

AUDIT COMMITTEE

6.00 P.M.

26TH APRIL 2006

PRESENT:- Councillors Malcolm Thomas (Chairman), John Gilbert, Ian Barker, Jon Barry, Keith Budden and David Whitaker

Also in Attendance

Fiona Blatcher Audit Commission

Officers in attendance:-

Roger Muckle	Corporate Director (Finance and Performance)
Derek Whiteway	Internal Audit Manager
Lynne Armistead	Risk and Insurance Manager
James Doble	Principal Democratic Support Officer

22 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25th January 2006 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

23 **ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER**

Fiona Blatcher (Audit Commission) introduced the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter which had been delayed from the usual December timetable due to allow the inclusion of the use of resources judgement being made. It was highlighted that this timescale was likely to remain in future years. On the whole the report highlighted some very positive messages for the Council and many improvements were highlighted. Further work was still required in the areas of risk management, performance and value for money. Additionally there was need for further work with regard to consultation and in particular a more sophisticated method of assessing customer satisfaction, although it was confirmed that this judgement had been formed based on the last customer satisfaction survey which was now some three years old. It was acknowledged that the Council had already put plans in place to move forward on these issues and that improvements had already been achieved in some cases.

Members discussed the issue of public perception of the Council and how this could be easily affected or damaged by negative issues but there was less awareness of when improvements occurred.

Fiona Blatcher noted that where resources had been targeted services had improved and this needed to continue, however the speed of change was sometimes slow and it was felt that this was due in part to Lancaster only being a district council.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

24 **FUNCTIONING OF FORWARD PLAN**

Councillor Stuart Langhorn introduced this report on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He outlined that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had highlighted a number of difficulties with the current operation of the Forward Plan which had adversely affected pre-decision scrutiny. The report had been prepared by Officers in response to these concerns and had been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was confirmed that the Forward Plan would be tied in to the Council's consultation strategy.

Councillor Ian Barker, confirmed that as Leader of the Council the Forward Plan was his responsibility and endorsed the recommendations as set out in the report.

Resolved:

That Council Business Committee be recommended to amend the constitution as set out below:

- (a) That a 12 month Forward Plan, with monthly updates, be recommended to the Audit Committee for the reasons set out above, with Officers being advised that Rule 15 may only be used in exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Chief Executive, or in his absence, the relevant Corporate Director. The 12 month Forward Plan to be introduced at the commencement of the new municipal year (May) so that Key Decisions can be fed into the process.
- (b) That an additional section be introduced into the Forward Plan Decision Form to be completed by the author stating the reasons for urgency.
- (c) That linkages are made between the Forward Planning process and the Council's Consultation Strategy, as outlined above, creating a consultation culture within and outside the Council and also in accordance with good practice.
- (d) That it be noted that the Forward Plan remains the responsibility of the Leader of the Council.
- (e) That it be noted that an additional section has already been added to the report template to indicate when an issue was published in the Forward Plan module.
- (f) That it be noted that the Committee Management System Forward Plan will be rolled out and is included in Service Business Plans for implementation as soon as possible.
- (g) That the electronic submission of Forward Plan items be introduced with the above mentioned information contained within the submission form.

25 RESULTS OF INTERNAL AUDIT WORK

The Internal Audit Manager presented the report which summarised new and follow up audit inspections since the last meeting. Members were supportive of the improved process where by audit reports were sent to them in 'real time' as opposed to them all being presented at a meeting. Members noted that this approach allowed questions to be asked of appropriate officers whilst the report was still current and for progress to be made rather than wait for a Committee meeting to take place - as had been the case with regard to the update on vehicles and plant.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

26 GOOD GOVERNANCE STANDARD SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Corporate Director (Finance and Performance) outlined that the self assessment had been used as a checklist tool to help the Council prepare work on the statement of internal control and that by and large the Council already complied with the vast majority of it, This could be evidenced in the fact that there were no red traffic light indicators. Many of the questions posed by the self-assessment were being addressed through other pieces of work, namely the annual Statement of Internal Control, and it was therefore recommended that it be taken forward in the context of this other work in order to avoid duplication.

Members discussed how procedures and policies on good governance could affect services and how they could assure themselves that issues such as the Customer Contact Centre were delivering tangible outcomes. It was felt that whilst this may be an area for future work it should not be pursued at this time.

Resolved:

That the good governance standard for public services be used as a self-assessment tool in the preparation of the Council's annual statement on Internal Control and Corporate Governance.

27 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

The Internal Audit Manager) introduced the updated plan and in doing so confirmed that he would be bringing forward some proposals for work to consider efficiency and Value For Money to the next meeting. In response to a question, it was confirmed that work that had been delayed from last year had all been accommodated in this plan.

Resolved:

That the Internal Audit Plan be approved.

28 BROADCASTING AND RECORDING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Principal Democratic Support Officer outlined a report which had been prepared at the request of the Committee with regard to the options for broadcasting and recording of Council meetings. In presenting the report he confirmed that there were a number issues if filming/ recording was to be allowed including accommodation, health and safety and legal implications. Therefore the Officer recommendation was that the Committee endorse the principal of filming recording of meetings of, but that that due to accommodation constraints implementation of this be included as part of the Access to Services accommodation review. After some discussion, the Committee decided to support Option 5 of the report.

Resolved:

- (1) That filming and webcasting of meetings be included within the remit of the Access to Services Review, in particular with regard to the meeting room facilities at either refurbished or new Town Halls.
- (2) That Filming/recording be allowed at meetings of Council, Cabinet, Audit, and Overview and Scrutiny Committee, so long as notice is given, via the Communications Officer, in advance.

29 RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRESS AND PROPOSED WORK PLAN

The Risk and Insurance Manager outlined progress to date with regard to risk management and highlighted where risk management work on slips and trips had saved the Council money. Members welcomed this approach.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress made to date with risk management be noted.
- (2) That the amended work plan be supported.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.32 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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