FINANCE, RESOURCES, AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton, on Friday 25 November 2016 at 9.30 am.

Committee Members Present:  Councillors:  P Hardy (Chairman), L Dale, W Kemp, T Lewis, T Palmer, R Savage and G Wheatley

Cabinet Member in Attendance:  Councillor:  M Edney

Officers in Attendance:  The Director of Business Development (D Lorimer), the Head of Finance & HR (P Catchpole), the Accountancy Manager (M Fernandez-Graham), the Property Manager (R Garfoot), the Support & Innovation Manager (K Woodhouse), and the Children’s Services Team Manager (L Downes)

Others Present:  Kevin Suter (Ernst Young)

127  MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

128  WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Kevin Suter to the meeting and introduced the new Head of Finance and HR, Peter Catchpole, to the Committee.
129 PROGRESS REPORT ON INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIVITY

The Director of Business Development presented the Progress Report on Internal Audit Activity during the period between 1 April and 15 November 2016, summarising the eight completed audits undertaken. Members noted that 60% of the Audit Plan had been completed and that seven of the eight areas covered had been awarded a reasonable assurance with the eighth receiving a limited assurance.

Following a brief discussion, it was

RESOLVED: To note the outcomes of the eight completed audits in the period covered by the report, and the position of the (revised) Internal Audit Plan for 2016/17.

130 INTERNAL AUDIT FOLLOW UP REPORT

The Director of Business Development presented the Committee with a report which detailed the progress made in relation to the Council’s implementation of the agreed audit recommendations falling due by 31 October 2016.

Members were advised that, as at the date of the report, no management responses had been received in relation to eight recommendations made regarding the audit review of the Help Hub, which had received a limited assurance. However, an updated paper was tabled at the meeting which sought to inform the Committee of the management responses and the current position regarding these recommendations. The Children’s Services Team Manager summarised the updated paper, reassuring members that four of the eight recommendations had been completed and that work was being undertaken to resolve the remaining four, as detailed in the paper. It was suggested and agreed that the Early Help and Prevention Manager be invited to attend the next meeting of the Finance, Regulation, Audit and Governance Committee in March 2017 to update members on these items.

In response to a member’s query regarding the outcomes of the audit, officers advised that they had found it a helpful process which had reinforced that best practices were in place and were being adhered to.

The Committee discussed the costs and benefits of the Help Hub and agreed that although the costs of the Hub were included in the Council’s budget, it was difficult to quantify the benefits to residents and savings made to the Council and its partners due to early intervention. Members noted that the Treasury Green Book model might demonstrate this more effectively and that the Hub could provide many examples of how future costs had been avoided due to their intervention.
Members discussed the objectives of the Help Hub and were reassured by officers that the procedures, aims and objectives were clearly documented and that the South Norfolk model was providing a good steer to other councils.

In response to a member’s question regarding data sharing within the Help Hub, the Committee was reassured that customers of the Hub were asked to sign a consent statement when registering for the service, which would allow partners to share information to provide the best solution for each case.

Following a brief discussion, it was noted that an article regarding the role of the Community Connectors would be included in the next Members’ Bulletin.

It was then

RESOLVED: To note the position in relation to the completion of agreed audit recommendations as at 31 October 2016.

131 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

Kevin Suter from Ernst & Young presented the Annual Audit Letter, explaining that it was a summary of all audit work carried out during the year, and he advised members that an unqualified audit opinion had been awarded. Members were pleased to note that the audit had been completed almost two months in advance of the statutory guidelines, even though it was the first year that the Council’s groups had been included in the audit.

It was then:

RESOLVED: To note the Annual Audit Letter.
132 ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017

The Property Manager presented the Asset Management Plan for 2017 and requested that members provide feedback on the new draft document. Members were advised that the current Plan had been reviewed and rewritten since its adoption by Cabinet in 2014, and now incorporated changes to the Council’s assets, as detailed in the report.

In response to a member’s question, officers agreed that the eight public toilets owned by the Council would be added to the Plan and it was also agreed that the Plan would reference that, once refurbished, the public toilets at Harleston would be leased to Harleston Town Council.

Members briefly discussed various points contained within the Plan, including the potential that up-front costs for letting out properties might be passed to landlords, the plans for the Council’s land at Park Road in Diss, and various matters at South Norfolk House, including the office ceiling and hot-desking.

It was noted that officers would present the Commercial and Residential Strategies to the Finance, Regulation, Audit and Governance Committee at its next meeting on 10 March 2017, following which, all documents would be presented to Cabinet for adoption in 2017.

The Committee suggested a few minor grammatical changes to the Plan, after which it was:

RESOLVED: To support the draft Asset Management Plan, subject to the above comments and minor amendments, prior to its presentation to Cabinet in 2017.

133 REVIEW OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN REPORT 2016

The Support and Innovation Manager presented her report which sought to advise members of the Council’s approach to dealing with complaints, including those which had been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in 2016.

Members were pleased to note that the cases referred to the LGO for South Norfolk were relatively small compared with those of other district councils in the area, and that SNC officers were constantly striving to improve the Council’s services and to learn from complaints, where possible. It was suggested and agreed that a review of the LGO Report should be brought annually to the Finance, Regulation, Audit and Governance Committee.
It was then:

**RESOLVED:** To note the contents of the report and add it as a standing item to the work programme of the Finance, Regulation, Audit and Governance Committee.

134 **FINANCE, RESOURCES, AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members noted the Finance, Resources, Audit & Governance Committee’s Work Programme, with the addition of the Review of the Local Government Ombudsman Report as a standing item, as detailed above.

The meeting concluded at 11.00 am

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Chairman