

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CORPORATE GOVERNANCE GROUP MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY, 15 APRIL 2009
(9.00 - 10.35 AM)**

Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), R Palmer (Director of Finance and ICT), J Akerman (Chief Internal Auditor) and I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive)

Apologies for Absence: P Haywood (Chief Executive) and C O'Boyle (Director of Corporate Support Services)

Place: Room 1.05, First Floor, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex

141. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 17.3.09

Agreed.

142. MATTERS ARISING

None for this meeting.

143. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None for this meeting.

144. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Noted.

145. CHIEF INTERNAL AUDITOR

Noted that an advertisement had been published in respect of filling the vacancy for Chief Internal Auditor which would occur from 20 April 2009 and that to-date two applications had been received.

Noted that relevant recruitment agencies were being approached in order to create a longer shortlist of applicants.

Agreed that assistance be sought from the Essex Human Resources Partnership if appropriate.

Noted that J Akerman would be leaving the Council's service on 17 April 2009 but would subsequently be employed on a temporary part-time basis for 2½ days a week, two of which would be at the Civic Offices, pending the appointment of a successor.

Noted that until the new Chief Internal Auditor was appointed J Akerman would continue as a CGG member.

Noted that a further vacancy in Internal Audit would occur shortly but at the present time discussions with the Leader of Council concerning approval to fill were pending.

Agreed that J Akerman's past service to the Corporate Governance Group and its best wishes for the future be recorded.

ACTION:

P Haywood/J Akerman to make arrangements for discussion with the Leader of the Council concerning the filling of the Auditor position.

P Haywood/J Akerman to arrange meeting with Leader of the Council.

146. AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION FEE - 2009/10

Noted that a letter had been received from the Audit Commission Comprehensive Area Assessment Lead regarding the annual inspection fee for 2009/10.

Noted that the total fee was £9,152 which compared with £6,569 for 2008/09.

Noted that when the full service inspection for Waste Management had taken place the fee charged had been £13,000 approximately for the year in question.

Agreed that the Audit Commission be asked to give a clearer analysis of how the proposed fee for 2009/10 had been arrived at bearing in mind that the matter was to go before the Audit and Governance Committee at its next meeting.

Agreed also that the Audit Commission should explain why there was a 40% increase in the inspection fee in comparison with 2008/09 and how the increase was justified.

ACTION:

R Palmer to discuss with Audit Commission.

147. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL AUDIT - DRAFT REPORT TO AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE (22 JUNE 2009)

Agreed that the Chief Internal Auditor consider the following suggested changes:

(a) Paragraph 16 – include reference to the method for consulting client services in respect of Internal Audit, conducted independently of Internal Audit itself;

(b) Paragraph 19 – add a comment regarding the percentage completion of Audits for 2008/09, a percentage of 95% which was the best for the last 4 years;

(c) Paragraph 13 – cross reference with the annual report of Internal Audit.

ACTION:

J Akerman to pursue.

148. INTERNAL AUDIT - ANNUAL REPORT

Agreed that J Akerman consider the following changes:

- (a) Paragraph 2.2 – re-write to reflect the position as at 31 March 2009;
- (b) Paragraph 6.10 – make reference to the recent update of the User Guide relating to Financial Regulations, clarify references to the Intranet and staff access and include reference to the total number of staff who had attended training courses in Contract Standing Orders, Budget Processes and Financial Regulations;
- (c) Paragraph 10.4 – make reference to the improving trend in the average number of days it takes to complete an Internal Audit Investigation and amend “2007/08” to “2008/09”;
- (e) Paragraph 10.6 – add reference to the Satisfaction Survey.

ACTION:

J Akerman to pursue.

149. DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2008/9

Agreed that the following changes be made to the present draft of the Governance Statement:

- (a) Paragraph 4.3 – consider deleting this section as it may relate to the previous year;
- (b) Paragraph 7.6/7.7 – review content of these two paragraphs in relation to the previous section of the report to be re-named “Service Issues and Improvements”;
- (c) Paragraph 7.6.1 – “Healthier”;
- (d) Paragraph 7.6.8 - amend to refer to “Service Improvements”;
- (e) Paragraph 7.7.9 – delete “again” and substitute “a Service Plan”;
- (f) Paragraph 7.7.11 – include effect of installation of tracking devices in fleet vehicles;
- (g) Paragraph 7.7.8/7.7.14 – clarify references to “staff”.

Agreed that the Directors of Housing, Corporate Support Services and Environment and Street Scene be asked to forward their sections of the Governance Statement as soon as possible.

Agreed that the final draft of the Governance Statement be submitted to the CGG meeting on 13 May 2009.

ACTION:

- (1) **Directors of Housing, Corporate Support Services and Environment and Street Scene to pursue.**
- (2) **J Akerman to consider other suggested changes to the current draft and report back to the next CGG with a revised version.**

150. ISO260 (2007/08) - ACTION PLAN MONITORING SCHEDULE

Latest Action Plan Monitoring Schedule noted.

Noted that there continued to be problems with notifications of starters and leavers although steps have been taken to integrate notifications to ICT and HR for updating purposes.

Agreed that there were still a recognisable need to improve the information being provided to ICT and HR from Directorates both in terms of timeliness and accuracy.

Agreed that current findings indicated that not all Directorates were fully engaged in the process of achieving assurance as to the proper control of income and debtors and that this continued to be seen as a function for Finance/Legal Services when in fact it was a service responsibility.

Agreed that this issue continued to be monitored by Internal Audit and an item placed on the next CGG agenda to review progress.

ACTION:

- (1) **J Akerman to consider changes to the Monitoring Schedule.**
- (2) **J Akerman to monitor income/debtor control.**
- (3) **Service Directors to note.**

151. WORKING GROUP ON CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS, FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND OFFICER DELEGATION (20.2.09 AND 16.3.09)

Recommendations agreed.

Agreed that in relation to Minute 8 of the meeting on 20 February 2009, I Willett should write to the Leader of Council to explain the legal difficulties with the proposed 10% discretion for lowest firms in tendering and also notify the Task and Finish Panel which had been established by the Local Strategic Partnership to deal with matters arising from the adverse economic conditions which currently prevailed.

Action:

I Willett to pursue.

152. ELECTION FUNDING - POSTAL VOTE VERIFICATIONS

Noted that in further discussions between the Ministry of Justice and the Treasury it had now been agreed to fund 100% postal vote verifications for the elections to be held on 4 June 2009.

153. STANDARDS COMMITTEE

(a) Complaint Assessments

Noted that one recent complaint had been referred for investigation and discussions were in hand to engage an external investigator for this purpose.

Noted that one previous assessment finding that a complaint should not be the subject of an investigation was now the subject of an appeal against that ruling which would be considered shortly.

Noted that all other complaints referred to the Assessment Sub-Committee had not been referred for investigation.

(b) Adjudications

Noted that an adjudication had been held in respect of two complaints recently and that these had resulted in a finding of no breach of the code.

Noted that a further complaint which had been investigated externally would now be referred for adjudication on a date to be agreed.

154. CENSUS

Noted that the Regional Returning Officer had been appointed by the Government as Census Champion for the Eastern Region and had convened a preliminary meeting to be held at Newmarket Racecourse on 27 April 2009.

Agreed that, if this were a race day, CGG's advice to the Returning Officer was that there should be no attendance but that if this was not a race day, he should consider the appropriateness and benefit of attending the venue.

ACTION:

I Willett to pursue and notify CGG of outcome.

155. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13 May 2009 at 9.00 a.m. in the Chief Executive's Office.

Agreed that a full programme of meetings for the remainder of 2009 be submitted to that meeting.

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