

## 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 4 September 2012.

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PRESENT - Councillor Sparks (Chairman), Councillors Ensor, Field, Reid, S Shing, Taylor and B Tidy

Also present: Councillors Freebody and Glazier

OFFICERS - Becky Shaw, Chief Executive  
Simon Hughes, Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Community Services  
Amanda Walker, Deputy Director of Finance  
Duncan Savage, Assistant Director, Corporate Resources, Audit and Performance  
Irene Campbell, Assistant Director, Community Services  
David Baughan, Head of Estates and Corporate Management  
Philip Baker, Assistant Director, Legal and Democratic Services  
Harvey Winder, Scrutiny Support Officer

ALSO PRESENT - Janine Combrinck, Leigh Lloyd-Thomas - External Auditors (PKF)

### 16. MINUTES

16.1 RESOLVED – to approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 June 2012.

### 17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

17.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barnes, Lambert and Whetstone. It was noted that Councillors Reid, Field and Taylor were substituting.

### 18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

18.1 There were no declarations of interest.

### 19. REPORTS

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

## **Scrutiny Items**

### 20. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES

20.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive setting out the detailed planning for 2013/14 and beyond as outlined in the State of the County report.

20.2 The Committee made the following comments about the policy steers, strategic performance summary and overview of financial information:

- Policy steer 6 of the Community & Resources portfolio (“ensure that our workforce planning activities and personnel policies support the strategic direction of the organisation”) is focussed insufficiently on outcomes compared to the other policy steers.

- The overall clarity of the policy steers could be improved by avoiding duplication, for example, between Policy steers 1 and 4 of the Community and Resources portfolio (“deliver strategies which align resources with outcomes and objectives” and “devise and deliver effective strategies for all business services”).
- It was made clear that the policy steers need to reflect the fact that the County Council places great importance on achieving value for money.
- It was clarified that the portfolio plans provide the details of how each policy steer is delivered and who is accountable for the delivery.

20.3 RESOLVED – To (1) report the above observations to the policy steers to Cabinet; and

(2) to establish an RPPR Board to meet in January 2013 comprising of Councillors Barnes, Ensor, Sparks, B Tidy and Whetstone to consider (1) the key outcomes and the targets that show whether the County Council’s priorities will be delivered, (2) the detailed portfolio and budget plans, (3) the emerging savings strategy.

## 21. OVERVIEW OF THE CORONER’S OFFICE

21.1 The Committee welcomed a report by the HM Coroner for East Sussex, Mr Alan Craze, outlining the role of the Coroner’s Office.

21.2 The following key points emerged during the discussion:

- The coroner investigates the roughly 40% of deaths that have not been signed off by a doctor. In instances where the cause of death cannot be determined, he orders a post-mortem. If the findings indicate an unnatural death, he orders an inquest into the cause. This happens in 4% of deaths.
- When the coroner considers that an accountable body (e.g. a hospital trust) could prevent future deaths by changing its practices, he may produce a Rule 43 report. This helps to ensure that lessons are learned after an inquest is held, although the system does not respond as effectively as it should.
- Successive governments have developed a more streamlined, full-time and ‘professional’ coroner service. As a result, over the past 15 years, the number of coroners has reduced from 170 to 96 in England and Wales. This has coincided with an increased workload caused by the decisions of the High Court and the European Court of Human Rights, for example, the requirement for a coroner to be available at all times.
- The newly appointed Chief Coroner will help to increase the overall quality of the coroner service by rewriting and standardising coronial policy.
- The annual budget for the Coroner’s Office in East Sussex is currently £847,000. East Sussex County Council is currently conducting a review into the requirements of the Coroner that enable him to carry out his statutory functions and looking at how it can make savings on this budget.

21.3 The Chairman thanked Mr. Alan Craze for his very interesting and informative report and for the thorough way he answered questions.

21.4 RESOLVED – to note the report and its appendices.

## 22. LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE REVIEW: RESULTS OF FACT FINDING

22.1 The Committee considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Community Services summarising the headline statistics of the research undertaken as part of the Library and Information Service Review.

22.2 The following key points emerged from the discussion:

- In many rural communities, residents must travel more than 15 minutes by public transport or on foot to the nearest static library. This means that they often travel by car or rely on mobile libraries.
- An alternative way to provide access to books could be to work with the parish councils and local volunteers to create book exchanges or to deliver books to residents who order them through the 'virtual library', a service that will include access to the catalogue of library books in East Sussex.
- The use of volunteers to run book exchanges such as the one in Rotherfield appears to be successful. However, when setting up a book exchange in the future, a service level agreement should be used to ensure that, amongst other things, it caters to all ages and reading levels.
- Langney Library in Eastbourne is very small but has a very large number of visitors due to the high footfall from the shopping centre it is located in. This would confirm that people are more likely to visit a library as part of a general shopping trip, which is the predominant view nationally amongst library strategists, than make a visit specifically to a library.
- There is potential for co-locating services. For example, in Uckfield there is a Registration Service session at the library every week that provides an opportunity to, for example, issue every registered child with a library card.
- Libraries support digital inclusion by offering computer literacy courses. This provides people on low incomes, or who require care, with access to cheaper online services or products and a broad range of County Council services such as Telecare and video conferencing.
- Mobile libraries are clearly unable to provide the full range of ICT services of a static library. One solution to providing a full service to people unable to access static libraries may be to extend the use of the 'mobile office' van. This service offers ICT access, tuition and an enquiry service and visits towns and villages for several hours at a time.
- Reading in all forms should be encouraged and the Library Service will ensure that it caters to all reading levels.
- The Committee were reassured that volunteers will not replace existing library staff.

22.2 RESOLVED – to recommend that the following areas should be investigated further at the consultation stage:

- The value of providing libraries and book exchanges close to shopping centres and other areas of high footfall.
- The value of providing book exchanges in rural areas in partnership with parish councils or voluntary organisations through a service level agreement that guarantees a minimum level of service and that caters to people of all reading ages.
- Whether volunteers could help to deliver books ordered through the 'virtual library' in order to keep down delivery costs.
- Whether the 'mobile office' service could be expanded.
- The scope to co-locate static libraries with other County Council services to reap benefits, such as has been achieved with the Registration Service.

## **Audit & Risk Items**

### **23 REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REPORT AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2011/12**

23.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director of Corporate Resources and the external auditors following their audit of the Council's statutory accounts for 2011/12.

23.2 The external auditors confirmed that they intended to issue an unqualified opinion on the Council's accounts for 2011/12 and also on the Council's arrangements for securing value for money. PKF also explained a number of changes that had been made to the accounts during the audit, along with a number of areas of control weakness most of which had already been identified and addressed through the Council's own internal audit processes.

23.3 In response to questions from Members, the Assistant Director – Audit and Performance confirmed that in regard to instances where internal audit testing had identified that invoice request forms had not been completed but invoices had been raised, other supporting documentation was in place to support the raising of the invoices

23.4 RESOLVED – 1) to note the reports and its appendices; and

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

#### 24 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT: QUARTER ONE

24.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director of Corporate Resources summarising the key audit findings, progress on delivery of the Action Plan and the performance of the internal audit service during Quarter 1.

24.2 RESOLVED - 1) to note the reports and its appendices;

2) to agree that no additional action should be taken in response to the issues raised as a result of the audits carried out during Quarter 1; and

3) to agree that there were no new or emerging risks for consideration for inclusion in the internal audit plan.

#### 25 DRAFT LOCAL AUDIT BILL – UPDATE AND CONSULTATION RESPONSE

25.1 The Committee considered a report by the Interim Director of Corporate Resources summarising the Government's proposals for local public audit and the Council's response to the consultation on the Draft Local Audit Bill.

25.2 RESOLVED – to note the reports and its appendices.

#### 26. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

26.1 The Committee considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Community Services setting out the Committee's planned programme of work for the forthcoming year.

26.2 RESOLVED – to note the work programme.

#### 27. FORWARD PLAN

27.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 September to 31 December 2012.

27.2 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan.