

SPECIAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 13th July, 2011 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room, Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Turner (Chairman)
Councillor Chambers (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Barker
Councillor Hussain
Councillor Robertson
Mr. A. Green (Independent Member)

In Attendance

Jamie Morris, Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services
Alan Boyd, Resilience Manager
Pauline Pilkington, Executive Director, Children's Services
Anne Thompson, Head of Service – Vulnerable Children
Bob Heighway, Operational Manager, Corporate Parenting – Transition
& Leaving Care
Andy Rust, Head of Vulnerable Adults Joint Commissioning Unit
Gary Mack, Head of Provider Services
Michael Hicklin, Service Manager, Provider Services

866/11

Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Flower and Councillor Murray.

867/11

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

868/11

Deputations and Petitions

There were no deputations submitted or petitions received.

869/11 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items on the agenda in private session.

870/11 **Notification of any issues of importance for consideration at a future meeting**

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

871/11 **No or Limited Assurance Reports**

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

The Chairman opened the meeting and invited everyone present to introduce themselves.

Further to Minute No. 839/11, the Chairman invited Rebecca Neill, Head of Internal Audit, to give a brief overview of the report and remind Members why the three selected No or Limited Assurance Reports had been brought back to Committee for consideration.

Rebecca explained the background to the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein. In doing so, Rebecca reminded Members that the three reports appended to her report had been selected for in-depth scrutiny by the Committee at its meeting on 12th April, 2011.

CCTV/surveillance

The Chairman then invited Jamie Morris, Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services, to provide assurances to the Committee on this matter. Jamie provided Members with historical and background information in relation to the CCTV/surveillance service to help the Committee appreciate how the service operated and the circumstances surrounding the reasons for the Limited Assurance report.

Jamie explained that Alan Boyd, Resilience Manager, had recently taken over the service which was part of the Safer Walsall Partnership and upon reviewing it, had raised various concerns. On knowing that CCTV/Surveillance had been a part of Internal Audit's planned programme of work, Alan had subsequently worked closely with colleagues in Audit and an action plan had been agreed targeting the various areas of concern.

Alan reported that he had now implemented all actions as contained within the plan. In addition, Alan informed Members that the service would be moving premises in the near future and invited the Committee Members to attend and inspect the new premises once fully operational.

Following in depth deliberations, Members sought assurances on the following specific aspects:-

- Councillor Robertson sought assurances on whether any new technology being purchased would be properly assessed to ensure it was future proof and compatible. Alan confirmed that this would be the case;
- Councillor Chambers sought assurances on 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.9, 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 of the action plan. Alan confirmed that all matters had now been satisfactorily addressed in accordance with the details contained within the action plan;
- Additionally, Councillor Chambers asked if the principles of the working smarter approach had diluted any governance aspects in relation to the carrying out of the revision of the service. Alan reported that it had not as he had to comply with strict policy and guidance throughout the process;
- Mr. Green asked if Internal Audit performed a follow-up audit to check agreed actions had actually been implemented and carried out. Rebecca Neill confirmed that Internal Audit had a robust follow up procedure in place;
- Councillor Barker sought assurances on 2.2 of the action plan. Alan confirmed that this action had now been implemented in accordance with the agreed action in the plan.

At the conclusion of the questioning, the Committee Members commended Jamie and Alan for their professional and valued work in relation to this matter.

The Chairman then asked Members if they were content and assured in relation to this report.

All Members of the Committee subsequently confirmed that they had received suitable assurances in relation to this item.

Transition and Leaving Care

The Chairman invited Pauline Pilkington, Executive Director, Children's Services, to provide assurances to the Committee on this matter.

Pauline provided Members with historical and background information in relation to the transition and leaving care service to help the Committee appreciate how the service operated and the circumstances surrounding the reasons for the Limited Assurance report.

Pauline acknowledged that the report did not make for a very good read and assured the Committee that she took the matter very seriously and was constantly monitoring the situation via her performance board. In addition, she informed the Committee that 90% of the actions had now been implemented and the remaining 10% were being processed.

In closing, Pauline introduced Anne Thompson, Head of Service – Vulnerable Children, who had recently been appointed and was overseeing the implementation of the action plan.

In particular, Members sought assurances on the following specific aspects:-

- Councillor Chambers sought assurances on 5.1 of the action plan. Bob Heighway, stated that this had now been implemented;
- Councillor Chambers sought assurances on 6.5 of the action plan. Anne reported that this was one of the actions that had not yet been implemented as she was currently exploring the most appropriate solution. However, Anne stressed that the matter was in hand;
- Councillor Chambers sought assurances on 9.3, 9.5 and 9.10 of the action plan. Bob Heighway confirmed that all these actions had now been implemented;
- Councillor Barker sought assurances on 2.1 of the action plan. Bob reported that this action was in process;
- Councillor Barker sought assurances on 3.1 of the action plan. Bob confirmed that this was now in place.
- Mr. Green raised his concerns at the seriousness of the failings identified within the report and asked if disciplinary action had been taken where appropriate. Anne Thompson confirmed that staff were now being performance managed and disciplinary action would be taken where appropriate. Mr. Green stated that he would wish to see a more firm assurance by way of reviewing the implementation of the action plan sooner rather than later. Rebecca Neill advised that these reports would be subject to a follow up audit. Should there be any further concerns arising from the follow-up audit check, the Committee would be informed accordingly.

At the conclusion of the questioning, the Committee Members thanked the officers for their input.

The Chairman then asked Members if they were content and assured on this report. All Members of the Committee subsequently confirmed that, whilst holding considerable concerns at the various failings identified within the report, they were content with the general direction of improvement as a result of the action plan being implemented.

Home Care Establishment

The Chairman then invited Andrew Rust, Head of Vulnerable Adults Joint Commissioning Unit, who was at the meeting in place of Paul Davies, Executive Director, Social Care and Inclusion, who was on leave, to provide assurances to Committee on this matter.

Andrew provided Members with historical and background information in relation to the home care establishment to help the Committee appreciate how the service operated and the circumstances surrounding the reasons for the Limited Assurance report.

Andrew explained that Gary Mack had inherited the service and was striving to make it an exemplary service by way of implementing the various actions identified within the action plan.

In particular, Members sought assurances on the following aspects:-

- Councillor Chambers asked what the reasons were for the projected savings as identified on page 8. Andrew reported that it was mostly due to a deliberate move to downsize and would be achieved by way of removing some vacancies, some of which had not been filled for over three years in view of the focus of the service changing to more of a re-enablement service;
- Councillor Chambers asked what, if any, feedback had been received in relation to how the service was now being delivered. Andrew clarified that initial feedback had been positive;
- Councillor Chambers asked if any of the Council's Scrutiny Committees monitored the service area. Andrew informed the Committee that the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel did indeed monitor the service area;
- Councillor Hussain sought assurances on 5.1 of the action plan. Andrew confirmed that this action had now been implemented;
- Councillor Barker sought assurances on 1.1 of the action plan. Andrew informed Members that this action had now been implemented;
- Mr. Green asked when the follow-up audit check would take place. Rebecca advised Mr. Green that it would;
- Councillor Chambers stated that he would prefer to see a report back on this matter by no later than six months from this meeting as it related to a significant change in the service. Rebecca confirmed that she would review the audit plan to see if she could arrange an early slot for this follow up;
- Councillor Robertson sought assurances on 3.3 of the action plan. Andrew assured the Committee that this had now been actioned.

At the conclusion of the questioning, the Committee Members thanked the officers for their input.

The Chairman then asked Members if they were content and assured on this matter.

All Members of the Committee subsequently confirmed that they had received suitable assurance in relation to this item.

Resolved

That the reports be noted.

872/11

Annual Governance Statement

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Vicky Buckley, Head of Finance, presented the report and highlighted the salient points contained therein. Additionally, Vicky advised Members that she would be bringing the final version back to Committee for signing off at a future date.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) the findings of and recommendation arising from the Annual Governance Effectiveness Review, including the review of the system internal control be approved;
- (2) the Annual Governance Statement be approved as set out in Appendix 1.

Termination of meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.50 p.m.

Chair:

Date: