

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL held in MEETING ROOM 1, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 24 June 2008.

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

### 5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 6. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

### 7. FINAL ACCOUNTS 2007/08

The Panel considered the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). Having had their attention drawn to a number of amendments, Members were acquainted with issues arising, which included the Council's investments, the pension provision, the treatment of capital and the collection fund.

In response to a question by a Member, the Head of Financial Services reported that the accounts would be published via the Council's website and a summary provided in District Wide, the Council's newsletter to all households.

Having drawn the Panel's attention to minor changes to the way the accounts were compiled, discussions ensued on the accounting treatment of Eastfield House, in particular, the valuation assessed by the District Valuer. Nevertheless, the Panel have acknowledged the non-tangible and longer term benefits to be derived from the Operations Centre over a prolonged period.

The Head of Financial Services outlined the sources of the Council's income which excluded the Leisure Centres. With regard to the latter, Members were informed that Centre accounts were treated separately. In noting that the entry for 'Leisure' under the Income and Expenditure Account included a range of services across the Council along with the Leisure Centres, the Head of Financial Services was invited to consider including in the future a reference to this under the notes to the accounts.

Having commended the Head of Financial Services and relevant Officers on the compilation of the accounts, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 be approved and that the audit should commence.

**8. BENEFIT FRAUD PROSECUTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing a review of the policy for the sanction and prosecution of claimants, landlords, employees and Members who had committed benefit fraud.

In noting the increasing levels of fraud detection activity and the levels of sanction and prosecution undertaken by the Council, attention was drawn to the changes proposed to the policy.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report be noted;
- (b) that the revised Benefits Prosecution Policy set out in Appendix A to the report now submitted be approved;
- (c) that the Fraud Manager be authorised to undertake court hearings and issue formal cautions and administrative penalties as set out in paragraph 3.1 of the report; and
- (d) that staff within the Fraud Team be authorised to undertake investigations in fraud affecting all other District Council services and to report to the relevant Head of Service on the outcomes, findings and recommendations arising from these investigations.

**9. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE**

The Panel received and noted a report by the Director of Commerce and Technology (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal audit, which was required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2006.

Some concerns had been expressed over the failure to meet targets in respect of actions identified during the course of reviews undertaken by the Internal Audit Service. However, Members were assured that efforts to improve this were being made.

Members' attention was drawn to the proposal to organise a self assessment of the Panel in terms of CIPFA guidance on best practice. Having been encouraged to note the external auditor's positive endorsement of the service and in noting the identified areas for improvement, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the general effectiveness of the Council's Internal Audit Service in terms of the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Audit Practice be acknowledged;
- (b) that the action plan prepared to address the areas for improvement identified be noted; and
- (c) that a review of the Council's effectiveness against CIPFA's best practice guidance for Audit Committees be undertaken.

**10. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE: INTERNAL AUDIT AND ASSURANCE PLAN**

The Panel received a report by the Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was appended a proposed Internal Audit and Assurance Plan for the 12 months period commencing 1<sup>st</sup> August 2008. Having thanked Officers for their efforts in compiling the risk register, it was

RESOLVED

that the Audit and Assurance Plan be approved.

**11. EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2008/09**

*(Mrs L Sanford and Mr P Winrow of Grant Thornton UK LLP, the Council's external auditors, were in attendance for consideration of this item).*

The Panel received and noted a report by the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the planned work to be undertaken at the Council over the 2008/09 financial year.

**12. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION - STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Consideration was given to a report by the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which set out the arrangements the Council would need to have in place in order to comply with new duties placed on it by the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008. In noting details of the changes to the Constitution that would be required, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to approve the changes required to the Constitution as set out in Section 2 of the report now submitted.

**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 2007/08.

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

**14. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information which would enable the identity of individuals to be obtained.

**15. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN: LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF COMPLAINT**

The Panel received and noted a report by the Director of Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) on a complaint against the Council by a member of the public and the terms of compensatory payment negotiated by way of a local settlement.

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

**16. COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT COMPLAINT: AWARD OF COMPENSATION**

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) seeking approval of a compensation payment to be made under the Council's internal complaints system. Having been acquainted with the background to the complaint, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the sum of £1085.31 be awarded to the complainant outlined in the report now submitted.

Chairman