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CenSus Revenues and Benefits Task and Finish Group 6 FEBRUARY 2018

Present: Councillors: Nigel Jupp (Chairman), Tim Lloyd and Leonard Crosbie
(ex-Officio)

Apologies: Councillors: Michael Willett and David Coldwell
Absent: Councillors: Brian O'Connell

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

9 MINUTES

The notes of the meeting held 18th September 2017 were received.

10 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

11 ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

12 QUESTIONS FOR THE CHIEF INTERNAL AUDITOR

The Task and Finish Group had invited the Chief Internal Auditor to attend the meeting to answer general questions on the Council's internal audit work in relation to the monitoring of the CenSus Revenues and Benefits service. The Director of Corporate Resources also attended the meeting.

The Director of Corporate Resources provided a useful briefing note before the meeting. The Group discussed the note.

Members noted that the figures for subsidy reductions for the period since 2012/13 and that the loss for the 2016/17 claim was considerably lower than in the previous two years.

It was noted that the Head of Revenues and Benefits Service at Horsham had left Mid Sussex District Council in the summer of 2017 and they had recruited to a Transition Manager role that would be filled in March 2018.

The officers were hoping to completely reduce the outstanding amount of lost subsidy from 2016/17.

Members noted that the exercise to clear up CenSus dirty data in 2016/17 had been successful.

The figures for 2017/18 would not be available until November 2018. There was increased focus on the service and once the latest figures were available officers could identify whether the clean-up had been completely successful or whether the reduced losses in 2016/17 were due to sampling.

Members noted that the Council was on target to transfer the service over to the LGSS on 1st April 2018.

Overall the Group was pleased to see the subsidy losses coming down.

The Chief Internal Auditor explained to the Group how the current CenSus service was audited jointly by Horsham, Mid-Sussex and Adur councils. A breakdown was circulated to show how the auditing of each element of the service was rotated between the three councils.

Horsham's internal auditors had given "limited assurance" of the Benefits service in March 2017.

External auditors had put forward five recommendations in 2013/14 following their annual report; Members requested a copy of the report.

The Members asked for clarification on the external auditors additional fees in relation to housing benefits, this information would be provided following the meeting.

The LGSS would carry out future internal audits of the service.

Officers explained that there would be closer working with the LGSS. Members said they would comment on the governance of the CenSus partnership in their final report, with a view to assisting in setting up better arrangement for working with the new service from April.

The Group agreed that two further meetings would be held to finalise the review, before presenting a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Some potential dates for the next meeting would be sent to Members.

The meeting closed at 5.00 pm having commenced at 4.00 pm

CHAIRMAN