

Corporate Governance Committee – 9 November 2005

Present: Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris (Vice-Chairman) (In the Chair)
Councillors Beavan, Denington, Hall, Mrs Jones, Meikle, Prior-Sankey,
Wedderkopp and Mrs Whitmarsh.

Officers: Ms S Adam (Strategic Director), Mr P Weaver (Head of Environment
and Leisure), Mr C Gunn (Internal Audit Manager), Mr D Woodbury
(Health and Safety Advisor), Mrs G Croucher (Review Support Officer).

Also Present: Mr D Baker (Chairman, Standards Committee).

(The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm.)

22. Apologies/Substitution

Apologies: The Chairman (Councillors Williams) and Councillors Lisgo and
Mrs Smith.

Substitution: Councillor Mrs Jones for Councillor Mrs Smith.

23. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2005, were taken as read and
were signed.

24. Standards Committee – Annual Report 2004/05

Mr David Baker, Chairman of the Standards Committee, presented the Annual
Report of the Standards Committee for 2004/05. The Committee had been in
operation since 2000. Membership was made up of a majority of independent
members who were not connected with the Council, together with two parish
council representatives and one councillor from each of the political groups
represented on the Council.

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; and
- Advising, training or arranging to train Members on matters relating to the
code.

Training sessions on ethics and probity had been organised for all Taunton Deane and Parish Councillors. These had been well attended and would be incorporated in the induction training for new councillors in the future. The political group leaders of the Council had been asked to emphasise the importance of ethics and probity to their Members, and one further training session would be made available for those few Members who had not yet attended one of the sessions. Noted that refresher training would be included in the 2005/06 Member Training Programme.

Members of the Standards Committee had also received training on how to deal with Local Determinations and had been represented at the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

The Standards Committee had met on four occasions during the past year. The areas that had been discussed were:-

- Training;
- Consultation papers from both the Government and the Standards Board for England;
- Feedback from forums and meetings;
- Parish Councils and the Code;
- The future of the ethical agenda and the role of the Standards Board for England;
- A review of the existing Code of Conduct.

The Committee had responded to consultation papers from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Standards Board for England on Local Determination Regulations and Local Investigations – Draft Guidance for Monitoring Officers.

The Code of Conduct had been reviewed by the Standards Board for England and all Standards Committees had been invited to consider the Board's consultation paper. The Committee felt that the main issues had not been addressed. It was emphasised that most cases needed to be dealt with locally. In addition, the Committee felt that the process did not need to be as prescriptive and legalistic and a reserve power should be introduced giving the Standards Board the ability to call in cases within a particular time period.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life had produced a report which looked at the ethical agenda and the role of the Standards Board for England. The Standards Committee agreed with the views of this report and had submitted them to the Standards Board for England with copies to the ODPM, the Local Government Association and the National Association of Local Councils.

Mr Baker reported that in the future the Standards Committee intended to continue to provide training for Borough and Parish Councillors. It would continue to press for the local determination of cases with all but the most

serious to be dealt with by local Standards Committees rather than centrally by the Standards Board for England.

Further support would be offered to Parish Councils. Guidance on the appointment of Members would also be looked at shortly. The need for the Standards Committee to be open and transparent was recognised with meetings being more formally timetabled and advertised fully.

Mr Baker said the term of office for both Chairman and Committee Members was two terms with a new Chairman being elected every year. However, difficulties had been experienced in recruiting members of the public. It had therefore been agreed to approach the Somerset Influence Panel for help with recruitment.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

25. Strategic Risk Management

Considered report previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the following issues:-

- The work that had been carried out to manage Strategic Risk throughout the Authority;
- The work that had been carried out on Project Risk Management; and
- The action plan for future work.

The management of risk was an important element of good management in local authorities for the following reasons:-

- It minimised the chance of unplanned and unforeseen problems occurring;
- It identified opportunities that might fall within our appetite for risk;
- It ensured that as an organisation we remained insurable; and
- It was recognised as an essential element of good management by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

It was reported that there were two types of risk:-

- Direct threats (damaging events) which could lead to a failure to achieve objectives; and
- Opportunities (constructive events) which if exploited could offer an improved way of achieving objectives, but which were surrounded by threats

Risk in management terms was the likelihood that a business threat to the organisation actually occurred or that opportunities would be lost.

Risk Management provided a framework that enabled Taunton Deane to identify, assess, manage, monitor and report risks in a way that would enable the Council to minimise losses and maximise opportunities.

A Risk Management Strategy had been produced which set out the Council's approach to Risk Management, together with a sharepoint intranet site to form a comprehensive database of risk management activity and information.

A Corporate Risk Register monitored by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had been produced. This had been updated and the existing Directorate register had been regrouped in "Heads" groupings. This allowed Heads to take responsibility for managing the risks within their area. The Risk registers could now be incorporated into the Heads Service Plans and formed part of the performance monitoring system. The process could then be cascaded down to service level with appropriate support from the Risk Management Team (RMT) as necessary.

All major projects would now be subject to the Risk Management process with the appropriate project leader taking responsibility for the project risk register. Smaller projects would be assessed if requested by the project leader or CMT.

The proposed actions would be as follows:-

ACTION	TARGET DATE	RESP
Allocate new risk management trainees to service areas to facilitate deployment of Risk Management to service level	Oct 05	RMT
Update CMT Risk Register	Dec 05	CMT
Update Heads of Service Registers on annual basis (for inclusion in Heads Plans)	Nov 05	Heads
Completion of Risk Assessment Exercises At Service Level (for inclusion in Operational Plans)	Dec 05	SUMs
Update Risk Management Strategy	Apr 06	Pete Weaver
Populate Sharepoint site and keep up to date	Apr 06	Chris Gunn
Ensure list of projects undergo risk assessment	On going	Brendan Cleere
Report to Corporate Governance Committee at 6 monthly frequency	May 06	Pete Weaver

It was agreed that the Group Auditor would give a demonstration using Sharepoint to explain Risk Management to Members of the Committee at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

26. Health and Safety Management (HSM) System Briefing Note

Considered report previously circulated, which outlined progress on the development and introduction of a Health and Safety Management System (HSM System).

The HSM System would provide clarity, direction and understanding on the safety roles and responsibilities of all employees. It would ensure legal compliance and safe delivery of services. When fully implemented, the HSM System would provide visible coherence and integration throughout. It would combine the “hard” (information and systems) with the “soft” (cultural and leadership) issues and would make a strong contribution to the operating culture and well-being of the Council.

The Corporate Health and Safety Advisor had a key support role in:-

- Providing health and safety advice across all aspects of the Council's activities;
- Auditing and reviewing health and safety performance across all service units;
- Promoting opportunities to develop a positive safety culture;
- Developing effective Health and Safety Management System, policies and procedures;
- Evaluating risk and advising on impending legislation;
- Promoting consultation and health and safety partnerships;
- Supporting the drive for continuous improvement.

The HSM System would be phased in over a period of three years, which would link into other opportunities to maintain steady progress and an increased awareness of health and safety within the Council's operations.

There was good health and safety practice within the Council, although some gaps did exist which would need significant improvement. The programme of team workshops to support the Health and Safety Executive Project and the introduction of the Management Standards on Work Related Stress and the IT “Sharepoint” programme were now available to speed up the successful introduction of the HSM System.

By April 2006 the workforce should be equipped to accept and manage their health and safety responsibilities. The final part of the implementation process would be developing the role of the Council's Executive.

RESOLVED that:- (1) the report be noted; and (2) the Executive be recommended to note the actions planned and be requested to continue to support this initiative.

27. Internal Audit Services – Progress Report

Considered report previously circulated, which provided Members with an update on the progress made on audit recommendations from 2004/2005. The report also provided information on the activities of the Internal Audit team for the period July 2005 to November 2005.

During 2004/2005 31 audit reviews had been completed, resulting in 269 recommendations. Of these recommendations 101 did not need to be followed up as they related to the last leisure centre audits.

70 of the 88 recommendations made during 2004/2005 that had been retested so far had been implemented. The remaining 18 were either no longer appropriate or had been re-reported during the 2005/2006 audits.

Future reports by the Internal Audit team would now include a breakdown for each audit undertaken and performance would be monitored to ensure that recommendations were implemented.

Submitted for information a list of the audits completed from July to November 2005.

Further reported that the Internal Audit Team was currently operating with a full-time vacancy due to a recent promotion. Although the previously reported secondment had ended, until the current vacancy was filled, it was unlikely the 2005/2006 Audit Plan would be achieved.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and a further report made to the next meeting.

(The meeting ended at 5.48 p.m.).