

Corporate Governance Committee – 16 March 2009

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Beaven, Denington, Govier, Horsley, Paul,
Mrs Smith, A Wedderkopp and Mrs Whitmarsh

Officers: Ms S Adam (Strategic Director)
Mrs G Croucher (Democratic Services Officer)
Mr C Gunn (Group Auditor, South West Audit Partnership)
Mrs T Meers (Legal and Democratic Services Manager)
Mr D Woodbury (Health and Safety Advisor)

Also Present: Mrs A Elder (Chairman, Standards Committee), Mr T Bowditch (Audit Commission) and Mr P Weaver

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

1. Apologies/Substitution

Apologies: Councillor Henley (Vice-Chairman) and Councillor Critchard.

Substitution: Councillor Horsley for Councillor Henley

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2008 were taken as read and were signed.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Govier and Paul declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council and Councillor Denington declared a personal interest as a Board member of the South West Audit Partnership

4. Standards Committee Annual Report 2008

Mrs Anne Elder, Chairman of the Standards Committee, presented the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2008.

The Committee had been in operation since 2000 and membership was made up of a majority of independent members who were not connected with the Council, together with three Parish Council representatives and one Councillor each from the political groups on the Council. There was a requirement for the Chairman to be chosen from the independent members.

A number of membership changes had taken place in the last year. The Chairman of the Committee since 2000, Mr David Baker, had decided to step down and his contribution to the work of the Standards Committee was acknowledged. Following the introduction of the new Local Standards

Framework, a third Parish Council representative had also been appointed and the vacancies for independent members had been filled.

New regulations in May 2008 introduced a locally managed framework of compliance with the Code of Conduct. Local Standards Committees were now responsible for making initial assessments of allegations of misconduct and the sanctions, if any, to be imposed. The Standards Board for England would provide support, supervision and guidance and aimed to ensure a degree of consistency.

Since the introduction of the Local Assessment Scheme four complaints had been received and considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee. Three of the complaints had been referred for investigation and it had been decided not to proceed with the fourth.

The Standards Committee was responsible for:-

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by the Members and co-opted Members of the Authority;
- Assisting Members to observe the Code of Conduct;
- Advising on the adoption of a Code of Conduct;
- Monitoring its operation;
- Advising, training or arranging to train Members on matters relating to the code;
- Assessing and reviewing complaints about Members;
- Conducting Determination Hearings;
- Granting dispensations to Members with prejudicial interests; and
- Granting exemptions for politically restricted posts.

Mrs Elder gave a review of the past year that included:-

The strengthening of links with Parish Councils;

Members of the Committee had been represented at the Annual Assembly of Standards Committee, the South West Independent Members Group and the annual Standards Board for England Conference;

The continued sharing of good practices with colleagues;

Most Councillors continued to recognise the benefits of high ethical standards and the level of advice sought on ethics and probity was reassuring and

Successful training sessions had taken place on the new Code of Conduct and further training would be available.

In the forthcoming year it was hoped to introduce performance indicators and targets in order to monitor the work of the Committee. It was also hoped that the Committee's profile could be raised.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Elder for her very informative report.

Resolved that the report be noted.

5. Risk Management Update

Pete Weaver briefed Members on strategic risk management and provided an update on the improvement work underway. This included:-

- The Risk Management Strategy was currently being refreshed. Members discussed the content and objectives of the new Strategy. A redraft of the Strategy would be presented at the next meeting;
- The Corporate Strategic Risk Register was also being refreshed and Members were updated on the key risks facing the Council. They were also advised that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) was currently drafting action plans for each of these. Members were keen that risk management was seen as part of "the day job" and not something "additional";
- Members requested that our process/format was reviewed to align with those of our key partners. They were assured that this had been taken into account;
- Members asked to ensure that Health and Safety was linked to the Corporate Risk Register. It was confirmed that this was in hand; and
- Members asked that CMT focus attention on the things they can influence.

6. Changes to the Constitution

The Constitutional Sub-Committee had recently reviewed the Powers and Procedure Rules for Overview and Scrutiny and the recommendations were presented to Members by the Legal and Democratic Services Manager, Mrs Tonya Meers.

Members discussed the recommended amendments and agreed changes proposed by the Sub-Committee.

Resolved that Council be recommended to agree the proposed amendments to the Powers and Procedure Rules for Overview and Scrutiny.

7. Review of the Internal Audit Charter

Considered report previously circulated, setting out the terms of reference of the Internal Audit Charter. The Charter governed the work of the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) at Taunton Deane Borough Council.

Details of the Internal Audit Charter were submitted for consideration and review by Members.

Resolved that the Internal Audit Charter be adopted.

8. Internal Audit Plan 2009/2010

Submitted for consideration the Internal Audit Plan 2009/2010.

The Plan had been drawn up to reflect the wide range of work undertaken by the Internal Audit Section and comprised four main areas of activity:- Operational Reviews; Governance, Fraud and Corruption; Key Control Audits and Other Audit Activity.

Details of the reviews planned for 2009/2010 were submitted for consideration by Members.

Resolved that the Internal Audit Plan for 2009/2010 be agreed.

9. Internal Audit Plan – Progress Review

Considered report previously circulated, which provided an update on the significant findings and recommendations for the period January to March 2009.

Details were also reported of the operational audits completed since December 2008 which included the main issues raised and the management responses.

Members felt that further assurances were needed and it was agreed to invite the Economic Development Manager and the Chief Housing Officer to the next meeting of the Committee.

Details of the managed audits currently underway were provided, together with details of the audits to be finalised before the end of the financial year.

Resolved that the report be noted.

10. Health and Safety Monitoring Report

Mr David Woodbury, the Health and Safety Advisor updated Members on the Health and Safety Forward Plan.

Details of the progress made on priority issues was provided.

Resolved that the current position be noted.

11. Forward List of Agenda Items

The proposed Forward Programme for the Corporate Governance Committee was circulated for information.

Resolved that the Forward Programme be noted.

(The meeting ended at 8 p.m.)