

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, 27 March 2019.

PRESENT: Councillor L W McGuire – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, D A Giles,
Dr P L R Gaskin, H V Masson, D J Mead,
Mrs S Smith and D R Underwood.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P Kadewere, J P Morris, D J Wells and J E White.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS - COUNCILLOR P KADEWERE

At the beginning of the meeting, the Committee placed on record their thoughts and condolences to Councillor P Kadewere whose family had been affected by the cyclone on the eastern coast of Africa.

43. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23rd January 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

45. 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), the Committee were provided with a summary and update of completed and ongoing complaints received regarding alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct under the Localism Act 2011 since the start of the year.

The Elections and Democratic Services Manager drew attention to a recently published Independent Report on Local Government Ethical Standards and advised Members that a report summarising the findings would be presented at the Committee's next meeting.

RESOLVED

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

46. GRANT CERTIFICATION 2017/18

A copy of a report by the Benefits Systems & Development Manager

was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached the External Auditor's Annual Certification Report 2017/18. Members were reminded that the Council administered the scheme on behalf of, and claimed a subsidy from, the Department for Work and Pensions.

The Committee were encouraged to note that of the £32.8m in Housing Benefit grant received from central government, errors had been identified totalling £169. This was considered to be low given that the Benefits Team processed around 2,100 new claims and over 36,000 changes of circumstance for claimants in 2017/18. Having had their attention drawn to the fees charged by the External Auditor for completing this work, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the contents of the External Auditor's Annual Certification report 2017/18 be noted.

47. REVIEW OF CODE OF PROCUREMENT

Consideration was given to a report by the Procurement Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing amendments to the Code of Procurement.

By way of background, the Committee were informed that the changes proposed sought to ensure that social value was considered in all invitations to tender for services which would bring about employment, community and environment benefits to the District. Given that the Code formed part of the Council's Constitution, an amendment was proposed to the recommendation contained within the report to enable the Committee to recommend approval of the Code to Council. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the proposed amendments to the Code of Procurement as outlined in Appendix 2 of the report now submitted be recommended for approval by Council.

48. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2019/20

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 the content of the Internal Audit Plan for the period April to September 2019.

Members' attention was drawn to the current restructure of the Resources Service. Although the final outcome was not yet known, it was anticipated that there would be a slight increase in resources within the Internal Audit Team. Concern however was expressed at the decision to move risk management and insurance services out of the Internal Audit Team. The Interim Finance Manager reported that the function would remain in-house within the Resources Service. Furthermore, the Chairman confirmed that overall responsibility for risk management remained with the Committee and that reporting to Members would continue as planned. Nevertheless, the Committee

requested an explanation from the Head of Resources explaining the rationale behind the decision to move the risk management and insurance services team and to confirm that the service would not be outsourced.

Given that the outcome of the restructure was not yet known, the Committee were advised that this might impact upon the proposed Internal Audit Plan. Having expressed their disquiet at being asked to approve an Audit Plan that was likely to change, Members agreed to approve the Plan on the proviso that an update was received from the Executive Councillor for Resources on the restructure and its impact upon the Committee's role.

In response to a question raised by a Member, the Internal Audit Manager confirmed that he would include examples where Internal Audit had demonstrated its ability to positively influence and contribute to service developments and initiatives in a report due to be presented to Members at a future meeting. In noting that performance measures for the Internal Audit Service were currently in draft form but that the Committee would have sight of the measures once finalised, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Internal Audit Plan for the period April to September 2019 be approved; and
- (b) that changes to the Internal Audit Plan be approved following consultation with the Head of Resources (as Section 151 Officer) and the Chairman of the Corporate Governance Committee.

49. 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 decisions taken at previous meetings. In so doing, the Committee requested that the Annual Complaints Report include details of the number of complaints received the previous reporting year for comparable purposes.

Chairman