

CIVIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE23 September 2009
6:00pm – 7:00pm

Present: Cllrs Blackhurst (Alt), Boyce (Chair), Dryden, Herbert, Pitt, and Ward

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**09/Civ/36 Minutes**

Subject to a typographical error on page 7, 09/civ/32 first line, 'in-line' changed to 'on-line', the minutes of 24 June were signed by the Chair as a correct record.

09/Civ/37 Apologies for Absence

Cllr Rosenstiel (Cllr Blackhurst attended as the Liberal Democrat alternate member).

09/Civ/38 Declarations of Interest

None

09/Civ/39 Public Questions

A member of the public made a statement about his son's disenfranchisement at the 4 June election and the subsequent slow response to his concerns/complaint. The Chief Executive explained that the letter she sent to him on 24 July offered an unreserved apology. There were a number of errors concerning this elector's case and she had put measures in place to ensure this would not happen again. She stated that if there were more concerns that the gentleman had, she would be happy to meet to discuss them. She advised the Committee that this case had been an isolated incident.

The member of the public challenged whether this disenfranchisement was an isolated incident. He was not satisfied that the investigation undertaken by the Council had been transparent and requested that the matter be investigated externally.

Members commented that they did take any case of disenfranchisement seriously and agreed that the delay in responding to the gentleman's complaint was unacceptable. The Chair advised members that an elections

briefing was being arranged for 16 October at which arrangements for 4 June election and the next election would be discussed.

The Chief Executive agreed that the way the complaint had been handled was unacceptable and she would arrange a meeting with the gentleman to discuss his concerns further.

09/Civ/40 Audit Commission Annual Governance Report

The Council's External Auditor (Debbie Hanson) presented the report.

Ms Hanson drew the Committee's attention to pages 18 and 19 of the agenda which summarised the key messages for the Council, and the commentary and errors found in the financial statements with one recommendation on legal title of property assets (pages 20, 21). Overall the report was positive for the Council and its approach to supporting the external auditor with high quality work was welcomed.

Ms Hanson advised the Committee that the Council was performing well under its Use of Resources assessment (pages 22, 23). The Committee was advised that the evidence and judgements behind the scores would be reported to a future meeting as the timetabling had changed for national scoring assessment, with Councils being able to review scores awarded in mid-October. The Director of Finance advised the Committee that an action plan would accompany the Use of Resources judgements when reported most likely at a special meeting of the Committee held later in the year.

Cllr Pitt asked about why the Icelandic Bank losses were not reflected in the external auditor's report. The Committee was advised that external auditors were following Government guidance on any bearing an audit should have on this as it affected many local authorities. The Director of Finance stated that the Council's Icelandic Bank investments were not part of the Medium Term Strategy as the loss of interest and/or investment had been taken into account during the Budget Setting Report and reported to Council in February 2009.

Resolved (with no one voting against) that the

- 1) audited Statement of Accounts for year ending 31 March 2009 be approved;

- 2) Chair sign the Letter of Representation and audited Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2009 on behalf of the Council.

09/Civ/41 Members Allowances

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the report.

On delaying consideration of the 2010/11 allowances scheme to next spring, Cllr Herbert expressed concern that the Liberal Democrat group did not adopt the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations (from 2008) and it would prove difficult to recruit to Panel vacancies if the work of the Panel was seen mostly to be ignored. He believed that the Panel had come up with some good ideas to simplify the allowances scheme and that these should not be forgotten.

Cllr Ward stated that communication between the committee, councillors generally and the Panel should be looked at to facilitate any future work plans. The Chair stated that the current scheme should be altered to illustrate the merging of the basic allowance and the special responsibility allowance for area committees (which all councilors received). This had been recommended by the Panel but not picked up at the time.

On the recommendation to include the provision of broadband costs within the basic allowance, Cllr Herbert stated that Labour Group did not agree and more broadly wanted the Council to improve the provision of information technology to councillors.

Resolved

- 1) (by 6 votes to 0) to agree the timescale for adopting a Members Allowances Scheme as set out in paragraph 4.
- 2) (by 4 votes to 0) to agree with the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendation from November 2008 that the on-going cost of broadband should be met from the Basic Allowance and that this take effect immediately.

Chair