

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM
2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON THURSDAY, 20 APRIL 2006
AT 2.15 PM

Present:-

Councillor A E Davies - Chairperson

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>
D T Anderson	W May	J C Spanswick
G Davies	M L Simmonds	W H C Teesdale
R M Granville		

Officers:

N Meredith	- Head of Internal Audit
C Griffiths	- KPMG
B Davies	- Head of Personnel and Governor Support (Education, Leisure and Community Services)
J McKirdle	- Head of Service, Housing and Community Well Being
I Corlett	- Principal Officer, Financial Resources Unit
G Doak	- Group Auditor
M A Galvin	- Senior Cabinet and Committee Officer

94 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members/Officers:-

Councillor D A D Brett - Injury (due to a fall)
Councillor P A Evans
Mr L M James - Other Council business
Mr Ian Pennington - KPMG.

95 NON-ATTENDANCE DUE TO OTHER COUNCIL BUSINESS

None.

96 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared an interest in Agenda Item 4(iii) a report entitled School Governance, due to the fact they were all on the Board of Governors at various schools located in their respective areas. It had been established, following the receipt of legal advice, that whilst these Members could participate in discussions that ensued on this item a vote on the outcome of the report was highly unlikely, but if found to be necessary, further advice would be sought at that time:-

Councillor A E Davies
Councillor G Davies
Councillor R M Granville
Councillor W May
Councillor J C Spanswick

97 STELLENT CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director - Resources submitted a report upon the findings of an internal audit undertaken in respect of the Council's Stellant Content Management System.

The result of this audit reflected the System to be adequately controlled, with just a relatively small number of recommendations being made to address some minor issues, details of which were included in the report.

Members made the point that perhaps one improvement to the management of this System would be if a Corporate Unit were made responsible to update the System, rather than this being undertaken by one or two individual staff within each Directorate.

The Head of Internal Audit confirmed that this point had already been recognised at the time of the audit, together with the fact that more use of the system could be made of in general terms, by staff of the Authority.

RESOLVED: That the report on the completion of the audit of the Stellent Content Management System, including key messages that arose as a result of this audit, be noted.

98 SUPPORTING PEOPLE

The Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director - Resources reported upon an audit that had been undertaken in relation to the above Process, the outcome of which had indicated that the system of internal control within this area of work, was deemed inadequate.

A copy of the results of the findings of this particular audit was attached to the report at Appendix 'A'.

Officers from the Personal Services Directorate had been invited to the meeting to discuss some of the finer issues arising from this audit.

They commenced debate by expanding upon the Supporting People Programme, which had largely been introduced to assist the Government in endeavouring to reduce Housing Benefit bills.

At the request of the Chairperson, Officers gave a brief description of the Supporting People Programme.

The idea behind this, it was explained, was to separate the rent element from the support element so as to achieve an improved reduction and control of costs, and to make local authorities more accountable in this regard.

Officers then went on to explain that the Programme could be split into two main themes, one the Supporting People Grant for Older People, i.e. those in sheltered housing accommodation etc., and secondly Disability Support, a scheme for vulnerable types of people, for example those with mental health problems.

They added that these two themes came under the scope of the Supporting People Grant and the Supporting People Revenue Grant, two separate forms of

funding that, with the assistance of effective joint working between the relevant authorities, it was hoped would merge by 2008.

It was added that the recommendations arising from the audit could be split into two groups, namely Strategic and Operational. It was stressed that the recommendations that fell under the Strategic Group were proving difficult to meet, due to the continuous trend of a lack of resources. Operationally though, the area of Supporting People was having better support. He added that another reason for slow progress having been made on this area of work, was due to the fact that when the Supporting People Programme was firstly introduced, it was done so at the same time as the Council was dealing with the Housing Stock Transfer Process, with the result that resources available for the implementation of the Supporting People Programme were limited at that time.

A number of issues were then raised by Members, in relation to the audit including:-

- A lack of clarity within the Directorate of monitoring responsibilities where services are part funded by Supporting People Grant;
- Consideration (including re-evaluation) being given to the resources utilised on the Supporting People Programme (including two additional posts for this purpose);
- Whether systems were now in place to support costs coded to the appropriate cost centre, enhancing payments made to providers on a regular and consistent basis;
- The implementation of the RAISE system on target;
- The potential for efficiency savings as a result of the RAISE system;

Officers responded to these points contained within the Internal Audit Final report, to the satisfaction of Members.

Officers added that the RAISE system, when fully up and running, would assist significantly in the processing of Strategic Development work.

The Chairperson finally thanked both Mr McKirdle and Mr Corlett for attending and responding to questions raised in relation to the Supporting People Audit.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

99 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director - Resources submitted a report upon an audit undertaken in relation to School Governance, the outcome of which had been that systems in place to control this area of work had been deemed inadequate.

A copy of the result of the findings of this particular audit, were attached to the report at Appendix 'B'.

Mr Doak gave Committee some background information in relation to the audit which had been undertaken, with Officers having had beforehand, some feedback in relation to the service from parents, school governors and staff, amongst others. Certain areas of concern, had also been discussed in Focus Group Meetings.

The Internal Audit report (i.e. Appendix 'B') detailed the objectives of the audit, a summary and Audit opinion and findings amounting to eight recommendations for improvement, which were contained in the Management Action Plan attached to the said Appendix, together with the managements comments on these recommendations, and proposed dates for them to be implemented.

Mr Bill Davies from the Education, Leisure and Community Services Directorate had been invited to discuss the issues raised in the audit. He explained some of the more common and long standing problems. These were largely surrounding the fact that opportunities were in the main there and available for school governors, but these were not always taken up. The majority of this was in relation to a lack of support by governors in attending various training initiatives, and governors failing to read up on the various documentation they are provided with in relation to the role they perform.

Following discussions with Members on this topic, a number of issues were raised which may assist in improving the systems in this area of work, examples of which were:-

- To contact larger industrial and commercial companies to attract school governors (in view of there still being a shortage);
- More variety of courses for school governors, to include those requested rather than set by the LEA, (it was agreed by Members and Officers that this is already available);
- Is there too much expected of school governors, due to them largely being lay members undertaking a voluntary role? Could further regard be given here?
- Could more regard and flexibility be given to the timing of training sessions and school governor meetings? (it was agreed by Members and Officers that this is already available);
- Proposals to be put in place for improved inductions procedure, to include provision of induction booklet.
- The disabled should be encouraged more to become governors;
- Proposals are being considered to improve database and website facilities in relation to school governance;
- Further development of information pack for new governors is being considered;
- Facilities to be made available for more personal training if/where required.

In conclusion Mr Davies also advised that the new Executive Director - Learning was considering ways to become more proactive with governors particularly with regard to training and development, and for them to link in more with the Focus Group and for staff to meet more frequently with the Chairpersons of governing bodies, to monitor and progress issues surrounding school governance.

Arising from the conclusion of debate in relation to the findings of this audit, it was

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

100 STATEMENT OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director - Resources submitted a report, outlining the present position with regard to the Statement of Internal Control, including details of work currently proceeding with this.

The Head of Internal Audit advised that the draft document would hopefully be completed for submission to the Audit Committee on 1 June 2006.

He added that it was anticipated that the document would be signed off by the Leader and either the Interim Chief Executive or the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director - Resources, in the absence of the Chief Executive, due to his retirement.

It was also anticipated that the Internal Audit Annual report would be submitted at this meeting for Members consideration.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 3.57pm.