

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee held on  
Friday, 16 December 2011 at 9.30 a.m.

PRESENT:	Councillor Francis Burkitt – Chairman	
Councillors:	John Batchelor Charles Nightingale John Williams	Douglas de Lacey Ted Ridgway Watt
Officers:	Adrian Burns Fiona McMillan  Ian Senior Sally Smart	Head of Accountancy Legal & Democratic Services Manager and Monitoring Officer Democratic Services Officer Principal Accountant Financial & Systems
External:	Louise Davies Neil Gibson Paul King	RSM Tenon Audit Commission Audit Commission

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David McCraith and Richard Barrett.

### **26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor John Batchelor declared a personal interest as a member of Cambridgeshire County Council's Pensions Committee.

### **27. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Corporate Governance Committee authorised the Chairman to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2011, subject to the rectification of a typographical error in the fifth line of the third paragraph of Minute number 20 (Internal Audit: Progress Report) by deleting the words "or to" between the words "Audit" and "but".

At members' request, the Chairman sought updates on a number of items, responses being as follows:

- Min. 18 External Audit: Annual Governance Report, fourth paragraph): the Executive Director (Corporate Services) had decided not to write formally to Cambridgeshire County Council but had conveyed to the Pension Service the Corporate Governance Committee's concerns about the problems caused by the delay in the estimated value of the Pension Fund being issued and the actual value being announced. External Audit confirmed that the essential point was that the process should be correct.
- Min. 18 External Audit: Annual Governance Report, fifth paragraph): the Executive Director (Corporate Services) confirmed that this related to 2012-13.
- Min. 19 (Internal Audit Progress Report, third paragraph): officers noted the Committee's continued support for an Internal Audit investigation into progress with reform of the Planning and New Communities Service, focussing in particular on Conservation.
- Min. 21 (Treasury Management Benchmarking 2010-11, third paragraph): the Executive Director (Corporate Services) suggested that members of the Corporate Governance Committee be invited formally to the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder meeting in February 2012 when details of the Council's Investment Strategy

would be considered.

## 28. PLAIN ENGLISH ACCOUNTS

The Corporate Governance Committee **received and enthusiastically noted** a document called 'What we do, and how we spend your money doing it'.

Subject to a few minor amendments identified by Members, the Committee agreed that midnight going into 19 December 2011 should be the deadline for the receipt of further comments, following which the final document should be published before Christmas.

The Committee noted that, for next year's document, it would consider the following items:

- A different font
- A5 paper
- Photographs
- Information about Reserves
- Information about Councillor allowances and expenses
- Cross-references to appropriate pages on the Council's website where they could find further information

The Executive Director (Corporate Services) undertook to discuss with the South Cambs Magazine Editorial Board ways of getting publicity about the Plain English Accounts through that medium.

## 29. REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000: OFFICE OF SURVEILLANCE COMMISSIONERS INSPECTION REPORT AND QUARTERLY UPDATE ON USE OF RIPA

Immediately prior to the meeting, Chris Freeman, South Cambridgeshire District Council's Fraud Manager, made a short presentation on the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

The Corporate Governance Committee received a quarterly update report on the Council's use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) powers.

The Council was inspected by the Office of Surveillance Commissioners (OSC) on 12 October 2011 and, on 9 November 2011, the Council received the outcome of the inspection. The Council was commended for its overall good performance.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager reminded Members that their role was to oversee the process, rather than to get involved in the granting of authorisations.

Members noted with satisfaction that the Chief Surveillance Commissioner, Sir Christopher Rose, had written to South Cambridgeshire District Council endorsing the inspection report and had stated that he was pleased to see that the Council was commendably determined and successful in achieving RIPA compliance. Members also noted paragraph 10 of the Office of Surveillance Commissioners' report, which highlighted the fact that the Council was extremely conscientious in its compliance with the Act.

The Corporate Governance Committee

- (a) **noted** the inspection report attached as Appendix A;
- (b) **accepted** the recommendations set out in the report;

- (c) **asked** the Executive Director (Corporate Services), the Council's Senior Responsible Officer in respect of the operation of RIPA, to make sure that the recommendations in the report from the Office of Surveillance Commissioners were implemented;
- (d) **noted** the information contained in the report about the Council's use of surveillance powers in the period October to December 2011.

### 30. **AUDIT REPORTS**

#### 30 (a) **Internal Audit Progress Report**

The Corporate Governance Committee **noted** that Internal Audit had not raised any significant issues with South Cambridgeshire District Council during the current municipal year to date.

#### 30 (b) **External Audit Reports**

The Corporate Governance Committee **received and noted** a positive External Audit Letter relating to the Accounts for 2010-11.

Members particularly noted the good performance in relation to Benefits, and conveyed their appreciation to the Benefits Manager and her Team.

### 31. **MATTERS OF TOPICAL INTEREST**

Members discussed briefly the following matters of topical interest:

#### **Pensions**

Councillor Batchelor undertook to investigate the state of the Local Government Pension Scheme insofar as it relates to South Cambridgeshire District Council.

#### **Welfare reform in terms of Governance**

The subject of Welfare reform had been identified as the leading strategic risk for South Cambridgeshire District Council, although the Executive Director (Corporate Services) confirmed that there was no Governance issue at the moment.

#### **Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Debt**

The Committee noted that Council would have to decide how to handle in excess of £200 million of HRA debt before the end of March. The Chairman felt it essential that Members should have advance notice of this matter and every opportunity to contribute to the debate.

The Committee agreed to suggest to the Leader or Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder that one of them should announce, at the meeting of Full Council on 26 January 2012, that that there would be a formal agenda item about the HRA Debt at (a) the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder meeting on 21 February 2012; and (b) Full Council on 23 February 2012.

### **Localism**

The Committee asked officers to prepare a maximum four-page plain English Guide on the Localism Act as they impact on South Cambridgeshire District Council and its residents.

### **Northstowe**

This remained a strategic risk because of continued uncertainty over improvements to the A14.

### **Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document**

It was becoming increasingly urgent to finalise this document in the interests of good governance and defined policy.

### **Value For Money**

There was no longer a scoring system for value for money so the determination was now either 'adequate' or 'not adequate'.

## **32. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee had been rearranged from 30 March 2012 to Friday 23 March 2012 starting at 9.00am.

The Committee confirmed as meetings the following dates in 2012-13, all meetings starting at 9.00am.

- Friday 29 June 2012
- Friday 28 September 2012
- Friday 14 December 2012
- Friday 22 March 2013

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**The Meeting ended at 10.40 a.m.**

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