

AUDIT AND CORPORATE SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE

12th November 2014

Present: Mr A Archer (Deputy Chair in the Chair)
Mr D Ellis, Councillors M James, L Jenkins, RM Lewis and R Owens.

[Councillor DWM Rees arrived during consideration of the
Performance Report, *Minute 4 refers*]

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 10.00am – 11.45am)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs G Hayward, who was travelling to another meeting on behalf of the Authority, and Councillor M Williams.

2. Disclosures

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 16th July 2014 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2014 be confirmed and signed.

4. Performance Report for the period ending 30th September 2014

The Business and Performance Manager presented the performance to date for the Authority's Corporate Services for the first six months of the financial year. Appended to the report, and also presented at the meeting, were the key actions and measures within Corporate Services, and these showed that most performance was on target, although some activities were behind schedule.

The first of two red indicators related to staff absence, as there had been an increase in the number of days lost, mainly through extended absences of 4 – 8 weeks. Officers were monitoring both absences and trends. Members sought assurance that the increase in absences was not the result of work stress due to increased workload and officers replied that most of the absences this year were not stress-related and even when they were it was often due to a combination of circumstances. More detail on staff absence would be provided in the Health and Safety Report to be covered later on the agenda (*Minute 7 refers*).

Members also sought assurance that the increase in Health and Safety incidents (the second red indicator) was not as a result of lack of training



or protective personal equipment. Officers were able to provide that assurance, noting the Authority's good record on certification of staff, and explaining that the increase in incidents was believed to be due to an increase in reporting, which was something that was encouraged. Many of the incidents were minor and all were considered by the Authority's Health and Safety Group and Senior Management Team to see if lessons could be learned.

One Member asked a question about the progress on document management as he continued to receive complaints about the inability to access planning applications made to the Authority online. Officers replied that a number of potential solutions had been identified, but given the large amount of staff time that would be needed to implement them, none would provide value for money; there were also technical issues in using the system adopted by Pembrokeshire County Council. The Chief Executive added that it was something that the Authority would have to address and a report on the matter would be prepared for the next meeting of the Committee.

The final set of measures related to Communications and Marketing, and the Chairman wished to compliment staff at Oriel y Parc on the Peter Blake Exhibition and related activities. The Chief Executive advised that Jenn Jones would take up her post as Oriel y Parc Manager in the new year. Members also asked a number of questions relating to the attendance by the Authority at various shows and events and the effectiveness of the presence. Following a wide ranging discussion, it was agreed that it would be useful for the Communications and Marketing team to make a presentation to a future meeting of the Committee.

Finally, the Business and Performance Manager updated the Committee on the quarterly planning figures, with the Authority performing well, being third in the Welsh Government's league table for the number of applications determined within eight weeks. The Chief Executive advised that Mr Liam Jones had recently been appointed as the new Head of Development Management and consideration of how his post would be replaced was ongoing.

It was **RESOLVED** that the performance report be received.

5. Budget Performance Report for the 6 Months to September 2014

The Finance Manager reported that as at 30th September the Authority's net revenue expenditure was £2,783k, which was £424k (13.2%) under the profiled budget, and the main reasons for the variance were outlined by department in the report. A significant part of this was due to increased income from merchandise sales and car parks and details of these were given. It was pointed out that there was a typing error in the



last sentence on page 11 which should have read ‘...running behind the budget schedule...’.

Turning to the revenue forecast for the year, the report suggested a budget surplus of approximately £150k (rather than £100k as stated on page 14). The Finance Manager explained that the surplus income this year so far had been quite exceptional, and he therefore did not think it prudent to factor in those levels in future years. He also drew attention to the penultimate line of the table which showed a figure of £93k as a Welsh Government (WG) Claw Back and explained that clarification was still awaited from WG as to the effect this might have on the levy from Pembrokeshire County Council.

The report provided details of the Capital Programme, under which it was noted that the Origins Project had been completed and the final grant claims were being submitted. Details of the Authority’s reserves were also given and clarification was sought by a Member regarding the affordable housing commuted sum which he assumed formed part of these reserves. Officers explained that this money was paid directly to Pembrokeshire County Council as they had the appropriate procedures in place to collect it, however the Authority did have a say in how it was spent. A report to clarify this mechanism would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that the budgetary performance report for the 6 months ended 30th September 2014 be endorsed.

6. Internal Audit 2014/15

Members were reminded that the report of the 2013/14 Internal Audit, provided by Pembrokeshire County Council had been reported to the Committee in February and this had identified no significant failings. The report before Members set out the Internal Audit Plan for 2014/15 and noted that work had commenced the previous week and a final report would hopefully be brought to the meeting of the Committee next February. The Audit would cover the following areas: Finance Management System, Payroll & Expenses, Debtors, Grant Funding arrangements, Information Governance, Car Parks, Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre, Newport Information Centre, Carew Castle (Procedure Review only) and Implementation of Recommendations from the previous report.

Members were also reminded that, in collaboration with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, a joint tendering exercise was currently underway with a view to appointing Internal Auditors and a Chief Audit Executive for a 3 year period commencing April 2015. The tender document was attached for Members’ information and this had been published on Buy 4 Wales with a closing date of 28th November 2014. It was clarified that the decision as to the provider chosen would be taken by each Authority



individually and the amount of the tender meant that this could be taken at officer level, although it was agreed that an update would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Audit Plan for the 2014/15 accounting period and the proposed tendering for Internal Audit provision for 2015/16 thru 2017/18 be noted.

7. **Health and Safety Annual Report 2013-14**

The Personnel Manager began by apologising for the incorrect dates given in the opening paragraph of her covering report. This explained that the Annual Report, which was appended, was provided for Members to demonstrate consideration of health and safety at the most senior level in the organisation.

The Annual Report outlined actions undertaken in 2013-14 as well as providing accident/incident data, information on sickness levels and other statistics. Members asked whether in future reports the graphs showing the data could be more consistent in terms of their reporting periods, however they were supportive of the Authority's policy of seeking to increase the level of reporting of incidents and 'near misses' in order to prevent re-occurrence.

Turning to sickness levels, it was reported that absence levels in 2013-14 were significantly higher than in recent years with a total of 1445 days, and that this increase was in long term absences, largely attributable to mental health issues. 10 employees had been off work with depression, stress, anxiety, etc as compared to 6 the previous year; the absences were also of a much longer duration. However the Personnel Manager cautioned against over-analysing this information, noting that in the current year the trend seemed to be for physical injuries, rather than mental health issues.

Members remained concerned that some staff absence was due to work related stress. Officers explained that 'work' was a broad term that included office relationships as well as workload, however they agreed that the Authority had a responsibility to its staff and managers did take the issue seriously. Members did agree that lengthy absence from work was not necessarily good for staff in the longer term.

The report also highlighted the training and learning that had taken place over the year and it was noted that there had been less practical land management training due to a large number of courses having taken place the previous year. The Personnel Manager also noted that 29 staff had undertaken a Mental Health First Aid course over two days which was not an organisation or management course but one that would help



individuals to recognise and respond to the signs and symptoms in society in general and that this would have benefits for the Authority.

The final part of the report was an Action plan for the coming 3-years, and this set out the objectives, risks and performance indicators that would be measured.

Members thanked officers for an interesting presentation and the contents of the report were **NOTED**.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Chief Executive invited Members to suggest items they would like to consider at future meetings of the Committee. He noted that there were a number of standing and regular items which appeared on the Agenda, and the discussions that day had suggested some additional items: Affordable Housing Commuted Sum, Document Management and the work of the Marketing and Communications Team. One Member suggested that a report on the joint working that was currently being undertaken would also be useful. Members also asked that an email be sent to those Members of the Committee who were not present to ask if there were items they would like considered.

It was **RESOLVED** that the forward work programme consist of the following items: Affordable Housing Commuted Sum, Document Management, joint working and the work of the Marketing and Communications Team, together with any items suggested by those Members of the Committee who were not present that day.

9. Delegation of any issues for consideration by the Continuous Improvement Group

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues of concern that the Committee wished to delegate to the Continuous Improvement Group for consideration.

