

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 10 March 2008.

PRESENT - Councillor Tutt (Chairman)
Councillors Birch, Howson and Sparks

OFFICERS - Andrew Ogden, Director of Law and Personnel
Duncan Savage, Assistant Director, Audit and Performance
Phil Packham, Assistant Director, Resources
Russell Banks, Principal Audit Manager
Paul Dean, Scrutiny Manager

ALSO PRESENT - Rawdon Phillips, Insurance and Risk Manager for item 7 (see minute 51)
Mary Clarke, Head of Democratic Services for item 8 (see minute 52)

Stuart Frith, External Auditor

46. MINUTES

46.1 RESOLVED – to approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2007.

47. APOLOGIES

47.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dyason, Murphy and Whetstone

48. REPORTS

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

49. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT: QUARTER THREE

49.1 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.

49.2 Officers reported on and responded to questions from Members about the key audit findings set out in Appendix A to the report. Members' concerns focussed, in particular, on the findings highlighted in relation to:

- Building Maintenance – it was noted that an action plan had been agreed to address the key areas listed in the report and the outcomes would be reported back to the Committee.
- Building Maintenance Contractors working in schools – the Committee was advised that, although current DCSF guidance did not require CRB checks for building maintenance contractors working in schools, the issue was being addressed through

a new corporate policy from 1 April 2008. The Director of Law and Personnel confirmed that he would report back to the Committee on progress in due course.

49.3 RESOLVED – to (1) receive the report;

(2) endorse the actions being taken to address the issues raised in the key audit findings.

50 ANTI FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY

50.1 The Committee considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources setting out the revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and updating Members on other planned anti-fraud activity.

50.2 RESOLVED – to (1) note the revised County Council Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy prior to it being presented to Governance Committee for approval; and

(2) note and support the planned future anti-fraud and corruption activity.

51. STRATEGIC RISK MONITORING: UPDATE

51.1 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.

51.2 Members were reminded that training sessions to help them to address Risk Management issues appropriately would be held at the end of March and also immediately prior to the next Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 June 2008.

51.3 RESOLVED – to note the current strategic risks, update of their status and the mitigating actions being proposed and implemented by Chief Officers.

52. MEMBERS' SUPPORT

52.1 The Director of Law and Personnel reminded the Committee of two recently published major publications (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health and the Report of the Councillors Commission) which focussed on raising the profile of Councillors at a local level. The Act placed particular emphasis on the role of Councillors as “local place shapers” and community leaders whilst the Commission made recommendations about the role of Councillors and engagement with local communities and also about the kind of support they should receive to help them achieve these roles.

52.2 The Director of Law and Personnel outlined the support currently available for Members in the following areas and sought their views on how that support might be enhanced in the future to help them to undertake their evolving roles effectively:

- Provision of general resources and support;
- Departmental support;
- Councillor involvement;
- Member training and development;
- Communications;
- Staff understanding of Councillors' roles;
- ICT

52.3 Members expressed their appreciation of the support currently provided and put forward the following suggestions for further enhancement of that support:

- The attendance of non-Executive Councillors (as well as Executive Members) at the “Working in a Political Environment” courses provided for staff would be useful and help to emphasise the need for departments to involve local Members in issues at an early stage;
- Regular briefings for local Members on area based issues was important. Previously these had been carried out on a quarterly basis, but had been dropped as the result of budget cuts;
- It would be helpful, in terms of time and travelling, if provision could be made to enable Members to hold voice conferences/audio meetings if necessary;
- The availability of meeting rooms for Members was sometimes an issue as was the question of privacy in the Members’ Room;
- Community leadership was an important element of Councillors’ roles and further support would be essential as this role developed;

52.4 RESOLVED – to (1) welcome the report; and

(2) request the Director of Law and Personnel to take on board the suggestions made for further development of the support provided for Members.

53. QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT AGAINST THE COUNCIL PLAN

53.1 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 2007/08.

53.2 Officers reported on and responded to questions from Members about the two indicators scored red in the appendix to the report:

- Representation of the local community in the workforce; the percentage of the workforce with disability – Members were advised that the target for this indicator was based on what was considered, realistically, to be achievable. The County Council’s Disability Forum operated very successfully. All applicants for jobs with the Council, who were registered as disabled, were guaranteed interviews provided they met the minimum criteria for the post.
- Invoices paid within agreed terms – Departments were taking action to improve performance and a report would be considered by the Chief Officers Management Team at the end of March. The updated position would be reported back to the Committee in due course.

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

(2) the steps being taken to address the slippage on the two indicators.

54. RECONCILING POLICY AND RESOURCES: FEEDBACK

54.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Personnel which provided feedback on the outcomes of scrutiny input into the Reconciling Policy and Resources (RPR) process in 2007/08.

54.2 Members suggested that, whilst the 2007/08 RPR process had worked successfully in that it had enabled the Committee to be engaged in the process, both the timeliness of scrutiny involvement and the level of information provided, could be improved. In order to maximise the Scrutiny Committee's input, they would wish to be involved earlier in the 2008/09 RPR process and to receive more detailed information on the savings proposed and their impact. In particular, concern was expressed about the use of the terms high, medium and low when describing the impact of savings.

54.3 RESOLVED – to (1) agree that the 2007/08 RPR process had enabled the Scrutiny Committee to be involved and facilitated its input into the process; and

(2) request that (a) the Scrutiny Committee be involved in the 2008/09 RPR process at an earlier stage to facilitate fuller discussions and input on the proposed savings to meet the next year's challenges; and (b) more specific information be provided on the impact of savings.

54. FUTURE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

54.1 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.

54.2 Members were reminded that they had been circulated with the final report of the Scrutiny Review of the County Council's relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Councillor Sparks had been the Committee's representative on the Review Board and had been invited to attend the Community Services Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 March when the report would be considered. He could feed into that forum any issues that Members wished to raise on the report.

54.3 The Chairman asked Members to consider whether there were any elements of the Committee's work that should be reviewed on Best Value grounds and to notify him by the end of April so that discussion could take place at the June Committee meeting.

54.4 RESOLVED – to note the Committee's programme of work for 2008.

55. FORWARD PLAN

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

55.2 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan without comment