

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2010**

**Present:** Councillor Horne (Chairman) and  
Councillors Butler, Daley, Nelson-Gracie and Warner

**Also Present:** Claire Bryce-Smith and  
Stephen Golding (Audit Commission)

58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

59. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

60. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

61. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures.

62. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

63. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items be taken in public as proposed.

64. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2009

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed.

65. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2009

- (1) Minute 50 – Audit Commission Presentation on the Council’s Organisational Assessment 2008/09

The Director of Change and Environmental Services reported that the Audit Commission had revised the score of 3 for Managing

Performance element of the Organisational Assessment to 4 following the Council's appeal.

RESOLVED: That the Officers be complimented on work they have undertaken in achieving the overall score of 3 on the Organisational Assessment but in particular, for achieving the score of 4 for Managing Performance. Overall this has placed the Council in the top 18 authorities in England.

(2) The Annual Review of Business Continuity Arrangements 2009/10

The IT Manager reported that with the recent adverse weather conditions there had been an opportunity to test the resilience of the Council's corporate Business Continuity arrangements. Overall there had been a good response to the operation of those arrangements and each of the individual Business Continuity Plans for the Key Services had worked well. He indicated that the individual managers were looking at what had worked well and what had not and would adjust plans accordingly but overall the Council's response in these conditions had been good.

In response to a number of questions the IT Manager indicated that a number of things would need to be reviewed, in particular it needed to be made clear the differences between the Emergency Plan and the Business Continuity Plan and which elements of each of these plans had been invoked in these situations.

The Committee asked that when the post mortem had been done it was reported back to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the review of the Business Continuity arrangements arising from the recent adverse weather be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

(3) Role of the Audit Committee and its Terms Of Reference

The Head of Internal Audit and Risk Strategy indicated that a report on this matter would be coming to the next meeting of the Committee.

66. ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT 2009

The Committee considered the report of the Management Team setting out the Audit Commission's 2009 organisational assessment report on Maidstone Borough Council and in particular that the Council had received an overall score of 3 but that its score for managing resources had been increased from a 3 to a 4.

Claire Bryce-Smith of the Audit Commission indicated that Maidstone had done very well to achieve an overall score 3 out of 4 indicating that 47%

of Councils had scored 3 whilst 51% had scored lower. Only 4 Districts had scored an overall score of 4 and she also indicated that Maidstone was only one of only seven District Councils that had scored 4 for Managing Performance. She indicated that the Audit Commission had raised its score to 4 for Managing Performance because Maidstone had gone further than many other Councils in delivering in this area and in particular highlighted all the good progress it had made in respect of its six priorities and particularly picked out its performance in Affordable Housing. She also indicated the good work that the Council had done in providing access to services for the public through the Gateway.

She indicated that there was some discretion for the Audit Commission on the determination of the overall score when authorities had scored 3 for the Use of Resources and 4 for Managing Performance. However in the case of Maidstone it had decided that the overall score would be 3 and in order to have received a 4 it would have needed to have made significant progress in each of its priority areas. Although the Commission recognises the Borough Council had made significant progress in its priority on Affordable Housing. Therefore an overall score of 3 was considered to be right.

In terms of what happens next she indicated that the Audit Commission would be looking at what had changed since the last review but would be focussing on natural resources as well as financial planning, Duty to Involve and shared services.

She was then asked a number of questions relating to a number of different matters including the fact that Sevenoaks might have achieved an overall score 4 as they were one of the few authorities that had not been directly assessed by the Audit Commission, having private sector auditors instead. She also asked what was the differences between the overall scores of 3 and 4 and then a number of specific questions regarding specific issues in the report on the levels of recycling and bus services.

She responded in terms of bus services that this was a service the Council could influence whereas the Council had direct control for waste collection. The Director of Change and Environment Services indicated that since the original assessment the percentage of waste recycled had improved from the mid 20's to the mid 30's and was making progress which boded well for the authority. In relation to bus services the role of the Council was more of an influencing nature and one of taking a community leadership.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

67. AUDIT COMMISSION ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2008/09

The Committee considered the report of the Management Team setting out the Audit Commission's annual audit letter covering the year 2008/09. The letter set out the summary of the findings and the conclusions which had arisen during the Audit Commission's audit and inspection

programme. The Director of Change and Environment Services also indicated that on page 42 of the report Management Team had now set out a number of comments within the Action Plan regarding each of the actions. The Committee then asked a number of questions of Steve Golding from the Audit Commission regarding the Action Plans and in particular the element relating to the need for the changes in skills within the finance team.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Commission's Annual Audit Letter to Maidstone Borough Council be noted.

68. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.52 p.m.