

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 17th April, 2012 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room, Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Turner (Chairman)
Councillor Chambers (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Barker
Councillor Flower
Councillor Illmann-Walker (substitute for Councillor Hussain)
Mr. A. Green (Independent Member)

940/12

Vote of thanks

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman requested that the Committee's thanks be recorded in the minutes for all the good work achieved over the past year by officers and colleagues from Grant Thornton.

941/12

Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hussain, Murray and Robertson.

942/12

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th March, 2012 were submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th March, 2012, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

943/12

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

944/12 **Deputations and Petitions**

There were no deputations submitted or petitions received.

945/12 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items for discussion in the private session.

946/12 **Notification of any issues of importance for consideration at a future meeting**

No issues of importance for consideration at a future meeting were reported.

947/12 **Review of the effectiveness of the Audit Committee**

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

James Walsh, Chief Finance Officer, presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

A discussion took place in relation to a suggestion by Mr. Green that it might be useful for the Committee to receive and monitor this review on an annual basis.

The Committee having concluded the debate on the issue decided that it would be useful for the Committee to receive this review on an annual basis and that a future Audit Committee be recommended to determine an appropriate format.

Councillor Chambers also sought assurance that the one outstanding action would be implemented in the timescale identified within the report. Mr. Walsh reported that the action would indeed be implemented within the prescribed timescale.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress on the outstanding actions within the agreed Action Plan be noted;
- (2) That the review of the effectiveness of the Audit Committee be timetabled into the Committee's work programme on an annual basis and that a future Audit Committee be recommended to determine an appropriate format.

948/12

Future of local public audit

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

James Walsh, Chief Finance Officer, presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

The Committee held a general discussion on the proposals and requested that any further developments be reported to the Committee. Mr. Walsh advised that officers would actively be keeping a watching brief on any future developments and would report back to the Committee as appropriate.

Mr. Green questioned the length of the contract for which Grant Thornton had been Walsall's external auditors and the potential implications that may have on the independence of the relationship. Jon Roberts (Grant Thornton) clarified that Grant Thornton were now in their fifth year as Walsall's external auditors and explained the measures in place to ensure that suitable independence was in place for the remaining term of their contract.

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

949/12

Scrutiny of Council payments over £500 payments list

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

James Walsh, Chief Finance Officer, presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

Rebecca Neill (Head of Internal Audit) posed the question whether it was considered a valuable use of officer and committee time to continue considering this report when assurances on the council's expenditure are delivered by other means, namely the internal audit work plan and external audit's work; and taking into account the downward trend in interest in this item.

Councillor Illmann-Walker advised that the statistical information he had received in relation to this matter was different to the information contained within the report. Ms. Neill advised that she had obtained the information from the Open Data Team.

Councillor Flower commented that, given the situation with this report and its downward trend in interest, he was happy for the report to be taken out of the work programme for future years.

Following further discussions on this matter it was,

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) That this report no longer be required to routinely form part of the Committee's work programme.

950/12

Amendments to officer delegations under Part 3.5 of the Council's Constitution

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

John Garner, Democratic Services Manager, presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

Councillor Illmann-Walker sought clarification over the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA), delegation 29 which was reserved to the Head of Internal Audit. Rebecca Neill (Head of Internal Audit) provided clarification and advised that the Audit Committee receive regular updates on any action carried out under RIPA from Mr. Jamie Morris who was the senior responsible officer for RIPA. Councillor Chambers suggested that the Clerk could copy the last few previous RIPA reports that came to the Committee and pass them onto Councillor Illmann-Walker for his information.

Councillor Chambers then sought clarification on the various dates contained at the bottom of the majority of pages within the delegations document. Mr. Garner advised that these dates were a simple tracking method to show when amendments to the delegations had been approved by Council.

Councillor Illmann-Walker advised that he was fairly confident that the Borough still had public conveniences in Willenhall and asked if the deletion of delegation 17.16 could be investigated. Mr. Garner advised that he had been informed that the Borough no longer had any public conveniences but would investigate the matter and advise Members of the outcome.

There then followed a period of general discussion and questions on the matter following which it was,

Resolved

- (1) That in relation to the proposed deletion of 17.16 under the Executive Director, Regeneration Services delegations, it be investigated to ascertain if the Borough still had any public conveniences and review the situation with this delegation in light of the outcome of that investigation;
- (2) That the report be circulated to the Group Leaders and Independent Member for information.

951/12

No or Limited Assurance Internal Audit reports

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Rebecca Neill (Head of Internal Audit) presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein.

Mr. Green suggested that the summary report included the financial value and risk to the organisation of the audit reports under review. This would, in his view, make selection of reports easier. Rebecca Neill stated that she would take on board Mr. Green's comments and would consider the format and report content for future reports.

Following lengthy deliberations on this matter it was,

Resolved

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) That the newly constituted Audit Committee for the Municipal Year 2012/13 be recommended to consider all seven Limited Assurance reports with priority being given to the following reports for consideration at a special meeting of the Committee:-
 - Partnership frameworks;
 - Coroner;
 - Charging policies and application (fairer charging and extra care).

Termination of meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.12 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: