

Minutes

Performance Audit Committee
Thursday 24 August 2023, 12.00 pm
Online via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Christine Lester (Chair)
Andrew Burns
Sophie Flemig
Malcolm Bell
Jennifer Henderson
Ronnie Hinds

Apologies:

Sheila Gunn

In attendance:

Antony Clark, Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value (PABV)
Helena Gray, Controller of Audit
Douglas Black, Interim Secretary
Tricia Meldrum, Senior Manager, PABV (item 5)
Jillian Matthew, Senior Manager, PABV (item 5)
Mark MacPherson, Audit Director, PABV (item 5)
Sally Thompson, Senior Manager, PABV (item 5)
Carol Calder, Audit Director, PABV (items 6 & 7)
Kathrine Sibbald, Senior Manager, PABV (items 6 & 7)
Zoe McGuire, Audit Manager, PABV (item 7)
Chris Lewis, Senior Auditor, PABV (item 7)
Claire Richards, Senior Auditor, PABV (item 7)
Jillian Matthew, Senior Manager, PABV (item 7)
Ray Buist, Audit Manager, PABV (item 7)

1. Apologies for absence

It was noted that apologies for Sheila Gunn had been received.

2. Declaration of connections or conflict

Jennifer Henderson in relation to item 7, due to family connections in front-line social care in a Scottish Council.

Sophie Flemig in relation to item 5, as a member of the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Board.

Malcolm Bell in relation to item 5, as an Honorary Sheriff – of the Sheriffdom of Grampian, Highland and Islands – at Peterhead Sheriff Court.

3. Minutes of meeting of 27 April 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 27 April 2023 were noted, the Commission having previously approved them as a correct record and agreed the recommendations therein.

4. Risk assessment and implications for the work programme

This item was the subject of a joint meeting with the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee and is contained in a separate minute.

5. Justice, Education and Lifelong Learning cluster briefing

The Committee considered a briefing by the Executive Director of PABV on the Justice, Education and Lifelong Learning cluster. This focused on two topics: additional support for learning (ASL) and community justice.

During discussion, the Committee:

- Sophie Flemig noted that there is lot of pressure on the ASL system and some pathologising of the pandemic's impact. She suggested the proposed briefing paper about ASL is too service focussed and would benefit from including examples of prevention/early intervention. With regards to looking at ASL, Sophie suggested producing an output on the theme of prevention instead of the proposed audit outputs on the different topics.
- Antony Clark commented that in preparing for the drug and alcohol audit, there is likely to be a very strong prevention focus and that prevention is also a likely to be a theme in a number of other planned pieces of audit work such as in the area of child poverty. He reported that Audit Scotland is considering potentially producing an output on prevention that draws on and summarises the findings in this area from a range of our audit work as part of our ongoing interest in assessing and commenting on the effectiveness with which public service reform is being implemented.
- As regards alternatives to custody, Sophie suggested the team look at the range of bodies including all relevant partners involved in Community Justice Partnerships.

Action: Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

- Christine Lester noted recently-published data showing a reduction in drug-related deaths and thanked Audit Scotland colleagues for “*all their great work*” on the drug and alcohol audit.
- Malcolm Bell suggested that instead of looking at the varied outcomes for children with ASL needs, the focus could instead be on addressing why we have so many people in the system already and looking at a preventative agenda? Malcolm also asked the team to address sustainability in alternatives to custody.

Action: Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

- Andrew Burns agreed that a full performance audit on ASL should be delayed until after the new national performance framework is in place and agreed that a short sharp briefing should be published – by close of March 2024 – as a precursor, to keep the issues in focus. He also noted the substantive changes in community justice and the proposal's focus on governance, and agreed that governance and partnership working are definitely issues we should follow up on.

- Antony Clark noted that a March 2024 publication date might not be achievable for the ASL briefing because formal approval for this work has not yet been received from the Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland as scoping work has not yet begun. He noted that the paper could look at demands on, and capacity of, the ASL system before and after Covid, alongside data gaps and the prevention agenda.

Action: Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

- Ronnie Hinds supported the ASL proposals in the paper and stressed the importance of highlighting data gaps as prominently as we can.

Action: Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

- Christine Lester noted that the tranche of new Accounts Commission members joining it soon may have limited background on the issues being discussed and would need more background information to be included in the reports to the Commission and its committees. Antony Clark agreed that future audit reports and scoping documents would need more backstory.

Action: Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

Following discussion, the Committee:

- Agreed to audit work on:
 - Additional support for learning
 - Community justice.

6. Local Government Workforce – Briefing slides

The Committee considered briefing slides by the Executive Director of PABV on the Local Government Workforce.

During discussion, the Committee:

- Jennifer Henderson noted her excitement for this piece of work and supported the ideas around innovation – encompassing artificial intelligence/automation. They bring the potential for councils to focus their staff on the roles that only people can do. She highlighted the importance of looking at this from two angles, the technology and the people.
- Christine Lester was supportive of the audit work emphasising the potential of innovative thinking and joint roles, and encouraged time to be invested in these areas; with key engagement with our stakeholders. Carol Calder advised that hybrid working, shared services and upskilling would all be looked at as part of the work.
- Ronnie Hinds sought clarification on the scope of a different piece of work being undertaken on behalf of the AGS about workforce
- Ronnie Hinds supported the proposal to produce a blog, stating that the Commission wants to think about the nature/timing of comparable work and be at the forefront of looking at these issues from a local government perspective.

Action: Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

Following discussion, the Committee:

- Supported the teams' proposals on the work in this area.
- Agreed to a blog about workforce challenges, focussing on the performance management of staff and the impact of post-Covid hybrid working arrangements on staff performance.
- Noted that Ronnie Hinds would be closely involved in matching sponsors to audit projects. New committee members (probably one or two) are to be allocated to the role of sponsor of this BV-related blog upon their appointment.

Action: Accounts Commission Chair

7. Social Care: Work programme proposals

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director of PABV on the Social Care: Work programme proposals.

During discussion, the Committee:

- Christine Lester posed the question of how public audit (the Commission, Auditor General and Audit Scotland) is going to comment on social care alone without commenting on community health; and asked for key learning from previous reports to be taken into consideration.
- Antony Clark replied that the team hopes the IJB report, with its expanded scope, will provide a platform to start commenting on these issues. The Auditor General is supportive of the Commission's voice being expressed in this area and looks forward to working together on broader pieces of work.
- Ronnie Hinds noted his excitement at plans to expand our coverage of IJBs and highlighted the need to focus on the quality of data. Ronnie also posed the question of whether it would be sensible to start with workforce as the first 'Spotlight' area if we could add greater benefit by focusing on another area? He noted that there may be limited value in audit work highlighting staffing level issues when the challenge councils face in recruiting staff is already well known. He suggested that the Commission could potentially add more value by focusing on topics such as leadership and commissioning area, where there may be greater scope for early improvement.
- Kathrine Sibbald responded that part of the rationale for proposing the focus on workforce is it is the main issue stakeholders have highlighted in relation to sustainability in the sector. She also explained that it would also allow for commentary on other issues including commissioning as there are such close links. .
- Jennifer Henderson urged the team to look at the timings of when we can have an impact and the order in which we do things in. The contribution of unpaid carers should be properly represented in roundtable discussions, and they should be remunerated for their time.
- Sophie Flemig asked what feedback had already been received from advisory groups in terms of their views in this area. Antony Clark explained this.
- Both Andrew Burns and Malcolm Bell confirmed their support for the programme for work and are happy with potential focus on commissioning which could have a bigger impact.

- Ronnie Hinds noted his thanks to Christine Lester on behalf of the Commission for her perseverance in the drug and alcohol work and continued efforts to increase the focus on health and social care issues.

Following discussion, the Committee:

- Agreed that the focus should be on commissioning, for the first 'Spotlight' theme.
- Agreed to delegate to sponsors the approach set out in paragraph 20 for approval of scoping documents for the planned Drug and alcohol services performance audit.
- Agreed that new members will be allocated to the role of sponsors for this audit on their appointment. Ronnie suggested that the team contact him in the meantime until sponsors have been appointed.

Action: Policy Manager

8. Any other business

The Chair, having advised that there was no business for this item, closed the meeting.

Close of meeting

The meeting finished at 13.10 pm.