

FINANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 12 November 2013 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Barrott (Chair): Councillors MacKay, Mrs Mellor, Pittarello, Rhead, Mrs Syson, Weed and Williams.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Hammon (Portfolio Holder for Development Services) and Councillor Mobbs (Portfolio Holder for Finance).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs Sawdon.

88. **SUBSTITUTES**

There were no substitutes.

89. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

90. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2013 were taken as a correct record, subject to three amendments:

- the penultimate paragraph of minute 76 should conclude "in order to give Councillors confidence";
- minute 78, paragraph 4 be amended to read "the Police had asked the Council to deal with this internally"; and
- minute 81, paragraph 4 should conclude "A Member offered to pass some information on risk appetites to the Audit and Risk Manager".

It was confirmed that the risk appetites information had since been given to the Audit and Risk Manager.

The Chair updated the Committee on the outcome of the investigation into Members' travel claims. He confirmed that the Councillor in question had met with the Chief Executive on 18 October, that the Councillor's solicitor had given an explanation and that a summary of decisions had been produced, which the Chair read to the Committee. The Code of Conduct complaint had subsequently been withdrawn.

(Councillor MacKay joined the meeting during the course of this item)

91. **DEVELOPMENT SERVICES RISK REGISTER PRESENTATION**

The Committee received a report from Finance which set out the process for review by the Committee of the Development Services Risk Register.

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The Portfolio Holder for Development Services presented the register, stating that historically it had not been kept up to date but that he now reviewed it regularly with the Head of Development Services.

The top three risks in the Planning Department were the Local Plan, Building Control and Planning, the latter being in terms of managing applications, ensuring permissions were granted on time and so on. With regard to Building Control, the joint venture with Coventry City Council was itself a risk, but was considered to be a risk worth taking in order to modernise and remain competitive.

Members felt that the highest risks needed setting out clearly in the register, and suggested that a greater level of detail could be included in respect of actions.

The Portfolio Holder and Head of Development Services responded to questions relating to mitigating actions, staffing levels, succession planning, forward fund infrastructure, and training and other needs of staff members.

In addition to staff training, the Committee touched on whether training was required for members of the Planning Committee, and then went on to discuss the facilities available at Planning Committee meetings, which some Members felt were inadequate. Attention was drawn in particular to IT, which had failed twice at recent meetings, but also to the loudspeaker system and room layout.

The Audit and Risk Manager reminded the Committee that staff shortages and the loss of key personnel was listed in the register as a possible risk, not as an issue which the service was facing currently.

The Head of Development Services reported that monitoring of Section 106 agreements had commenced but that the officer doing this work had since been appointed to another post outside of the Service. A replacement was currently being sought and, once in place, would pick up this work as a matter of urgency.

Responding to a question relating to items in the register marked as having a 'high likelihood of very high impact', officers talked about management of minor jobs which could quickly become major ones and offered to circulate to the Committee an example of a dilapidation survey, in order to give Members greater confidence.

The Portfolio Holder, Head of department and officers were thanked for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the report be noted and its contents accepted;
and
- (2) the risk register include the top three risks facing the service and in future the covering report identify and describe these risks.

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(Councillor Mobbs joined the meeting during the course of this item)
(Councillor Hammon left the meeting at the conclusion of this item)

92. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

The Committee received a report from the Head of Finance which presented and commented on the Council's Annual Audit letter, attached as an appendix to the report. The letter was the Council's external auditor assessment of the Council, drawing on audit, inspection and performance assessment work. It had been prepared by the Council's external auditor, Grant Thornton.

Mr Gregory attended the meeting on behalf of Grant Thornton, to present the letter and respond to questions. He pointed out that auditing standards now required Grant Thornton to report to the Committee both before an auditor's opinion was given and afterwards. Mr Gregory also drew attention to a new section within the report entitled "key areas for Council attention".

As previously reported to the Committee on 25 September, an objection to the accounts had been received in relation to HS2 expenditure, which the auditor was duty bound to investigate prior to certification. Mr Gregory reported that this investigation was progressing well and that he was confident that the accounts would be closed by Christmas. He estimated that the fee for work relating to the objection should not exceed £10,000 and he hoped that it would not be more than £5,000. With regard to the outstanding certification of a Housing Benefits claim, Mr Gregory confirmed that this was on target to be completed by the end of November.

Mr Gregory was thanked for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Annual Audit letter and covering report be noted, and that any further information required from either officers or the Council's auditors be agreed.

93. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 November 2013.

Item 4 – Council Tax Reduction

The Committee noted that all of the recommended changes had been taken account of in the Council's budget, and supported the recommendations in the report.

94. PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item, by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information

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within paragraphs 1, 3 and 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

The full text of Minute 95 is recorded in a confidential minute which was to be considered for publication following implementation of the relevant decisions. However, a summary is as follows:

95. URGENT ITEM – NEWBOLD COMYN GOLF COURSE

The Committee considered an urgent item which was a report from the Head of Cultural Services outlining the current situation relating to the operation of Newbold Comyn Golf Course and detailing recent vandalism.

The report was noted and it was agreed that a meeting be arranged with the operators of the Golf Course, in order to offer support.

96. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 November 2013.

Item 13 – Working with Bowls England - Update

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report, but noted that although the Championships presented an opportunity to promote the District as a whole, references to Warwick and Kenilworth were lacking.

The Committee also highlighted the point that car parking had been a major concern for Bowls England when the championships were held in Worthing and that Bowls England did not favour park and ride.

97. PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item, by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraphs 1, 3 and 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

The full text of Minute 98 is recorded in a confidential minute which was to be considered for publication following implementation of the relevant decisions. However, a summary is as follows:

98. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 November 2013.

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Item 19 – Tree Preservation Order Insurance Claims

The Committee passed comment on and supported the recommendations in the report.

99. **EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)**

The Committee considered the following non-confidential items which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 November 2013.

Item 8 – Coventry & Warwickshire City Deal

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report as amended in the addendum, but requested clarification of the Council's expected long term financial commitment, which was unclear.

Item 9 – Budget Review to 30 September 2013

The Committee noted savings still to be achieved within 2013-14, detailed in Appendix F, sought reassurance those targets would be reached and supported the recommendations in the report.

Item 12 – Access to Kingfisher Pools, Warwick

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Item 14 – Auto Enrolment – Pension Scheme

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

Item 15 – Sustainability Officer

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report. Members requested further details of what this post had achieved to date.

100. **COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE**

A report from Civic and Committee Services summarised the Executive's response to comments which the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee gave on reports submitted to the Executive on 9 October 2013.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

101. **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the latest published version of the Forward Plan.

One of the five main roles of overview and scrutiny in local government was to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of Executive decisions. If the Committee had an interest in a future decision to be made by the Executive it was within the Committee's remit to feed into the process.

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The Forward Plan detailed the future work programme for the Executive. If a non-Executive Member highlighted a decision which was to be taken by the Executive which they would like to be involved in, Members could then provide useful background to the Committee when the report was submitted to the Executive and they were passing comment on it.

RESOLVED that, at present, there were no forthcoming Executive decisions which Members wished to have an input into before the Executive make their decision.

102. REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

A report from Civic and Committee Services detailed the Committee's work programme for 2013/14.

RESOLVED that the work programme for 2013/14 be noted.

103. PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items, by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraphs 1, 3 and 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

The full text of Minutes 104 and 105 are recorded in a confidential minute which was to be considered for publication following implementation of the relevant decisions. However, a summary is as follows:

104. MINUTES (CONFIDENTIAL)

The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

105. COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE – APPENDIX 2 (CONFIDENTIAL)

A report from Civic and Committee Services summarised the Executive's response to comments which the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee gave on reports submitted to the Executive on 9 October 2013.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 8.45 pm)