

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 13 June 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor L W McGuire – Chairman.
Councillors P Kadewere, D A Giles,
Mrs M L Beuttell, Dr P L R Gaskin,
H V Masson, Mrs S Smith and
D R Underwood.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, J W Davies, D J Mead and J P Morris.

4. MINUTES FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 28th March and 23rd May 2018 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

Councillor D R Underwood declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in Minute No. 9 by virtue of the fact that he was the Chairman of Disability Huntingdonshire, an organisation which dealt with benefits matters on behalf of clients.

6. UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT AND REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

Consideration was given to a report by the Member Support Assistant (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), which provided an update on the adoption of Codes of Conduct by Town and Parish Councils and the receipt and publication of register of interests forms on behalf of District, Town and Parish Councillors. All of the 71 Town and Parish Councils had adopted a Code of Conduct, with 57 based on that adopted by the District Council, twelve had opted for the Code promoted by the National Association of Local Councils and the remaining two Councils had adopted their own version of the Code.

41 Town and Parish Councils had published their full Register, which comprised the Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) forms of all Councillors. The remaining 30 Councils had vacancies in their Memberships. In terms of individual DPIs, 586 of a total of 650 had been received from Parish Councillors and 59 were vacancies. In response to queries about the reported vacancies, an undertaking was provided that the position would be verified for the next report.

Having noted that the forms of all District Councillors had been published, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

7. CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS - UPDATE
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By means of a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), in accordance with its responsibility for monitoring the operation of the Code of Conduct, the Committee was provided with general information on alleged breaches of the Code. A brief summary was provided of each of the matters referred to in the report. Members were then advised of the arrangements for conducting hearings. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the progress of outstanding complaints and the conclusion of cases resolved since the last meeting be noted.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

9. ANNUAL REVIEW OF BENEFITS RISK BASED VERIFICATION POLICY FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) reviewing the Council's use of the Benefits Risk Based Verification Policy in the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. The Council had employed this approach since 2013. It was considered to be working well and, consequently, no changes were recommended to the Policy. Following a question by a Member, it was reported that the characteristics of risk groups were not disclosed to Councils. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED

that the continued use of the Huntingdonshire District Council Benefits Risk Based Verification Policy appended to the report now submitted be endorsed.

10. RE-ADMISSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC
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RESOLVED

that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

11. REVIEW OF FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY
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Consideration was given to a report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), which provided an overview of the activity of the Corporate Fraud Team during 2017/18, as required by the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy. It was pointed out that, contrary to paragraph 3.2 of the report, the number of prosecutions had increased.

In response to a question by a Member, it was reported that the service was endeavouring to adopt a more commercial approach by providing services to external organisations and that this had consequential benefits for the Council such as making housing available to homeless individuals. Following a further question, it was confirmed that 3C Legal were consulted on the validity of prosecutions to minimise any risk to the Council.

The Committee discussed the Regulation of Investigators Powers Act. The use of directed surveillance was subject to a formal process before it could commence involving approval by a senior Officer and a Magistrate. In addition, prior to undertaking surveillance, analysis was undertaken of its potential risks and benefits; however, the Council also had a zero tolerance approach to fraud. Successful prosecutions were publicised. Members were acquainted with the sources of referrals for investigation.

Reference having been made to the service's involvement in internal disciplinary matters, the resources available to the service were outlined. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

12. REVIEW OF REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (RIPA) POLICY FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

By means of a report by the Corporate Fraud Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Committee was acquainted with the recommendations for the Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) arrangements arising from an inspection by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office. The inspection had produced a number of recommendations, which had been implemented. Monitoring of surveillance activity by the Council would in future be reported to the Committee annually as part of the Annual Fraud Report. During their review of the Policy, Members decided that future amendments should be approved by the Committee.

RESOLVED

that, subject to an amendment to the Policy Updating Procedure to require any changes to be approved by the Committee, the Covert Surveillance – Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (Part II) (Directed Surveillance and the use of CHIS) Policy and Procedure appended to the

report now submitted, be approved.

13. LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE
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With the aid of a report by the Internal Audit and Risk manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee considered proposed changes to the Local Code of Corporate Governance. The changes had been identified during a review by the Council's Management Team. During discussion on the changes, comment was made that Members' involvement in the icare value system should be explored.

RESOLVED

that the (May 2018) Local Code of Corporate Governance be endorsed.

14. WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY, GUIDANCE AND CONCERNS RECEIVED FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the outcome of a review of the Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance. The review found that only minor changes were required.

The report also referred to the whistleblowing allegations received in the year ending March 2018. No allegations had been made by Officers but six had been received from members of the public. The latter had been forwarded to the relevant sections for action.

RESOLVED

that the Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance Note appended to the report now submitted be approved.

15. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE: ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18
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In compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Committee gave consideration to the Internal Audit Service Annual Report and opinion by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book). The Report referred to the work undertaken by Internal Audit during the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 to support the opinion statement that at April 2018 the Council's internal control environment and systems of internal control provided adequate assurance over key business processes and financial systems.

The Committee discussed the audit planning process. A new approach had been introduced for 2018/19 whereby a plan covering a three month period would be produced and then updated quarterly. It was expected to be more flexible and reactive to the Council's requirements.

The Committee agreed to take into account the Internal Audit and Risk Manager's opinion when considering the Annual Governance

Statement for 2017/18. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Annual Report on the work of the Internal Audit Service and the Internal Audit and Risk Manager's opinion be noted.

16. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

Consideration was given to a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was appended the Committee's draft Annual Report to Council for the year ending 31st March 2018. Members endorsed the contents of the report and discussed their training requirements. It was agreed that the Internal Audit and Risk Manager would distribute a survey on their skills and requirements to Committee Members and use the findings to devise a training future programme. In addition, the Head of Resources undertook to provide training on finance.

Subject to the inclusion of an introduction by the Chairman and additional text on the audit opinion, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that the Corporate Governance Committee Annual Report to Council for the year ending 31st March 2018 be approved for submission to the Council, and
- b) that the Internal Audit and Risk Manager be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, to make any minor amendments to the Report.

17. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT FIELD_PAGE_RANGE

The Committee received and noted a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on progress of actions in response to decisions taken at previous meetings. In discussing its contents, the Head of Resources was requested to provide training on audit and the audit process.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

Chairman