

**Society of District Council Treasurers**

**Minutes of the Executive Committee held on 12th September 2014**

**At the CIPFA Offices, Robert Street, London**

**In Attendance:**  Peter Stuart (President), Angela George (Secretary), Bob Palmer, Frank Wilson, Simone Donaghy, Chris Brewer, Sandra Cowley, Norma Atlay, Jane Kitchen, Steve Richardson, Chris Mills, Alan Peach, Rob Bridge, William Jacob, Jason Vaughan, Dean Langton, Nick Eveleigh.

**Also in attendance:** Bevis Ingram(LGA), Lisa Quinn (Capita), Mike Suffield (NAO), Laura Deery (CIPFA).

1. **Apologies**

**Apologies** were received from – Jill Penn, Jo Wagstaffe, Kevin Jaquest, Shirlene Adam, (Martin Henry).

Also: Sally Marshall (DCEN), Marcine Waterman (Audit Commission)

1. **Minutes of Previous Meeting and actions arising**

Minutes of the previous meeting of 16th May were agreed.

Frank reported that the handover arrangements for the Treasurer role should be completed within the next few weeks and the outstanding SDCT Accounts will be presented shortly.

**Action – Frank Wilson**

Angela George reported that the final SDCT Constitution incorporating previous comments made by the Executive would be presented to the next meeting for approval

**Action – Angela George**

Angela George referred to the request from our sponsors Capita for feedback from the Executive on the Customer and Self Build Scheme. No feedback had been received and the Executive were requested to try to give feedback in future (whether positive or not).

**Action – All Executive members**

All other outstanding actions have either been actioned or picked up elsewhere on the agenda.

1. **Financial Settlement 2015/16 onwards**
   1. The Executive considered papers from the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance. Also considered were requests from CIPFA (Fair Funding Settlement 2015) and the DCEN (Financial Independence Project Group) who were requesting assistance from the SDCT to progress these issues. It was agreed that the different work streams led by the different bodies were potentially overlapping and the Executive agreed we need to co-ordinate work to avoid being stretched in too many directions. The Executive considered the responses to the various questions raised and it was agreed that Sandra would lead on co-ordinating the response with support from Dean, Rob, Steve and Norma.

**Action – Sandra to co-ordinate the response to the Independent Commission (subsequently submitted). Also to advise CIPFA that she would be the SDCT representative to work on their project.**

**Action – Kevin Jaquest to liaise with Sally Marshall to consider how to support the DCEN on the investments and borrowing work stream (as lead advisor on Treasury Management).**

**Action – Shirlene Adam to liaise with Sally Marshall consider how to support the DCEN on the Income Generation work stream (as lead advisor for Income, Fees and Charges).**

1. **Business Rates Retention Scheme**

Laura Deery from CIPFA was in attendance for this item.

A request has been received from the DCLG for a representative to take part in a review of Business rate Retention and Revenue Support Grant Payment Profiles. Steve Richardson commented that many of the issues on Business rate retention particularly on review of the appeals process had been ‘kicked into the long grass’ and this particular working group would add no value to the process and should ideally be part of the existing working groups (i.e. the Business Rate Implementation Working Group) already established.

**Action – Steve to respond to the DCLG.**

1. **Single Fraud Investigation Service**

Bevis Ingram referred to a request from the DWP to take part in a discussion with CFO’s regarding the Housing Benefit Subsidy regime and how it incentivises Council’s (or not) in dealing with housing benefit fraud, error and debt. Dean offered to attend the meeting on the Societies behalf on 2nd October.

**Action - Dean Langton**

Bevis also referred to the Housing benefit Administration deductions for SFIS and offered to recirculate spreadsheets showing **indicative** deductions for SFIS (LGA analysis). The DWP are not now considering any options for allocating the cut in 2015/16, they will take it only from the Councils that have gone live by 31 March 2015 (125 Councils). The figure of £12m for 2015/16 has been confirmed, but the figure of £37m for 2016/17 has not. DWP should provide conformation on the figures by the end of October.

There was also confirmation following concerns raised by the SDCT when the DWP attendance the Executive meeting earlier in the year, that that the SFIS service will deal with **all** allegations of Fraud – not just those over £2000. The Executive were pleased that their comments had been taken on board by the DWP, however it was not clear whether the DWP had imparted this information to Council’s as a number of Executive members present had not heard this news.

1. **Capita**

Lisa Quinn from Capita Asset Service gave a presentation (attached) on a number of initiatives that Capita are developing to assist Councils with their financial projections to provide greater forecasting certainty. This work includes development of a Revenue Modelling Service, a Capital Monitoring Service and a Business rates Modelling Service. It was anticipated that the Business Rates Modelling system would be developed by December 2014 and the Revenue Modelling by the summer of 2015. The Capital monitoring service is already launched.

A number of questions were asked by the Executive.

Lisa suggested that she would be interested in working with an authority as a reference site for both the Business Rates Modelling Service and potentially the Revenue Modelling Service.

**Action – Executive members to consider whether they would be interested in acting as a reference site to assist in the development of the model.**

1. **Audit Update**

The Executive considered a note circulated by Bob Palmer (attached).

* 1. **National Audit office**:

Mike Suffield provided an update on the NAO programme of work. He also reported that the NAO would be taking on eleven people from the Audit Commission when the Commission finally finishes in March 2015.

There would be a reference panel meeting the following Monday (of which Bob Palmer is a member) to consider various issues.

* 1. **Audit Commission**

The Executive discussed their experience of the different approaches taken by auditors to the Business rates appeal provision and also to the additional charges being applied by the different firms.

It was noted that the Audit Commission had written directly to Leaders of Councils with the NFI results requesting that they may wish to discuss the results with their CFO.

**Action – Bob to write to the Audit Commission requesting an explanation of the seemingly different practices and fees emanating from the different audit firms.**

**8. Advisor Reports**

8.1 Council Tax Partnership Forum and briefing note on Council tax Support issues – notes attached from Dean Langton, including slides from the recent Council tax Support Follow Up Survey recently considered at the SDCT workshop at CIPFA Conference.

**9. Reports from External Bodies / Sponsors:**

**9.1 DCEN** – issues discussed under item 3.

**9.2 LGA / SOFI / ALATS** – No meetings held to report on.

1. **Any Other Business:**

10.1 Bevis reported that the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association together with local government representatives have been working with central government departments to reduce the volume of top-down information and data that local authorities are required to submit to central government. He reported that Local Government representation had fallen away and requested volunteers to work with the group (CLIP).

**Action – Angela George to seek representation from the wider membership if no-one from the Executive was able to support the group.**

10.2 Bevis informed the Executive that the LGA Finance Conference was being held on 6th January (The SDCT general meeting is on 9th January).

10.3 A number of other issues were raised and discussed by the Executive including;

* Transfer of Local Land Charges (Dean)
* VAT on Trade waste (Frank)
* Council Tax Freeze grant 2015/16 (Simone)
* CFO’s – new ways of working (Norma)

1. **Date of Next Meeting** – 24th October 2014
2. **Part B – Private Executive Business**
   1. **Executive vacancies**

The Executive agreed to accept the 2 applicants for the vacancies on the Executive from Andrew Crookham (Harrogate) and Nick Edwards (Scarborough). Subsequently the Executive also agreed Sanjiv Kohli (Hinckley and Bosworth).

**Action - Angela George to notify the new members.**

* 1. **Website SLA**

The Website domain is now resolved. An audit of the content of the website would now take place.

**Action – Chris Mills**

Following the SDCT meeting a meeting took place with Alan Finch from the LGA and a smaller group from the Executive to discuss how the LGA could progress developing the finance offer in Sector led Improvement (slides attached).