

Audit Committee – 4 December 2008

Minutes of the meeting of the **Audit Committee** held on **4 December 2008** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr J Thomass

Cllr C I Black

Cllr Mrs L A Butcher

Cllr Mrs J Dillnutt

Cllr K A Gibbs

Cllr Mrs J A Mockford

Cllr S P Smith

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr A J Humphries.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J P Cottis, T Livings and D G Stansby. Thanks were extended to Cllr J P Cottis for chairing the last meeting of the Committee.

OFFICERS PRESENT

Y Woodward	- Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management
T Metcalf	- Audit and Performance Manager
R Whetton	- Corporate Policy and Partnerships Manager
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

343 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

344 ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management providing Members with the opportunity to monitor the progress of the Internal Audit Plan for 2008/09.

Officers confirmed, in response to a question relating to the allocation of days for Elections on page 8.7 of the report, that the allocation should be revised to 6, rather than 4 days. Responding to a supplementary question relating to the imbalance of remaining time allocated for the remaining 5 months of the year, officers advised that a lot of holiday time was taken in the summer and that the period from autumn onwards tended to be more productive, with less leave taken by staff.

Resolved

That progress on the 2008/09 Audit Plan be noted. (HFAPM)

345 PARTNERSHIP UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management asking Members to endorse the findings of requested follow-up reviews of two of the Council's major partnerships, namely Castle Point and Rochford Domestic Violence Panel and Groundwork Trust South Essex.

In response to a Member enquiry relating to the Groundwork Trust projects and concern that there might be overlap with the work of other organisations, officers confirmed that copies of the Trust's business plan would be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

Responding to an enquiry relating to the possibility of the Groundwork Trust undertaking ditch clearance work, officers advised that it was unlikely that the Trust would do such work, as its main focus was more around sustainable communities and improving the quality of people's lives, but that enquiries would be made.

Members expressed their satisfaction with the improved governance of the Castle Point and Rochford Domestic Violence Panel following the appointment of a new Chairman.

Resolved

That the findings of the reviews be endorsed. (HFAPM)

346 PARTNERSHIP REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management asking Members to endorse the findings of the review of the Thames Gateway South Essex Housing Strategy Forum.

It was noted that Thames Gateway South Essex was experiencing a degree of change, with a new Chief Executive imminent. TGSE would be reviewing all its structures, with Rochford District Council involved in this process.

Resolved

That the findings of the review be endorsed. (HFAPM)

347 RISK MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management summarising the progress made under the Council's Risk Management Framework up to November 2008 and an update of the Corporate Risk Register for 2008/09.

In response to a Member concern that was raised relating to catastrophic risk,

officers advised that this was addressed in the Corporate Risk Register and all the Council's buildings were properly insured, including total loss.

Responding to a Member query relating to any risks associated with the possibility of political change, officers confirmed that such an eventuality was classed as a low risk because any political changes post-elections were unlikely to be immediate and would be identified at the next review of this risk.

In response to a specific Member question relating to the Council focus of risks presented on pages 11.11 and 11.13 of the report, officers confirmed that the Council, in partnership with other agencies, including the County Council, Police and Primary Care Trust, had in place statutory emergency planning arrangements to address any potential risk to the community, including risks associated with flooding and fire.

Officers, responding to a supplementary enquiry relating to the economic downturn, confirmed that the Council's housing division would address within its own divisional risk register the possibility of any economic downturn leading to an influx of residents to the housing register and benefits system.

In response to a further enquiry relating specifically to item 6 on page 11.11 of the report, officers advised that page 11.17 of the report provided a detailed breakdown of the kinds of controls in place to minimise highlighted risks. It was important that the Corporate Risk Register continued to be monitored on a regular basis.

Resolved

- (1) That the revised Risk Management Framework and Policy be approved.
- (2) That the revised Corporate Risk Register be approved.
- (3) That risk management progress reports be considered by the Audit Committee twice a year with the next report being due mid 2009. (HFAPM)

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business on the grounds that exempt information as disclosed in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

348 AUDIT REPORT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Finance, Audit and Performance Management drawing Members' attention to completed audit investigations and providing an update of audit recommendations.

In response to Member questions, the following was noted:-

- The Council has not lost any data and has policies and procedures in place to try and prevent this happening. The Council operated a data protection policy, within which it was very difficult to move any data outside the Council's I.T. systems; most members of staff also did not have access to any pen drives within the Council. Any instances of staff contravening the data protection policy would result in disciplinary procedures being applied.
- Each Council computer was linked to one specific printer, usually located either within, or just outside the office. Any confidential documents would be printed to a computer within the immediate vicinity of an officer's desk.
- A system has been introduced that ensures that, on leaving the Authority, an officer's access to the Council's I.T. systems is removed immediately, with any passwords to ancillary software changed or deleted promptly, as appropriate.
- Under the Data Protection legislation it would be a criminal offence for a member of staff to disclose any Council-related private and confidential information to any external bodies. Officers, on logging onto the Council's I.T. system, have to agree to the conditions of the Council's I.T. Code of Conduct, before being able to access any of the network. The Code clearly details the restrictions on the use, including downloading, of Council data.
- In future any private and confidential documents coming into the Authority would be scanned by trained officers in a secure room. The original documents would be shredded within the same, limited access area. Staff would scan all exempt data in a block, rather than scanning private and confidential items at the same time as any general correspondence.

Resolved

- (1) That the conclusions and results from the audits in appendix 1 be agreed.
- (2) That the updated information on the audit recommendations, outlined in appendix 2, be agreed.
- (3) That the security of private and confidential information be carefully monitored. (HFAPM)

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The meeting closed at 8.25 pm.

Chairman

Date

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