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## CORPORATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Corporate Affairs Committee was held on 26 October 2005.

**PRESENT:** Councillor Clark (Chair), Councillors J A Jones, McPartland and Porley.

**OFFICIALS:** B Baldam, J Bennington, C Davies and A Weatherson.

**\*\*AN APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE** was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs H Pearson.

### **\*\* DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

### **\*\* MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Affairs Committee held on 24 August 2005 were submitted and approved.

## **STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2004/2005**

Further to the meeting of the Committee held on 27 July 2005 the Director of Resources submitted a report in respect of the 2004/2005 Statement of Accounts which included extracts from the audited Statement of Accounts providing details of the main accounting financial statements.

Details were provided of alterations which had been made from the draft which whilst indicated several movements, they were mainly presentational matters which ensured complete compliance with revised SORP requirements. They also built upon the major improvements already included in the draft accounts in respect of asset classification and the decision to adopt the full, modified requirements for Group Accounts.

The report referred to the main components of the Accounts as follows:

Appendix A - Consolidated Revenue Account  
Appendix B - Consolidated Balance Sheet  
Appendix C - Housing Revenue Account.

Specific reference was made to a presentational change in respect of the Consolidated Balance Sheet which contained a provision of £3.4m in respect of the pension deficit attributable to those staff transferred to ERIMUS.

**ORDERED** as follows:-

1. That the 2004/2005 draft Statement of Accounts be approved.
2. That in view of the complexity and size of the document relating to the full Statement of Accounts the Director of Resources ensures that such future documents are made available to Members in accordance with legal requirements prior to seeking the Committee's approval.

## **DISTRICT AUDIT REPORT – FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2004/2005**

The Director of Resources referred to the report of the District Audit Manager, which outlined matters arising from the audit of the financial statements for 2004/2005.

Work on the financial statements was substantially complete and it was anticipated that an unqualified opinion would be issued by 31 October 2005 a draft report on which was given in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

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Reference was made to a number of errors, which had been identified, which related primarily to presentational issues and disclosures required by CIPFA, SORP and BVACOP and had no impact on the reported surplus or levels of balances.

As required details were given of the fees, which had been charged over the three Audit Codes of Practice elements, and in comparison with the previous year.

NOTED

#### **SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES – LEA SCHOOL GOVERNORS – HALL GARTH SCHOOL**

A report of the Head of Policy and Resource was presented in respect of the appointment of LEA representatives to Hall Garth School which would come under constitutional arrangements with effect from 1 January 2006.

It was noted that the existing LEA representatives of Councillor Carr and Mr P Semp had both indicated their willingness to serve a further term of office.

**ORDERED** that Councillor Carr and Mr P Semp be appointed as LEA Representatives on Hall Garth School Governing Body with effect from 1 January 2006.

#### **MEMBERS' SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES – DEPENDENT CARERS' ALLOWANCES**

In a report of the Members' Office Manager the Committee was advised of proposed amendments to the provisions of the Members' Scheme of Allowances in relation to Dependent Carers' Allowances.

The Council Scheme of Allowances made provision for two Dependent Carers' Allowances: one payable in respect of child care responsibilities, and the other in respect of adult dependents who required care.

Following the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Members' Remuneration, Council had previously agreed at its meeting held on 10 December 2004 that both Dependent Carers' Allowances should be linked to the Statutory Minimum Wage (Child Care Allowance) and the 'contract' rate that the Council pays for domiciliary care (Adult Carers' Allowance).

**ORDERED** that the Members' Scheme of Allowances be amended in respect of Dependent Carers' Allowances as follows: -

- i) That the Child Care element of the Carer's Allowance is increased from £4.85 to £5.05 with effect from 1 October 2005;
- ii) That the Adult Dependent Care element of the Carer's Allowance is increased from £9.27 to £9.45 with effect from 7 October 2005.

#### **PUBLIC SECTOR OMBUDSMEN SERVICES – REFORM**

In a report of the Members' Office Manager Members' views were sought regarding the proposals for the Reform of Public Sector Ombudsmen Consultation Paper that had been issued by the Cabinet Office in respect of the services offered by the three different Government Ombudsmen who had responsibility for the oversight of services in England.

It was suggested the current legislation, which governed the role and powers of the various Ombudsmen, restricted the way in which they worked and had led to inefficiencies and duplication in effort in the way that the Ombudsmen provided their services.

The Consultation Paper contained five proposals for reform in relation to: -

- i) The Power to Work Collaboratively

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- ii) Delegation of Powers
  - iii) Power to Issue Guidance
  - iv) Alternative Resolution of Complaints
  - v) Exhaustion of Remedies.

The report concluded that the proposals contained in the Cabinet Office Consultation Paper were considered to be sensible and should result in real improvements for complainants, especially those who had complex cases.

It was considered that the proposals appeared to maintain the necessary protection, in terms of rights and freedoms for complainants that one would expect from Public Service Ombudsmen. Where collaborative working appeared the most effective way to proceed, the complainant's permission would be obtained and there should be no increase in the 'bureaucratic burden' on complainants or on the Council.

It was noted that there were no significant cost implications in the proposals and in some cases savings could result through more efficient and streamlined working practices.

**ORDERED** that a response on the Consultation Paper relating to the Reform of Public Sector Ombudsmen be based on the conclusions set out in the report submitted subject to the following additional comments:-

- a) that the current requirement for a complainant to submit a written complaint to a Member of Parliament in respect of cases falling within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Ombudsman should be reviewed as it was considered an additional and unnecessary barrier for complainants;
- b) it was considered appropriate however for the respective Member of Parliament to be notified by the Parliamentary Ombudsman of any such complaints.