

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, 10 October 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor L W McGuire – Chairman.
Councillors P Kadewere, D A Giles,
Dr P L R Gaskin, H V Masson, D J Mead,
J P Morris, Mrs S Smith and J E White.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler and D R Underwood.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chairman informed the Committee that it was the final Corporate Governance Committee that Melanie Stimpson would attend as she was due to leave the Council's employment at the end of October.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman expressed appreciation to Ms Stimpson for her support and contribution to the Committee and wished the very best in her future role.

26. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26th July 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary or other interests received at the meeting.

28. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2018

The Committee received and noted a report by the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) of complaints submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and data relating to Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints received by the Council in 2017/18.

At 7.03pm Cllr J P Morris entered the meeting.

The Committee was informed that the LGO had been advised of 20 complaints of which there had been three detailed investigations, two of which were upheld.

Of the two complaints upheld by the LGO, one referred to a planning enforcement matter and although the LGO had not found fault with the Council's decision on the matter, it had stated that there was fault in the Council's communications with the complainant.

The other complaint upheld by the LGO referred to a planning decision where there was some fault by the Council in the way in which it responded to the initial complaint.

With regard to internal complaints, the Committee was advised that the Council had experienced a significant increase in the volume of Stage 1 complaints, largely as a result of the refuse/recycling round reconfiguration which was introduced in early 2017. The majority of complaints related to missed bin collections in Quarter 1 (April – June 2017). From a total of 280 complaints, 270 of these related to Operations. However, Operations had still achieved a 99.7% collection rate.

At 7.07pm Cllr D J Mead entered the meeting.

The Council had a two stage complaints process and in 2017/18 three cases were deemed to be 'Unreasonable Complainants' which had resulted in the Council withdrawing some of its services to the three complainants, with the exception of statutory obligations.

In response to a question regarding Appendix 1 and the number of planning and development complaints referred to the LGO, it was explained that some processes had altered within the department but overall the number of complaints to the LGO remained consistent over the years.

Regarding Appendix 2 it was confirmed that no Stage 2 complaints had been received for Leisure and Health in 2017/18.

The value of including the details within the report as to the reasons for the Stage 1 Operations complaints was considered and it was concluded that the detail within the report was sufficient as Members could contact the Corporate Team Manager directly for further information. The important aspect to focus upon was the key messages for service improvements.

It was noted that the Integrated Performance Report presented quarterly to both the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Cabinet included the number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints received by the Council.

One comment which the Committee concurred was that given the transformation over the last 18 months throughout the Council the increased number of complaints was not a surprise.

It was requested that future reports include any key lessons learnt from complaint resolutions as well as a summary of complaint themes.

The Corporate Governance Committee requested that the respective Executive Councillors attend meetings when there was a relevant item within their remit on the agenda. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Governance Committee, having offered comment on the LGO local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council and the data relating to formal Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints, the contents of the report be noted.

29. CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS - UPDATE

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.

The Committee were advised that there were currently no outstanding Code of Conduct complaints for determination.

In response to a question regarding sanctions, although limited, could include the requirement for training. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the conclusion of cases resolved since the meeting in June 2018 be noted.

30. GOVERNANCE BOARDS - EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) following a review of the effectiveness of the Council's Governance Boards (GB).

A series of GB had been established with the purpose to review internal governance processes and practices across the Council in respect of:

- Information Management.
- Programmes & Projects.
- Finance & Procurement.
- Safeguarding.

In early 2017 there had been a fundamental review of the GB in operation, which had been reported to the Committee in July 2017. The report updated the Committee in respect of the operation of the GB since. The Committee were informed that the Head of Resources considered the current four GB were effectively challenging the Council's process and practices, although not explicitly tackling the strategic risks identified in the 2017/18 Annual Governance Statement. Therefore the Senior Leadership Team would consider whether a further review was required to ensure that the strategic risks were addressed.

The reviews had assessed how well each GB was performing against the Terms of Reference and a score was indicated which ranged from 1 being poor through to 5 being excellent. Although the majority of scores were 4 or 5 there were a number of 3 or 2 scores, an example being governance of the Commercial Investment Strategy (CIS). In

response to a question of how the Committee would recognise if the matter was improving, it was explained that the Integrated Performance Report presented quarterly to both the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Cabinet included an update on the CIS with details of investments to date, the level of returns expected as well as information on potential investment opportunities reviewed. The Finance and Procurement GB were responsible for monitoring the controls in place and processes involved to manage the CIS.

In response it was suggested that further clarity and assurances were required and as a result it was proposed that as the Finance and Procurement GB had not devoted sufficient time to the governance of the CIS, and an update report be presented to the Committee in six months.

There was some discussion as to whether the Committee should receive a report regarding the effectiveness of the Council's GB more regularly. However, it was agreed that this would not be necessary on the basis that the Head of Resources present any exception reports to the Corporate Governance Committee. Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

- i. that the Corporate Governance Committee notes that the Finance and Procurement Governance Board has not devoted sufficient time to the governance of the Commercial Investment Strategy and therefore requires an update to be reported to the Committee in six months; and
- ii. that any exception reports by the Head of Resources be presented to the Corporate Governance Committee.

31. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN QUARTER 3 - 2018/19

Having previously agreed to receive on a trial basis the Internal Audit Plan quarterly, rather than on an annual basis, the Committee considered the quarter three Audit Plan 2018/19 (a copy of which is appended is the Minute Book).

Regarding the audit of the new Financial Management System - Technology 1 (T1) that went live on 9th July 2018, it was explained that work would be required to identify the key controls across all the T1 modules prior to completing quarterly assurance reviews. It was anticipated to be a substantial piece of work and discussions were taking place with 3C partner Councils to investigate if the workload could be shared.

The audit report to review the administration processes associated with receiving and responding to Freedom of Information requests had been drafted and was to be issued imminently.

Fieldwork had been completed regarding the audit of the management of the mobile phone project across the 3C partner authorities and the draft report was expected to be issued by the end of October 2018.

Having considered the report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager the Committee,

RESOLVED

to approve the Internal Audit Plan 2018/19 for quarter three.

32. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2017/18

With the aid of a report by the Finance Manager presented in his absence by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee was acquainted with the contents of the external auditor's Annual Audit Letter.

Members' attention was drawn to paragraph 3.5 of the submitted report which detailed an excerpt of the observations made by Ernst and Young LLP. Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the 2017/18 Annual Audit Letter be noted.

33. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received and noted a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on progress of actions in response to any decisions taken at previous meetings.

It was confirmed that the item listed within the report was a biennial report and not an annual report as listed.

Chairman