

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 23 September 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor C J Stephens – Chairman.
Councillors M G Baker, P J Downes,
P M D Godfrey, J A Gray, T V Rogers and
L M Simpson.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs L Sandford and Mr P Winrow – Grant
Thornton UK LLP.

17. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 24th June 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

19. HOUSING BENEFIT FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the activity of the Benefits Fraud Investigation Team over the previous three years.

In noting details of the activity undertaken by the Team over the 2005 to 2008 period, the Panel were encouraged to note the level of partnership working being undertaken by the Team with a range of agencies including the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs, the Police Authority, the Customs and Borders Agency and the National Health Service.

Having recognised the level of performance achieved by the Benefits Fraud Investigation Team, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report be noted; and
- (b) that future reports on the activity of the Benefits Fraud Investigation Team be submitted to the Panel.

20. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

The Panel received a report by the Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained his opinion on aspects of the Council's systems of internal control and which summarised the progress made against the 2007/08 Annual Audit

Plan and the performance standards achieved.

Members noted the Audit and Risk Manager's conclusions in relation to the level of assurance provided by those areas of the Council's internal control environment which had been the subject of evaluation by the Internal Audit Service. The Panel were encouraged to note the improvement that had been made in terms of the implementation of agreed audit actions and noted that the Chief Officer Management Team monitored outstanding audit actions on a quarterly basis.

RESOLVED

that the report and statement be noted.

21. RISK REGISTER

With the aid of a report by the Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was acquainted with changes made to the Risk Register between the period 1st April to 31st August 2008 inclusive.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

22. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit the following urgent Item in accordance with Section 100B (4) (d) of the Local Government Act 1972 given the need for the Panel to consider the report prior to considering the approval of the Council's Governance Statement.)

With the assistance of a report by the Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was acquainted with progress made to embed risk management within the Council organisation. Members noted the work undertaken to improve the Council's current "Use of Resources" rating to level 3 against the risk management standard. Having acknowledged the role of the Risk Management Group in the work undertaken during the previous year, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

23. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL

Pursuant to Minute No. 08/09, the Panel received a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing the outcome of a review of the Panel's own effectiveness against CIPFA's best practice guidance for Audit Committees.

In noting details of a workshop that had been held for Panel Members in August 2008 and having drawn the Panel's attention to identified

areas for improvement, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the outcome of the review be noted; and
- (b) that the Action Plan prepared to address the areas for improvement be approved.

24. PROTOCOL BETWEEN THE LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing the adoption of a protocol for the relationship between the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

The Panel were advised that the CIPFA/SOLACE publication on "Good Governance in Local Government" recommended the development of a protocol as good practice. Additionally, it was noted that the adoption of the protocol was an outstanding issue identified in the Council's Governance Statement.

The Head of Administration drew the Panels' attention to minor textural amendments that had been made to the protocol since its circulation and apprised Members with the comments that had been made on it by the Leader of the Council. Having sought further clarification on protocol 3.7 at a future meeting, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the protocol for the relationship between the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive as now amended be approved.

25. GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the outcome of the annual review of the Council's governance arrangements. In addition, the Chairman reminded the Panel that they had taken part in the annual review of governance arrangements which was the basis of updating the Annual Governance Statement. The Panel discussed the Governance Statement, which had been prepared on behalf of the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, summarised the corporate governance work carried out in 2007/08 and identified matters to be addressed during 2008/09. The Panel noted that the Director of Commerce and Technology had endorsed the Statement in respect of the Council's system of internal control and having received similar assurances from the External Auditor, it was

RESOLVED

that the Governance Statement prepared by the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and Director of Commerce and Technology on behalf of the Council for 2008/09 be endorsed and countersigned by the Chairman of the Panel.

26. APPROVAL FOR PUBLICATION OF THE 2007/08 ACCOUNTS

The Panel considered the draft accounts for the year 2007/08 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Having considered the Council's letter of representation, Members were informed by Mrs L Sandford that an unqualified opinion would be provided on the accounts.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the letter of representation be approved and the Director of Commerce and Technology be authorised to sign it on behalf of the Council;
- (b) that the auditor's report be received and the appended Action Plan for dealing with the matters highlighted noted; and
- (c) that the revised set of accounts now submitted be approved for publication.

Chairman