

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 22 May 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor E R Butler – Chairman.
Councillors M G Baker, K J Churchill,
G J Harlock, R Harrison, P Kadewere and
R J West.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor P G Mitchell.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 26th March and 15th May 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor R J West declared an interest in Minute No 13/10 as a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being).

6. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL - PROGRESS REPORT

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) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions. In response to concerns that little progress appeared to have been made to introduce a corporate guide to managing projects, the Assistant Director, Finance and Resources reassured the Panel that some work had already been undertaken to prepare a timeframe and establish a Working Group.

Additionally, it was reported that a letter had yet to be sent to the Departments for Communities & Local Government and for Works & Pensions over the cost of auditing benefit claims, as the Assistant Director, Resources was awaiting confirmation as to whom it should be sent.

7. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to an individual and is likely to reveal the identity of that individual.

8. HOUSING NEEDS 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) regarding a complaint that the Council had not responded correctly to a claim of homelessness which had been made to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Members' attention was drawn to the background to the claim and the action taken in response to the findings of the Ombudsman. The Panel expressed some surprise that the Ombudsman had decided, in the first instance, to investigate the matter rather than refer it back to the Council. In response to which, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that the Ombudsman has this discretion when dealing with a complaint about homelessness. In concluding that the matter could have been dealt with through the Council's complaints procedures, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the report be received and a compensation payment of £250 awarded to the complainant to be set against his personal debt to the Council; and
- (b) that the Housing Needs and Resources Manager be requested to clarify why the Council had not been given the opportunity to resolve the matter in the first instance.

9. RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be re-admitted to the meeting

10. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANELS

A report by the Internal Audit Manager was submitted which summarised the findings of a review by a Working Group established by the three Overview and Scrutiny Panels to look into the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book.

The Internal Audit Manager reported that the Panels were generally acting effectively in terms of the discharge of their responsibilities and fulfilling their terms of reference.

In discussing the areas identified by the Working Group as requiring improvement, attention was drawn to the engagement of the public and other stakeholders. In that respect, Members expressed their disappointment that the proposed pilot Local Joint Committee had not yet been organised. As a way forward, Members suggested that the Deputy Executive Leader be requested to update the Panel on the progress being made with the pilot scheme.

Having considered whether there was scope to review other Panels or Committees, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the outcome of the Working Group's review of the effectiveness of the Panels be noted;
- (b) that the outcome of the effectiveness review be taken into account when considering the annual governance statement; and
- (c) that the effectiveness reviews be continued with a review of the Licensing and Protection Panel/ Licensing Committee.

11. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE

Consideration was given to a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of the Internal Audit Service as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011.

Members were advised that the self-assessment review had been conducted by the Internal Audit Manager against "proper practice" provisions of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and the Local Government Application Note to the PSIAS. Particular attention was drawn to an action plan which had been prepared to address the areas of non-conformance. Having been reassured that these instances were only of a minor nature and were not considered significant enough to warrant inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the outcome of the Internal Audit Manager's self-assessment which shows that the Internal Audit Service generally conforms with the PSIAS be noted;
- (b) that the intention of the Action Plan to address the areas of non-conformance identified from the self-assessment be noted; and
- (c) that the areas of non-conformance, as outlined in Appendix B of the report now submitted, be confirmed as not being significant enough to be considered in the Annual Governance Statement.

12. WORK PROGRAMME AND TRAINING

By way of a report by the Assistant Director, Finance and Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members were acquainted with a work programme for the Panel for 2013/14.

The Internal Audit Manager encouraged the Panel to attend a training session for Members with finance, governance, audit and risk management responsibilities being held on 14th June 2013, details of which would be emailed to Members.

Additional, it was reported that Members would be invited to an informal session to discuss the draft annual governance statement prior to it being considered formally by the Panel at their July meeting.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

13. FRAUD WORKING GROUP

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit the following urgent item in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 given the need to appoint to the Working Group)

RESOLVED

that Councillors E R Butler, K J Churchill, G J Harlock and P G Mitchell be appointed to the Fraud Working Group for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Chairman