

Audit and Standards Committee

Meeting held 16 February 2023

**PRESENT:** Councillors Colin Ross (Chair), Ben Curran (Deputy Chair), Angela Argenzio, Simon Clement-Jones, Tom Hunt, Kevin Oxley, Garry Weatherall and Alison Howard (Co-opted Independent Member)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 No apologies for absence were received.

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

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

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

4.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 19 January, 2023 were agreed as an accurate record, subject to a typographical error at of the minutes. '*South Yorkshire Mayoral Combines Authority*' will be amended to South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority.

4.2 The Senior Finance Manager, Linda Hunter suggested that Internal Audit carry out a review of the Council's Code of Corporate Governance as it would not be part of a Core Cities peer review.

**5. EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT**

5.1 The Committee received a report from the Council's external auditor, Ernst & Young.

5.2 Hayley Clark explained that the report provided the Committee with an update on the Council's key risks. It also identified a timeline of communication and deliverables.

5.3 Dan Spiller explained that the first 2 bullet points on page 5 of the report (page 19 of the agenda) were the 2 main areas of work yet to be completed by external audit for their 2021/22 audit. It was added that some of the following bullet points which highlighted ongoing work by External Audit had progressed since the paper was published.

- 5.4 From page 7 of the report (page 21 of the agenda) risks were identified, the details of those risks who provided and the status of those risks were reported.
- 5.5 It was mentioned that the report gave an update relating to Value for Money although the full position will be reported at a future meeting of the Committee. Dan Spiller added that Ernst & Young anticipated on giving a clean opinion in relation to Value for Money.
- 5.6 The report then highlighted the proposed timetable of external audit work up until May 2023.
- 5.7 Members of the Committee asked questions and following responses were provided: -
- 5.8 In relation to Investment Property Evaluation, Hayley Clark agreed that this were a common recurring risk although the risk tended to change therefore making it harder to prepare for.
- 5.9 Hayley Clark mentioned that the requirement for ?? were increasing year on year and unless there were a change centrally, it was anticipated that this trend would continue.
- 5.10 Dan Spiller highlighted the different methodology and input issues and explained why they were included in the report.  
Hayley Clark mentioned there still may be some outstanding pieces of work at the time of which External Audit bring their report (Report of those Charged with Governance ISA 260) to the 9 March 2023 meeting.
- 5.11 The Interim Director of Legal and Governance, David Hollis mentioned that under the new system, delegation cannot be given to an individual Member therefore that delegation would have to be given to an Officer. This may be something the Committee has to consider when they look to sign off the accounts at the next meeting of the Committee.
- 5.12 **RESOLVED:** That the committee noted the content of the report.

## **6. ANNUAL STANDARDS REPORT**

- 6.1 The Committee received a report from the Interim Director of Legal and Governance which highlighted the activities of the Committee and provided details of the outcome of the Standards complaints received from January to December 2022.
- 6.2 The Interim Director of Legal and Governance explained that the report included the changes to the Standards regime that were introduced in July 2012 by the Localism Act 2011.

- 6.3 Although it was no longer a statutory requirement to have a Standards Committee, Full Council approved the retention of a Committee to deal with Standards complaints and adopt a new Members' Code of Conduct and a Procedure for Dealing with Standards Complaints.
- 6.4 Two Independent Persons, as required by the Localism Act 2011, were appointed jointly with Barnsley MBC to assist the Monitoring Officer in dealing with complaints. It was mentioned that the Committee had recently appointed Karen Widdowson as an Independent Person and that David Waxman had been re-appointed to his position as Independent Person.
- 6.5 Members of the Committee asked questions and following responses were provided: -
- 6.6 The Interim Director of Legal and Governance confirmed no complaints had been made against a Parish Councillor from January 2022 to December 2022.
- 6.7 Following a comment from Karen Widdowson (Independent Person), The Interim Director of Legal of Governance agreed it would be appropriate to include previous years complaints figures in the table at section 5 of the report, so that the Committee could see trends of complaints figures throughout the years.
- 6.8 The Interim Director of Legal and Governance explained that 1 of the complaints which were reported within 'Withdrawn or Invalid' were diverted to the Protocol for Officer / Member.
- 6.9 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee (1) commented on the Annual Report; and (2) approved the report for submission to Full Council.

## **7. REVIEW OF MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

- 7.1 The Committee received a report from the Interim Director of Legal and Governance. The Code of Conduct and Procedure was reviewed on an annual basis by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Persons. The report set out any revisions that were recommended for the Committee to consider.
- 7.2 The Interim Director of Legal and Governance explained that the latest version of the Procedure for Dealing with Standards Complaints was approved by Full Council in November 2022 as part of the Monitoring Officer Protocol.
- 7.3 The Interim Director of Legal and Governance outlined all the recent changes to the procedure, to the Committee. It was mentioned that these could be found in red text, in the updated version of the procedure, which was distributed to Members at the start of the meeting.

7.4 Following the introduction to the report, no questions or comments were made by Members of the Committee.

7.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee (1) recommends to Full Council the adoption of the revised Procedure and that the Constitution is amended accordingly; and (2) refers the revised Procedure to the Parish and Town Councils for consideration and adoption.

## **8. FINDINGS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS AND OMBUDSMAN REPORT FROM 17 NOVEMBER 2022**

8.1 The Committee received a report from the Service Delivery Manager, Customer Services.

8.2 The Service Delivery Manager (Customer Services), Corleen Bygraves-Paul explained that following a discussion in November 2022 by the Audit & Standards Committee, recommendations were made which could be found at appendix 1. A presentation were shared at the meeting to give an update on the actions following those recommendations. These recommendations were also sent to the Chief Executive of the Council.

8.3 The Service Delivery Manager (Customer Services) gave a presentation to the Committee. The presentation will be published on the Council's website after the meeting.

8.4 Members of the Committee asked questions and following responses were provided: -

8.5 The Head of Customer Services, Paul Taylor agreed that Customer Services should look at different methods to capture members of the public's opinions in relation to Customer Services and what their experience were with the relevant service.

8.6 The Service Delivery Manager (Customer Services) mentioned that Officers were aware of the areas of weakness within the service and that the action plan presented to the Committee was an ongoing plan which would aim to continuously improve the service.Keep going in this direction.

8.7 The Service Delivery Manager (Customer Services) confirmed that Service Directors were responsible for ensuring that complaint response times were met in a timely manner and were built into their Service Plans. It was added that Executive Directors were also updated on these processes and were present when the Performance and Delivery Board met, where these complaints were reported.

8.8 The Head of Customer Services expressed his thanks to the Audit & Standards Committee for the recommendations as these had caused some

momentum to improve the service, and evidence of that was already starting to show.

- 8.9 A Member of the Committee mentioned the importance of consulting with as many citizens as possible, in order to receive as much data as possible, to continue to improve the service.
- 8.10 The Service Delivery Manager (Customer Services) confirmed that complaints received via telephone were recorded and monitored closely and that these recordings were used to help train members of staff.
- 8.11 The Head of Customer Services confirmed there are high numbers of complaints in relation to Blue Badges. One reason for this is that some hidden disabilities can now entitle people to a blue badge, and so some disabilities are not easily identified. Processes can be extended due to needing a medical assessment. This creates a delay which can cause members of the public to complain. It was added that there are also other reasons relating to the processes of receiving a Blue Badge which can lead to complaints.
- 8.12 **RESOLVED:** That the committee (1) approves the Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan for the period November 22-March 2024; (2) that Bi-annual attendance be given at this Committee meeting to discuss performance against the Improvement Plan. This will include our partner's performance against agreed KPIs; and (3) continued support of Committee to ensure prioritisation, accountability and responsiveness of complaints handling.

## **9. HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM - AUDIT UPDATE**

- 9.1 The Committee received a report from the Interim Director of Legal and Governance which updated members on the meeting of the audit recommendation, to update the Open Housing Management System, to appraise the Committee, and to note the planned audit activity in the next municipal year (2023/24) in relation to the Housing Management System.
- 9.2 The Assistant Director of Legal and Governance, Robert Parkin explained that the Housing Policy Committee was the supervisory committee for this piece of work and that regular updates were given to that Committee, in relation to the system.
- 9.3 It was mentioned that The Senior Finance Manager, Internal Audit had advised that this project will be audited in the next municipal year and therefore would fall into next year's audit plan.
- 9.4 A Member of the Committee mentioned that he had undertaken a training session with Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and that the Audit Committee Position Statement was reviewed as part of that training. Referring to the statement he noted the importance and

expectation that the Committee should be able to request reports and have access to information, and therefore a role in the oversight of this system. He noted that he welcomed the proposed audit and looked forward to seeing the outcome.

- 9.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Audit and Standards Committee (1) notes the contents of this report, and the reporting and performance oversight activity under the Housing Policy Committee in relation to the Housing Management System; and (2) notes that the Internal Auditor will conduct an audit of the Housing Management System and where the audit finds that there is *no assurance* or a *limited assurance with high organisational impact*, it will form the basis of a report to this committee.

## 10. WORK PROGRAMME

- 10.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Legal and Governance that outlined the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. Members were asked to identify any further items for inclusion.
- 10.2 The Senior Finance Manager mentioned that she had been made aware by the Director of Children Services, that the Community Schools Update report will not be ready for the 9 March meeting.
- 10.3 **RESOLVED:** That (1) the work programme be noted; and (2) that the Community Schools Update Report be moved on the work programme to the April meeting.

## 11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- 11.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 9 March, 2023.