

**A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
WAS HELD ON 18 MARCH 2010**

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

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

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Councillor Mrs Forder had been nominated to replace Councillor Gill for this meeting.

39. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor Cully, Councillor Gill and Mr Lidgley.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

41. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Governance Committee held on 21 January 2010 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

42. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

43. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

PART II

44. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2008/09

Consideration was given to a report of Mazars, the Council's external auditors, which summarised the findings from their 2008/09 audit. It included messages arising from the audit of the Council's financial statements and the results of the work undertaken to assess the arrangements to secure value for money in the Use of Resources.

Mazars were represented at this meeting by Mr Mike Attenborough-Cox.

Members were advised that progress was being made in identified areas of concern and this would be included in the action plan to be presented to the Committee in July 2010.

With regard to the Council's score of 2 on Use of Resources, Members were advised that, with additional resources, an improved score of 3 could be achieved in chosen priority areas. District Audit had indicated that the Council was making progress and further evidence of progress could be supplied to them.

The Council aspired to a score of 3 for managing finances across the board but the necessary resources to achieve this were not available. The action plan could be extended to indicate how an overall score of 3 could be achieved at a relatively low cost but this improvement could not be guaranteed. Internal processes were being reviewed and the new financial management system may create extra capacity for the Council to achieve a better score.

Concerns were raised with regard to Member/Officer relationships and the importance of Member training, including new Member induction training, was emphasised.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Council's external auditors be noted.

45. CERTIFICATION OF CLAIMS AND RETURNS – ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to a report of Mazars, the Council's external auditors, which summarised the findings from the certification of 2008/09 claims. The report included the messages arising from their assessment of the Council's arrangements for preparing claims and returns and information on claims that Mazars amended or qualified.

Mr Attenborough-Cox explained that the report was a new requirement. No significant problems or errors had been identified and Mazars were satisfied with the way the Council conducted this part of its business.

Mr Attenborough-Cox expressed his thanks to the Council for its help and assistance in this and all other matters where Mazars had been involved.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Council's external auditors be noted.

46. LOCAL ASSESSMENT MONITORING REPORT

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer which advised the Committee on the operation of the arrangements for Local Assessment.

Concerns were raised regarding the time taken by officers to respond to complaints about the Council. Officers advised that problems could arise where the officer responding to the complaint had sometimes to wait for information from another unit. It was noted that no time constraints were imposed upon complainants and this could lead to a complaint taking longer to deal with than expected.

It was suggested that the next six-monthly complaints monitoring report should contain a

review of procedures and in-depth analysis of complaints so that the reason for the length of time to deal with them would become more apparent.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the report of the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer be noted; and
- b) the Corporate Services Manager be requested to include a review of procedures and in-depth analysis of complaints in his next six-monthly complaints monitoring report.

47. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance which provided the Committee with the planned annual coverage of Internal Audit resources for 2010/2011.

RESOLVED: That the 2010/2011 Internal Audit Plan, as attached in Appendix One of the report of the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance, be approved without amendment.

48. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a joint report of the Financial Services Manager and Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance which provided the Committee with an update on risk management within the Council.

Officers advised that the Strategic Risk Register was a fluid document which, although not always able to fully mitigate risks, would be able to identify them. One of the largest areas of risk identified was the concessionary travel scheme and in particular the risk relating to the appeals by the bus company which could result in a significant increase in the cost of the scheme. Provision for such awards was believed to be adequate but a significant appeal was currently in progress and the Council had to be aware of the risks involved.

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Risk Register attached to the joint report of Financial Services Manager and the Head of Internal Audit & Risk Assurance be noted and approved.

49. STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

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

It was agreed that a report to update the Committee on the Use of Resources should be brought to the meeting of the Committee on 15 July 2010 and that the Annual Complaints Monitoring report, including a review of procedures, should be brought forward to the same meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) a report to update the Committee on the Use of Resources be submitted to the Committee on 15 July 2010;
- b) the Annual Complaints Monitoring report, including a review of procedures, be brought forward for submission to the Committee on 15 July 2010; and
- c) the revised Workplan be noted.

50. INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM 17 MARCH 2010

The Chairman advised that he had attended the above Forum and accordingly presented his report to the Committee. A copy of the report is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix A.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and concluded at 6.50 p.m.

CHAIRMAN