

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 28 June 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor E R Butler – Chairman.
Councillors M G Baker, G J Harlock and T V Rogers.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R S Farrer, A R Jennings and P G Mitchell.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 23rd March and 18th May 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

6. FINAL ACCOUNTS 2010/11

(Mr C McLaughlin of Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP, the Council's external auditors, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

With the aid of a presentation by the Head of Financial Services, the Panel considered the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2011 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and a series of amendments which were tabled at the meeting (a copy of which is also appended in the Minute Book).

Members were acquainted with changes to the Accounts and Audit Regulations which no longer required Members to approve accounts before they were audited. However the Panel was reminded that because of changes created by the introduction of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) in 2011, the Panel had requested previously that the accounts be presented to them. The Panel was advised of the complexity of the new accounting system which, following significant Government and accountancy institute pressure on local authorities, would now mirror more closely those of the private sector. Members were assured that the accounts, which formed the official record of what had happened over the last year, would be robustly audited by external auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and any significant concerns would be reported to the Panel in September.

The Panel was acquainted with the recommendations made by the auditors following the publication of last year's accounts and the remedial action that had been taken where appropriate. Following assurances that current IT systems and practices were adequate,

Members concurred with the view that a network intrusion detection system could not be justified at the present time due to the excessive cost both in terms of finance and staff time and in light of more anticipated changes by the Government.

The Panel was advised also that following a recent technical check, the item on leases would need to be amended.

Having requested clarification on a number of details within the report including the payment date for election fees and having highlighted a number of inconsistencies, Councillor G Harlock was advised that amendments would be made where necessary during the final stage of preparation by the team. The Accountancy Manager also undertook to circulate responses to the questions raised.

Having commended officers, in particular the Head of Financial Services and his team on the compilation of the accounts given the restricted timeframe and challenging circumstances, the Panel

RESOLVED

that, subject to the amendments circulated at the meeting and minor textural amendments, the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2011 be noted.

7. INTERNAL AUDIT 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 annexed a proposed Internal Audit and Assurance Plan for the 12 months period commencing 1st August 2011.

The Panel was acquainted with the background to the resourcing of the Plan and advised that the internal audit service maintained a four year strategic audit plan. It was explained that although there had been a reduction in the number of audit staff in the previous year, proposals for the introduction of 'lean' and continuous auditing of the Council's financial systems should mean that the need to buy in the extra audit days that had been previously anticipated would be eliminated.

Having been advised that computer audits had in the past been carried out by external computer auditors and did not form part of the submitted audit plan, the Panel was informed of preliminary talks with both Peterborough City and Cambridge City Councils on future joint computer audit arrangements.

Having raised concerns over what potentially appeared to be the excessive time allocated for the auditing of both the Charter for Elected Member Development and office and mobile telephone use, the Panel

RESOLVED

that having regard to the aforementioned comments the Audit and Assurance Plan be noted.

8. COMPLAINTS

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic 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 2010/11.

The Panel was advised that response times for responses to requests for information by Ombudsman investigators had been reduced from 47.2 to 18.4 days following criticism from the Ombudsman.

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

Chairman