

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, 29 JANUARY 2015**

Councillors: Meehan (Chair), Griffith (Vice-Chair), Adamou, M Blake, Elliott, Engert, Ibrahim, Jogee, Wright, Bull and Sahota

Apologies: Councillor Ozbek

MINUTE NO.	SUBJECT/DECISION	ACTION BY
CNCL391	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS (IF ANY)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ejiofor and Opoku, and consequently Councillors Bull and Sahota were in attendance as substitute members.</p>	
CNCL392	<p>URGENT BUSINESS</p> <p>There were no items of urgent business.</p>	
CNCL393	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
CNCL394	<p>DEPUTATIONS / PETITIONS / PRESENTATIONS / QUESTIONS</p> <p>There were none.</p>	
CNCL395	<p>MINUTES</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2014 be approved as a correct record of the proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.</p>	
CNCL396	<p>GRANTS CERTIFICATION REPORT</p> <p>Paul Dossett and Paul Jacklin of Grant Thornton introduced the item and drew attention to the Summary of Findings set out on pages 10 and 11 of the Certification Report. They pointed out that in regard to key messages which were set out in the Summary, all claims had been submitted and certified by the specified deadlines. Paul Dossett and Paul Jacklin then referred to the Action Plan, attached at Appendix B to the report, which contained one recommendation as follows: 'Identify the reasons for the high number of errors identified within housing benefits cases. Implement a strategy to reduce the errors and to mitigate the risk that subsidy will be reclaimed by the Department of Work and Pensions'. The Committee noted the management response to the recommendation, which was also contained in the Action Plan.</p> <p>Responding to a question from a member of the Committee, officers stated that the errors referred to in the recommendation related mainly to</p>	

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assessments carried out in regard to child tax benefits. The Chair stressed the need to ensure that similar errors were not made in future. The Assistant Director – Finance informed the Committee that Sergio Sgambellone had recently been appointed as the Council’s Assistant Director for Customer Services, and that it would be appropriate for him to be requested to attend a future meeting of the Committee in order to provide an update on what action had been taken, and progress made, to deal with the errors relating to housing benefits.

A member of the Committee stressed the need for greater emphasis being placed on the training of staff who dealt with housing benefits, and that the Assistant Director for Customer Services should attend the next meeting of the Committee to explain what action had been taken on the matter of the errors.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report, and the oral updates given at the meeting by Grant Thornton, be noted.
2. That the Assistant Director for Customer Services be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee to provide an update on action taken to deal with the errors within housing benefits cases.

CNCL397 EXTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS UPDATE

Paul Dossett and Paul Jacklin of Grant Thornton introduced the report and in doing so drew attention to the comments contained therein on page 21 relating to the 2013/14 Audit Certificate. The Committee noted that Grant Thornton had not yet been able to certify the 2013/14 audit as complete, due to two objections raised on the accounts by local authority electors. Of these, one related to bailiff enforcement of parking/traffic debts and the other to the court costs requested by the Council at the point of issuing a summons for non-payment of council tax. The Committee noted that once these two objections had been resolved Grant Thornton would be able to issue the 2013/14 Audit Certificate and close the 2013/14 audit, and it also noted that Grant Thornton would provide an update on this matter at the next meeting.

Paul Dossett and Paul Jacklin of Grant Thornton referred to the matter of accounting for schools, as detailed in the report, and highlighted the fact that debate concerning the recognition of school land and buildings on local authority balance sheets had been re-ignited. Paul Dossett and Paul Jacklin went on to point out that Grant Thornton was taking a leading role, working with the Audit Commission, CIPFA, and other audit firms, in trying to resolve this issue as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report, and the oral updates given at the meeting by Grant Thornton, be noted.

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	<p>2. That it be noted that Grant Thornton would provide an update at the next meeting of the Committee on progress regarding the completion of the 2013/14 audit and the issuing of the 2013/14 Audit Certificate.</p>	
CNCL398	<p>INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT - 2014/15 QUARTER 3</p> <p>Anne Woods, Head of Audit and Risk Management, introduced the report and in doing so informed the Committee that in regard to tenancy fraud 27 properties had been recovered, or succession applications refused, to-date, and she hoped that the target of 50 properties being recovered by the end of the financial year would be achieved. Anne Woods then drew attention to the fact that six properties had been recovered in the third quarter through the tenancy amnesty initiative, and that following the cessation of the amnesty period the Council would enforce a zero-tolerance approach in regard to any tenants found to be sub-letting and that the Council would prosecute those concerned. She continued by saying that the Council would continue to work with registered providers to tackle tenancy fraud. The Committee noted the comments given by Anne Woods regarding housing benefit fraud, and the fact that the Fraud Team's target of 20 prosecution cases for 2014/15 had been achieved and passed, with 24 prosecutions having been carried out to-date.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the audit coverage and counter-fraud work completed be noted, along with the actions taken during the quarter to ensure audit recommendations are implemented and to address the outstanding recommendations during the third quarter 2014/15.</p>	
CNCL399	<p>TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2015/16 - 2017/18</p> <p>George Bruce, Head of Finance – Treasury and Pensions, introduced the report, and informed the Committee that the proposed strategy of minimising borrowing and continuing to make use of internal balances not only minimised costs, but also reduced the credit risk associated with investments, as the amount being invested is low. The Committee noted that new borrowing would still be required during 2015/16 due to planned maturities and capital expenditure, and it was proposed that the cost of refinancing be minimised by borrowing short-term from local authorities to maintain liquidity and taking opportunities to fix borrowing rates should favourable opportunities arise.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the proposed Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2015/16 to 2017/18 be agreed and recommended to Full Council for final approval.</p>	

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CNCL400	DELEGATED DECISIONS, SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS, URGENT ACTIONS RESOLVED: That the report be noted.	
CNCL401	ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF AN URGENT NATURE There were no items of urgent business.	
CNCL402	DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 24 March at 7.00pm.	

The meeting ended at 8.56pm.

**COUNCILLOR GEORGE MEEHAN
CHAIR**