

NORTH DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, NORDON, SALISBURY ROAD, BLANDFORD FORUM ON THURSDAY, 29 MARCH 2007 AT 10.00AM

Present: Cllr I Stewart (Chairman)
Cllr D Milsted
Cllr J P L Tory
Cllr P Webb (from 10.15am)

Apologies: Cllr C Kay and Vic Smith, Financial Services Manager

Also Present: Chris Peachey, Audit Commission

Officers: Debbie Wiltshire, Senior Auditor

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

29. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2007

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2007 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

30. ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER

Chris Peachey, Audit Manager, Audit Commission, presented the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter to the Committee. He highlighted that the timetable for the Letter had been varied for this year only to allow for inclusion of the information from the Direction of Travel and Use of Resources assessments. The Letter confirmed that the Council was showing good levels of improvement in its performance, especially in those areas that it had set as its priorities. There had also been significant improvements in its financial reporting and standing.

Members commented as follows:

- In relation to benchmarking with other councils there was concern that it was very difficult to be sure that you were comparing like with like as no two services measured their costs in the same way.
- The comment in paragraph 36 of the Letter stating that the Council had previously had a 'relaxed approach to residential development which has led to housing oversupply' was not an accurate reflection of the real position. Until approximately 18 months ago brownfield site development applications that had been refused by the District Council had been allowed by Planning Inspectors on appeal. Even now Inspectors' decisions were inconsistent as to whether oversupply was a relevant consideration.
- There was an important role for the Accounts and Audit Committee in relation to Internal Control, especially in the implementation and monitoring of the Assurance Framework.

- To thank Chris Peachey for the role he had played in the improvements to the Council's performance and in its relationship with the Audit Commission.

Resolved

To receive the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

Reason for Decision

For the Committee to receive and consider the Audit Commission's assessment of the Council.

31. INTERNAL AUDIT – PERIODIC UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Senior Auditor advising of the high priority outcomes from Internal Audits which have been finalised in the period since the last report to the Accounts and Audit Committee.

Members noted that the South West Chief Auditors' Group were requesting better targeting of the NFI data matching in view of the time commitment involved in checking matches and the small number of matches that were referred on.

The following comments were made:

- In relation to unpaid debt collection for sundry debtors, consideration could be given to using credit reference agencies.
- Accounts and Audit Committee should consider the quarterly monitoring reports providing details of the level and types of outstanding debts.
- Officers should consider providing a definition to staff of those items of expenditure (such as subscriptions and publications) that do not require purchase orders.

Resolved

To note the content of the Appendices to the report detailing the high priority recommendations made following internal audits undertaken.

Reason for decision

For the Committee to monitor audit high priority control weaknesses.

32. STRATEGIC AUDIT PLAN

Members received the report of the Financial Services Manager detailing the Strategic Audit Plan for the next four years.

The Committee asked that they receive sight of the joint working arrangement agreement with East Dorset and Christchurch Councils.

Resolved

That the Strategic Audit Plan as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

Reason for decision

To keep Members advised of the Audit Plan for the next four years.

33. DRAFT AUDIT AND INSPECTION PLAN FOR 2007/08

Members were circulated copies of the Draft Audit and Inspection Plan for 2007/08 for information.

The meeting ended at 11.45am.

CHAIRMAN