

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR AUDIT AND BEST VALUE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Audit and Best Value held at County Hall, Lewes on 22 March 2007.

- PRESENT - Councillor Tutt (Chairman)
Councillors Birch, Gadd, Murphy (Vice-Chairman) and Sparks
- OFFICERS - Andrew Ogden, Director of Law and Personnel
Duncan Savage, Assistant Director, Audit and Performance
Russell Banks, Principal Audit Manager
Paul Dean, Scrutiny Manager
John Morris, Assistant Director (Property) for item 7 (see minute 41 below)
Becky Shaw, Director of Policy and Communications for item 8 (see minute 42 below)

35. MINUTES

35.1 RESOLVED – to approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 November 2006.

36. APOLOGIES

36.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Livings.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

37.1 Councillor Birch declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in relation to the Hastings On Street Car Parking element of item 5 (Internal Audit Progress Report: Quarter Three) as a Member of Hastings Borough Council.

38. REPORTS

38.1 Copies of the reports on the matters dealt with in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

39. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT: QUARTER THREE

39.1 The Committee considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources summarising the key audit findings, progress on delivery of the audit plan and the performance of the internal audit service during Quarter 3.

39.2 The Assistant Director, Audit and Performance confirmed that follow up reviews and ongoing monitoring would be carried out in the three areas identified in the report as having weak internal controls.

39.3 The Committee was advised that, since circulation of the agenda, the Adult Social Care Business Transformation Board had decided to reduce the scope of the programme that would go live on 1 April 2007 from that previously planned. Internal audit activity, therefore, was focussing on supporting the contingency measures in place for service delivery and business continuity, particularly with reference to income collection and payments relating to new contracts, from 1 April and ensuring that the systems in place would be robust.

39.4 Members were concerned to ensure that the Cabinet had been briefed on the situation and requested that a report on progress be brought back to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting in June when the Director of Adult Social Care or Assistant Director, Resources would be invited to attend the meeting. In the meantime, the Scrutiny Committee Chairman should be kept updated on the situation.

39.5 RESOLVED – to (1) note the information contained in the report and updated at the meeting;

(2) request that the Director of Adult Social Care ensure that the Cabinet has been briefed on the situation in respect of the Adult Social Care Business Transformation Programme and that a report is brought to the next meeting updating on progress.

40. STRATEGIC RISK MONITORING: UPDATE

40.1 The Committee considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources providing updated information on the list of current strategic risks, their status and mitigating actions.

40.2 Members suggested that the morale and motivation of staff (strategic risk 3), might be a cause for concern, particularly when looked at in conjunction with the update on Managing People in the IDeA Corporate Peer Review (appendix to item 6 on the agenda). Whilst recognising that staff morale/motivation was likely to be more of a problem in specific areas of the Council and that work was being undertaken to address the issue, the Committee agreed that a report should be brought to the next meeting with more information on the pressure points across the Council and action being taken to address the issues raised.

40.3 In response to concerns raised about strategic risk 10 (failure to work effectively at locality level) in relation to the role of local Members, the Director of Law and Personnel confirmed the commitment of the Council to engage with local Members as much as possible. Emphasis on the role of local Members formed part of current training courses and was included in the new online induction package. Members had been invited to participate in officer training courses and would continue to be included wherever possible.

40.4 RESOLVED – to (1) note the current strategic risks, update of their status and the mitigating actions being proposed and implemented by Chief Officers; and

(2) request the Director of Law and Personnel to report to the next meeting with more detailed information on the areas of concern for staff morale and motivation across the Council and the work being undertaken to improve the situation.

41. DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY CODE

41.1 The Committee considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources detailing the content of the Disposal of Property Code and some of the considerations which apply to individual cases.

41.2 Members suggested that the Code should be amended to ensure that local Members are consulted at an early stage of the disposal process.

41.3 RESOLVED – to note and endorse the contents of the Disposal of Property Code subject to the inclusion of a reference to the need to consult with local Members on all property disposals at an early stage.

42. QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT AGAINST THE COUNCIL PLAN

42.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Policy and Communications providing updated information on performance against the Council Plan for the 3rd quarter of 2006/07. Members were advised of a typographical error in paragraph 3.1 (fourth bullet point) of the report: the reference to the individual score for the key line of enquiry covering risk management should be “three” rather than “four”, however this remained an improvement on the previous score in this area.

42.2 In response to concerns that the Committee would like to see smarter targets and milestones on progress in the Peer Review action Plan, the Director of Policy and Communications explained that the substantive items in the Action Plan had now been updated and incorporated into the Council Plan which would be considered by the County Council at its meeting on 27 March 2007.

42.2 Members drew attention, in particular, to two areas of the Peer Review Action Plan:

- Enhance locality working (item 3.2) – the Director of Law and Personnel reported that it was intended to bring a report on this issue to the Cabinet in the next few months (see also minute 40.3 above);
- Contact Centres and the need for more management information (item 4.2) – the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources would be asked to write to the Scrutiny Committee Members outlining overall progress on this issue across the County Council. It was noted that some Scrutiny Committees were intending to visit call centres and the invitations could also be extended to Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Members.

42.2 RESOLVED – to (1) note the selection of successes and achievements made during this quarter;

(2) note the Peer Review Action Plan update; and

(3) request the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources to write to Members of the Scrutiny Committee outlining the overall progress being made with item 4.2 of the Peer Review Action Plan (contact centres – need for more management information).

43. FUTURE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

43.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Personnel setting out the Committee’s planned programme of work for the forthcoming year.

43.2 RESOLVED – to note the programme of work with the addition of items agreed at this meeting.

44. FORWARD PLAN

44.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 22 March 2007 to 30 June 2007.

44.2 RESOLVED - note the Forward Plan without comment