

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the **JOINT AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE** meeting held at Mid Suffolk District Council, Needham Market on Monday 2 September 2013 at 9:30am

PRESENT:

MID SUFFOLK

G M Brewster
D Burn
T A Curran
Mrs E B Gibson-Harries (Chairman)
Mrs P M R Godden
D J Macpherson
Mrs J C Storey (Vice Chairman)

BABERGH

P D Burgoyne
D M Busby
B Riley
C A Roberts
L H Young

In attendance:

Head of Corporate Resources
Head of Corporate Organisation
Corporate Manager – Internal Audit
Corporate Manager – Financial Services
Interim Corporate Manager – Legal Services
Governance Support Officer (VMC)
Governance Support Officer (JB)

1. SUBSTITUTES AND APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillors S J Gemmill and D C Rose.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2013 were confirmed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

Minute 4 – second paragraph – final sentence – this referred to an item on the Work Plan and the comment should be included under Item 9: Draft Work Plan for the Period 1 February 2013 to 31 May 2013.

Minute 4 – final paragraph – this decision was not made at the meeting and should therefore be deleted from the minutes as it did not accurately reflect discussion at the meeting

Minute 9 – to be amended to include 'Review of officer non-salary expenses'.

4. PETITIONS

No petitions had been received.

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

There were no questions from Members.

6. JOINT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Report JAC8

Corporate Manager – Internal Audit

The report sought approval for the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) to accompany each Council's financial accounts 2012/13.

The Joint Audit and Standards Committee had responsibility for being satisfied that the AGS properly reflected the risk environment and any actions required to improve it.

It was noted that the Statement had been compiled by the Corporate Manager – Internal Audit with input from the Councils' Statutory Officers. The Statement had been seen by both Leaders of Council who were satisfied with the content subject to the Committee's comments.

Members accepted the report subject to the following comments being considered and the Statement amended where appropriate:

Translating the vision into objectives with measurable outputs

17. A reference to the relationship to Scrutiny Committee and the processes in place to ensure that changes were made in areas where improvement was required should be included to ensure that the Statement gave a balanced view.

The role of the Heads of Service

27. Clarification needed of responsibilities of the roles of Heads of Service and other officers regarding transactional management services
29. Final sentence – add 'and staff'

It was also suggested that it would be helpful if in future a structure chart showing the two Councils arrangements was included under this section.

Risk Management Arrangements

37. Clarification needed that the Risk Register was a 'live' document updated as required, but that a quarterly report of amendments was reported to Management Board and Members

Role of the Chief Financial Officer

- 45/46 Clarification needed that each Council has an individual S151 Officer

Ensuring Development Needs for Members and senior officers are met

61. The paragraph should also reflect the importance of the benefit of training in showing staff they were valued

Communication and Consultation with the public and other stakeholders

64. It was considered that the consultation exercise had not been comprehensive and the paragraph should reflect this

Members agreed to delegate to the two Chairmen of the Committee, in consultation with the Head of Corporate Resources, to approve the final Joint Annual Governance Statement. Officers were also requested to present a copy of the approved Statement to the next meeting of the Committee.

By a unanimous vote

RESOLUTION 1

That the Chairmen of the Joint Audit and Standards Committee, Councillors Mrs E B Gibson-Harries and D M Busby, in consultation with the Head of Corporate Resources be delegated to approve the Joint Annual Governance Statement 2012/13. Further, it be noted that, subject to that approval, the Leaders of each Council sign the Statement on behalf of their respective Council

RESOLUTION 2

That a copy of the approved Joint Annual Governance Statement 2012/13 be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Audit and Standards Committee

7. JOINT ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT – 2012/13

Report JAC9

Corporate Manager – Financial Services

The report was required to comply with the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management (“the Code”) and provided the Committee with a comprehensive assessment of Treasury Management activities for the year.

The report included performance on Prudential Indicators which were set in the 2012/13 Treasury Management Strategies (revised February 2013).

In response to Members’ questions the Corporate Manager – Financial Services confirmed that:

- Santander Bank was not on the list of Babergh authorised counterparties
- In view of current reported difficulties at the Co-operative Bank the Council was monitoring the position carefully and managing the situation by keeping a minimal amount available to cover cheques issued and not keeping monies on deposit. Banking contracts were due for renewal in 2014 and the position would be considered at that time.

A further question was raised as to why the actual 2013 Cumulative Maximum External Borrowing Requirement for Mid Suffolk was much higher than the estimated figure, and how the estimated figure was arrived at. The Corporate Manager – Financial Services agreed to look into this and forward a response to Members of the Committee.

It was noted that although currently there was a different approach to treasury management by each Council it was intended to align this where possible in the future.

Members requested that a glossary of the acronyms used in the report be included in the final copy to be presented to Council along with references to Santander and the Co-operative Banks.

RESOLUTION

Members agreed to delegate to the two Chairmen of the Committee, in consultation with the Head of Corporate Resources, to approve the final Joint Annual Treasury Management Report 2012/13 for recommendation to Council for approval

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

That the Treasury Management activity for the year 2012/13 be noted. Further, that it be noted that performance was in line with the Prudential Indicators set for 2012/13

8. UPDATE ON COMPLIANCE WITH LOCALISM ACT 2011

Report JAC10

Monitoring Officer

The report updated Members on the measures taken to comply with the requirements within Chapter 7 of the Localism Act and to identify any further actions required.

It was noted that 85% and 79% of the Parish Council Register of Interests had now been received.

Members were asked to consider the following suggestions to encourage parish council compliance with the Act and to advise officers of the preferred way forward:

- Letters to be sent to all individual parish councillors who had yet to complete a Register of Interest, together with guidance on what needed to be included and the consequences of not complying
- The issue to be raised at the next Suffolk Monitoring Officers' meeting to ensure consistency of approach across the county, and a county-wide protocol for dealing with non-compliance to be considered
- Work with SALC who give advice to parish clerks and could address any concerns regarding lack of information
- Look at ways of working with the police who would have to deal with non-compliance as a criminal issue. This approach would need to be county-wide.

Members felt that police involvement would be unnecessarily heavy handed and should not be considered.

It was suggested that it could be helpful for Ward Members to approach the parishes within their ward to find out if there were any issues preventing the completion or submission of the forms and to explain the need to do so as soon as possible.

The Committee agreed that the following action should be taken to encourage parish council compliance:

- the Interim Corporate Manager – Legal to send letters to all individual parish councillors
- liaise with SALC regarding a reminder to all parish clerks
- Ward Members to speak to relevant parish councils.

Members requested that a further report be brought to the next meeting detailing the updated position.

RESOLUTION 1

That the measures taken to comply with the requirements within Chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011 be noted

RESOLUTION 2

That the following action be taken to encourage parish council compliance with the Act:

- *Letters to be sent to all individual parish councillors who had yet to complete a Register of Interest, together with guidance on what needed to be included and the consequences of not complying*
- *Work with SALC who give advice to parish clerks and could address any concerns regarding lack of information*
- *Ward Members to speak to relevant parish councils*

RESOLUTION 3

That a further report be brought to the next meeting detailing the updated position

9. WORK PLAN

Report JAC11

Members noted the Work Plan and the addition of a further report:

- Mid Term Treasury Management Report – 4 November

Discussion ensued as to why the report 'Review of Officer Non-Salary Expenses' requested and agreed at the previous meeting during consideration of the item 'Terms of Reference' had not been added to the Work Plan. It had now been indicated that Full Council approval was required to include this in the Terms of Reference, although this was not outlined in the report which stated that:

- *'The Joint Committee is able to approve minor corrections. The Chief Executive has been delegated authority to make other alterations in consultation with the political group leaders as recommended by the Joint constitutional Review Group.'*

Members noted that some discussion had taken place with the Chairmen regarding the definition of 'Council Officers', ie did this refer to all officers or Heads of Service and Management Board only, but no conclusion had been reached.

Members requested that the two Chairmen of the Committee, in consultation with the Head of Corporate Resources and Councillor B Riley, agree a definition of 'Council Officers' so that the information could be collated and circulated to the Committee Members before the next meeting.

RESOLUTION 1

That the Chairmen of the Joint Audit and Standards Committee, Councillors Mrs E B Gibson-Harries and D M Busby, in consultation with the Head of Corporate Resources and Councillor B Riley agree a definition of 'Council Officers' and 'expenses' in the context of the requested report 'Review of Officer Non-Salary Expenses'

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