

**Minutes of:                   AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting:           15 March 2007**

**PRESENT:                   Councillor Sandiford (Chair, substituting for  
Starkey)  
Councillor Dickinson, Eaton, Haworth, P Steen**

**IN ATTENDANCE:         Phil Seddon, Head of Financial Services  
Bill Lawley, Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager  
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer**

**ALSO PRESENT:           Councillor Entwistle**

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The Committee observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect for the death of Councillor Jeff Cheetham who was a member of the Audit Scrutiny Committee.

**1.     APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Starkey and Bernadette O'Connor (co-opted Member).

**2.     DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**3.     MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 25 January 2007 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

**4.     URGENT ITEM**

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items of business.

**5.     PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No questions were raised under this item.

## **6. CHAIRS INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and indicated that the Scrutiny Support Officer had circulated a paper from the Head of Human Resources in response to progress made in relation to sickness absence reporting and separation of duties.

This was in response to issues highlighted in the last audit progress report when it was noted that some departments were not reporting sickness absence to the Human Resources team. There were also comments in the report about the lack of segregation of duties within the calculation and input processes with these duties being assigned to one member of staff.

The Chair informed Members that the Head of Internal Audit met with the Head of Financial Services and the Scrutiny Support Officer to discuss Audit Scrutiny Working Practices and the Committees' Terms of Reference.

It was agreed that these be discussed with the Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager and it was noted that a meeting was due to take place soon to enable any changes to be incorporated into the new Constitution.

### **Resolved:**

That the Committee note the progress made by the Human Resources Team in the reporting of sickness absence and the segregation of duties.

## **7. PROGRESS UPDATE ON RECOVERING DEBTS**

The Head of Financial Services gave a verbal update outlining progress made in relation to the recovery of debts. Since 29 January 2007, the Head of Financial Services and the Legal and Democratic Services Manager had met with the Principal Legal Officer to review the progress of debt recovery.

At the beginning of the process, £69k of outstanding debt was with the Principal Legal Officer. Up to 14 March this had reduced by £21k to £48k. A majority of this debt clearance was a result of debtor write-offs (£13k) and other non-cash transactions.

It was noted that some payment arrangements were now in place and credit notes outstanding from service areas had been issued.

The Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager informed Members that debt recovery procedures were now given high priority and

significant progress had been made over the last few months by ensuring that any money able to be recovered was being recovered.

Concern was raised that some people may not have basic bank accounts to enable them to make payments for some charges incurred to them and the Head of Financial Services indicated that people could receive advice from the one stop shop on payment methods.

A Member made reference to the Credit Union who offered a basic bank account to members of the public.

The Head of Financial Services responded to a question by a member in relation to the rent arrears and it was noted that that this was transferred with the Green Vale Homes contract.

**Resolved:**

That congratulations of the Committee be extended to the Head of Financial Services, the Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager and the Principal Legal Officer for the improvements made with recovery of debts.

**8. STRENGTHENING LINKS BETWEEN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AND THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager outlined proposals to strengthen the relationship between the Standards Committee and the Audit Scrutiny Committee to ensure there was a strong working relationship between the two Committees.

It was noted that the Standards Committee was responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and co-opted Members. The Committee also monitored the operation of the Code of Conduct and the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements.

It was noted that the Audit Scrutiny Committee had a direct interest in the work of the Standards Committee as Audit considered compliance with its own and other published standards and controls including ethical governance arrangements.

The Audit Scrutiny Committee had been asked to consider receiving regular information from the Standards Committee detailing the nature of its work and to submit the Minutes of their meetings to the Audit Scrutiny Committee as a regular agenda item to ensure that items relating to the role of the Audit Scrutiny Committee were taken forward. The Standards Committee were also asked to consider the option of submitting six monthly reports to the Audit Scrutiny Committee setting out details

relating to the Standards Committee's work and the impact upon the ethical agenda for Rossendale.

Members agreed to the above, but asked that either the Chair or a spokesperson from the Standards Committee attend the meeting on a six monthly basis to answer members' queries in relation to the report.

The Scrutiny Support Officer indicated that the Chair of the Standards Committee could meet with the Chair of the Audit Scrutiny Committee to discuss future working relationships.

**Resolved:**

That the Committee agree to developing links with the Standards Committee and ask that the Chair or a spokesperson for the Standards Committee attend the meeting to answer members' queries on the content of their report which would be submitted on a six monthly basis.

**9. LOCAL DETERMINATION**

The Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager presented a paper highlighting a recent Local Standards Hearing and a Summary of the Decision. He asked the Committee to consider the Council's compliance with the Members Code of Conduct and to capture any learning points from the determination.

The Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager informed Members that a new Code of Conduct was due to be published before May 2007 and that Members would receive training on the new Code.

The Chair made a suggestion that the wording of the Declaration of Interest agenda item could be amended to say that Members declaring an interest in any agenda item be requested to contact the Monitoring Officer prior to the meeting.

**The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and finished at 7.15pm**

Signed.....  
(Chair)

Date.....