

SOUTH RIBBLE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING 5 MARCH 2014

REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2014

External Audit – Certification report 2012/13

- Received a report on Grant Thornton's work on certifying our National Non-Domestic Rates return and Housing and Council Tax Benefit Subsidy claim
- Pleased that the National Non-Domestic Rates return had been certified without amendment
- Learned that a small number of errors in the processing of changes in circumstances relating to the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Subsidy claim had led to an overpayment of benefit but reassured that these were a 'one-off', requiring no repayment to the Department of Work and Pensions and that a new checking regime had been introduced to minimise the risk of this overpayment recurring
- Welcomed attempts to recover any overpayments made and reassured that residents were not put into financial hardship by the recovery process

Budget Monitoring Statement as at 31 December 2013

- Aware that there was still some uncertainty surrounding the year-end position (Business Rates Retention and Small Business Rate Relief) but current indications were that there may be a small transfer to General Reserves
- Requested a more extensive written explanation of the Housing Benefit subsidy system in view of its complexity
- Expressed concern about the ongoing uncertainty about the impact of the Business Rates Retention Scheme and requested a Learning Hour on the scheme when technical details were published by central government
- Noted that Building Control fee income was forecast to be under budget but informed that there were likely to be no consequences for the authority even though, by law, the function was required to break even over a three year period
- Welcomed the completion of a number of schemes within the Capital Programme

Corporate Governance Progress Report

- Received a report on the progress made to strengthen the council's governance arrangements
- Welcomed the significant amount of progress reported on and commended the desire for continual improvement
- Learned that a new computer system for tracking and monitoring customer complaints was being piloted and that a new policy for dealing with vexatious complaints had recently been approved and was designed to ensure a more joined up approach across affected service areas
- Expressed thanks to the Director of Corporate Governance for her hard work over the years on the governance agenda across the authority

Internal Audit Progress Report

- Received a report on progress made on the South Ribble and Shared Financial Services Internal Audit Plans
- Invited to advise Internal Audit of any areas we would like to see included in the next Internal Audit Plan so that they could be included in the overall risk assessment
- Looked forward to receiving proposals for a revised rating system at a future meeting
- Commended the excellent work of the Internal Audit Service

Forward Plan

- Considered a request from the Scrutiny Committee to review the procedure for member sign-off of My Neighbourhood spend but concluded this was not appropriate at this time as we had already reviewed the governance arrangements of My Neighbourhood areas more than once and an Internal Audit of My Neighbourhoods was currently underway
- Noted the Forward Plan without further debate

I hereby commend the report to Council.

COUNCILLOR WARREN BENNETT
CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE