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MEETING	AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE	21 SEPTEMBER 2009
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS B WATSON (CHAIR), BROOKS (VICE-CHAIR), BOWGETT, JAMIESON-BALL, SCOTT AND R WATSON
APOLOGIES	COUNCILLOR KIRK
IN ATTENDANCE	COUNCILLOR MOORE (EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES) STEVE NICKLIN (DISTRICT AUDITOR) ALISTAIR NEWALL (DISTRICT AUDIT)

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## **PART B - MATTERS REFERRED TO COUNCIL**

### **31. THE INTRODUCTION OF A CORPORATE APPROACH TO HANDLING PETITIONS AND E-PETITIONS**

Members considered a report which detailed how petitions were currently being dealt with across the Council, set out a potential corporate approach to handling petitions and proposed the introduction of e-petitioning via the internet.

The report had been prepared in response to a referral back by Council of this Committee's recommendation, at their meeting in January 2009 in respect of petitions (Minute 37 of that meeting refers), and to requests made by this Committee on 31 March 2009 (Minute 41 of that meeting refers) and by the Working Group tasked with looking at the detailed implementation of changes to the Council's decision-making structure. It also responded to a requirement in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction (LDEDC) Bill currently before Parliament for local authorities to have a system for dealing with both paper and electronic petitions and to publicise their responses to petitions.

Following consultation with Directors, the IT&T team and the Monitoring Officer, the following options were presented for Members' consideration:

**Option 1** – introduce an e-petitions facility and Corporate Petitions Register using the ModGov committee management system (CMS) at no extra cost and with immediate effect. This was the recommended option.

**Option 2** – defer a decision on the introduction of one or both these facilities.

**Option 3** – invite the Head of IT&T and TC to examine in more detail the migration of these facilities (currently with EDRMS). This would cause delay.

**Option 4** – no change to current practice. This would fail to address forthcoming legislative change.

Members commented that the report did not address the issue raised at the Council meeting on 21 January 2009 regarding the definition of 'residents' whose signatures on a petition could trigger a debate at full Council. Officers agreed to bring this information to the next ordinary meeting of the Committee, in December 2009.<sup>1</sup>

**RECOMMENDED:** That Council approve the introduction of a Corporate Petitions Register and e-petitions facility, as outlined in the report, based initially upon using the facilities currently available within the ModGov CMS.

**REASON:** In order to comply with the legislative requirements of the forthcoming LDEDC Bill.

Action Required

1. Bring this information to the next meeting

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**32. REVIEW OF THE AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE (ARTICLES & FUNCTIONS)**

*[See also under Part A Minutes]*

Members considered a report which proposed the appointment of an independent adviser to the Audit & Governance Committee, as part of a review of the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Details of the current Terms of Reference, as set out in the Council's Constitution, were attached as Annex A to the report. The addition of an independent adviser would be in line with best practice as set down by CIPFA and recent Audit Commission and CLG Select Committee recommendations responding to the Icelandic Banks collapse.

An extract from the Select Committee report, stating that audit committees should recruit an independent member to assist in their scrutiny of treasury management arrangements, was provided at Annex B. However, co-opted members could not be appointed to audit committees which had power to approve the accounts. It was therefore suggested that one or more independent advisers be appointed for this purpose, on a non-voting basis.

**RECOMMENDED:** That Council approve the appointment of one independent adviser to the Audit & Governance Committee and that the Articles be amended to reflect this change.

**REASON:** To ensure that the composition of the Committee reflects and meets best practice and professional requirements.

B Watson, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 8.30 pm].