

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE

26 NOVEMBER 2012

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND
COMMUNITIES**

Report prepared by Zena Cooke

1. AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETINGS SCHEDULE

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider and agree the number of scheduled meetings of the Audit Committee during the municipal year.

1.2 Recommendation of Director of Regeneration and Partnerships

1.2.1 That the Committee has four scheduled meetings in a municipal year in line with the other MKIP Audit Committees, Kent County Council, Medway Council, and a number of other District Councils in Kent, with the first meeting of each year being scheduled for July.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.2 The number of scheduled meetings is the same as when the Committee's role was significantly different. The Committee previously received regular reports from the Audit Commission on Comprehensive Performance Assessment, Comprehensive Area Assessment and Use of Resources at set times throughout the year. Since the Audit Commission stopped this aspect of its work in 2010, the total number of reports to the Audit Committee each year has reduced and the timing of meetings needs to be reviewed to support an amended financial reporting cycle.

1.3.3 Comparable neighbour 'MKIP' authorities have fewer meetings of their audit committees. At Swale the Audit Committee currently meets five times a year, but intends to reduce this to four from 2013/14. Tunbridge Wells and Ashford Audit Committees meet four times a year. The Audit Committees for the County Council, Medway Unitary, Canterbury and Dartford Councils also meet four times a year.

- 1.3.4 Until last year it was necessary for the Committee to meet in June in order to agree the Council's Accounts by the due deadline. This process has been changed by statute and the Committee must now meet in September to agree the audited accounts.
- 1.3.5 In recent years there has been a change of membership of the Committee following each municipal election. This has required that, preferably, new members undertake induction training before their first meeting. This has proven to be extremely difficult when the first meeting of the Committee is scheduled for June.
- 1.3.6 It is considered that four meetings a year accurately reflects the Committee's workload and enables it to conduct its scheduled work. If it should prove necessary for special meetings to be arranged, they can be added as and when required.
- 1.3.7 The work programme for the current year is attached at Appendix A. This is based on six meetings a year. As Members can see, the majority of the items that are addressed by the Audit Committee are 'one-offs' during the year. The length of time between meetings should not therefore create any lack of continuity, as might be the case for other committees that carry out project work over a longer period.
- 1.3.8 A specimen work programme is attached at Appendix B, which illustrates how the same reports would have been scheduled if the Committee had planned to meet four times during the year. This is based on deleting the June and January meetings.
- 1.3.9 In order to ensure that the gaps between meetings are not too long and the meetings are more evenly spaced than currently, attention can be given to adjusting the meeting dates from 2013/14 onwards so that, for example, the November meeting is put back by a couple of weeks to December, and/or the March meeting is brought forward by a couple of weeks.
- 1.3.10 It is recommended that the number of scheduled meetings of the Audit Committee is reduced to four a year and that the first meeting of the Committee during each municipal year takes place in July.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.4.1 The number of scheduled meetings could remain at six. However, based on the governance and financial reporting cycle requirements this would be excessive.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 Ensuring that the Committee cycle is efficient and effective and supports the corporate objective of corporate and customer excellence.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 The reduction in the number of meetings could mean that there are delays in reporting emerging issues to the Committee. This can be mitigated by scheduling the meetings more evenly, ensuring that the Committee's work programme is kept up to date and if an important matter arises that needs to be urgently brought to the attention of the Committee, arranging an additional meeting of the Committee.

1.7 Other Implications – none directly.

1.7.1

- 1. Financial
- 2. Staffing
- 3. Legal
- 4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
- 5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
- 6. Community Safety
- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement
- 9. Asset Management

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices – None

1.8.2 Background Documents - None

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

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This is a Key Decision because:

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Wards/Parishes affected:

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