

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR AUDIT, BEST VALUE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Audit, Best Value and Community Services held at County Hall, Lewes on 9 November 2011.

- PRESENT - Councillor Sparks (Chairman)
Councillors Ensor, Lambert, D Shing and B Tidy.
- Councillor Freebody was also in attendance
- OFFICERS - Becky Shaw, Chief Executive
Simon Hughes, Assistant Chief Executive
Duncan Savage, Assistant Director, Corporate Resources, Audit and Performance
Amanda Walker, Deputy Director of Finance
Philip Baker, Assistant Director, Legal and Democratic Services
Irene Campbell, Assistant Director: Community Services
Lee Banner, Policy Officer for item 7 (see minute 32)
Sarah Hills, Personnel Manager, Personnel & Training for item 8(b) (see minute 34)
Alison Bryson, Registration Manager for item 9 (see minute 35)
Paul Dean, Scrutiny Manager
Harvey Winder, Scrutiny Support Officer
- ALSO PRESENT - Leigh Lloyd-Thomas - External Auditor

26. MINUTES

26.1 The Committee clarified that the reference to school governors in minute 21.5 should have specifically referred to LEA governors.

26.2 RESOLVED – to approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 September 2011.

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

27.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barnes and Whetstone. It was noted that Councillor D Shing was substituting for Councillor S Shing.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

28.1 There were none.

29. REPORTS

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

Audit Items

30. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT: QUARTER TWO

30.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate Resources summarising the key audit findings and progress on delivery of the Audit Plan and performance of the Internal Audit Service during Quarter 2.

30.2 The following key points emerged from the discussion:

- Whilst ASC accepted the need to review its investigation procedures relating to allegations of misuse of Blue Badges these needed to be proportionate to the risk involved
- The administration of the Blue Badge scheme was subject to a national review.
- A new facility for relatives of deceased badge holders has been set up by the Council that allows them to return the badge to the Council more easily.

RESOLVED - (1) to note the reports and their appendices; and

(2) that there were no identified concerns arising that needed to be brought to the attention of the Governance Committee

31. TREASURY MANAGEMENT

31.1 The Committee considered a review of Treasury Management activity by the Director of Corporate Resources.

31.2 The Committee thanked the Treasury Management Team for their prudent fiscal planning, particularly during a time of financial uncertainty.

31.3 RESOLVED – To note the Treasury Management performance for the first six months and the changes to our Strategy for 2011/12.

Scrutiny Items

32. SOUTH EAST SEVEN PARTNERSHIP: UPDATE

32.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive to update the Committee on the progress of the South East Seven partnership and the next steps.

32.2 In addition to the report, the Chief Executive made the following comments about the South East Seven Partnership:

- The work of Members and officers in progressing the SE7 collaborative activities is starting to deliver benefits for the County Council:
 - the opportunity to fundamentally redesigning Special Educational Needs and Disability services through engagement with the Department for Education's and the Department of Health's Pathfinder programme;
 - the development, in partnership with the University of Brighton, of a Masters degree course in Highways engineering to help address the identified skills gap in the profession; and
 - SE7 Benchmarking group will make it easier to benchmark services where there are no pre-existing arrangements.

32.3 The Committee praised the progress the SE7 was making. The Committee acknowledged the difficulty of negotiating large-scale partnerships and was pleased that the Council was actively promoting the partnership.

32.4 RESOLVED - to note the report and its appendices.

33. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE USE OF CONSULTANTS IN EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL: UPDATE

33.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate Resources summarising the progress on improvements in the Council's use of consultants.

33.2 The following key points emerged from the discussion:

- There is an acknowledgement that consultancy will always be a needed on some level on a short term basis. It is possible that the continued restructuring as a result of service reviews could lead to more short term skills gaps that may mean an increased use of consultants. However, figures show expenditure on consultancy has fallen between 2009/10 and 2010/11.
- Additional advertising and targeted identification of potential users is being considered to ensure there is a greater uptake in the use of the intranet toolkit for consultancy.

33.3 RESOLVED - to note the report and its appendices.

34. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE USE OF AGENCY STAFF IN EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL: UPDATE

34.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate Resources summarising the progress on improvements in the Council's use of agency staff.

34.2 The following key points emerged from the discussion:

- Under the new Agency Worker Regulations, all agency staff receive the same wages as regular staff after 12 weeks.
- All vacant posts are advertised to staff in the redeployment pool before they are advertised externally.
- During the assessment of a post and during the recruitment process, agency staff may still be needed to ensure continuity of the service.
- Agency staff are still needed for posts that require a high level of skill, especially in ICT, where the Council cannot pay the market price for permanent staff and outsourcing the work to an external company does not offer best value.

34.3 RESOLVED – (1) to note the report and its appendices;

(2) to receive a Summary of the number of hours worked by Agency staff in 2011/12 and over the same period in 2010/11.

35. THE REGISTRATION SERVICE: SERVICE REVIEW PROGRESS

35.1 The Committee considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Community Services summarising the service review of the Registration Service.

35.2 The following key points emerged from the discussion:

- The Registration Service is looking to develop into the market in mid-tier weddings. This will require upgrading facilities and improving the overall experience of weddings on offer. If successful should create a surplus, helping the service to become self-sufficient.
- Registration Services employs 45 staff, mostly on casual contracts. There are peaks in demand between April and September and during weekends. Staffing

arrangements cover these peaks and remain flexible towards less predictable peaks in demand.

35.3 The Committee congratulated Registration Services staff for fulfilling all statutory requirements whilst working diligently to balance the finances of the service. The Committee welcomed the promotion of wedding services in light of the evidence that marriage benefits family and community life.

35.4 RESOLVED - to note the report and its appendices.

36. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

36.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Governance and Community Services setting out the Committee's planned programme of work for the forthcoming year.

36.2 RESOLVED – to add to the Committee's programme of work for 2011/12 as follows:

- An update of the service review of the Library and Information Team to be presented at the 28 February 2012 meeting.
- All members of the Committee to be invited to attend an ET&E Scrutiny Committee economic development working lunch on 2 December 2012.
- The Chairman to attend the ET&E Scrutiny Committee RPPR Board on 15 December to ensure there is no duplication of work between the committees on economic development matters.
- A member reference group comprising of Councillors Sparks, Barnes and B Tidy to meet with the Assistant Chief Executive to provide a member perspective on the service review of Communications. An update of the service review will be presented at the 28 February 2012 meeting.
- Property Division will run a workshop for the Committee members to inform them of developments in property asset management. Date TBA
- A report is to be circulated prior to the 28 February 2012 meeting providing an introduction to the Contractors Insurance Top-Up Facility. If necessary, an update on the service will be requested for the 28 February 2012 meeting.

37. FORWARD PLAN

37.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 December 2011 to 31 March 2012.

37.2 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan.