

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Thursday 28 April 2005 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor David Turner (Chairman)
Councillor Rose Martin (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Keith Chambers
Councillor Desmond Pitt
Councillor Ian Robertson
Councillor Mrs. Doreen Shires

179/05 Apology

An apology for non-attendance at the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Griffiths.

An apology for lateness was submitted on behalf of Councillor Robertson.

180/05 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2005, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

181/05 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

182/05 Deputations and Petitions

No deputations were received or petitions submitted.

183/05 Late items to be introduced by the Chairman

There were no late items to be introduced by the Chairman.

184/05 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985**

Resolved

That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items set out in the private part of the agenda for the reasons set out therein and by reason of Section 100A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

Non-Executive Functions

185/05 **Annual Audit Letter 2003/04 - Progress Report**

A report was submitted:

(see annexed)

Referring to the report, Andy Burns indicated that the traffic light system had been used to categorise performance as in previous years. Of the 6 actions reported, 5 were green and one was amber. The amber light related to achievement of performance targets which had not all been hit. He added that the Council was getting better at achieving its targets and positive progress was being made.

Resolved

That the progress against identified key issues be noted and further progress updates be received throughout the next audit year.

186/05 **Audit Progress Report**

A report of the District Auditor was submitted:

(see annexed)

Brian Warwick drew attention to the main points contained in the report.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

187/05 **Community Associations and Delegated Budgets**

A report of the District Auditor was submitted:

(see annexed)

Brian Warwick reported that audit should not be considering the Council's policy on community associations, but rather the processes that were in place to achieve results and monitor how good the service provided was. Referring to the main conclusions contained in the report, Brian Warwick reported that the Council was now clear about what it wanted to achieve with its youth service. The funding formula and service delivery model were still to be decided.

Referring to the allocation of funding, Brian Warwick reported that this was not as robust as it should be and that service level agreements were weak. However, the Council was aware of this and was already taking action to remedy the situation.

With regard to monitoring and control arrangements, Brian Warwick reported that audit arrangements for community associations were in place, but the Council was not maintaining an up to date and complete record of key community association documents.

Councillor Robertson referred to the illness of the Quality Assurance Officer and asked if this exacerbated the problem. Brian Warwick replied that a lot of activity was going on now to improve processes and systems would be more robust in future.

Councillor Turner referred to page 8 of the report and the variation in costs per unit for community associations. He requested that a report be prepared for a future meeting of the Committee to explain these variations.

Brian Warwick undertook to liaise with Andy Burns as to the best way to obtain the information requested, but indicated that he would report on 2004/5 rather than 2003/4 as contained in the report.

Councillor Robertson commented that quality provision was a key factor in the provision of youth services. He felt that the fees charged should reflect the degree of deprivation in the area concerned.

Councillor Turner indicated that he hoped for a level playing field for all community associations. If fixed costs were higher for some than others, then this should be investigated.

Councillor Robertson suggested that comparison of community associations which stood alone as contrasted with those that were linked to schools might provide useful information. Brian Warwick indicated that cost and quality would be looked at. If the variations in unit costs were legitimate, then the report would explain this.

After further discussion, it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted;

- (2) That a report on unit cost variations between community associations be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

188/05 Community Associations and Delegated Budgets - Action Plan

A report of the District Auditor was submitted:

(see annexed)

Brian Warwick reported that officers were working hard to ensure that the action plan was adhered to and he was pleased with the progress which had been made.

Referring to recommendation R1 regarding professional qualifications for youth workers, Councillor Robertson commented that smaller organisations would struggle to comply. He was concerned that the well-meaning volunteer should not be excluded because of qualification requirements. Brian Warwick replied that service level agreements would be tailored to the needs of individual community associations.

Andy Burns suggested that a further report could be submitted to the Committee in approximately 6 months time to enable progress to be maintained.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That a further report be submitted to the Committee in approximately 6 months time to enable progress to be maintained.

189/05 Agency Staffing in Social Services

A report of the District Auditor was submitted:

(see annexed)

Brian Warwick reported that, as a result of additional staff being employed, tremendous improvements had been made. Sickness analysis had shown that stress was a major problem, so stress management measures had been introduced to overcome this. This, in turn, had led to the use of agency staff reducing and, once the improvements had been carried out, then improvements should be sustained.

After further discussion, it was:-

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Private Session

190/05 **Exclusion of public**

Resolved

That during consideration of the remaining items on the agenda, the Committee considers that the items for consideration are exempt information by virtue of the appropriate paragraph(s) of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972, and accordingly resolves to consider those items in private.

191/05 **Putting the Citizen First**

The report of the Audit Commission was submitted:

(see annexed)

After a number of questions from members, it was:-

Resolved

That the report be noted.

(Exempt information under paragraph 9 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972)

Termination of meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.10 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: