

FINAL ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

29 September 2006

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

4 October 2006

GOVERNANCE AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out proposals for new governance and reporting arrangements for the council, and asks the Final Accounts and Audit Committee to approve the proposal.

Background

2. At their meeting in April 2006 the Standards Committee noted that although they had been receiving reports on Equality and Diversity arrangements in the authority, the council's constitution did not give them the power to do so. This gave rise to a discussion about governance and reporting arrangements, with particular reference to the division of responsibilities between the Standards Committee and the Final Accounts and Audit Committee.
3. The minutes of the meeting reflect the outcome of those discussions, and are transcribed below:

Chairman's Announcements *The Chairman explained that the Committee would not be considering a report on equality and diversity at this meeting. This was because the Committee was not empowered to consider this matter under its current terms of reference. A report on equality and diversity would be considered by the Cabinet in the near future. Officers agreed to review the allocation of responsibilities for the various aspects of corporate governance, including Equality and Diversity, Ethical Conduct, and Risk Management, between the various Member bodies (Cabinet, Standards Committee, Final Accounts and Audit Committee, and Overview and Scrutiny Committee) and to bring a report to the next meeting of the Committee.*

4. At the request of the Standards Committee and the Chief Executive, the attached governance and reporting structure was prepared in order to address the Standards Committee's concerns. The new structure addresses a wider range of reporting requirements than those requested by the Standards Committee, because the chief executive wished to take this opportunity to consolidate the arrangements to achieve clarity and accountability for all of the authority's reporting functions.
5. The proposed structure was drafted using written guidance from CIPFA. It is aligned with appropriate reporting and governance arrangements that are

contained in Wiltshire County Council's constitution. It has been reviewed and amended in the light of comments from chief officers.

6. This report forms part of the council's wider programme of ethical governance improvement. The ethical governance improvement programme is overseen by the Standards Committee, but where relevant, reports and recommendations are made to other committees.

Main Considerations for the Council

7. It is important for the council to ensure that it has in place clear and transparent arrangements for governance and reporting, that these are widely available, and understood by all those who write and receive reports. This will ensure that decision making is made by the appropriate committees and that all relevant committees are kept informed about issues that concern them. It will also ensure that decisions are made by those committees which are best placed to see that any recommendations they make are implemented.
8. The structure proposed in the attached document is not definitive. For example, it contains no reference to governance and reporting arrangements for partnership working, because these have yet to be agreed. However, it is proposed that when they have been finalised, they are incorporated into the document, and that any other relevant arrangements are similarly included. It is proposed, therefore, that the governance and reporting structure should be treated as a living document, with regular reviews to ensure that it is fit for purpose. It is proposed that the Final Accounts and Audit Committee should take responsibility for these reviews.

Recommendations

9. That the Final Accounts and Audit Committee adopts the attached governance and reporting arrangements on behalf of the authority.
10. That the Final Accounts and Audit Committee asks the Monitoring Officer to include the arrangements in the protocols attached to Wiltshire County Council's constitution.
11. That the Final Accounts and Audit Committee ask the corporate standards manager to review the arrangements after they have been in operation for six months and bring a report to the committee.

Risk Assessment

12. There is a risk that the proposed arrangements might not be found to be fit for purpose. However, this risk can be mitigated by regular reviews. There is a greater risk in not implementing the proposed new governance and reporting structure, because the current governance and reporting arrangements have been found to lack clarity and accountability in some areas.

Financial Implications

13. None

Environmental Impact

14. None.

Legal Considerations

15. The new arrangements have been checked to ensure that they are compliant with the Local Government Act 2000 and the council's constitution. There are no other relevant legal considerations.

STEPHEN GERRARD

Monitoring Officer

Report Author: Nina Wilton, Corporate Standards Manager

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None