

At a meeting of the AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on FRIDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER, 2006 at 1.30 p.m.

Present:-

Mr. G.N. Cook in the Chair.

Councillors Mrs. M. Forbes, Mrs. J. Heron and L. Scott and Mr. J. Paterson.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Allan and Anderson.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29th September, 2006 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Internal Audit Services – Half Yearly Update for 2006/2007

The City Treasurer submitted a report, copy circulated, which considered the performance of Internal Audit Services (IAS) up to 15th September, 2006, the areas of work undertaken and information on current developments in IAS.

The Head of Audit gave an overview of the report. He explained that half yearly reports would be produced in future to assure Members of the section's work.

Referring to Section 3, Planned and Actual Resources available, the staffing resource of 16.6 full-time equivalent members of staff was as expected and the utilisation of the productive time available was on target at 74%. Section 4 of the report, Key Performance Indicators, showed that the overall performance was on track to achieve all targets, except the level of implementation, although work was ongoing in Directorates to improve this further.

In summary the Head of Internal Audit reported that the work to date was on target to deliver the Audit Plan and retain a high quality service.

The Chair congratulated Internal Audit on an excellent report.

Having considered the report it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the Internal Audit Services' performance be noted.

Audit Commission – Progress Report – October 2006

Lynne Hunt, of the Audit Commission, submitted a progress report for October 2006 which provided a summary of external audit work undertaken since the Audit Plan was presented to the Committee in June. The outcomes were attached at Appendix 1 and had been discussed with relevant Officers.

The Council's Audit Manager provided an overview of the report which provided assurance on the work of external audit and also summarised outstanding issues. She explained that the reports were very detailed and wondered whether Members would prefer summarised reports in future.

Data quality and BVPP had been discussed at the last meeting when issues around Libraries' performance indicators had been raised. The Council's Audit Manager noted that work was being undertaken to ensure that reliable auditable evidence would be available to support 2006/2007 outturns. A new Library Information System was being implemented which would provide audit trails in future years and the Council's Audit Manager was assured this would be effective.

The Council's Audit Manager then brought Members' attention to the section on Ethical Governance and reiterated that this was an area of great interest to both local press and people. The Standards Committee had requested that external audit undertake a review of documents and the control framework. The Council's Audit Manager commended the Council for the considerable time and effort dedicated over recent years to improving the culture and establishing robust ethical standards and suggested these ethical practices could be shared with other Local Authorities.

Recommendations had been made for Civil Contingencies and Children's Services which would be followed up in 6-9 months to ensure implementation.

The Council had participated in two National Audit Commission surveys. Outcomes were generally positive but issues regarding staff knowledge had been raised. An Action Plan had been produced to address the issues and progress would be assessed in 12 months. Fifty eight out of 119 local schools had participated in the Annual Schools Survey which represented schools views on support and assistance from the LEA and self assessment arrangements for Every Child Matters. Overall responses received were positive.

On Looking Ahead, work was in progress or scheduled as detailed in paragraph 31 of the report and a Corporate Assessment Site Visit was expected in January 2007.

The Chair commented on the positive outcomes of the report and invited comments from the Committee.

Councillor Mrs. Forbes referred to Civil Contingencies and the sharing of information and wondered how this could be monitored. The Council's Audit Manager suggested that local data and voluntary sharing systems would be more effective and commented that the Civil Contingencies Act empowered Local Authorities to obtain information. However, this had only recently been introduced and, therefore, how it would develop in practice was unknown.

Members noted new legislation which required a major incident plan to be implemented. The City Treasurer explained that the Civil Contingencies Act would achieve a joined-up approach between the emergency services by creating an understanding and appreciation across all agencies. He assured the Committee that the Chief Fire Officer would be made aware of any potential risks.

Councillor Mrs. Forbes referred to paragraph 25 in relation to the Children's Trust. She noted that governance and partnership arrangements, with clear protocols on decision making and accountability were being developed, however, raised concerns regarding accountability and responsibilities and wondered whether this would be clearly defined to the Council and the public. In response, the Council's Audit Manager advised the Committee that the first phase of the arrangements had been established with good functional working relationships, but it had been recommended that the Action Plan should clearly define roles and responsibilities.

The City Solicitor added that he had drafted the Terms of Reference for the Children's Trust which focused on clear accountability and they had been shared with Partner agencies. He explained that work on a more detailed document was ongoing but assured the Committee that he personally was involved in the development of arrangements.

Mr. Paterson was pleased to note the number of school survey responses received, considering that completion had been optional.

Having considered the content of the Audit Commission – Progress Report – October 2006, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that it be received and noted.

(Signed) MR. G.N. COOK,
Chairman.