

**A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
WAS HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2010**

Councillors Burgess (P), Cully , Forder (P), Gill (P), Kimber (P) and Wright (P).

Independent Members: Mr R V Perry (P) and Mr G Lidgey (P).

29. APOLOGIES

An apology for inability to attend the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Cully.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee held on 29 October 2009 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

32. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

33. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

PART II

34. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES AND ANALYSIS

Consideration was given to a report of the Corporate Services Manager which requested Members to consider an analysis of complaints for the first 6 months of the current financial year.

Members were advised that a more detailed annual report would be brought to the Committee for consideration in September 2010.

Concerns were raised regarding complaints received about the attitude of some Housing Services staff. Members were advised that all individual complaints were looked into and dealt with. It was recognised that many staff within Housing Services encountered, on occasions, particularly difficult customers. It was decided that the Housing Services Manager be approached with regard to whether there was any need for additional customer care training for staff.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the report of the Corporate Services Manager be noted; and
- b) the Housing Services Manager be approached with regard to reviewing the issue of complaints about Housing Services staff and whether there is any need for additional customer care training.

35. STRATEGIC INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2010/2013

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance which provided Members with the planned coverage of Internal Audit resources for April 2010 to March 2013.

With regard to the sharing of a resource with Portsmouth City Council for an IT Audit specialist, Members were advised that Gosport Borough Council currently used a private company for this work and there was insufficient expertise available within the Hampshire Audit Alliance. Therefore Portsmouth City Council were to employ such a specialist, a resource which other authorities would then be able to access.

Members were advised that each high risk area was looked at annually together with other areas as necessary in order to meet external audit requirements. The aim was to look at all areas to be audited over a five year period.

RESOLVED: That the 2010/2013 Strategic Internal Audit Plan, as attached in Appendix One of the report of the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance, be approved.

36. INTERNAL AUDIT – PROGRESS REPORT FROM 1ST OCTOBER 2009 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2009

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance which tabled the performance of the Internal Audit Section in the three months of 2009/10 (1st October 2009 – 31st December 2009) against the agreed audit plan. The report also provided Members with an update on other key internal audit business within that same period.

Officers explained that the Audit Commission had replaced Mazars as the external auditor but, as they would be working with Mazars, no significant change of working practice was anticipated. Discussions were, however, to be held with the Audit Commission.

Officers were asked whether there were any other potential partnership arrangements such as that with Eastleigh Borough Council and were advised that, although there were no negotiations taking place at present, general discussions had taken place at meetings of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Chief Executives Group. In the past, Hampshire had been provided with funding for the Hampshire Improvement Partnership but this had achieved

little. However, some local authorities were showing interest in partnership working. Hampshire County Council was looking to approach others with regard to partnering arrangements for IT and Human Resources.

Members were advised that, due to its relatively small size, it was difficult for Gosport Borough Council to maintain an internal audit service and it was therefore sensible to operate partnering arrangements. The resultant increase in staff experience together with joint training and bulk buying, were of benefit to the Council. The partnership arrangement with Eastleigh Borough Council was working well and others would be looked into although there was a need to be mindful of the potential additional work to be undertaken by the Head of Internal Audit and Risk Assurance should any further partnerships be entered into.

RESOLVED:

- a) the Committee finds that the performance of the Internal Audit Section from 1 October 2009 to 31 December 2009 has satisfactorily been reviewed; and
- b) that the Head of Internal Audit's report on other key internal audit business during the above period be noted.

37. USE OF RESOURCES - MONITOR

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Treasurer which informed the Committee of progress responding to changes in the Use of Resources (UoR) test.

Members were advised that the Audit Commission was now the Council's external auditor and had seen an advance copy of the report. Progress on the action plan had been adequate but there were resource issues. The last test results had been encouraging but further discussions between officers and the Audit Commission would be held in order to produce a realistic plan for 2010/11.

With regard to good governance, Members were advised that no detailed feedback had been received but arrangements were considered to be adequate. The whistle blowing policy would need to be re-launched.

The issue of encouraging Member training was raised and officers advised that a need for financial awareness training had been identified by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This was planned for the new Municipal Year.

Members were advised that the Comprehensive Area Assessment format was more relaxed and with a lighter touch than its predecessor, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. There was no indication at present that expectations would be raised but they may be changed.

Officers advised that the Council's overall score of 2 equated to meeting basic standards and that Members had been satisfied with this score. However, they had felt there was a need to

concentrate on areas where the Council wanted to achieve improvements but the ability to achieve in such areas would have to take account of financial issues as well as staffing resources.

The Borough Treasurer advised that, with regard to the new test, he had been through the draft with the Audit Commission. The Council's self assessment had corresponded closely with the assessment of the Audit Commission. The test was considered to be fairer than its predecessor.

Members drew attention to the importance of Member/Officer working arrangements and the need to improve performance in this area. It was felt that new Member induction was important and that existing Members had a responsibility to transmit a suitable culture to new Members.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the progress made against the action plan approved in July 2009 be noted;
- b) the outcome of the 2009 assessment be noted;
- c) an action plan for 2010/11 be drawn up early in the next municipal year; and
- d) progress continue to be monitored at six monthly intervals.

38. STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Consideration was given to the Workplan of the Standards and Governance Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Workplan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 6.43 p.m.

CHAIRMAN