

COMBE MARTIN PARISH COUNCIL

Summary Report of the Internal Operational Audit/Review of the Council

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Presented to the CMPC Personnel Committee on the 25th of August, 2017.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council has completed an in depth internal audit/review of the Council's operations and administrative arrangements, with the aim of supporting the employee team in the delivery of the service and establishing what further improvements can be made.

1.1. Review/Audit Format

Individual employee job descriptions formed the basis for a set of questions which were scored as applicable against three criteria:

‘Acceptable condition’, ‘Legally compliant’, ‘Good Practice’.

It is the post, activity, location, equipment and condition that is scored against the expected standard, not the person.

The full audit/review report submitted to the Councillors with all of the evidence and a more detailed narrative, contains information about Council employees and procedures which are protected from disclosure.

This Summary Report is for publication to the community as the content shows all areas audited and findings that are in the public interest.

1.2. Identification of Statutory and Non-Statutory Tasks

In addition to the general workforce duties, the following duties, roles and responsibilities have been identified* as key areas of delivery for the Council, Clerk:

Writing letters, reports, memos, organising meetings and events advising on making lawful decisions and policy, researching topics of concern to the council, keeping up to date with current legislation, managing projects, sites, facilities and finance, managing records, teams and staff, negotiating, marketing and public relations, purchasing equipment.

Accepted basic good office practice, organisational systems and management standards have been applied to arrive at a judgement on performance.

*Source: The Essential Clerk, SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks)

2. AUDIT FINDINGS

2.1.1. Standing Orders

The Council minutes of the meeting from 8th of May 20017, item 9/17 record the adoption of CMPC Standing Orders, Dated May 2016. These Standing Orders are factually incorrect and need to be corrected.

The conduct of the Council meetings is heavily influenced by the quality of the agenda and the content of the motions presented. Councillors and the Clerk should reflect on their understanding and compliance with standing orders - Motions and agenda setting.

2.1.2. Employee Issues

The annual performance reviews for the Clerk & Employee have not been done, this is a responsibility of the Personnel Committee and Clerk respectively.

Therefore, deficiencies were identified in; Job Description and person specs, refresher training and record keeping.

Overall CMPC provides secure terms and good conditions of employment, but work is required on implementation and quality of supervision and support.

2.1.3. Welfare and Health and Safety

The employees demonstrate an acceptable level of awareness and understanding, but this needs to be supported and maintained by improved systems, management support and performance.

2.1.4. Administrative Systems

Office Systems (general): A number of admin systems have fallen into disuse and are no longer used or maintained, this is adversely affecting the efficiency and function of the office. Too much activity is dependent upon the knowledge and input of the Clerk.

There is little evidence that any attempt has been made to embrace the cost saving advantages of new IT technologies or established bespoke parish council packages.

This deficiency is common to all areas of the office/admin functions.

Office Systems (Property): Arrangements for maintaining the statutory requirements, such as Gas safety, Electrical Certification, Fire safety, and insurance for CMPC property are in place.

2.1.5. Information Management and Record keeping

The current method of filing and storing information on the Council's activities and interactions is not clear, accessible or readily available to Councillors.

A number of record systems exist, in particular the financial records which are audited every year.

However in other areas there is uncertainty and the lack of a centralised system means the information if held, is not readily accessible for the early and complete resolution of issues for the Community.

The lack of 'Cost Centre' information, identifying locations and activity expenditure means that the Council cannot establish real costs for locations or activities to allow proper planning of future expenditure.

This unacceptable business risk, results in delays and a negative community perspective or reputation issue for the Council.

2.1.6. Management of office staff and manual workforce

The following areas were audited and weakness identified which will be addressed in the Action Plan: Measurement of Operational workload, - Supervision and work allocation, - Health and Safety risk assessments, - Contract and contractor management, - Emergency work/planning.

2.1.7. Areas identified but not audited

Identification of time spent interacting/supporting councillors - Analysis of time recording sheets - Public interactions. Due to anticipated difficulties in locating the information, there is little value in auditing these subjects at this time.

2.1.8. The Clerk's Role and Responsibility

Given the central importance of the role and responsibility of the Council Clerk, in supporting the Councillors and community, no audit or review of the Council's performance or 'state of health' is complete unless it also looks at the contribution, delivery style and relationship of the Clerk with the Councillors.

The Clerk as the 'Proper Officer' is the source of legal advice to the Chairman and Councillors (and day to day manager of the workforce) and is expected (has a legal responsibility) to be the 'Gate keeper' and steer a consistent legally compliant and efficient course as the Council membership changes.

The performance is a shared responsibility with the Councillors and is very dependent on the respective abilities and established working relationships.

The audit team have carefully considered this relationship and identified that most of the deficiencies identified are long term and pre-date the election of the current Council.

The reported long standing omission to carry out an annual review/appraisal of the Clerk and produce a personal development plan as required under Standing Order 26.3, is seen as a major contributory factor to the current unsatisfactory situation.

Given the recent announcement of the resignation of the Clerk, further comment on positive actions to address and support the relationship issues are omitted from the audit report.

2.1.9. Resources

This audit/review has not considered the current level of employee resource, as the available management information is unreliable and not capable of giving a true picture.

Going forward the audit/review has identified the opportunity for some significant operational changes, but these are dependent on competent management working within a sound and functioning management system, which currently does not exist.

Any such changes would require full engagement with our employees and proper project management.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1.** The overwhelming conclusion of the Audit/review is that very little of the Council's current operating or management systems is in an 'Acceptable condition', 'Legally compliant', or exhibiting 'Good Practice'.
- 3.2.** The auditors acknowledge this is a shared responsibility between the Councillors and the Clerk, but recognise that many of the deficiencies are not new and are the responsibility of the Clerk and previous Councillor inaction.
- 3.3.** The Council needs to 'Reset' and rebuild its basic operational and management systems in an action plan

4. RECOMMENDATION

The Personnel Committee accept the findings of this Audit/Review as presented in this report and move to address the concerns and defects identified.

Cllr. P James Chairman.....August 2017.