

MINUTES OF: THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 4th December 2008

**PRESENT: Councillor Gledhill (Chair)
Councillors A Barnes, Haworth, Lynskey, J Pilling, and Pawson**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Linda Fisher, Executive Director - Business
Phil Seddon, Head of Finance
Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and ICT
Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Customer Services
Clive Portman, District Auditor
Tony Hough, Audit Manager, Audit Commission
Zaheer Abbas, Senior Auditor, Lancashire Audit Services**

**ALSO PRESENT: Heather Massie, Independent Co-opted Member
1 member of public**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dickinson, Challinor and Essex and Andrew Fox, Principal Auditor, Lancashire Audit Service.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 23rd September 2008 be agreed and signed by the Chair as correct record:

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items for discussion.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were raised under this item.

6. AUDIT COMMISSION REPORT PROBITY IN PLANNING – including Ethical Governance Arrangements

Tony Hough, Audit Manager, Audit Commission was pleased to announce that the service now demonstrated good leadership, improvement, and good officer/member working relationships. There was still work to do (e.g. Scheme of Delegation, Local Development

Framework), but on the whole, direction of travel was good. Clive Portman commented on the notable difference in culture, particularly concerning performance management since the previous assessment.

A number of questions were raised by Members to which the Executive Director - Business responded:

- Current status of the Scheme of Delegation
- Communication
- Complaints

The Executive Director - Business reported that a Governance Working Group would be overseeing the Scheme of Delegation prior to submitting to Development Control, Cabinet and Full Council.

There was a discussion relating to the following:

- Changes to Scheme of Delegation with regard to 6 objectors from the current 3.
- The call-in procedures and the impact on the delivery of national indicators and the timeliness of determining applications.
- The role of training regarding commercial awareness

In response to the discussions the Executive Director - Business confirmed that the move to 6 objectors was good practice and that the call-in procedures still applied. Tony Hough and the Executive Director – Business agreed that training helped members to understand applications and the quality of decision making.

Councillor A Barnes noted that because members of her group had previously objected to the changes regarding 6 objectors, she would be abstaining from voting on this item.

Resolved:

1. That the area for Development and recommendations outlined in paragraph 9.1 be agreed and implemented as part of the Planning Unit Improvement Plan.
2. That progress on such matters to be reported to a future Audit Committee.

7. LEARNING FROM BENEFITS INSPECTIONS

Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and ICT introduced the report and confirmed that Capita would instigate a self inspection of Rossendale's service in the New Year including a benchmarking exercise.

There was discussion relating to the following:

- Roles and responsibilities of Capita and the Council
- Key things to do next

In response to questions from members the Head of Customer Services and ICT confirmed

that he would map out the key roles of Capita and the Council, and informed that more joined up working with Lancashire County Council was required to achieve one point of contact for customers (face to face) whether it be all benefits, health, crime, fire, etc.

Tony Hough and Clive Portman commented that the benchmarking initiative would bode well for future use of resources scores and that it was important to be realistic and self aware of the actions which needed to take place.

Resolved:

That the Audit Committee endorse the Audit Commission's proposals and use of good practice contained in "learning from benefits inspections" for service improvement. This would support the existing framework and programme of work already carried out by Capita to provide service improvement.

8. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

Zaheer Abbas, Senior Auditor, Lancashire Audit Services introduced the report and updated members with the position for the period ending 31st October 2008. There had been no instances of significant weaknesses found and the audit plan was on track.

Resolved:

That the Internal Audit Progress Report for the seven months to 31st October 2008 be noted.

9. USE OF RESOURCES ACTION PLAN

Phil Seddon, Head of Finance, presented the report which updated Members on the Council's Use of Resources Action Plan in order to achieve a score of 3 by 2010.

The latest published score for the Council in relation to Use of Resources is 2, and the Council is due to receive its latest score for the period ending March 2008, during December 2008. Early indications are that the Council will retain its score of 2. The action plan had been produced to take a corporate wide approach and collective ownership of the goal of achieving a score of 3 by 2010.

Clive Portman, District Auditor indicated that the biggest change was now the emphasis on 'outcomes. The new methodology and scoring was a reflection of characteristics of an organisation and therefore be tough and very difficult for Councils in maintaining their current scores or achieving their targets.

The District Auditor agreed to provide a short presentation to the next meeting.

Resolved:

That the Use of Resources Action Plan be approved.

10. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE – SELF ASSESSMENT

Zaheer Abbas, Senior Auditor, gave a verbal update on the Audit Committee Self Assessment indicating that this was best practice under the CIPFA guidelines.

The Chair supported the initiative and suggested that the self assessment should take place following the next Audit Committee as a full cycle of meeting would then have been completed.

Resolved:

That the self assessment commence after the next Audit Committee meeting at the end of February.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and finished at 7.45pm)

Signed
(Chair)

Date
