

The **AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE** met at **WARWICK** on the **22nd September 2008**.

Present: -

Independent Members

John Bridgeman CBE (Chair)

County Councillors

Sarah Boad
Les Caborn
Mick Jones
Tim Naylor
Bob Stevens
John Vereker CBE

Also present:

Tony Parks and David Rigg, Audit Commission.

Officers

David Clarke, Strategic Director Resources
Greta Needham, Head of Law and Governance
Jane Pollard, Overview and Scrutiny Manager.
Garry Rollason, Audit and Risk Manager,
John Wright, Committee Manager

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mark Magowan and David Carter.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None

(3) Minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee meeting held on 16 June 2008.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2008 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

(4) Matters Arising.

(a) Future Items

The Committee requested that a report be submitted to future meetings of the Committee of a timetable of forthcoming items which will be considered by the Committee

(b) Minute 4 (a) 30 April Minute 2 Investigation under the Member Code of Conduct

The Committee noted that the Standards Board For England had been informed of the decision of the Audit and Standards Committee in relation to Councillor Kanwardeep Singh. The Committee was informed that Councillor Singh had yet to undertake the training required by the Committee and efforts were ongoing to arrange a suitable appointment for the training to take place.

(c) Minute 3 Revised Terms of Reference and Arrangements for the Audit and Standards Committee

The Committee noted that references were being taken from the two preferred candidates for the role of additional independent members of the Committee. It was anticipated that the names of the new members of the Committee would be confirmed at the Council meeting on 21 October.

(d) Minute 4 Contract Standing Orders for Schools

Members enquired what steps were being taken to develop imaginative delivery methods to ensure that schools engage with the requirements of the revised Standing Orders and were informed that details would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

(e) Minute 5 Adult Social Care Case Recording

The Committee noted that a further report would be made to the November meeting of the Committee.

(f) Minute 6 The Annual Governance Statement 2007/2008

The Committee noted that the governance statement had been reported to Cabinet and Council for approval.

(g) Minute 7 Opinion Audit Plan 2007/08, Audit and Inspection Plan 2008/2009 and Audit and Inspection Letter 2006/2007

The Committee was informed that training for members on the Comprehensive Area Assessment would take place in the new year.

(h) Minute 10 (1) Joint/Reciprocal Working Arrangements

The Committee was informed that the possibility of reciprocal working arrangements with the Police Authority continued to be explored though the Police already had reciprocal arrangements in place with West Midlands Police. The District/Borough Councils in the County had indicated that they were not interested in establishing reciprocal arrangements at present due to the low level of code of conduct complaints.

2. Standards Board for England – Bulletins No. 39 and 40

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development on the content of the Standards Board Bulletins No.39 and 40.

Resolved that

- (i) the content of the Standards Board Bulletins No. 39 and 40 be noted; and
- (ii) a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on the content of the Local Standards Framework guidance which had recently been published by the Standards Board.

3. Adjudication Panel Annual Report 2007-2008

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development on the content of the Adjudication Panel's Annual Report 2007-2008

Resolved that the content of the Adjudication Panel's Annual Report 2007-2008 be noted.

4. Standards Board for England Annual Report 2007-2008

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development on the content of the Standards Board for England Annual Report 2007-2008.

Resolved that the content of the Standards Board for England Annual Report 2007-2008 be noted.

AUDIT ITEMS

5. Review of Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy

The Committee considered the joint report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development and Strategic Director of Resources on the refinement of the existing anti fraud and corruption policy and supporting strategy. The documents had been reviewed to reflect changes in legislation, best practice and allows the Council to demonstrate its continued commitment to the highest standards of probity.

The Committee proposed the following further changes to the policy:

- Paragraph 4 of the Policy, Bullet point 3 be amended to indicate that the Council expects that all individuals and organisations associated with it to also operate to the same high standardsl..
- That as part of the induction process for all newly elected councillors training should be provided on the anti fraud and corruption policy and supporting strategy.

- Appendix 2 of the anti fraud and corruption strategy be reviewed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all involved in the prevention of fraud and corruption.

Resolved that, subject to the amendments listed above, the updated anti fraud and corruption policy and supporting strategy be supported and Cabinet be recommended to approve the documents.

6. Statement of Accounts 2007/2008, Annual Governance Statement 2007/2008 and Letter of Representation Report

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Directors of Resources and of Performance and Development. The Committee were informed of the minor changes arising from the final audit of the Statement of Accounts 2007/2008 and of the Annual Governance statement. The Committee also considered the Letter of Representation from the authority to the Audit Commission for 2007/2008.

The Audit Commission had provided an unqualified opinion of the accounts and expressed their appreciation for the co-operation they had received from officers.

The Committee considered the recommendations contained within the Annual Governance Report and noted that progress on the implementation of the recommendations made by internal audit on the HR Service Centre Transactions report and action plan would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee as part of the quarterly audit report.

Resolved that

1. the report relating to the amended accounts and Annual Governance Statement be noted;
2. the recommendations set out in the Annual Governance report be approved and endorsed; and
3. the contents of the Letter of Representation from the authority to the Audit Commission for 2007/2008 be noted.

7. Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Notice

The Committee were reminded that following the incident at Atherstone on Stour on 2nd November 2007, the Health and Safety Executive had issued an Improvement Notice. The Improvement Notice incorporated a schedule of actions that it required the Authority to take. Subsequently the County Council appealed against the Notice and at an Employment Tribunal in March 2008 it was agreed that the Improvement Notice be 'stayed'. The effect of this decision was that both the appeal and the Improvement Notice were suspended.

Officers of the Fire Service had met with the HSE to discuss the new risk information policy implemented in May 2008. The HSE had indicated that it now felt that the Fire and Rescue Authority were compliant with the requirements of the Improvement Notice. It was noted that the terms of the Improvement Notice had been made available to all members of the Council.

The investigation into the fire was still ongoing and the outcome was not expected for at least another year.

Resolved that the report be noted.

8. Calculation of the Culture Rating

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Resources.

The Committee were informed changes were made to the CPA framework for 2008 related to service level assessment of the framework. In order to achieve a three star rating in the culture assessment no more than 15% of performance indicators could score at or below the lower threshold. In 2006 only one indicator had been below the threshold however in 2007 two indicators scored below the lower threshold and therefore the culture rating had dropped to a two star rating. The indicators in question related to the percentage of the total length of footpaths and other rights of way that are easy to use by members of the public and the cost per visit to libraries. The Committee was informed that work was ongoing to improve footpath accessibility but progress was dependant upon a limited budget. With regard to the cost of visits to libraries the indicator had been changed to reflect the increased online access to library services.

Resolved that the report be noted.

9. Opinion Audit Plan 2007/08, Audit and Inspection Plan 2008/2009 - Additional Information

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Resources.

At it's previous meeting the Committee had requested additional information following discussion a report on the Opinion Audit Plan 2007/2008 and Audit and Inspection Plan 2008/2009. The report outlined the transition process form the present Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework to the Comprehensive Area Assessment which would be introduced in April 2009.

Resolved that the report be noted

10. Any Other Business

There no items of other business.

11. Dates of Future meetings

18 November 2008
23 February 2009

12. Report Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved that members of the public be excluded from the meeting for items 13 and 14 below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1,2 and 7C of the Local Government Act 1972.

13. Exempt minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2008.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2008 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

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Chair of Committee

The Committee rose at 11:40 p.m.