

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL held in the Aquarius Room, St Ivo Leisure Centre, Westwood Road, St Ives, Cambs, PE27 6WU on Wednesday, 24 March 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor C J Stephens – Chairman.
Councillors M G Baker, P L E Bucknell, P J Downes, A Hansard and T V Rogers.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor S J Criswell.

33. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9th December 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors A Hansard and T V Rogers declared personal interests in respect of Minute No. 09/43 by virtue of their membership of the Cabinet.

35. HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT FRAUD STRATEGY AND PROSECUTION POLICY

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 Benefit Fraud Strategy and Benefits Prosecution Policy.

In noting the increasing levels of fraud detection activity and the levels of sanction and prosecution undertaken by the Council, including those within the Local Taxation and Housing Departments, attention was drawn to the changes proposed to the Strategy and the Prosecution Policy.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report be noted;
- (b) that the revised Benefit Fraud Strategy set out in Annex A to the report now submitted be approved;
- (c) that the revised Benefit Fraud Prosecution Policy set out in Annex B to the report now submitted be approved; and
- (d) that the Cabinet be recommended to amend the delegated functions to allow the Fraud Team to undertake investigations in fraud affecting Local Taxation and Housing Services and all other District

Council services and to report to the relevant Department on the outcomes, findings and recommendations arising from these investigations.

36. ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT 2008/09

(Mrs L Sandford of Grant Thornton UK LLP and Mr N Smith from the Audit Commission, were in attendance for consideration of this item).

With the aid of a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were apprised with the findings of the Audit Commission's report on the Council's Organisational Assessment for 2008/09.

In introducing the report, Mr N Smith from the Audit Commission informed Members of the Panel that the Council had performed well overall, improving on a number of areas that matter to local people. In terms of the future, the Panel's attention has been drawn to those areas which had been identified for improvement. In discussing Huntingdonshire's performance against other District Councils, Members were advised that whilst performance was compared to the other Cambridgeshire authorities, comparisons were also made against comparable authorities who have similar characteristics to that of Huntingdonshire.

RESOLVED

that the Organisational Assessment report for 2008/09 be received and noted.

37. EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT: CERTIFICATION OF GRANTS CLAIMS 2008/09

(Mrs L Sandford of Grant Thornton UK LLP and Mr N Smith from the Audit Commission, were in attendance for consideration of this item).

Consideration was given to a report by the Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing the External Auditor's certification of specific grants received by the Council in 2008/09. In noting there were no significant issues arising from the report, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Grants Report for 2008/09 be received and noted.

38. NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE

With the aid of a report by the Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel received background information relating to the National Fraud Initiative and the work undertaken by the Council on the resulting, potentially fraudulent, matches provided by the Audit Commission. Having had their attention drawn to the various data sources required to be submitted to the Audit Commission, Members were apprised with the results of the data matching exercise which indicated that a low number of fraud cases and errors had been identified, which were

currently being investigated by the Fraud Team.

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be noted.

39. 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 September 2009 to 28th February 2010 inclusive. Having requested for specific information on the “very high” residual risks to be included in future reports, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

40. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE: INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel received and noted a report by the Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the progress made to date in respect of the delivery of the 2009/10 Annual Audit Plan and the performance standards achieved. Members were encouraged to note the achievement made by the Council with regard to the implementation of agreed audit actions which had been delivered on time. An update on issues previously raised concerning the Code of Procurement and data encryption will be submitted to the Panel at its September 2010 meeting.

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be noted.

41. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

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 proposed changes to the Code of Financial Management and Code of Procurement.

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to approve the revised Code of Financial Management and Code of Procurement as appended to the report now submitted.

42. PROGRESS REPORT ON ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND RISK ASSURANCE

Consideration was given to a joint report by the Heads of People, Performance and Partnerships and Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which provided the half yearly review of the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan, together

with the Council's improvement plan, and an overview of the level of assurance provided to the Council for those risks identified within the Risk Register.

RESOLVED

- (a) that progress made to date with regards to the implementation of the action plan arising from the Annual Governance Statement and the Council's improvement plan be noted; and
- (b) that the level of assurance provided within the Risk Register be noted.

43. APPOINTMENT OF CABINET MEMBERS

With the aid of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) consideration was given to a proposal by the Structure Review Working Party to amend the structure of the Council to a form of leadership required by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Whilst the Act requires the Council to implement either an elected mayor or an executive leader model at its annual meeting in May 2011, it is being proposed that interim arrangements should be introduced for the Leader of the Council to be authorised to determine the membership of the Cabinet with effect from May 2010. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to delete the following Council Procedure Rules with effect from the annual meeting of the Council in May 2010:-

- "1.1 (vii) appoint the Deputy Leader;
- 1.1 (viii) agree the number of members to be appointed to the Cabinet and appoint those members to the Cabinet."

44. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT POLICY

By means of a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were provided with an opportunity to review the content of a draft Member Development Policy. Having been advised that the Policy had already been endorsed by the Member Charter Working Group, and following discussions regarding the financial implications of the proposal upon the Council, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the Member Development Policy as set out in Annex A to the report now submitted be approved.

Chairman