

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL held in THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARYS STREET, HUNTINGDON on Tuesday, 27th June 2006.

PRESENT: Councillor C J Stephens – Chairman.
Councillors K J Churchill, P J Downes, J A Gray, T V Rogers, L M Simpson and R J West.

5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 17th May 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor P J Downes declared a personal interest in Minute No.8 by virtue of being a trustee of the Cambridgeshire County Council Pension Fund.

Councillor T V Rogers declared a personal interest in Minute No.8 by virtue of being the District Council's representative on the Cambridgeshire County Council Pension Fund.

7. EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

(In attendance for this Item were Mr J Golding of RSM Robson Rhodes LLP, the Council's external auditors and Mr M Smith, the Council's Relationship Manager from the Audit Commission.)

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Financial Services to which were attached the Council's Use of Resources judgement 2005-06 and the Annual Audit and Inspection letter (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book). In introducing the Audit and Inspection Letter, Mr Smith informed Members that the Council had made good progress against some of its Improvement Plan priorities but that progress against others had been slower than originally envisaged. The letter also reflected a varied performance against Best Value Performance Indicators. Having referred to a positive direction of travel in respect of internal and external communication, performance management, risk management, learning and the Council's accommodation, Mr Smith concluded by referring to issues of capacity which had been raised in the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment and which would need to continue to be addressed.

In response to questions by Members on the Call Centre and on the allocation of resources, Mr Smith informed Members that as it had an excellent rating the Council was assessed on its direction of travel against its Improvement Plan.

With regard to the Use of Resources judgement, Mr Golding

emphasised that this would, in future, form a significant part of revised arrangements for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

The Panel discussed its role in approving the accounts. Particular significance was attached to Members' understanding of information presented to them and their preparedness to question the annual statement. Members then discussed the Council's aspirations regarding future assessments, following which it was concluded that a judgement would need to be made to balance the benefits which would follow from higher ratings of performance and the investment of resources which would be required to achieve them. In that context a further report was requested for the next meeting on progress against the Action Plan contained in the Use of Resources judgement. Having noted that changes would be made to the criteria of the Value for Money element of future Assessments, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the reports be received and noted;
- (b) that the actions to be taken on the Use of Resources be noted;
- (c) that a further report on value for money be presented to the Panel's September meeting; and
- (d) that a report be submitted to the September meeting on progress in delivering the Action Plan.

8. FINAL ACCOUNTS 2005/06

The Panel considered the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2006 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Their attention having been drawn to a number of corrections, Members were acquainted with issues arising from the accounts, which included the Council's investments, its debtors and creditors, the pension provision, the treatment of capital and the collection fund.

In response to a question by a Member, the Head of Financial Services outlined the sources of the Council's outcome, excluding the Leisure Centres. With regard to the latter, and in response to a further question, Members were informed that Centre accounts were treated separately. Members discussed the cost to the Council of the Leisure Centres, pricing policies and the possible benefits of reviewing the current arrangements.

Following a question on pensions, the Panel was informed of the procedure for determining the Council's employer contributions. Members discussed likely future trends in the levels of employer contributions.

The Panel then discussed the Council's policies on the treatment of liabilities and the effect of Best Value Performance Indicators on the payment of invoices.

Finally, in response to a question by a Member on the adoption of a policy to increase the proportion of costs that were recharged to

capital projects, the Head of Financial Services informed the Panel that this gave the Council flexibility and that the practice had been approved by the Auditors. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2006 be approved to enable the Audit to commence.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

With the aid of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel gave consideration to a revised Risk Management Strategy. Having discussed the budget process and the Council's approach to the identification and recording of risk, it was

RESOLVED

that the revised Risk Management Strategy be approved.

10. UPDATE ON RISK REGISTER AND AUDIT PLAN PROGRESS

Having considered a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing an update on the development of the Risk Register and on the Audit Plan, and on the understanding that a further report on the Internal Audit Plan 2006/07 would be submitted to the next meeting, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

11. CRIMINAL RECORDS BUREAU: CHECKS FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) recommending the introduction of Criminal Record Bureau checks for Members. The requirement to undertake checks also would apply to independent Members of the Standards Committee and to all Members of the Leisure Centre Management Committees.

Having noted that checks carried out for Cambridgeshire County Council Members who were also Members of the District Council would be accepted, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks be introduced with immediate effect; and
- (b) that the process as set out in Appendix A to the report now submitted for managing applications for Criminal Bureau Record checks be approved.

12. PERSISTENT AND/OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS POLICY

Further to Minute No. 08/04 and having considered a report by the Director of Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel approved proposed amendments to the Council's Persistent Complaints Policy in the light of experience gained since its introduction some two years previously.

RESOLVED

that the Persistent and/or Vexatious Complaints Policy as appended to the report now submitted be approved for implementation with immediate effect.

13. COMPLAINTS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Director of Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing an analysis of the Council's internal complaints and a summary of complaints concerning the District Council which had been determined by the Local Government Ombudsman in 2005/06.

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

14. SPECIAL MEETING

Members noted that a Special Meeting of the Panel would be held on 27th September 2006.

Chairman