

AUDIT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 4 October 2001

Minutes of the meeting of the **Audit Services Committee** held on **4 October 2001** when there were present:-

Cllr J R F Mason (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs H Hall (Vice Chairman)

Cllr C I Black
Cllr G Fox
Cllr J E Grey
Cllr D R Helson

Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr P J Morgan
Cllr P D Stebbing
Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Mrs R Brown

SUBSTITUTE

Cllr R Adams

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Warren	Chief Executive
R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
Mrs T Metcalf	Audit and Process Review Manager
Mrs C Paget	Audit and Process Review Manager
Mrs N Bishop	Principal Auditor
Mrs M Martin	Committee Administrator

ALSO PRESENT

R Bint Pannell Kerr Forster

353 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2001 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

354 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Committee noted the progress of the Outstanding Issues, together with the following confirmation:-

Car Park Administration (Minute 2/01)

The Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement Working Group would be addressing the issue of car park patrols, and a report would be brought back to this Committee. (HRHM)

355 EXTERNAL AUDITORS REPORT ON BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN FOR 2001/2002

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The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive together with the appended External Auditors Report and the final recommendations and conclusions. The External Auditors have a statutory responsibility to audit Rochford District Council's Best Value Performance Plan.

The Chairman welcomed the representative from the External Auditors to the meeting. Mr Bint confirmed that the Performance Plan had contained many strong features and it provided much that the District Council could continue to build on. Members noted that the document appended to the report had only contained details of those areas requiring further action.

During discussion of the Action Plan with the External Auditor the following points were noted:-

- The need to identify those performance indicators (PIs) that were not doing so well together with those showing very good results.
- Guidance would be provided by Pannell Kerr Forster on the nature of the information required relating to resources required to deliver the review programme.
- Members were concerned that the consultation of electors on the overall objectives of the authority should not build the hopes of local residents beyond the financial constraints of the Authority. Mr Bint confirmed that he would supply some sample questionnaires used by other local authorities.
- The External Auditor agreed that future audits should evaluate the effectiveness of any consultation.
- The Summary Plan could be developed in future through channels such as Rochford District Matters, the Council's web site and partner organisations.
- The External Auditor confirmed that local authorities can determine their own quality of life indicators.
- Members expressed concern that there could be a duplication of issues if indicators were provided by both the County and District Councils, particularly where the District Council do not have a direct responsibility. However, it was recognised that there may be some value in forming partnerships between areas of differing responsibility such as housing and health. Individual Best Value reviews would provide meaningful action plans and targets, relevant to this Council.
- The cost to the Authority of implementing the recommendations should be neutral in the long term as they should reflect 'best practice'.

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Mr Bint wished to congratulate the Officers, in particular Mrs Paget, on the quality of the plan. The Chairman added his thanks on behalf of the Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That the External Auditor's report be agreed.
- (2) That the implementation of the Recommendations be monitored through Internal Audit's Monitoring Report. (CEx)

356 AUDIT COMMISSION STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2001

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive relating to a document which had been put forward by the Audit Commission concerning their proposals for a new strategy. Stakeholders were invited to comment on the proposals and this Council's proposed responses had been appended to the report.

Resolved

That the response detailed in the Appendix be agreed. (CEx)

357 MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which drew Members' attention to the latest Audit Commission publications and suggested best practice. These had been summarised in an Appendix to the report.

The recommendations of the external auditors, including Best Value and Value for Money reports, and the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate had also been appended in order that they may be monitored by this Committee.

Resolved

- (1) That the additional Audit Commission publications be acknowledged and the recommended best practice arising from them be noted.
- (2) That the updated monitoring sheet for the Audit Commission publications be agreed.
- (3) That the monitoring sheet for the external audit recommendations, including the value for money reports, be agreed.
- (4) That the monitoring sheet for the Best Value Performance Plan recommendations be agreed.
- (5) That the monitoring sheet for the BFI recommendations be agreed. (CEx)

358 THE 2000/2001 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive relating to the 2000/2001 Performance Indicators, details of which were appended to the report.

As part of the overall management of the performance indicators and requirement of the External Auditors, an explanation by the appropriate Head of Service had also been included where the year on year variance had differed by at least 15% -.

The Committee noted that some revisions might be needed once the indicators had been reviewed by the External Auditors. This information would be forwarded to Members.

During discussion, the following was noted:-

- Next year's Best Value Performance Plan would compare the results with those of other local authorities and comments would be supplied, where Rochford was performing poorly
- BVPI 12 - these figures are an average and therefore include periods of long term absence
- BVP 12/13 - the Chief Executive confirmed that a briefing sheet would be prepared for Members detailing the reasons for the year on year variance, and appropriate comments would be added when the details are published.
- AC-A1b – the number of buildings in which all public areas are suitable for and accessible to disabled people is now four and this information would also be included in a Press Release.
- BVPI 113 - whilst the Old House and the Windmill buildings do not fulfil the criteria for museums, attention could be drawn to them in the Press Release, particularly as school parties visit the Old House on a regular basis.

Resolved

- (1) That the indicator results be noted.
- (2) That explanations for the year on year variance, as detailed above, be supplied to Members. (CEX)

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

359 AUDIT REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive which drew Members' attention to the completed audit investigations and provided an update of audit recommendations. The main points arising from these audits had been summarised either within the body of the report or appended to the report.

Members noted that the issue of the duties of the Car Park Patrol Officers would be addressed by the Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement Working Group.

Members complemented the officers on the excellent presentation of the audit report on Car Parks.

Resolved

- (1) That the recommendations from the audit reports be agreed.
- (2) That the updated information on the audit recommendations be agreed.
(CEX)

The meeting closed at 9 pm.

Chairman

Date