

## **Audit Services Committee - 4 April 2000**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Audit Services Committee** held on **Tuesday 4 April 2000** when there were present:

Cllr N Harris – Chairman

Cllr P A Beckers  
Cllr G Fox  
Cllr Mrs J Hall  
Cllr T Livings

Cllr G M Mockford  
Cllr C R Morgan  
Cllr P D Stebbing  
Cllr P F A Webster

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R E Vingoe.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P. Warren – Chief Executive  
R Crofts – Corporate Director (Finance and External Services)  
Mrs T Metcalf – Audit and Process Review Manager  
Mrs N Bishop – Principal Auditor  
G Brazendale – Committee Administrator

The Chairman introduced and welcomed Mrs Bishop to this, her first Meeting of the Committee.

### **108 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 April 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

#### **Resolved**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

### **109 AUDIT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee considered the confidential report of the Chief Executive which outlined the extent to which the Audit and Process Review Unit had met the 1999/2000 Audit Plan. A detailed analysis comparing the amount of time actually spent in auditing various Council

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services with the time programmed in the plan was appended to the report.

The Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) informed Members of two revisions to the Appendix: the variance figure for ad-hoc provisions was 14 rather than 17, and that for special assignments was 9 rather than 8 as shown.

Members noted that the restructured Audit and Process Review Unit had completed 72% of the Planned Audits. Progress on implementation of the Audit Plan had been discussed with the Council's External Auditors who would be conducting a review of the completed audits during April. They were aware of the audit areas not completed and the Strategic Audit Plan already agreed by this Committee on 11 January 2000.

The Committee received details of those service areas where full audits had not yet been completed, together with operational issues such as staff training, staff deployment and the development of new systems of assessment, which had affected progress with completion of the 1999/2000 plan. The Audit and Process Review Manager gave examples of the use of the risk assessment methodology, the introduction of which had previously been agreed by the Committee.

### **Resolved**

That progress on the implementation of the 1999/2000 Audit Plan be noted. (CEX)

## **110 AUDIT REPORT**

The Committee considered the confidential report of the Chief Executive which included the following:-

- Summaries of two internal audit reports, concerning Improvement Grants (5) and Council Tax (7). Copies of the full reports were available for examination in the Members' Lounge.
- The current copy of the monitoring document for the audit report recommendations.

Members were informed that, in relation to report 7 (Contracts) the Approved List had not yet been finalised since the necessary information had not, until recently, been submitted by the contractors. It was anticipated that completion of the List would have been achieved by the time of the Committee's next Meeting in July.

- Summaries of further Audit Commission documents as follows:-

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- ◆ No Time Like the Present – facing the challenge of the Year 2000 date change.
- ◆ Listen up! – the effective community consultation.

During discussion of this summary, a number of Members questioned the practicability of seeking to reconcile the outcome of public consultations with the decision-making role of Councillors; in certain cases, it would not always be possible to meet the wishes of the community due to other priorities. It was acknowledged that, at the very least, Councillors would be obliged to give the results of public consultations careful consideration as part of the decision-making process.

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that Council had agreed to make a sum of £30,000 available in the current financial year to cover the cost of undertaking community consultations, which would primarily relate to the Best Value initiative. It was intended to produce a Corporate Consultation Strategy for consideration by Council before the recess, which would seek to identify ways in which the community's satisfaction with the Authority across a range of service areas could be gauged. It would be necessary, in considering the Strategy, to determine the appropriate method of conducting consultations and the questions to be asked, without raising unrealistic public expectations. To lessen the financial impact of conducting consultations, Officers would be considering possible partnership arrangements with a number of other agencies such as the Police, Castle Point Borough Council, and the Primary Health Care Group. In addition to Best Value, the Modernising Agenda, relating to the re-organisation of the Council's Committee structure, would be a significant issue upon which consultation was required, and the role of the press and Rochford District Matters in disseminating information was considered.

The Audit Commission's requirements concerning community consultation were that the Authority would be expected to demonstrate involvement of all sectors of the public in the process, including those that were normally most difficult to reach. Where the views expressed by consultees were not practicable to adopt, it would be necessary clearly to show that those views had been considered as part of the decision – making process. The Council's consultation methodology would be assessed by the external auditors.

In response to Member questions, the Chief Executive indicated that:

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- The size of the resident population being consulted and the level of response would vary according to the subject to be considered.
- The training programme for Members, to take place in May, would include guidance relating to liaison with the media.
- ◆ Protecting the Public Purse (Update) – ensuring probity in Local Government. The Corporate Director informed the Committee that a report examining the extent of the Authority's compliance with the verification framework would be produced as soon as the Department of Social Security released details of its financial regime.
- ◆ Best Assured – the role of the Audit Commission in best value.
- ◆ Forget Me Not – mental health services for older people.
- ◆ Getting the Groundwork Right – financial health for Local Authority trading units.
- ◆ Seeing is Believing – how the Audit Commission will carry out best value inspections in England.
- The monitoring report outlining progress with recommendations contained within the Audit Commission's publications.

### Resolved

- (1) That the recommendations from the audit reports listed above be agreed.
- (2) That the updated information on the audit recommendations be agreed.
- (3) That the additional Audit Commission publications be acknowledged and the recommended best practice arising from them be noted.
- (4) That the updated monitoring sheet for the Audit Commission publications be agreed. (CEX)

The Meeting closed at 8.20pm

Chairman

Date