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MEETING	AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE	13 JANUARY 2009
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS PIERCE (CHAIR), BROOKS (VICE-CHAIR (PRESENT FOR THE ITEMS UNDER MINUTES 26-37), CRISP, JAMIESON-BALL, SCOTT (PRESENT FOR THE ITEMS UNDER MINUTES 26-37), KIRK AND R WATSON
IN ATTENDANCE	COUNCILLOR MOORE (EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES) ALISTAIR NEWALL (AUDIT COMMISSION)

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## PART B - MATTERS REFERRED TO COUNCIL

### 37. PROPOSED CHANGE TO THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION REGARDING PETITIONS

Members considered a report which outlined proposed constitutional changes to the way in which the Council dealt with petitions submitted by residents and businesses in the City of York area.

The changes had been suggested by Cllr Scott, who had originally intended to put the matter before Full Council by way of a notice of motion but had agreed for it to be brought via the Audit and Governance Committee instead. The proposal was to amend the current arrangements under Standing Order 7 - whereby petitions brought to Full Council were referred to the Executive or appropriate committee to deal with - so as to enable a debate to be initiated at Full Council by means of a petition signed by at least 1,000 residents. It was also suggested that the possibility of introducing an on-line petition facility be examined. However, this would need to be given further consideration by Officers, who had already had preliminary discussions regarding on-line petitioning.

Members were invited to consider the following options:

**Option 1** – recommend a change to Standing Order 7 to provide for *'residents to initiate a debate at Full Council upon any issue touching and concerning the City of York where a minimum of 1,000 residents petition.'*

**Option 2** – make no recommendations at this stage but receive a further report following enactment of the Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Bill, which includes a new duty on local authorities to respond to petitions.

**Option 3** – not to recommend any changes in relation to petitions.

RECOMMENDED: That Option 1 be agreed and that Standing Order 7 be amended to provide for *'residents to initiate a debate at Full Council upon any issue touching and concerning the City of York where a minimum of 1,000 residents petition.'*

REASON: To enable residents to make an active contribution to matters affecting the City, in advance of the enactment of Government requirements to respond to petitions.

**38. THE AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2007/8 - A PROGRESS REPORT**

*[See also under Part A minutes]*

Members considered a report which identified the main conclusions of the Audit Commission (AC) in respect of the 2007/08 financial year audit and outlined action taken and planned in response to the AC's recommendations.

The AC had concluded that the Council had not adequately addressed the issues highlighted in the 2006/07 audit and that improvements were needed to the planning of the financial statements closedown process, the quality and timeliness of supporting working papers, the communication between finance and property services and the asset register spreadsheets.

During the past three months, a significant programme of work had been developed to address the AC's concerns and to establish a more regularised format for the accounts closure process. Improvements already under development were highlighted in paragraphs 5 to 11 of the report. An action plan setting out the work completed or ongoing to address each issue was attached as Annex 1. Members were invited to consider whether any further action was required.

RECOMMENDED: That authority be given to the Audit and Governance Committee to approve the Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement.

REASON: In accordance with advice given at this and the previous meeting regarding the practice in other authorities and to address the issues with the current approval process highlighted by the Audit Commission.

R Pierce, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 7.40 pm].