

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CORPORATE GOVERNANCE GROUP MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2012
(9.30 - 11.15 AM)**

Present: D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive) (Chairman) B Bassington (Chief Internal Auditor), C O'Boyle (Director of Corporate Support Services), R Palmer (Director of Finance and ICT) and I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive)

**Apologies for
Absence:**

Place: Room 1.05, First Floor, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None for this meeting.

72. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 14.12.11

Agreed.

73. MATTERS ARISING

(a) Senior Recruitment Task and Finish Panel – Scoping Report (Minute 57(b))

Noted that the Scrutiny Panel had now agreed the final text of its report on recruitment procedures which would now be considered by the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and the Council in February 2012.

Noted that Counsel was reviewing the Council's Constitution's Employment Rules and an opinion and redrafting was expected over the next few weeks.

(b) Policy on Staff Acting as Executors or Beneficiaries (Minute 63)

Noted that there had been a discussion at the recent meeting of the Public Legal Partnership and a member had indicated that the "Crossroads" Charity had a similar policy.

Noted that this would now be supplied to the Partnership for further consideration.

Noted that Essex County Council did not have such a policy in place.

ACTION:

C O'Boyle to pursue.

(c) Grange Farm Trust (Minute 64)

Noted that a letter had been sent to the Secretary to the Trust requesting details of the grant aid dispersed by the Trust in order that a report could be made to the next Council meeting.

(d) EFDC v Saundercock

Noted that following a discussion earlier in the week among Corporate Governance Group members the Council's Legal advisers had been asked to submit a counter offer of between £30,000 and £55,000 in settlement and, although there had been no formal response from the solicitors acting for the other side, there were indications that a counter offer was more likely to be at the lower end of the scale.

ACTION:

R Palmer to pursue.

74. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Noted.

75. EFDC ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN 2011/12 - PKF

Noted that the Council's external auditors had now submitted their Audit Plan for 2011/12.

Agreed that subject to minor clerical changes already notified by R Palmer and to clarification of the wording in Appendix A (item 2) (New Property Management System) to indicate which of two systems was described.

Noted that this Plan will be submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 9 February 2012.

ACTION:

R Palmer to pursue.

76. INTERNAL AUDIT - MONITORING REPORT/OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2011

Agreed that the draft report be submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee subject to the following comments/amendments:

(a) include reference to a further report to be made to the Corporate Governance Group and the Audit and Governance Committee on financial appraisals carried out by the Chief Internal Auditor in connection with tendering exercises;

(b) make reference to recent staff sickness and resignation from Internal Audit Section and indicate that the possibility of re-directing staffing resources to support fraud initiatives was being actively considered; and

(c) amend wording of Housing Repairs Service report to clarify the reasons for previous discrepancies in stock records ie due to poor recording procedures.

ACTION:

B Bassington to revise report.

77. AUDIT COMMISSION NATIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDIES - "AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS 2010/11"

Noted that the Council had complied with the various audit and signing off of the statutory accounts as indicated in this report.

Agreed that no further action was required.

ACTION:

S Tautz to note.

78. AUDIT COMMISSION NATIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY - "PROTECTING THE PUBLIC PURSE"

Agreed that the report of B Bassington be referred to the next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee with a copy of the National Audit Study.

Agreed that reference be made in the report to the opportunities for staff in Internal Audit to cover for any possible loss of expertise in fraud matters as a result of any restrictions on the Council's access to fraud staff as a result of the Department of Work and Pension reorganisation.

Agreed that recommendation (1) in the report to the Audit and Governance Committee should make reference to this new fraud initiative.

Noted that training in "money laundering" procedures had already been provided to Finance and Legal staff and a reporting process was already in being.

ACTION:

B Bassington to amend report.

79. EXECUTIVE AND REGULATORY DECISION-MAKING - DRAFT REPORT FOR CONSTITUTION AND MEMBER SERVICES SSP

Draft report agreed subject to the following comments:

(a) wording changes requested by the Director of Planning and Economic Development regarding planning proposals involving Council property which were regarded as having planning permit in regulatory terms.

(b) no reference be made at the present time to New Homes Bonus but the situation be monitored with a view to deciding at a future date as to whether further amendments should be made.

Agreed that C O'Boyle and I Willett fine tune the wording of those changes under (a) to ensure the meaning was absolutely clear.

ACTION:

I Willett to finalise report.

80. STANDARDS COMMITTEE

(a) Assessments, Reviews, Investigations and Adjudications

Schedule noted.

(b) New Ethical Framework – Member Training (11.2.12)

Noted that over 60 delegates had booked for this training.

(c) DCLG Advice on Implementation

Noted.

(d) PLP – Joint Working on New Standards Arrangements

Progress report noted.

(e) Future Conduct Arrangements – Draft Report for the Standards Committee

Draft report agreed.

ACTION:

I Willett to pursue.

(f) Investigations Conducted by the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer on behalf of other Essex Councils

Noted that the investigation conducted on behalf of Harlow Council had now been concluded.

Noted that the final report of the investigation conducted for Basildon Borough Council had now been submitted.

81. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Buckhurst Hill Parish Council – HR Support

Noted that an approach had been received from Buckhurst Hill Parish Council for HR support in connection with the recruitment of a new parish clerk.

Noted that preliminary scoping discussions had been held with the Parish Council by the Assistant Director (Human Resources) and that subject to a service level agreement and full recharging of costs this support could extend to a further review of the Parish Council's staff establishment.

Agreed that, in order to minimise the risk on this Council, the Service Level Agreement should be very clear in placing responsibility for decisions on the HR issues with the Parish Council and that EFDC was operating in an advisory capacity only.

Noted that at an earlier stage, Buckhurst Hill Parish Council had requested training on governance/procedural matters.

Agreed that this would be better left until after the May elections for the parish.

ACTION:

C O'Boyle/I Willett to monitor.

82. DATE FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

15 February 2012 at 9.30 am in the Acting Chief Executive's Office.

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