

# **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

**Thursday 18 December 2014**

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Coulter, Darke, Munkonge, Rowley, Seamons, Thomas and Wade.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Nigel Kennedy (Head of Finance), Jeremy Thomas (Head of Law and Governance), Jennifer Thompson (Law and Governance) and Anna Winship (Financial Accounting Manager)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Christopher Dickens (Pricewaterhousecoopers), Alan Witty (Ernst and Young).

## **27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fooks (Councillor Wade substituted), and from Councillor Fry (Councillor Munkonge substituted).

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, the Committee appointed Councillor Darke to chair the meeting.

## **28. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **29. SETTING OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE 2015-16**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance setting out the information and calculations required to set the "Council Tax Base" for 2015/16 as required by section 33 of The Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012.

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Finance, introduced the report and answered questions. He explained that the tax base is the calculation of the number of properties that are liable for a council tax charge expressed in terms of a Band D equivalent for the parishes and the unparished area of the City. The figure is adjusted to take account of reductions for discounts and reductions such as council tax support, single person discounts and empty property discount and is subsequently used to calculate total collectable council tax income for the year. The major preceptors, the County Council and Thames Valley Police are paid their precepts out of these monies and any adjustment for variations in the actual council tax income is made at year end, with amounts being paid or reclaimed from the preceptors in proportion to their precepts.

The Committee resolved:

1. that the 2015/16 Council Tax Base for the City Council's area as a whole is set at 42,658.7 (as shown in Appendix 1)
2. that the projected level of collection is set at 97.5%



Christopher Dickens introduced the report and answered questions.

He said

- Senior management had added a new audit of the project management and costings of the Rosehill Community Centre to see what lessons could be learned.
- The issues highlighted in car parks had been resolved and income forecasts were justifiable.
- The largest single risk to the Council's medium term financial strategy came from the loss of business rates for the three years of the Westgate redevelopment.
- Several interim reports may be issued in advance of the next meeting.

The Committee noted the report and asked to consider the audit report on the procurement of Rosehill Community Centre.

#### **34. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT - COLLECTION FUND**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance on behalf of the Council's Internal Auditors, Pricewaterhousecoopers, detailing the audit of the collection fund (controls and processes over council tax and business rates).

Christopher Dickens introduced the report and outlined the recommendations and actions taken.

The Committee noted the report

#### **35. PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance setting out the progress made on the implementation of internal and external audit recommendations.

The Committee noted the report and the changes to the tracker.

#### **36. RISK MANAGEMENT QUARTERLY REPORTING: QUARTER 2 2014/2015**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance updating the committee on both corporate and service risks as at the end of Quarter 2, 30 September 2014.

The Committee noted the report and the changes to the risk register.

#### **37. UPDATE ON FRAUD INVESTIGATION 1 APRIL TO 30 NOVEMBER 2014**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance setting out the Investigation Team's activity and performance from 1 April 2014 to 30 November 2014 and giving an update on the progress of the team restructure, Department

of Communities and Local Government grant bid and transfer of Housing Benefit investigation responsibilities to the Department for Work and Pensions.

Scott Warner introduced the report and answered questions. He said:

- The tenancy amnesty had successfully publicised the council's stance on tenancy fraud with 1 property returned and multiple referrals received, 11 of which are deemed likely to result in social housing properties being brought back into use. The amnesty would probably not be repeated and stronger action would be taken against anyone found to be sub-letting in the future.
- Working with South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils had proved successful for all parties with significant results achieved.
- Consultation was on-going on the forthcoming transfer of housing benefit fraud work to the DWP. The team will be restructured to provide an effective fraud investigation service for council tax discounts, business rates, housing and other service areas across the authority. This included developing an Oxford Fraud Hub and a new data warehousing system which will allow cross-matching of data with other local authorities' and records from Registered Providers of Social Housing. The DCLG funding would be used for this.

The Committee congratulated the team on their successful bid for DCLG funding to establish a county wide fraud intelligence and investigation hub

The Committee noted the report.

### **38. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Committee agreed to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2014 as a true and accurate record.

### **39. DATES AND TIMES OF MEETINGS**

The Committee noted the dates and times of future meetings.

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.05 pm**