

DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

23 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present:

Councillors: Adshead Taylor (Chairman)
Barnes Tindall
Douris W Wyatt-Lowe

Officers:

J Deane Corporate Director (Finance & Operations)
D Skinner Assistant Director (Finance & Resources)
C Taylor Group Manager (Strategic Planning and Regeneration)
C Baker Group Manager (Revenues, Benefits and Fraud)
S Potton Revenues & Benefits Support, Team Leader
J Doyle Member Support Officer

Others:

S Knowles MAZARS

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Elliot.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

51. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

The minutes of the meeting on 29 July 2015 were agreed by the Councillors present and signed by the Chairman.

52. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

53. PROGRESS REPORT – INTERNAL AUDIT (Item 5)

S Knowles (SK) of Mazars introduced this item and began by going through the progress to date. The auditors have issued the Regeneration report (considered later in the agenda) and have produced the draft report on licensing for which they are awaiting management comments and they will be reported at the next meeting. All other planned work is started and underway to schedule.

She then drew attention to the follow up recommendations on reports raised in the audit reports for 14/15 and the three recommendations partly implemented or

Chairman

outstanding.

Cllr Douris raised questions on the Operational Risk Total on Page 10 referring to Data Security. He pointed out that work on this should have been started but has been deferred to quarter 3 and was assured that it is in hand.

S Knowles clarified that the references to the Regeneration report should be the same as those in the report considered later in the agenda.

As a general point Cllr Douris suggested that the Internal Audit (IA) Progress report should include a date by when the recommendations should be implemented – in order for the committee to monitor progress. He followed this up by suggesting that, where appropriate, there should be a note explaining why the target date has not been achieved.

Cllr Taylor then raised a housing repairs issue that affected a disabled resident in his ward as an example of the DBC officers having a completion notice from Osbourne for a job which he knows not to have been completed. He suggested that as part of the IA audit of Housing Repairs later this year he would like them to examine how DBC test what Osbourne say they do against what they have done.

To assist Cllr Douris suggested that IA consider site visits as part of their process. D Skinner (DS) Assistant Director (Finance & Resources) pointed out that DBC should provide the 'control' to test Osbourne's processes and that IA's function is to examine the effectiveness of that control.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe sought clarification on IA's sampling of the repairs 'jobs'. SK advised that IA will look at an 8-10% random sample of the jobs to ensure the service is being properly investigated.

Actions:

IA to include target dates by when the recommendations should be implemented in their report; and

Where appropriate, there should be a note explaining why the target date has not been achieved.

54. INTERNAL AUDIT – REGENERATION (Item 6)

S Knowles opened this item by highlighting the two priority 2 and four priority 3 recommendations which she reported had been accepted by DBC Management who are working on addressing the issues highlighted.

Cllr Tindall raised some issues regarding the low numbers of officers attending the steering group and sought some reasons why officers are not attending in greater numbers. He suggested that it may not be the correct officers who are attending and this suggests that the regeneration steering group is not functioning correctly and that the training needs to be reviewed.

C Taylor (CT), Group Manager (Strategic Planning and Regeneration pointed out that they have reviewed the attendance to address the issues - they now have a list of representatives from each service area who will be encouraged to attend the meetings. The lead officer of each team should be responsible for making sure that the invited officers attend.

Cllr Tyndall then suggested that officer consider using some form of 'Skype' as an alternative to encourage greater participation.

CT then went on to add that the CorVu 'change control' reporting element of the

recommendations had been addressed by Rob Smythe and his team.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe felt that the meetings may be better attended if officers were encouraged to attend only the session relevant to them as he doubted that all those involved had to be present for everything. He suggested that the meeting agenda might need to be made clearer.

CT responded that the Regeneration Board and the Steering Group Terms of Reference have been reviewed to address the issue.

Cllr Douris proposed that that each Department/Section should be encouraged to have a designated officer and a nominated sub for the times they cannot attend.

The Chair sought confirmation that the recommendations were being actioned and completed. CT advised that they had either been completed or were awaiting ratification by the Regeneration Board; everything that can be done up till the date of this meeting has been done. The last scheduled meeting of the Board had to be cancelled but the actions would be carried out at the next meeting and the suggested systems are in fact in place. S Knowles advised that she will confirm the work completed in her summary follow-up report.

In response to a question from Cllr Douris, CT confirmed that the training in recommendation 6 has been given and the recommendation actioned.

55. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Resolved:

That, under s.100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A Part 1 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during the item in Part 2 of the Agenda for this meeting, because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, that, if members of the public were present during the item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information relating to the business affairs of the Council which may be of value to fraudsters. The Department for Work and Pensions, which oversees housing benefit administration, states that this information should not be made public due to the sensitivity of its contents.

Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part 1, paragraph 3.

56 INTRODUCTION OF RISK BASED VERIFICATION FOR HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT (Item 8)

Full details can be found in the Part II minutes.

57 WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The members considered the Audit Committee work programme for 2015/16

Cllr Tindall questioned whether the committee would have the time to consider all the items proposed for the March 2016 meeting. Cllr Douris suggested that the officers reconsider the proposals and amend the work programme.

The meeting ended at 8.40pm

Chairman