

Audit and Standards Committee

Meeting held 24 October 2019

**PRESENT:** Councillors Sioned-Mair Richards (Chair), Simon Clement-Jones (Deputy Chair), Angela Argenzio, Adam Hurst, Mohammed Mahroof, Pat Midgley, Josie Paszek and Liz Stanley

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**1. ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING AND THE REMAINDER OF THE YEAR**

- 1.1 The Director of Legal and Governance opened the meeting and asked for nominations for Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee for the meeting.
- 1.2 A nomination was made that Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards be elected Chair of the Committee for the meeting and the remainder of the year. No further nominations were received.
- 1.3 **RESOLVED:** That, Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards be elected Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee for the meeting and the remainder of the year.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- 2.1 There were no apologies for absence.

**3. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

- 3.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 4.1 No declarations of interest were made.

**5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

- 5.1 **RESOLVED:** That, the minutes of a meeting of the Committee held on 25th July 2019 were approved as a correct record.

**6. FINAL ACCOUNTS AUDIT PROCESS**

- 6.1 Hayley Clark (Ernst and Young) informed Committee that the report had been submitted to the Audit and Standards Committee in July, but that all audit

procedures were now complete and assurances had been received from the pensions authority. The accounts had been signed off by the Chair of Audit and Standards Committee.

- 6.2 Councillor Josie Pascek asked questions regarding the housing re-evaluation, financial statement corrections and the level of reserves. Hayley Clark explained that the housing re-evaluation had had no impact on the budget as it was contained within an un-useable reserve. The uncorrected differences were not felt to be material and were part of the accounting process. They had been appended to the letter of representation. The auditors had met with the Council regarding the reserves which had dropped in 2018/19 and were happy with the progress made to increase the reserves so far in 2019/20.
- 6.3 Dave Phillips (Assistant Director of Finance) noted that there had been a small overspend in 2018/19 which had caused the reserves to drop. A process was in place to look at how to top up the reserves and the Budget Settlement was better this time, which was enabling the Council to plan better.
- 6.4 Councillor Mohammed Mahroof asked how sporting facilities were recorded and Hayley Clark responded that sporting facilities were recorded using Depreciated Revenue Costs which was the approved accounting process.

## **7. ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN REPORT**

- 7.1 Gillian Duckworth (Director of Legal and Governance) presented the report which gave details of complaints about the Council received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.
- 7.2 Liz Stanley asked why there had been a significant increase in complaints received by the Council regarding Veolia and Capita services. Eugene Walker (Executive Director of Resources) explained that changes to the Brown bin services had caused the increase in complaints regarding Veolia. As the services provided by Capita were being brought back in house, the complaints were now being recorded using the Council's complaints procedure. This change in recording accounted for the increase in Capita complaints.
- 7.3 Councillor Josie Pascek asked how the Council were performing against the points for improvement included within the report. Gillian Duckworth explained that the CRM replacement was well underway and would resolve some of the issues. The Council was working on its Digital Acceleration Programme and customer services was high on the agenda for change.
- 7.4 Councillor Mohammed Mahroof said that 2000 complaints was a high number and only 35% had been responded to in 20 days. Eugene Walker acknowledged that performance had not been good enough, but the number of complaints was relatively low compared to the number of transactions. The telephony system was being replaced and more training was being given as part of bringing customer services back in-house. A separate plan was in place to improve performance.

7.5 Councillor Josie Pascek noted that there had been a number of ombudsman complaints regarding vulnerable adults and children. This represented both a financial loss to the Council and possible reputational risk.

7.6 **RESOLVED:** That, an update report, including answers to the questions raised, be presented to the next meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee.

## **8. FEEDBACK FROM THE ETHICAL STANDARDS WORKSHOP**

8.1 Gillian Duckworth presented the report which provided the Committee with the best practice recommendations arising from the Ethical Standards Workshop held with Committee Members on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019 which considered the report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, dated January 2019.

8.2 The actions were detailed in the report and included changes to the Members Code of Conduct and the Standards Complaints Procedure. Once the changes had been made, they would be brought to the Committee for approval, before being presented to Full Council.

8.3 Councillor Angela Argenzio raised the issue of accessibility of the Council's website for those with learning difficulties and visual impairment and Gillian Duckworth explained that the Digital Acceleration Programme would be complete by March 2020 and would include such accessibility issues. However, information could be brought back to Committee on how accessibility would be achieved.

8.4 **RESOLVED:** That, the outcomes of the workshop be accepted and the amended policies/codes be brought to the meeting of the Committee in January for approval and forwarding to Full Council for adoption.

## **9. WORK PROGRAMME**

9.1 Gillian Duckworth submitted a report providing details of an outline work programme for the Committee for the period October 2019 – July 2020.

9.2 Dave Phillips explained that the PFI Objection report had now been received from KPMG, the Council's former auditor's, and following a three week appeal period for the objector, the report could be signed off by the Council. This would mean that the Annual Audit Letters for 2016/17, 17/18 and 18/19 could be approved.

9.3 Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards (Chair) commented that due to the PFI objection report being received and the amount of associated reports scheduled for the meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020, the additional meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> December should be called, to start at 4.30p.m.

9.4 **RESOLVED:** That, the Committee's work programme for the period October 2019 to July 2020 be approved and the additional meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019 take place, starting at 4.30p.m.

**10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

10.1 Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards reminded Committee that the additional meeting scheduled for Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022 would now take place, to start at 4.30pm.

10.2 It was noted that meetings of the Committee would be held at 5.00p.m. on:-

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019 at **4.30p.m.**

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020 (additional meeting, if required)

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (additional meeting, if required)

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020