

CIVIC AFFAIRS29 June 2011
6.30 - 9.01 pm

Present: Councillors Boyce (Chair), Rosenstiel (Vice-Chair), Brierley, Marchant-Daisley and Herbert

Also Present: Councillor Wright for item 11/43/Civ and spoke under Council rule 39.2 (3)

Officers Present:

Chief Executive – Antoinette Jackson
Director of Resources – David Horspool
Head of Accounting and Support Services – Julia Minns
Head of Internal Audit – Steve Crabtree
Head of Legal Services – Simon Pugh
Democratic Services Manager – Gary Clift
Committee Manager – Martin Whelan
Accountant (Projects and Publications) – Charity Main

Also Present

Neil Gibson – Audit Commission

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**11/33/civ Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Stuart and Councillor Ward (Liberal Democrat alternate).

11/34/civ Declarations of Interest

Councillor Rosenstiel declared a personal interest in item 11/43/Civ as a member of the Council of the Electoral Reform Society.

11/35/civ Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 16 May 2011 were approved as a true and accurate record.

11/36/civ Public Questions

There were no public questions.

11/37/civ To approve the content of the Annual Complaints Report 2010-11

The committee received a report on the Annual Complaints Report 2010-11 from the Customer Services Business Manager. The Customer Services Business Manager highlighted the key themes in the report.

An extract of the Standards Committee's draft minutes relating to the Annual Complaints Report from 15th June was tabled.

- i. The meaning of "others" in customer feedback was questioned. The Customer Services Business Manager explained that others related to feedback received via comment cards used in the Customer Services Centre.
- ii. The reduction in the number of complaints received was welcomed, however further explanation was requested on the reasons for the significant reduction in performance against the response time target. The Customer Services Business Manager acknowledged that performance had dropped significantly and outlined the mechanisms in place to improve performance.
- iii. Clarification was requested on whether repeated requests for services were classified as complaints. The Chief Executive explained that usually the first request for service would be treated as a request for service and then only a complaint if the request was not dealt with effectively.
- iv. An explanation was requested on the reported significant reduction in the number of complaints received by telephone and regarding services formerly provided by City Services. The Customer Services Business

Manager explained that all phone calls into the Customer Services Centre were recorded. It was also explained that a number of issues, which had previously been recorded as complaints, were actually requests for services for example a missed bin.

- v. Information was requested on the process for recording complaints received regarding services provided by the County Council. The Customer Services Business Manager advised that the complaints were passed to the County Council and the complainant advised accordingly.
- vi. In response to a question regarding future aspirations, the Chief Executive confirmed that the existing target was still valid. The committee noted that there was a trend towards increasingly complex complaints, which took longer to resolve.

Resolved to

- i. Note the comments received from the Standards Committee
- ii. Approve the Annual Complaints Report 2010-11 for publication on the Council's website.

11/38/civ Review of the effectiveness of the systems of Internal Audit

The committee received a report from the Director of Resources regarding the effectiveness of the systems of internal audit.

Resolved to

- i. Receive and endorse the "Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit 2010/11"

11/39/civ Head of Internal Audit Opinion

The committee received a report regarding the Head of Internal Audit Opinion.

Members of the committee made the following comments regarding the report

- i. In response to the issues raised regarding contract management and associated areas, it was suggested that further training should be extended to officers. The Head of Internal Audit and Director of Resources explained that a training programme had been rolled out to staff, and that work was ongoing to enhance processes and systems to improve performance.
- ii. Clarification was requested on the relationship between the audit plan and IS90001. The Head of Internal Audit explained that IS90001 was a quality audit, and that the audit plan was a much wider audit mechanism.
- iii. The lack of references to efficiency was questioned. The Head of Internal Audit explained that the efficiency of processes and systems was an integral part of the approach in the audit plan.

Resolved to

- i. Receive and endorse the Head of Internal Audit Opinion

11/40/civ Assurance Framework and Draft Annual Governance Statement 2010 / 2011

The committee received a report regarding the "Assurance Framework and Draft Annual Governance Statement 2010/2011" from the Principal Auditor.

Resolved to

- i. Note the arrangements for compiling, reporting on and signing the Annual Governance Statement

11/41/civ 2010-11 Statement of Accounts.

The committee received the 2010-11 Statement of Accounts.

- i. Significant concerns were raised regarding the accessibility of the accounts following the introduction of International Financial Reporting

Standards (IFRS). The Head of Accounting and Support Services noted the concerns. It was also explained that officers had made ongoing representations regarding the issues raised about accessibility.

- ii. An explanation of the implications of not adopting IFRS was requested. The representative of the Audit Commission explained that it was a legal requirement to publish the accounts in accordance with the new Code of Practice (based on IFRS) and that failure to do so would result in a qualified audit opinion.
- iii. Information was requested on the different types and amounts of usable reserves. The Head of Accounting and Support Services advised members that this information was included in the Council's annual Medium Term Strategy.
- iv. The possibility of including more visual information, ratios and comparative information was suggested. The committee were advised that it would have been difficult to include such requirements within the new Code of Practice due to the variety of circumstances of local councils. The committee were advised that the opportunity to present information in a more visual and accessible format would be taken in preparing the Council's Summary Accounts, which are published alongside the statutory accounts on the Council's web site.

Resolved to

- i. Note the contents of the draft Statement of Accounts
- ii. Approve the accounting policies on which the accounts are approved.

11/42/civ Review of the Contract Procedure Rules

The committee received a report from the Strategic Procurement Advisor regarding the review of the contract procedure rules.

In a response to a question from a member of the committee, the Strategic Procurement Advisor confirmed the arrangements for providing feedback to bidders. The committee were advised that feedback would be automatically provided to all bidders for contracts over £75,000 and on request for under £75,000.

Resolved to recommend that Council

- i. Approve the amendments to rule 21 of the Contract Procedure rules as set out in Appendix 1 of the committee report.
- ii. Approve the additional amendments to the Contract Procedure Rules by the substitution of the following references
 - a. Director of Finance becomes Director of Resources
 - b. Head of Legal and Democratic Services becomes Head of Legal Services.

11/43/civ Review of elections held on 5th May

The committee received a report from the Chief Executive regarding the elections held on 5th May 2011.

Members of the committee raised the following issues

- i. Concern about the disenfranchisement of voters in Newnham and Arbury.
- ii. The need to clearly communicate changes to electoral milestones on the website.
- iii. The need to consider the implication of future joint polls, which may result in confusion for members of the public.
- iv. Concerns about the level of micromanagement from the Electoral Commission.
- v. The ongoing need to find a suitable venue in Newnham to replace the portakabin on Grange Road.
- vi. The possibility of considering making more effective use of the space in the Large and Small Hall was suggested, prior to looking at other venues in the city. Concerns were raised about the logistical difficulties, which may be presented with an off-site count.

- vii. In elections where “grass-skirt” counting techniques were being used it was suggested that any single ballots should be counted separately in sorted piles.
- viii. Clarification was requested about the issues raised about the difficulty experienced with the transfer from the electoral register to contact creator.
- ix. The robustness of the project planning was welcomed, but it was agreed that there was a need to ensure that the process was adequately resourced.
- x. Concerns about the temporary “loss” of 20 votes in the Arbury poll count within the structure of the ballot boxes.
- xi. Whether the issues raised in the report had been the result of any cuts in funding.
- xii. Clarification was requested on the number of disenfranchised voters in Arbury who only returned the beige postal vote ballot papers.

The Chief Executive welcomed the feedback and acknowledged the concerns that were raised.

- i. The issues regarding the temporary lost ballot papers in an Arbury ballot box were acknowledge but it was emphasised that this was the first time that the problems had arisen with the collapseable boxes and Presiding Officers would be shown how to construct them in the future. All 20 votes were counted.
- ii. It was acknowledged that local discretion could have been used in the colour for the city ballot papers. The limited number of suitable colours was noted as a potential problem when there was more than one ballot.
- iii. It was acknowledged that the problems in Newnham shouldn't have happened, but that the Presiding Officer concerned had accepted full responsibility for the errors and that the training or processes were not at fault.
- iv. The concerns regarding the micro-management of the Electoral Commission and reduced level of local discretion were acknowledged

and further representations would be made based on the committee's comments.

- v. It was noted that the City Council couldn't compel venues to accommodate a polling station, but that work was ongoing to find a suitable venue in Newnham if the Selwyn Diamond would not be available again.
- vi. The suggestion regarding the procedure for counting single vote papers separate to multiple votes using the "grass skirts" would be considered to see if it was practical.
- vii. It was confirmed that around 54 people who returned the beige postal votes had not subsequently returned lilac postal vote papers. The Chief Executive agreed to provide the exact number outside of the meeting.
- viii. The committee were advised that the level of resources in the elections office was being reviewed, and it was noted that it was likely that a budget bid would be made for additional resources. The positive improvements made as a result of moving the first line of enquiry to the Customer Services Centre were acknowledged.
- ix. It was confirmed that there had been no cuts to the level of resources in the elections team.

The committee made the following additional comments regarding the report.

- i. Clarification was requested on whether there was a pattern to the number of phone calls received and whether this could be used to improve service delivery in future?
- ii. Information was sought on whether the review was being used to inform the planning for future elections.
- iii. The deployment of resources from Member Services was raised as a potential problem, particularly at a busy time for Councillors.
- iv. It was suggested that contact should be made with South Cambridgeshire District Council to see whether any information still existed about their previous use of Kelsey Kerridge Sports Centre for election counts.

- v. Clarification was requested on the nature of the complaint regarding venues in East Chesterton.

The Chief Executive responded to the additional comments raised by the committee.

- i. The committee were assured that she was confident that the changes proposed in the report would improve the process, but that it was impossible to fully design out all potential problems in a project of this size and complexity.
- ii. The comments regarding Member Services support were noted and officers would look at this in planning the additional support taken from Democratic Services for the election.
- iii. The committee were informed that if a potential alternative venue for the count were favoured they would be consulted on the practical implications of this.

Resolved to

- i. Note the proposed actions in the report

11/44/civ Review of Corporate Governance

The Head of Legal Services presented a report on the “Review of Corporate Governance”.

The Head of Legal Services tabled an amendment sheet.

Members of the committee made the following comments

- i. Clarification was requested on the rationale for deleting the reference to minutes in relation to the Independent Remuneration Panel – The Democratic Services Manager advised that the conclusions of the panel were included in its report and no separate minutes were produced.
- ii. It was agreed that the Independent Remuneration Panel would be requested to consider whether it should deliberate in public at all times.

- iii. Clarification was requested about the interrelationship of different Codes and the potential for conflict. The Head of Legal Services acknowledged the concern, and explained that the Code was designed to provide a framework for all governance activities across the organisation.

Resolved to

- i. Note the comments from the Standards Committee
- ii. Agree the Code of Corporate Governance for approval at Full Council on 21st July 2011

The meeting ended at 9.01 pm

CHAIR