

Selection & Constitutional Review Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Selection & Constitutional Review Committee held in Committee Room No.1 (Fougères Room), Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the 10th June 2009

Present:

Cllr. Clokie (Chairman);
Cllr. Bartlett (Vice-Chairman);
Cllrs. Ayres, Bradberry, Davidson, Davison, Mrs Hicks, Kemp, Wells.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor Mrs Hicks attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Goddard.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Goddard, Miss Hodgkinson, Mrs Martin.

Also Present:

Deputy Chief Executive, Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

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Resolved:

That subject to noting that Councillor Smith was also present at the meeting, the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on the 5th May 2009 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

52 Annual Governance Statement

The report explained that under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 the Council was required to review, at least once a year, the effectiveness of its systems of internal control and include a statement on internal control within the Council's Statement of Accounts. Following a CIPFA/SOLACE review on Local Authority governance in 2007 the requirement to publish a Statement on Internal Control had been replaced by the requirement to publish a more wide ranging Annual Governance Statement. The statement attached to the report met that statutory requirement. However the Deputy Chief Executive explained that this Council had decided to retain the Statement on Internal Control to the Audit Committee to analyse the risk issues within the remit of that Committee. The Statement on Internal Control travelled with the Annual Governance Statement which this Committee was being asked to approve because of its broader outlook on governance and risk. The two documents would come together and be submitted with the Financial Statements to the Audit Committee at the end of June. The significant governance issues identified during 2008/09 were outlined in the report. In conclusion the Deputy Chief

Executive said that the External Auditors had commented that the Council's Governance Arrangements were one of its strongest suits.

A Member mentioned references to the State of the Borough Debate within the Statement and asked that if the decision to retain it would be seen as a plus point by the External Auditors. The Deputy Chief Executive said that this was a feature of the Council's Constitution and something that Local Authorities were encouraged to hold, but there was no compulsion. Perhaps following recent Member discussions a line should be added to the Statement to explain that the format of the State of the Borough Debate was to be reviewed. Another Member said that the overwhelming majority of Members on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (across all Political Groups) had voted to abolish the State of the Borough Debate and make more effort to encourage Members to attend regular Committee meetings. They had made it quite clear that they did not wish to continue with the Debate. The Chairman said that the Executive had concluded that the State of the Borough Debate should be given "one more shot". The majority of comments had indicated that the last two Debates had not been well received so he had proposed to form a small working group with other Group Leaders to agree a new format. His view was that the public rather than Councillors should be the dominant factor at the Debate. He asked the Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer to ensure that the working group was set up as soon as possible to agree the way forward. The State of the Borough Debate did offer an opportunity for genuine participation. It was an unmistakable fact that members of the public did not attend regular Committees and at least the Debate did also attract some press attention.

A Member asked about the audit recommendations not being implemented with regard to Grounds Maintenance. The Deputy Chief Executive said there had been a substantial review of the Service as part of the Budget Strategy and a lot of effort had been directed into that restructure. A new Team Manager had now been appointed and would take up post in July. It would be for him to take on board the recommendations about process and monitoring.

In response to questions about the Race Equality and Gender Equality Schemes and Housing Contracts the Deputy Chief Executive explained that Overview & Scrutiny had been asked to review the Council's current position in relation to equality work and that there would be a follow up audit during 2009/10 to confirm that recommendations within the audit of Housing Contracts had been implemented.

A Member referred to the management of utility provision and purchasing arrangements. He had been greatly concerned about the confusion generated over recent billing from Kent County Council in that there seemed to be no central point in the Council for the management of utilities and the contract arrangement that the Council had entered into seemed unsatisfactory. The Leader agreed that this was a concern and asked for a report to be submitted to the July Executive on the whole issue of management and procurement of utilities.

Recommended:

That subject to the above comments the Annual Governance Statement be approved

In accordance with Procedure Rule 17.5 Councillor Davison asked for it to be recorded that he had abstained from voting.

DWS

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
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