Interviews etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider who needs to be spoken to <p><i>Depending on the nature of the review, this may include:-</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Other Elected Members</i> ○ <i>Members of CMT</i> ○ <i>Other Officers</i> ○ <i>Service Users</i> ○ <i>Trade Unions</i> ○ <i>Professional Experts</i> ○ <i>Community Groups</i> ○ <i>External Partners</i> ○ <i>Deciding what advance correspondence is required with any or all of the above</i>
<p>Anticipated Outcome</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering from the outset what you expect the review to deliver can be useful <p><i>Depending on the nature of the review, this may include:-</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Making recommendations to Cabinet on how a policy or service delivery could be improved</i> ○ <i>Improved understanding of the challenges faced by the service concerned</i> ○ <i>Suggesting a different approach to delivery of a service</i>
<p>Timescales</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help ensure the review progresses as intended, consider setting timescales for various aspects of the review <p><i>This may include:-</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>When the review is scheduled to start and finish</i> ○ <i>When any updates are to be provided to the committee</i> ○ <i>When a draft report is shown to officers for comments</i> ○ <i>When the final version of a report and related executive summary, prepared on the committee's behalf, are to be submitted to the committee and then the Cabinet</i> ○ <i>When progress on implementation of recommendations accepted by the Cabinet may be reviewed</i>

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
ARISING FROM 2022 SELF-EVALUATION

GENERAL ISSUES, COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RELATED MATTERS, INCLUDING ITS APPROACH AND UNDERSTANDING OF ITS ROLE IN THE COUNCIL

- (1) In 2012/13, the Committee welcomed a change of name from the Audit to Audit and Scrutiny Committee which it felt better portrayed the extent of its role and its focus on both financial and non-financial matters. The Committee, meetings of which are generally well attended, still holds the view that its membership should not be extended to include an independent person. It is always an option to invite others, including other Members, to contribute to its work.
- (2) The Committee continues to value very highly its Terms of Reference, which cover a range of governance issues amongst other things. The current Committee wish to emphasise to those appointed to it following the forthcoming Elections that, although the Committee has few decision making powers other than as specified (e.g. to agree the Internal Audit Strategy and Plan), its extensive remit continues to provide scope to look at a wide range of issues of its own choosing; it does not need to be bound by what others consider appropriate; and it can speak to any appropriate officers and Members when doing so.
- (3) As the Terms of Reference have not been reviewed for many years however, it is recommended that they are to:-
 - (i) Compare them with those of similar committees in other authorities;
 - (ii) Ascertain if any issues referred to in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Practical Guidance for Audit Committees (LAs and Police) 2018, including the CIPFA Position Statement within it, should be referenced further or more clearly; and
 - (iii) Determine if reference should be added to reports now considered routinely (e.g. Annual Code of Corporate Governance and Annual Fraud Response Statement).

It is suggested that those appointed to the Committee in May are made aware of the 2018 Guidance referred to above.

- (4) It is considered important to stress, regarding the work of the Committee, that all of its members (whether Administration or Opposition) should **always** act in an apolitical manner; scrutinise issues objectively, independently and in a non-confrontational manner; focus on improvement; and adopt a 'critical friend' approach, in the interests of the Council as a whole.
- (5) The Committee's Terms of Reference are accessible on both the intranet and internet. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) and senior managers are regarded by the Committee as having a full understanding and acceptance of its role. However, as the extent to which the role and purpose is understood and accepted by **all** officers is not fully known, it is suggested that it could be useful to consider a survey at some stage to determine this and if any related action is required.

- (6) During the next Administration, once the new Chair has settled into the role, publishing an article on the Committee's role, as has been done in the past, could be valuable to help heighten awareness of it.
- (7) It would be useful to ensure, at the start of the Administration, that all members of the Committee are fully aware, and become familiar with, the Scheme of Administration and Scheme of Delegated Functions and, therefore, how decisions are made and by whom. Both are widely available.
- (8) In the interests of clarity, it is important to ensure that the locus of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee versus that of the Performance and Audit Committee of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) is clearly understood, especially by new Members.

CALL-IN ARRANGEMENTS

- (9) It is important to ensure, very shortly after the Elections in advance of Cabinet meetings resuming, that all new Members fully understand how the call-in arrangements operate and that issues may be referred to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee or full Council.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED ISSUES

- (10) Addressing the learning and development (L&D) needs of the Committee can be challenging. The important responsibilities the Committee has underlines the importance of its Members being willing to and taking advantage of relevant training offered and other L&D development opportunities, to gain the knowledge and expertise they require. Training will be made available on a range of issues as part of the Elected Members Induction Programme and can be arranged subsequently, including in response to need or requests, on an on-line, group or individual basis as appropriate.
- (11) Regarding the extent to which detailed financial/technical expertise amongst the membership exists or is essential (which depends to an extent on who is appointed to the Committee in any case), what is felt to be most important is having access to such expertise through officers for example, which already exists.
- (12) Various issues are being identified on which induction training and briefings will be useful. Sessions of relevance to scrutiny which the Committee's membership, and other Members also, are strongly encouraged to attend include sessions on:-
 - (i) Various key issues to be led by the CMT shortly following the Elections, parts of which will, for example, focus on governance issues and provide a broad overview of financial issues, including the role of the Chief Financial Officer, funding sources and plans, and the importance of plans being prudent and affordable;
 - (ii) Effective scrutiny, which amongst other things should encourage questioning as other scrutiny training sessions are likely to do also;
 - (iii) The roles of Internal Audit and External Audit, the full scope of which may not be fully clear to new Members (the Committee suggests this should include reference to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) which members of the Committee could also be alerted to by the Clerk or Chief Auditor at an early stage);

- (iv) Risk management; and
 - (v) Treasury management (the Committee recommends that training on this quite technical issue is organised twice during the Administration).
- (13) In view of the importance of the Committee's role, and scrutiny generally, the delivery of scrutiny training earlier than provided following the 2017 Elections is supported. Doing so, and attendance at such training, would also help raise the profile of such work and its importance amongst Members at an early stage.
- (14) It is emphasised that the attendance of all Members at the training referred to above is useful, not only because scrutiny is the responsibility of all Members, committees and the full Council, but also because the Committee's membership can change during an Administration as it did various times after the May 2017 Elections.
- (15) A knowledge and skills analysis formed part of the Committee's self-assessment which was both retrospective and forward looking. It is recommended that, in due course, members of the new Committee make use of the *Knowledge and Skills Framework* in the 2018 CIPFA Guidance referred to above, to help them evaluate their own knowledge and skills and assess if any relevant L&D needs remain to be addressed.

GUIDE TO SCRUTINY AND REVIEW

- (16) To complement the above, it is recommended that the *Guide to Scrutiny and Review*, prepared in 2019 with the assistance of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee Members and approved by the Council in June that year, which was distributed widely then, should be shared with Elected Members following the Elections, including those appointed to the Committee, and be referred to and used as required.
- (17) It is suggested that promotion of the *Guide* during the effective scrutiny training session (Section 12 refers) would be valuable.

COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL WORK PLANS AND ANNUAL REPORT

- (18) Although recommended by CIPFA, no Annual Report is prepared by the Committee or submitted to the Council. This has not been requested by the Council and is not considered crucial because the Committee's Minutes and Agendas are widely available (which since 2019 have included reports on its Annual Work Plan) and in view of the pressure on resources supporting the Committee.
- (19) The Committee's workload can be challenging for its Members, with the current Committee having had realistic expectations about what can be achieved with the resources at its disposal, as the new Committee should do also. Having an annual Work Plan has confirmed what has been achieved, is planned and is outstanding at any given point in time; helped the Committee prioritise its workload; and enhanced transparency on both. However, to further raise awareness of the Committee's work, it is recommended that each year a copy of the Work Plan, on its completion, should be put on the internet where the Committee's Agendas and Minutes etc. are available.
- (20) To complement the above, a copy of the report it has already been agreed to prepare, summarising the Committee's work over the past 5 years, should be shared with new members of the Committee, other Elected Members and made available on the internet.

DETAILED INVESTIGATIONS UNDERTAKEN BY COMMITTEE

- (21) Some detailed review work, which the Committee itself decided to pursue, has been done, but not to a great extent taking account of the limited resources available to the Committee which need to be considered regarding the implementation of its Work Plans.
- (22) When the Committee makes recommendations following a detailed investigation (most work on which is done out with formal meetings), the Cabinet response is submitted for noting. The Committee then actively seeks feedback after a period of time on the actual implementation of the recommendations accepted by the Cabinet. It is recommended that this is always done to help the Committee monitor and assess the impact of its work.
- (23) When undertaking such investigations, but otherwise also as appropriate, the Committee could consider making better use of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework data available. This is one way of comparing performance locally with that elsewhere.

GOVERNANCE AND CONTROL

- (24) To the extent the Committee is made aware of issues, it considers the adequacy of the control environment and related assurances; and assesses the scope and effectiveness of the systems established by management to identify, assess, manage and monitor financial and non-financial risks. This is achieved such as through its consideration of risk managements reports, and other reports on corporate governance for example. The new Committee should note that it is always an option to ask further questions or make recommendations on governance issues.
- (25) The most recent External Audit Annual Audit Report (November 2021) considered by the Committee, then the full Council, confirmed that overall the Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place, therefore no concerns are held on this by the current Committee at present. Current members of the Committee are familiar with the governance arrangements, but they should be highlighted to new Members, such as through induction.
- (26) The Committee's Work Plans now help confirm timescales for considering a range of governance issues each year, including the Local Code of Corporate Governance, the Annual Governance Statement (when the Annual Accounts are considered), risk management reports and ones on treasury management to name a few examples. Although the Committee considers a range of reports on governance, risk and control, it does not tend to make many recommendations on these issues, which could be useful to consider further, but it does query some issues and seek related assurances.
- (27) The Committee receives assurances on risk issues and some such issues are taken forward by the Council in partnership or collaboration with other bodies, but there is no specific reference to partnership or other collaborative arrangements in the Committee's Terms of Reference, such as on seeking assurances that they are working effectively and that the related governance arrangements are appropriate. There has been considered to be an increase in partnership working since the Terms of Reference were first prepared and subsequently reviewed, which may be useful to reflect better in them in an appropriate way.

- (28) It is appropriate for the Committee to consider risk management as an integral part of its work. Where comments are fed back (e.g. on risk scores or related issues) from the Committee, it is not always actively checked if and exactly how they are acted upon which could be useful to pursue, possibly by seeking confirmation on this in the biannual reports submitted to the Committee on the Strategic Risk Register and Risk Management Progress.
- (29) A report on the Local Code of Corporate Governance is submitted to the Committee annually and is likely to be one of the first reports considered (probably in June 2022) prior to consideration of the Annual Governance Statement later in the year when the Annual Accounts are also considered. This will provide a useful overview of the arrangements in place. The Committee reviews the self-assessment of governance arrangements when the Code is considered, but is not actively involved in the self-assessment exercise otherwise. It is acknowledged that doing so might not necessarily alter the outcome, but it could be useful to suggest benchmarking to see what approach is taken in other areas.
- (30) There is considered to be free access to the External Auditor. However, taking account of the 2018 CIPFA Guidance, it would be useful to seek clarification if the External Auditor would value an annual meeting with the Chair and/or other Members to discuss issues of mutual interest, including corporate governance matters, and any advice the External Auditor may have for the Committee on how it discharges its responsibilities.

ROLE OF CHAIR AND RELATED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

- (31) It is considered useful to refer to the key role the Chair plays in driving forward the Committee's work and ensuring the effective management of its meetings. For the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, this role includes ensuring an objective and apolitical approach and focus on improvement is taken as referred to earlier; encouraging constructive discussion and questions to be posed such as to seek assurances; and encouraging Members to contribute to the formulation of its Work Plans.
- (32) It has been commented that chairing a major committee can be very challenging, especially for new Members. If the new Chair has little experience of this, it is recommended that advantage is taken of any training available.
- (33) It is useful, in the interests of clarity when, at the end of items considered by the Committee, the decisions taken are summarised by the Chair.

SOURCES OF GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

- (34) The Committee interacts regularly with various officers, including the Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) who provides a useful and important point of contact for the CMT, the Chief Auditor and the Clerk.
- (35) A range of senior officers readily attend meetings (some regularly), and it is very important that all are treated respectfully when they do. They, and others, contribute to reports and respond to related queries and have been found to be very willing to do so.
- (36) It is important to note that, out with meetings, it is always an option for members of the Committee to seek clarity on issues from officers, which is encouraged, either directly or via the Clerk.

- (37) As well as encouraging Members to seek further clarification from officers on issues out with meetings, it would also be useful to encourage Members to alert the Clerk or Chair in advance to issues they wish to raise at meetings where possible. This would help ensure that answers could be requested and made available at Committee meetings in the interests of transparency.
- (38) Inviting some officers, with whom the Committee interacts regularly, to a short informal session immediately after the first meeting, simply to introduce themselves briefly and to provide an opportunity for questions/ clarification may be useful.
- (39) Previous members of the Committee could be a useful source of guidance for new members of it, if they were willing to provide this.

COMMITTEE'S SPECIALISATION ARRANGEMENTS – AUDIT REPORTS ETC.

- (40) The Committee considers various external audit reports, internal audit ones and external inspection reports; related risk and performance issues; and management feedback under its own specialisation arrangements, which helps enable them to be considered in more detail than might otherwise be the case.
- (41) Under these arrangements, all members of the Committee see the External Audit reports and Inspection reports the Clerk has been alerted to. However, currently working in pairs, they specialise in leading the review of various ones depending on the subject matter. It may be worth considering responsibilities resting with individual members of the Committee, rather than pairs, to help ensure no dubiety exists about who is responsible for leading a review of a report or providing feedback. It is suggested that the Committee be invited to consider the general position on this at its first meeting and, subject to the outcome, specific remits at its second one.
- (42) Regarding potential questions itemised in some National External Audit reports, where these are provided it would be useful for the Clerk to highlight these further to members of the Committee when the reports are circulated. It is recommended that greater use of them is encouraged, although it remains the case that Members are always free to formulate their own questions and ask officers to attend to respond to these.
- (43) It is also recommended that the new Committee considers if they wish to invite appropriate senior officers to attend more meetings of the Committee to answer questions on External Audit issues etc. when local feedback on these is considered, at least more than at present. It has been observed that more issues tend to be raised when officers attend than is the case otherwise, and it could provide valuable opportunities for further clarification to be sought on the implementation of actions that are on-going and the timescales for doing so.
- (44) For several years the Committee has welcomed reviewing some external inspection reports prepared on Council services, considering this a welcome development and improvement. These are also considered under its specialisation arrangements and would be the subject of a report to the Committee, by exception, if felt necessary by its Members. However as receipt can be sporadic, it is not fully clear if the Clerk has been alerted to the publication of all such reports. To address this, it is suggested that it would be useful for the Clerk to send an email to departments, on a 6-monthly basis, requesting notification of all inspection reports published in the previous 6 months. This would help ensure they are all received and allow them to be reviewed more timeously.

- (45) The Committee continues to have high confidence in the Chief Auditor and her team, and has continued to adopt a risk managed approach on internal audit issues which are reported on regularly to the Committee, progressing matters by exception when it wishes to pursue specific issues. Some issues are dealt with under the Committee's specialisation arrangements. This is considered the most effective use of the Committee's limited time and resources.
- (46) It would be useful to encourage members of the Committee to return the pro-formas they are requested to complete on various reports (under its specialisation arrangements) to the Clerk sooner than they are returned at present. This would make it clearer, earlier, what further action if any is suggested by Members.

ETHICAL ISSUES

- (47) Reference to the Ethical Framework is not specified in the Terms of Reference and the Council does not have a Standards and Ethics Committees to support ethical values with which to work, but some ethical issues are considered, such as when the Local Code of Governance is considered annually, or when reports on fraud and corruption are discussed, providing opportunities for assurances to be provided or sought. It is not suggested that there is a need to change the Committee's Terms of Reference on such issues, unless considered appropriate following a wider review of the Terms of Reference as suggested at (3) above.
- (48) It would be useful to ensure that members of the Committee, and others, are aware of the range of approaches taken by the Council on countering fraud and corruption at an early stage, such as through the induction programme (possibly as part of the session on Internal and External Audit if possible) or to ensure that Members of the Committee know, at an early stage, where to access the most recent Fraud Response Statement.
- (49) On a specific issue, it has been some time since the Committee actively promoted whistle blowing. It is felt important that people feel safe about raising concerns in this way. The new Committee may wish to consider if some further work in relation to this issue is merited, such as pursuing further related publicity (e.g. an article involving the Chair) to help raise awareness of the importance attached to addressing fraud and irregularity and promote confidence in and champion the whistle-blowing arrangements in place.
- (50) It should be noted that when information is submitted anonymously, those submitting it cannot be advised of the outcome in person, but some feedback on work taken forward may be available, including in reports prepared by the Internal Auditor.

SCRUTINY EFFECTIVENESS

- (51) As reflected in the *Guide to Scrutiny and Review*, it is important generally for those involved in scrutiny, including members of the Committee, to ask questions and seek assurances on issues such as the implementation of action plans and the completion of such plans, and focus on how improvement can be achieved. Members do ask questions, at times more than at others, are invited to do so by the Chair when items are being considered, and are comfortable doing so, but encouraging more (framed appropriately to challenge and elicit detail), taking advantage of guidance and training available, was discussed and could be valuable.

- (52) It was acknowledged that it might not always be possible for all answers to be provided at meetings, with the provision of clarification, other feedback and assurances later considered acceptable, where necessary. During discussion, it was suggested that it might be useful, in the interests of transparency, if the Clerk submits a summary of clarification provided on issues after meetings, to the next meeting. The extent to which this might be of interest to those observing meetings is unknown.
- (53) Regarding a range of issues, including matters raised in audit reports, inspection reports and reports on risk management for example, the Committee should be encouraged to focus particularly on and seek assurances on higher risk issues. This could include seeking clarification and assurances on actions taken, and how risk scores have changed or will change as a result of actions taken for example.

PERFORMANCE OF COMMITTEE - SELF-ASSESSMENT AND HOLDING COMMITTEE TO ACCOUNT ETC.

- (54) Completing a further self-evaluation exercise recently was considered worthwhile. As in 2017, the Committee's view remains that periodic self-evaluations are useful to help analyse its own performance and allow areas for improvement to be considered. It is recommended, in the interests of good governance, that further periodic self-assessments of the Committee's own operations are undertaken, but not as frequently as annually due to its limited time and resources available for this. However, rather than only doing one review during the Administration, it is suggested that it could also be valuable to do a further one, mid-way through it.
- (55) CIPFA's views is that the Committee should be held to account regularly by the full Council as part of its governance role, with a range of issues reviewed (e.g. adherence to Terms of Reference, good practice adopted and self-assessment work done), such as if an Annual Report is submitted to the Council. No such arrangements have been established locally. It would be for the Council to determine what is appropriate, should it choose to.
- (56) Further to the comments above, irrespective of any view that might be taken by the Council, there could be merit in suggesting that some form of appropriate external perspective on the Committee's performance is considered (perhaps as part of a mid-term self-assessment). This could include seeking views from the CMT, or a peer review by a Chair of a Committee in another local authority. It is commented in Section 30 above, that a meeting with the External Auditor could be useful periodically.
- (57) Learning how Audit and Scrutiny Committees operate elsewhere, as has been done in the past (but not for some time) such as through visits from or to other areas could be useful too.

COMMUNICATION

- (58) The Committee supports the use of plain English in reports, receiving information in a format that is easy to understand and meets its needs, and definitions of all acronyms being provided.
- (59) Given its importance, communication was on a list of issues the Committee considered reviewing, but there was insufficient time and resource to do so prior to the Elections.
- (60) A view was expressed that finding Councillors' contact details, including those serving on the Committee, could be a little better presented on the Councillors' pages on the website to assist with contact. It would be useful to see if this could be addressed.

Audit and Scrutiny Committee
2022/23 Work Plan

Planned Report Date	Report Subject	Report by	Date Considered by Audit & Scrutiny Committee
7 April 2022	East Renfrewshire Council - Annual Audit Plan 2021/22	External Auditor	7/4/22
	Strategic Risk Register and Risk Management Progress - Biannual Report	Chief Executive	7/4/22
	Work Progressed by Committee Since 2017; Performance Against 2021/22 Work Plan; and Self-Evaluation (See Note 6 Below)	Clerk to the Committee	7/4/22
23 June 2022	Unaudited Annual Accounts 2021/22	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	23/6/22
	Code of Corporate Governance	Director of Business Operations and Partnerships	23/6/22
	Consultancy Expenditure and Related Log (See Note 1 below)	Clerk to Committee in liaison with Chief Procurement Officer	23/6/22
	Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 - Implementation Progress – January to March 2022	Chief Auditor	23/6/22
	Internal Audit Strategic Plan 2022/23 – 2026/27	Chief Auditor	23/6/22
	National External Audit Report - Local Government Financial Overview 2020/21	Clerk in liaison with Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	23/6/22
	Integration Joint Board Performance and Audit Committee - Invitation to Co-opt Member of Audit Scrutiny Committee	Clerk to the Committee	23/6/22

Planned Report Date	Report Subject	Report by	Date Considered by Audit & Scrutiny Committee
23 June 2022 (Cont'd)	Audit and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan, Outcome of Self-Evaluation and Related Issues	Clerk to the Committee	23/6/22
11 August 2022	Annual Treasury Management Report 2021/22	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	
	Internal Audit Annual Report 2021/22	Chief Auditor	
	Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 - Implementation Progress - April to June 2022		
29 September 2022	Strategic Risk Register and Risk Management Progress – Biannual Report	Chief Executive	
	Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption - East Renfrewshire Council Annual Fraud Statement 2022/23		
	National Fraud Initiative – Update	Director of Business Operations and Partnerships	
	National External Audit Report - Local Government Overview 2022	Clerk to the Committee in liaison with Director of Business Operations and Partnerships	
	Managing Absence – 2021/22 Annual Report	Director of Business Operations and Partnerships	
	Summary of Early Retirement/ Redundancy Costs to 31 March 2022		

Planned Report Date	Report Subject	Report by	Date Considered by Audit & Scrutiny Committee
26 October 2022	2021/22 Annual Accounts and Draft Annual Audit Report for East Renfrewshire Council	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer) and External Auditor	
	2021/22 Annual Accounts for Council's Charitable Trusts and External Audit International Standard on Auditing 260 Report		
10 November 2022	Interim Treasury Management Report 2022/23	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	
	Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 – Implementation Progress – July to September 2022	Chief Auditor	
	Update on Audit and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2022/23	Clerk to the Committee	
January 2023 (See Note 4 Below)	<i>As of June 2022, no items scheduled to be considered</i>	N/A	N/A
February 2023 (See Note 4 Below)	Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 – Implementation Progress October to December 2022	Chief Auditor	
	Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) Assessment		
	Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24	Head of Accountancy (Chief Financial Officer)	
March 2023 (See Note 4 Below)	Strategic Risk Register and Risk Management Progress – Biannual Report	Chief Executive	
	East Renfrewshire Council - Annual Audit Plan 2022/23	External Auditor	
	Internal Audit Strategic Plan 2023/24 – 2027/28	Chief Auditor	

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 that further reports on consultancy expenditure, as referred to in the log created for this, should be submitted annually after the end of each financial year. The next report is scheduled to be submitted in June 2022.

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 (now the Resilience Coordinator) has provided further updates in November 2020, March and September 2021, and February 2022. Subsequent to various meetings, at the request of the committee, he has provided clarification on a range of issues which has been circulated, including on the EU Settlement Scheme, funding issues and State Aid.

When the most recent report was submitted in February 2022, the committee agreed that the Resilience Coordinator should provide further information to the Clerk for circulation to Members on telephone charges, the length of time the temporary Fuel Poverty Worker had been appointed for, and to what extent the Shared Prosperity Fund would replace EU structural funding. That was circulated on receipt. Otherwise the report and related comments made were noted.

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 around March or April 2021, and that the Clerk should liaise with members of the committee 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 further, taking account of other information available to them, such as reports submitted to the Council on COVID-19 issues. On 25 November 2021 the then 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 meetings between January and March 2023 are subject to approval of the calendar of meetings by the Council in June 2022. The Work Plan will be updated when the exact dates are known.

An extra meeting on 26 October 2022 has been proposed to allow reports on the 2021/22 Annual Accounts for the Council's Charitable Trusts, the 2021/22 Annual Accounts for the Council, the Draft Annual Audit Report for East Renfrewshire Council and related documents to be considered then, following which they will be submitted to the full Council meeting which is already scheduled to take place at 7.00pm that evening. This will meet the external auditor's revised requirements for 2022 regarding the signing of the Annual Accounts by the end of October.

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.

As scheduled, the updates were considered by the committee on 20 January 2022. Regarding the *Income Generation and Commercialisation* investigation, the committee agreed then that further clarification be sought, for circulation by the Clerk, on issues raised at the meeting regarding Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10 and 11 of the report, and otherwise noted the report and related comments made. Regarding the *Climate Change* investigation, the committee agreed that the Head of Environment (Strategic Services) seek and provide further clarification to the Clerk for circulation to members of the committee on issues raised at the meeting on public transport and the environmental measures to be installed in the new Eastwood Leisure Complex and what its carbon dioxide emissions would be compared to the current facility. That information was circulated to the committee prior to the Elections. Otherwise, the report and related comments made were noted.

Should the committee wish to do so, it could request further updates on progress in future.

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 undertook during the Administration; and that a further self-evaluation exercise be completed.

On schedule, a report on both issues was submitted to and approved by the committee in April 2022 following which a related report is to be submitted to the committee on 23 June 2022.

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 remains that progressing these as frequently as annually is neither a necessary nor efficient use of its limited time and resources. The committee appointed following the Election, is to be asked if it would support a mid-Administration evaluation and end of Administration one in future.

Note 7 (External Audit Reports)

The External Auditor confirmed that a number of reports, briefings etc. were due to be published in the first few months of 2022, such as the financial overview of local government 2021/22 on which a report is to be submitted to the committee on 23 June.

It was highlighted in January that, subject to when various reports are published and given that time is needed to consider the content and response locally, some reports might not be dealt with until after the Election and would therefore be itemised in the committee's 2022/23 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 then 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 at its meeting on 21 January 2021. Arrangements were made to enable other Members of the Council 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. Discussions on progressing any more detailed work were outstanding at April 2022.

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 the pandemic, 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 such issues were identified. Discussions on any more detailed work to be progressed were outstanding as of April 2022.

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 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 the committee on the admission policy and the appeals system. That presentation was made and noted in November 2019. Discussions on any more detailed work to be progressed were outstanding as of April 2022.

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, could be considered for review in the 2022/23 financial year, following completion of the current roll-out of the provision.