

AUDIT COMMITTEE

25 SEPTEMBER 2012

Present:- Councillor M J Page (Chairman), Councillor D C Skeels (Vice-Chairman), Councillor S H Challinor, Councillor L J Double, Councillor M J Talbot (except items 8 - 11)

In Attendance:- Head of Resource Management (Karen Neath) (except items 8 – 12 (part)), Acting Head of Planning Services (Clare David) (except items 14 – 17), Finance and Procurement Manager (Richard Barrett), Regeneration Manager (Tom Gardiner) (except items 13 – 17), Head of Internal Audit (Steve Blake), Revenues and Benefits Manager (Harry Bates), Benefits Team Leader (Keith Jacobs) and Senior Democratic Services Officer (Ian Ford)

Also in Attendance:- Carl Pettit (Audit Commission) and Neil Harris (District Auditor) (both except items 15 - 17)

(10.00 a.m. - 12.17 p.m.)

8.. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

9. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 June 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ABOVE MENTIONED MINUTES

There were none.

11. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 15.3 (IF ANY)

There were none.

12. VERBAL OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT REGENERATION ISSUES

Further to minute 3 (28.6.12) the Regeneration Manager attended the meeting, gave an outline of the current work being undertaken by the Regeneration Section, together with the risk and other governance issues that the Section potentially faced.

Following a question and answer session, the Regeneration Manager was thanked for his attendance.

13. VERBAL OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT PLANNING ISSUES

Further to minute 3 (28.6.12) the Acting Head of Planning Services attended the meeting, gave an outline of the current work being undertaken by Planning Services (including the recent changes to the way the Planning Committee conducted its meetings) and set out the risk and other governance issues that potentially affected the work of the Planning Services Department.

Following a question and answer session, the Acting Head of Planning Services was thanked for her attendance.

RESOLVED that

(a) the relevant Head of Department(s) be required to attend the next meeting of the Committee in order to answer any questions Members may have on Governance issues relating to the Housing and Community Life service functions; and

(b) the Head of Planning Services and the Regeneration Manager be invited back to provide an update to the Committee at an appropriate time in the future.

14. AUDIT COMMISSION'S ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REPORT

The Annual Governance Report (including the Letter of Representation) was presented to the Committee by the District Auditor.

He reported that the Audit Commission planned to issue an unqualified audit opinion on the Statement of Accounts and value for money arrangements and he extended his thanks to the Officers within the Financial Services section for their good work, co-operation and assistance. He commended the Council on producing an excellent set of accounts.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, congratulated the Officers from the Audit Commission and the Council's finance team for their excellent work over the last year.

It was moved by Councillor Talbot, seconded by Councillor Challinor and:

RESOLVED that

(a) the contents of the Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report 2011/12, including the required adjustments to the Financial Statements as set out in Appendix 2 to that report, be noted;

(b) the Letter of Representation, set out as Appendix 3 to the afore-mentioned report, be approved;

(c) the Chief Executive and Head of Resource Management be authorised to sign the Letter of Representation for forwarding to the Audit Commission; and

(d) the audited Statement of Accounts for 2011/12, as amended for the adjusted items identified in the Annual Governance Report, be approved for publication.

15. THE LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME - PROJECT RISK ANALYSIS

The Committee gave consideration to a report of the Head of Resource Management which set out the potential risks to the Council arising from the project to replace Council Tax Benefit with a Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

The risks for that project were reported under the following headings:-

- Timescale
- Legislation
- Governance
- Implementation
- Service delivery
- Transition
- Finance

Having considered and discussed the information submitted, it was moved by Councillor

Challinor, seconded by Councillor Talbot and:

RESOLVED that the actions being taken to manage and mitigate the risks associated with the implementation of the Local Council Tax Support Schemes across Essex be noted and that a further update be provided to the Committee at its December meeting.

16. TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Committee considered the progress made against items identified requiring further action or responses.

In respect of the item regarding Member representation on outside bodies, the Finance and Procurement Manager undertook to provide a separate update to Committee Members as soon as possible.

It was moved by Councillor Talbot, seconded by Councillor Double and:

RESOLVED that

(a) the progress against the table of outstanding issues, as set out in the Appendix to item A.3 of the Report of the Head of Resource Management, be noted; and

(b) in respect of future Tables of Outstanding Issues, a more specific target date should be included against the tabled items and further, in respect of Member representation on outside bodies, in the opinion of this Committee, a Member representing the Council on an outside body should produce appropriate reports to the relevant Portfolio Holder detailing his/her activities on that outside body.

17. ANY OTHER ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN DECIDED WERE URGENT

There were none.

The meeting was declared closed at 12.17 p.m.

18. TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ISSUES

There was submitted a report by the Council's Corporate Director (Corporate Services) which presented to Members the progress against outstanding actions identified by the Committee.

It was reported that there were no significant issues to bring to the attention of the Committee, with updates provided against individual items, as set out in Appendix A to item A.6 of the Report of the Corporate Director (Corporate Services). It was confirmed that the three items in Appendix A of the afore-mentioned report were a snapshot at this time and that the Committee would be kept up to date on the issue of the Council being able to appoint external auditors in 2017/18 and Mr Barrett gave further clarification on that issue. Further information was set out in Appendix B to that report that gave updates against actions identified within the Annual Governance Statement, again with no significant issues to highlight at the present time.

Mr Barrett also informed the Committee that the department had currently been working with insurers concerning a property risk audit.

Other matters reported for the Committee's consideration were the Code of Corporate Governance, how the department was dealing with fraud issues as identified in the afore-mentioned report. Mr Barrett informed the Committee he would report on updates as

appropriate and include this as an item on future Table of Outstanding Issues reports along with arrangements in respect of the Garden Communities project that is currently being developed with Local Authority

Having discussed the contents of the report it was:

RESOLVED that the progress against the Table of Outstanding Issues be noted.

19. ITEMS SCHEDULED FOR THE NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE IN JUNE 2016

The Committee noted that the date for its next meeting was Thursday 23 June 2016 commencing at 7.30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, in the Council Offices, Thorpe Road, Weeley.

It was reported that items currently scheduled for that meeting included:

- 1) Annual Report of the Head of Internal Audit and Annual Review of Effectiveness of System of Internal Control
- 2) Internal Audit Regular Monitoring Report
- 3) Annual Governance Statement (including review of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance)
- 4) Corporate Risk Register (six monthly review)
- 5) Table of Outstanding Issues (including update against External Audit Recommendations)

The Chairman thanked the Officers and also Chris Hewitt and Kevin Suter for all the help, advice and assistance that they had given him and the Committee. He also thanked the Members of the Committee for their input and commitment to the work of the Committee.

Chairman