

MEETING AC.10:0607
DATE 12.04.07

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Audit Committee** held in Committee Room 3/4, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on **Thursday, 12th April 2007**.

(10.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m.)

Present:

Members: Derek Yeomans (in the Chair)

Mike Best	Peter Roake
Charles James	Alan Smith
Roy Mills	June Wood

Officers:

David Stapleton	Corporate Director – Health and Wellbeing
Tony Richbell	Safety Adviser
Andrew Weston	Senior Accountant
Gerry Cox	Head of Internal Audit Partnership
Bob Gillis	Democratic Services Manager
Andrew Blackburn	Committee Administrator

69. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd March 2007, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

70. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Emma Bourne and Ian Martin.

71. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

72. Public Question Time

No comments or questions were raised by members of the public.

73. Operational Risk Assessments (Agenda item 5)

Following the request of the Audit Committee at the March meeting, the Safety Adviser provided members with an update on the procedure for the undertaking and recording of operational risk assessments required in order to comply with health and safety legislation.

He summarised his report on the agenda and confirmed that 16 of the 19 services had now submitted copies of their operational risk assessments to him. He further reported that subsequent to the preparation of the agenda report the Area Development Service - North had submitted their operational risk assessments. He also reported that the Area Development Service - West had submitted some of their assessments whilst the assessments in respect of the Economic Development, Planning and Transport Service were in progress. The Safety Adviser further commented that progress had been made and recommended that a reminder be sent to Heads of Service who had not yet submitted all their risk assessments and that a further one month period be given to allow the outstanding documentation to be provided.

The Corporate Director – Health and Wellbeing reported that he had already sent a reminder to the services concerned and would continue to monitor progress. He assured members that the assessments would be completed.

The Committee concurred with the remarks of the Chairman in congratulating the Safety Adviser in ensuring that this matter was progressed. The Safety Adviser noted the request of members for an update at a future meeting.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) that a reminder be sent to Heads of Service who have not submitted all their risk assessments;
 - (2) that a further one month period be given to allow the outstanding documentation to be provided;
 - (3) that the Safety Adviser submit a further update to a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

*(Tony Richbell, Safety Adviser – (01935) 462655)
(tony.richbell@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

74. Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and Use of Resources Judgement (Agenda item 6)

The Senior Accountant referred to the agenda report and asked members to review the District Auditor's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, a copy of which had been sent to members. It was noted that the District Executive had received a presentation by officers from the Audit Commission relating to the letter at their meeting on 5th April 2007. The resolution of the District Executive in response to the letter was reported and noted by the Committee.

The Senior Accountant summarised the key messages and the action needed by the Council, which were set out in the letter. In conclusion he informed the Committee that the letter was extremely positive about the improvements the Audit Commission had seen to be demonstrated within the organisation. The Committee also noted that the Use of Resources Judgement had improved from an overall score of 2 to a 3. The achievement of an overall 3 had been due partly to the Statement of Internal Control Action Plan that had been drawn up by the Council and monitored this year by the Audit Committee. A further action plan was to be drawn up to ensure that the Council continued to strengthen its position to a strong 3 for 2007.

During the ensuing discussion, a number of comments were made including the following:-

- it was considered that the Council should only be involved in non-statutory partnerships where they were effective and provided value for money. The Senior Accountant commented that the Audit Commission were content with the

partnerships provided they represented value for money and that the organisation concerned adhered to the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements, e.g. financial probity. He also commented that the list of partnerships was to be reviewed. The Committee supported the review being undertaken;

- reference was made to one of the actions needed by the Council being to strengthen performance management by focusing more on service delivery and better outcomes for the community. A member referred to the waste collection service and commented that, although agreeing that the service was better and improving, there were still problems relating to variances in the service provided in some areas of the community, which it was felt should be addressed to achieve a better outcome for that community;
- reference was made to the criteria for a person to be included on the homelessness list and a member expressed concern that it may exclude some people who, although not meeting the criteria, could effectively still be classed as homeless.

The Committee, having reviewed the Audit Commission Annual Report and Inspection Letter, wished to commend the Head of Finance and her staff for all the work carried out in achieving an overall 3 in the Use of Resources Judgement. Members also wished to record their recognition of the work carried out in connection with the Council's unitary bid.

- RESOLVED:** (1) that the contents of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for 2006/07 and the response of the District Executive be noted;
- (2) that Management Board be requested to take into account the comments made by the Committee regarding the evaluation of partnerships, waste collection service and homelessness, as set out above, for consideration within the Council's Corporate Improvement and Development Plan;
- (3) that the improvement and content of the Use of Resources Judgement be noted.

*(Donna Parham, Head of Finance – (01935) 462225)
(donna.parham@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

75. Internal Audit Plan 2007/08 (Agenda item 7)

The Head of Internal Audit Partnership referred to the Committee having received details and considered the Internal Audit Plan for 2007/08 at their meeting in February this year when members were asked to note its content.

He further reported that since going through the process, the Council had been advised by the Audit Commission that recognised best practice was for the Audit Committee to approve the annual plan.

The content of the plan was, therefore, set out in the agenda report for members' approval.

RESOLVED: that the Internal Audit Plan for 2007/08 be approved.

*(Gerry Cox, Head of Internal Audit Partnership – (01458) 257410)
(gerry.cox@southwestaudit.gov.uk)*

76. Annual Review of Constitution (Agenda item 8)

AC10M0607

The Democratic Services Manager referred to the agenda report and asked the Committee to consider and comment on the Annual Review of the Council's Constitution. It was noted that the Annual Review of the Constitution was intended to ensure that the document was up to date prior to the annual Council in May each year.

Members had before them copies of those sections of the Constitution that were to be amended. He asked the Committee to consider recommending full Council to approve the amendments at its April meeting.

The Democratic Services Manager answered members' questions on points of detail during which reference was made to the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and to whether it was a statutory duty for Local Authorities to appoint inspectors to respond to animal welfare concerns. The Democratic Services Manager mentioned that there would need to be a report submitted to the relevant members with regard to the Act.

The Democratic Services Manager also clarified that the relevant paragraphs of the Constitution would be renumbered once the amendments had been adopted.

- RESOLVED:** (1) that the current position with the review of the Constitution as set out in the supplementary report to the agenda be noted and that Council be recommended to agree the actions set out in that document;
- (2) that Council be recommended to approve the amendments to the following sections of the Constitution:-
- Part 3 - Section 3 - Functions that cannot be the responsibility of the District Executive
 - Section 6 - Schedule of Functions Delegated to Officers
 - Part 5 - Members' Profiles.

(Bob Gillis, Democratic Services Manager – (01935) 462563)
(bob.gillis@southsomerset.gov.uk)

77. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda item 9)

Members noted that as there was no meeting scheduled in May, the next meeting of the Audit Committee would be held on Thursday, 28th June 2007 at 10.00 a.m. in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

NOTED.

(Andrew Blackburn, Committee Administrator – (01460) 260441)
(andrew.blackburn@southsomerset.gov.uk)

The Chairman referred to this being the last meeting of the Committee before the elections and thanked members for their support during his chairmanship. Members thanked the Chairman for his work in chairing the Committee.

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Chairman