

ACCOUNTS AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE

25 SEPTEMBER 2012

Present :- Councillor Dennis Willetts (Chairman)
Councillors Glenn Granger, Marcus Harrington, Julia Havis, Cyril Liddy and Gerard Oxford

Substitute Members :- Councillor Nigel Offen for Councillor Ray Gamble
Councillor Martin Goss for Councillor Scott Greenhill
Councillor Peter Higgins for Councillor Theresa Higgins
Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell
for Councillor Jon Manning

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Will Quince

9. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 July were confirmed as a correct record.

10. Have Your Say!

Mr. Andy Hamilton addressed the Committee saying he had addressed the Cabinet on 5 September 2012 concerning six decisions taken by the Cabinet that were failures of civic responsibility and he was disappointed that he had not received a response by the Cabinet to the issues he had raised, describing this as an unacceptable face of public service.

Mr. Hamilton said some recent Council decisions such as £200k repayments to Taxi Drivers due to a management failure, the unpopular leasing out of the Abbots Activity Centre to save £30k and the £8k individual financial inducement to remove elderly people from Joyce Brooks House, but were small when compared with the financial millstone (Visual Arts Facility) blocking the bus park. Mr. Hamilton said huge amounts of public money is being poured into firstsite to prop up the Visual Arts Facility, against budget cuts to Mercury Theatre and Colchester Arts Centre Grants and the closure of gymnastic activities at leisure World. It showed the Council was more committed to providing art related activities for the art elite and its phantom visitor army.

Mr. Hamilton said the Council had not tried to have the new bus station sited on the present location and to blame the Department of Education was a poor excuse. Mr. Hamilton said the building remained a white elephant, costing the taxpayer millions of pounds.

Given this information, Mr. Hamilton questioned the professional integrity of the auditors by suggesting the closing down of the Audit Commission would allow the Council to commission professional auditors in the future.

Councillor Willetts responded to Mr. Hamilton by saying the criticism of the Audit Commission was unfounded and asked Mr. Hamilton to retract the remark.

In regards to the decisions referred to by Mr. Hamilton, Councillor Willetts said these issues should be addressed to the Cabinet, and he believed the Portfolio Holders would have already provided robust responses to most comments.

Councillor Willetts said whilst the Committee will not respond to his comments, they would be passed onto the Cabinet.

11. Results of consultation on proposal to change the name of Harbour Ward

Mr. Andrew Weavers, Monitoring Officer, presented the report that provided the results of the consultation on the proposal to change the name of Harbour Ward.

Mr. Weavers confirmed to the Committee that the consultation was undertaken in a cost effective and timely fashion, with all the consultation response forms delivered by hand, thereby providing a saving in cost.

The closing date of the consultation was 27 July, with 504 respondents representing 18% of the 2,857 properties in the Harbour Ward.

Mr. Weavers said of these, 392 (77%) responses are in favour of changing the name of the ward to Old Heath.

Mr. Weavers said that if the Committee so wishes, it could recommend that the decision of the Committee is presented to full council at the meeting on 17 October 2012.

Thereafter, a change of ward name would not take effect until the first publication of the Register of Electors after this date, and this would be in March 2014.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted that the majority of respondents to the public consultation on the proposal to rename Harbour Ward Old Heath Ward were in favour of the name being changed.

RECOMMENDED to COUNCIL that:-

A special meeting of the Full Council be convened on 17 October 2012 for the purpose of passing the following resolution:-

“That in accordance with Section 59 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Council resolves that Harbour Ward be renamed Old Heath Ward and that the appropriate authorities be notified of this change as soon as practicable”

12. Annual Statement of Accounts

Mr. Heath had briefed Members of the Committee (an invitation was extended to all Members of the Council) on the Annual Statement of Accounts at a closed meeting,

6pm on Thursday 20 September, 2012, attended by Councillors Harrington, Havis, Liddy, Manning, Offen and Willetts.

Mr. Heath provided an overview of the accounts that included the Movement in Reserves Statement, the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Balance Sheet and Cash Flow Statement.

Councillor Willetts expressed thanks to Mr. Heath for providing the briefing, a very good preparatory presentation.

Ms. Debbie Hanson, Officer of the Audit Commission, Mr. Gary Belcher, Audit Commission and Mr. Steve Heath, Finance Manager, attended the meeting for this item.

Ms. Hanson presented the Annual Governance Statement to the Committee, explaining that this was a preparatory report before the Audit Commission issues their final statements.

The Annual Governance Report was a very positive report and Ms. Hanson expressed thanks to all the officers for their excellent performance and support in finalising the accounts.

Ms. Hanson mentioned the three key messages, that the Council had produced a good quality and timely set of accounts, that a prior period adjustment in respect of donated assets was now included in the final version of the financial statements, and that a small number of minor errors had been corrected by management, but there had been no impact upon the level of general fund reserves as a result of the changes.

Ms. Hanson concluded that the Council had put in place adequate arrangements to secure financial resilience and secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Ms. Hanson asked the Committee to take note of the adjustments to the financial statements and approve the letter of representation on behalf of the Council.

Ms. Hanson confirmed that following this decision the Audit Commission the audit would be signed-off by the Officer of the Audit Commission before the 30 September 2012 deadline.

In response to Councillor Willetts, Ms. Hanson said that in regards to valuing heritage assets, it is recognised that some assets e.g. Colchester Castle are too difficult to value, though in most cases items do have an insurance value and this can be used for valuation purposes.

The code of practice requires Council's to value all assets where possible, and where not, the asset has to be disclosed within the accounts.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- i) Accepted the Auditors' report and noted the comments in the covering report.

- ii) Approved the letter of representation and the audited Statement of Accounts.
- iii) Thanked officers and the Audit Commission for their hard work and support in ensuring a timely and accurate completion of the closure of the accounts 2011/12.

13. Work Programme

Councillor Goss asked the Committee to consider reviewing the financial performance of Veolia Contract, including service delivery, quality of performance and costs of delivery.

RESOLVED that the Committee;

- i) Approved the current Work Programme.
- ii) Agreed for the Chairman and Group Spokespersons to consider a briefing note on the Veolia Contract at the next briefing of the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Panel to consider the merits for including the item onto the work programme.