

AUDIT COMMITTEE

6.00 P.M.

24TH SEPTEMBER 2008

PRESENT:- Councillors Malcolm Thomas (Chairman), Jon Barry, Abbott Bryning, Tina Clifford (as a substitute for Councillor Hanson) Roger Dennison, Geoff Knight and Keith Sowden

Apologies for Absence:-

Councillor Janice Hanson

Officers in attendance:-

Roger Muckle	Corporate Director (Finance and Performance)
Nadine Muschamp	Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer
Derek Whiteway	Internal Audit Manager
Debbie Chambers	Principal Democratic Support Officer (part)
Sharon Marsh	Democratic Support Officer

Also in attendance:-

Heather Garrett	KPMG
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11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25th June, 2008 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

12 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There were no items of urgent business authorised by the Chairman.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - ANNUAL LETTER 2007/08

The Principal Democratic Support Officer presented a report that informed Members that the Commission for Local Administration in England had recently published its Annual Letter and Report for 2008, which gave an overview of the work undertaken by the Ombudsman, along with detailed statistics of complaints received and investigations carried out.

Members were requested to consider whether it would be helpful if the Ombudsman were invited to make a presentation to Officers on how complaints were investigated and/or to discuss complaint handling in general.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2007/08 be noted.
- (2) That no comments be made to the Ombudsman on the form of the Annual Letter.
- (3) That the Ombudsman be invited to make a presentation to officers on how complaints are investigated and/or to discuss complaint handling in general.

15 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT – RESTRICTION ON CABINET MEMBERS AS MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING AND HIGHWAYS REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Principal Democratic Support Officer introduced a report that provided the Committee with a risk assessment and information about practice within other Local Authorities to enable Members to consider whether Cabinet Members should be excluded from taking part in the consideration of planning applications as Members of the Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee.

Members were informed that should they be minded to make a recommendation that would alter the Constitution, the recommendation must be submitted to Full Council for determination.

It was reported that genuine concerns had been raised by the public and Members. The Committee discussed at length the risks associated with allowing Councillors to be both members of Cabinet and the Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee and public perception of this and considered the information provided from other Local Authorities on this subject.

Members considered whether a decision to limit Councillors involvement in both bodies would impact on other decision making Committees such as Licensing Act Committee.

The Committee also discussed concerns that political groups might find it difficult to put forward enough non-Cabinet Members with availability to attend the Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee as it was a long, daytime meeting.

Members discussed the possibility of allowing Councillors to be members of both Cabinet and the Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee, but not allowing the Cabinet Member to take part in a decision made at Planning that directly related to a decision previously made by the Cabinet.

It was proposed by Councillor Jon Barry and seconded by Councillor Geoff Marsland:-

“That it be recommended to Council that Cabinet Members should not sit on the Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee for items directly related to those which have been previously considered by Cabinet (whether they were at that particular Cabinet item or not).”

Resolved:

That it be recommended to Council that Cabinet Members should not sit on the Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee for items directly related to those which have been previously considered by Cabinet (whether they were at that particular Cabinet item or

not).

16 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2007/08

The Head of Financial Services presented a report that updated Members on the outcome of the audit of the Statement of Accounts for 2007/08.

Heather Garrett from KPMG reported that the External Audit had gone smoothly and had been completed in the agreed timescales. It was reported that there were no issues that needed to be brought to the Committee's attention.

Members queried whether the Medium Term Financial Strategy was completed and were informed that it had just been finalised and would be circulated in plenty of time before the next meeting.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes the report for 2007/08 issued by the Council's External Auditors, and the letter of representation signed by the S151 Officer.

17 RESULTS OF INTERNAL AUDIT WORK

The Internal Audit Manager introduced a report that informed the Committee of the results of Internal Audit work for the period since the last meeting. An Appendix to the report was submitted to Members for consideration. Members were given an update on levels of assurance issued for areas audited since the June 2008 meeting.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

18 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN UPDATE

The Internal Audit Manager presented a report that advised Members of the latest position regarding the development and delivery of the 2008/09 Internal Audit Plan and to seek approval for a proposed schedule of potential future assurance audits. It was reported that there was an aim to keep the Audit Plan more flexible and adaptive to new issues.

Members considered the priority given to individual areas for Internal Audit.

Resolved:

- (1) That the current monitoring position is noted.
- (2) That the proposed schedule of potential assurance audits is endorsed.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.02 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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