

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**AUDIT COMMITTEE**  
**17<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2008**

**REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR PUBLICISING THE PRE-AUDIT COPY OF THE COUNCIL'S FINAL ACCOUNTS**

<b>OPEN</b>	
<b>COMMUNITY STRATEGY PLAN:</b>	Internal Organisational Theme
<b>CORPORATE THEME:</b>	Improving Corporacy & Performance
<b>KEY PRIORITY:</b>	Financial and Asset Management
<b>STRATEGY:</b>	Final Accounts
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	Councillor John-Paul Campion
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:</b>	Head of Financial Services
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<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>APPENDIX 1</b>	Current Arrangements for Publishing the Pre-Audit copy of the Council's Statement of Accounts and Comparison to Neighbouring Authorities
<b>APPENDIX 2</b>	Areas for Consideration

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide Members with an opportunity to note and review the arrangements for publicising the pre-audit copy of the Council's Final Accounts.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

The Audit Committee is asked to NOTE the current arrangements for publishing the pre-audit copy of the Council's Final Accounts.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Audit Committee on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 2007, agreed the current arrangements for publicising the pre-audit copy of the Council's Statement of Accounts on the Council's website and in the Kidderminster Shuttle be noted and reviewed for future years.
- 3.2 The reason for this review was Member disappointment at the lack of generation of public interest in the accounts when they learnt there have been no public inspections in recent years and just a few telephone enquiries received each year.
- 3.3 This report sets out the statutory requirements for publication and compares current practice with that of other local Councils to allow Members to note and review the current arrangements.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003, as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (Regulations) 2006, state that “the relevant body shall make the accounts and other documents, available for public inspection for 20 working days before the date appointed by the external auditor.” There is no statutory guidance on how the accounts should be made available; this is a matter for each local authority to decide.
- 4.2 The appointed day is when the external auditor will be specifically available to answer any questions or queries of local government electors, following the 20 day notice period. Whilst KPMG, our outgoing external auditors, did not receive any questions during their 9 year term of office they considered that our publication methods were adequate. The Audit Commission is now embarking on their first year of office as our external auditors. The appointed day for the 2007/2008 Accounts has been agreed as the 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2008, and this report has been undertaken in consultation with them.
- 4.3 As part of this review, a comparison of current arrangements to those used by a number of other local authorities was made, together with comparison of the number of queries/inspections generated. These are contained in Appendix 1.
- 4.4 As Appendix 1 shows, whilst other Council’s publication methods are in some cases more extensive, they generate very few inspections/enquires. Officers contacted expressed the opinion that it is difficult to get the public interested in such a technical area. Since form and content is statutory it is not possible to make it more interesting.
- 4.5 In common with this authority, most queries are received when the Council Tax demands are posted out in March, when there is a “rush” of public interest. Since this authority is the billing authority for the County Council and theirs is the “lions share” of the levy, many of these calls are redirected to them.
- 4.6 Appendix 2 details areas for consideration as part of this review.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The cost of the statutory notice in the Kidderminster Shuttle was £230 last year. If Members decide to place additional adverts there is a cost implication estimated at £590 for the Express and Star, £120 for the Kidderminster Chronicle. From other authority’s experience it is unlikely that this extra cost will generate much more interest in this technical area.

#### **6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003, as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (Regulations) 2006, state that “the relevant body shall make the accounts and other documents, available for public inspection for 20 working days before the date appointed by the external auditor.”

## **7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with the appropriate legislation and to ensure the arrangements are to the satisfaction of the external auditors.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations require a statutory period of notice for public inspection and query of the accounts before the “appointed day”, when the external auditor must be available to answer any questions.
- 8.2 Statute gives no prescription on how this consultation should be advertised; this is a matter for each authority.
- 8.3 Whilst research performed as part of this review shows other authorities vary in methods employed, very little public interest is generated in the pre-audit copy of the Statement of Accounts.
- 8.4 Consideration be given to the areas detailed in Appendix 2 which could have the potential to try and stimulate public interest and participation in the Council’s Final Accounts.

## **CONSULTEES**

- 9.1 Corporate Management Team.
- 9.2 External Auditors
- 9.3 Financial Services Manager

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 Audit Committee 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, AUD.11
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