

CIVIC AFFAIRS

27 June 2012
7.45 - 9.35 pm

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

Officers Present

Director of Resources – David Horspool
Head of Accounting Services – Julia Minns
Head of Corporate Strategy – Andrew Limb
Head of Customer Services – Jonathan James
Head of Internal Audit – Steve Crabtree
Head of Legal Services – Simon Pugh
Democratic Services Manager – Gary Clift
Information Manager – Anne Melia
Committee Manager – Martin Whelan

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

12/32/civ Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

12/33/civ Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12/34/civ Minutes of previous meeting

Councillor Herbert expressed concern about the process of reporting Civic Affairs Committee adoption minutes to Council, without consultation with opposition spokes. Specific concerns were discussed. It was agreed that draft minutes should be circulated to the Chair and Spokes prior to publication.

The committee approved the minutes of previous meeting.

12/35/civ Public Questions

There were no public questions.

12/36/civ Review of the effectiveness of the systems of Internal Audit

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

The committee made the following comments on the report

- i. The work undertaken by Internal Audit was welcomed.
- ii. Officers were questioned on whether there were further opportunities to share the outcomes of reviews, in order to increase the understanding of the work undertaken by the team. The Director of Resources outlined some specific limitations in expanding the sharing of outcomes, however agreed that further work was required to ensure that where appropriate review outcomes could be easily accessed.
- iii. The Director of Resources was also asked, whether the current structure allowed the Internal Audit function to operate as independently as possible from the management structure where required. The Director of Resources explained that whilst the Head of Internal Audit was line managed by the Director of Resource, they had direct access to the Chief Executive and other senior managers
- iv. The use of the term "Audit Committee" throughout the document was highlighted as potentially confusing. The Director of Resources explained that the document had been produced using a national template, however it was agreed that in future the term Civic Affairs would be used throughout.
- v. Clarification was requested on the likely format for the committee handbook. The Head of Internal Audit explained that document would be 20/25 pages long, and contain information related to the remit of the committee.

Resolved (Unanimously) to

- i. Note the “Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit 2011/12”.

12/37/civ Head of Internal Audit Opinion

The committee received the Head of Internal Audit Opinion.

The committee made the following comments on the report

- i. The Head of Internal Audit was asked whether there were any similarities with the profile of work undertaken at Peterborough City Council. The committee were advised that, as Peterborough was a unitary authority, a significant proportion of the Internal Audit work was focussed on Children’s Services, Schools and Adult Social Care.
- ii. Clarification was requested on whether the issues related to leaseholder service charges had been resolved. The committee were advised that the issues had been identified, resolved and reported back to Housing Management Board.
- iii. Members questioned, why no significant issues had been identified with the Brandon Court items, despite the significant delays. The Head of Internal Audit noted the comment.
- iv. The Head of Internal Audit was asked to provide an explanation for the apparent high level of non or limited assurance reports, and whether the audit plan completion target was set too high. The Head of Internal Audit explained that the plan focussed on areas of highest risk, and areas where concerns had been raised. The committee were also advised that the 95% completion target was appropriate and was based on no other priorities developing during the year

Resolved (Unanimously) to

- i. Note the Head of Internal Audit: Annual Audit Opinion 2011/12.

12/38/civ Assurance Framework and Draft Annual Governance Statement 2011/12

The committee received a report from the Head of Corporate Strategy regarding the Assurance Framework and Draft Annual Governance Statement 2011/12.

Resolved (Unanimously)

- i. Noted the Assurance Framework and Draft Annual Governance Statement 2011/12

12/39/civ Code of Corporate Governance

The committee received a report from the Head of Legal Services.

Resolved (Unanimously) to recommend

- i. That the Council approves the Code of Corporate Governance at Full Council on 19th July.

12/40/civ Statement of Accounts 2011-12

The committee received the Statement of Accounts 2011/12 from the Head of Accounting Services.

The committee made the following comments on the Statement of Accounts.

- i. A request was made for a copy of the Statement of Accounts summary document to be circulated with the draft accounts. The Head of Accounting Services explained that the summary document was produced later in the process and would be made available to all councillors.
- ii. Clarification was requested on the inclusion of heritage assets. The committee were advised that the CIPFA Code of Practice required the inclusion of heritage assets.

- iii. In response to a question from the committee, the Head of Accounting Services outlined the key changes to accounting policies, which had been used in the development of the Statement of Accounts.
- iv. A briefing was suggested for members to further understand the Statement of Accounts.
- v. Clarification was requested regarding the process by which Ernst and Young had been appointed the Council's external auditors. The Director of Resources explained that the district audit function of the Audit Commission was due to cease imminently, and that as an interim step prior to Councils having the ability to appoint their own auditors, regional lots had been let for district auditor elements of the Audit Commission's work.

Resolved (Unanimously) to

- i. Note the draft statement of accounts and approve the accounting policies on which they are prepared.

12/41/civ Cambridgeshire Information Sharing Framework

The committee received a report from the Information Manager, regarding the Cambridgeshire Information Sharing Framework.

Some members expressed unease about the principle of sharing, but acknowledged that the Council was not able to alter the protocol without the agreement of other partners. It was agreed that there should be an easy and clear process to allow people to opt out of having their data shared. The Information Manager explained that each sharing activity would be subject to a more detailed framework, which would provide these safeguards.

Concerns were raised regarding the narrow definition of sensitive personal information. It was noted that the definition was the statutory definition.

It was agreed that training was very important, and following discussion it was agreed that the training materials would be circulated to members of the committee, and included on a future Civic Affairs agenda if members wished following circulation of the materials.

It was requested that the language on page 249 should be gender neutral.

Resolved (Unanimously)

- i. To approve the Cambridgeshire Information Sharing Framework.
- ii. That training materials are circulated to all members of the committee, and consideration is given to the training materials being discussed at a future meeting.

12/42/civ Annual Complaints Report 2012

The committee received a report from the Head of Customer Services regarding the Annual Complaints Report 2012. The Head of Customer Services highlighted a minor correction regarding information supplied by the Local Government Ombudsman.

The committee welcomed the improved performance. Questions were asked regarding the following issues

- i. Clarification was requested on the reference to 35% decrease in complaints, and its likely cause being greater use of email. The Head of Customer Services advised that the definitions had not changed, but that as emails were generally more succinct it was often easier to pick out complaints.
- ii. Further information was requested on whether the complaints target, referred to the initial holding response or conclusion of the issue. The Head of Customer Services confirmed that the target related to conclusion of the issue.

Resolved (Unanimously) to approve the Annual Complaints Report 2011/12 for publication on the Council's website.

12/43/civ Review of Local Elections held on 3rd May 2012

The committee received a report from the Democratic Services Manager regarding the local elections held on 3 May 2012.

The following comments were made on the report

- i. The smooth running of the election was welcomed. Information was requested on the plans for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections. The Democratic Services Manager explained that limited information was currently available, but advised that Councillors would be briefed at appropriate times.
- ii. Clarification was requested on whether it was possible (and legal) to inform voters where their postal vote had been rejected. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to explore whether this would be legal and explore the practicalities of doing so.
- iii. Further information was requested on the circumstances, which lead to the publication of the Mill Road Bridges magazine in the pre-election period. The Democratic Services Manager advised that the complaint was being investigated by the Head of Community Development.
- iv. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to investigate whether the Council had any discretion to alter the postal ballot return form, to require that the month be written in words to avoid confusion between days and months.
- v. The inclusion of maps on polling cards was welcomed.
- vi. Members of the committee expressed significant concerns about the implications of the timing of the Police and Crime Commissioner election in November.

Resolved to

- i. Note the review of the local elections held on 3rd May 2012.

12/44/civ The matter of prayers at the commencement of the Council meetings

The committee received an update on the matter of prayers at the commencement of the Council meetings.

The former Mayor (former Cllr Nimmo-Smith) was thanked for the manner in which he handled the meeting regarding prayers at the start of the Council meetings.

Members of the committee made the following comments on the issue

- i. The possibility of formally removing the option for formal prayers was suggested. Members expressed concern that this approach could also be seen as discriminatory.
- ii. It was noted that it had been suggested that the existing practice couldn't be described as prayers. It was also noted that there was nothing precluding a Mayor having more than one Chaplain.

The committee agreed that the Mayor be advised by the Democratic Services Manager that the "calling to prayer" at Council meetings should be discouraged. In place there should be the opportunity for her Chaplain to express his "thought for the day" and for members to then have a moment of silent reflection. The guidance for future Mayor's would be made clearer on this matter and before being included would be shared with the Committee for its comments.

12/45/civ Committee Dates 2012/13

The committee received a report from the Democratic Services Manager regarding some issues raised by councillors and the public with committee dates 2012/13.

The committee made the following comments

- i. The improved scheduling to allow members to attend the Local Government Association conference was welcomed.
- ii. The need to maintain a range of days and times for committees, to allow members with different commitments to take a full part in the democratic process was agreed, however it was suggested that committees should retain the flexibility to make minor adjustments to start times.

- iii. It was agreed that it would not be appropriate for Joint Development Control Committee to meet in May 2013 prior to the County Council AGM.
- iv. It was suggested that officers should make recommendations to the relevant members on area committee scheduling.

Resolved to

- i. To request that Joint Development Control Committee is re-scheduled so that it is not scheduled to meet between the County Council Elections and the County Council AGM.
- ii. Request that officers review the existing Area Committee clashes and that they make suggestions to the relevant Area Committees.
- iii. Leave Licensing Sub-Committee and Civic Affairs as scheduled for May 2013.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

CHAIR

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