

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 25 July 2019

PRESENT: Councillor L W McGuire – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, P Kadewere, D A Giles,
Dr P L R Gaskin and D N Keane.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors H V Masson, J P Morris, D J Wells, S M Burton and Mrs S Conboy.

17 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12th June 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

19 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. With regards to case number 19/24, a Standards (Hearing) Sub-Committee would be convened to consider the report produced by the Independent Investigator.

A discussion then ensued on the level of information provided within the report and requests were made for additional information to be provided. Following debate, the Elections and Democratic Services Manager undertook to include a timeline for each case in future reports and to give further consideration to requests made by Members which were likely to reveal the identity of individuals. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

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

(Councillor D A Giles abstained from voting on this item).

20 POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

With the aid of a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee were acquainted with details of the process involved to undertake a review of polling districts and polling places as required by Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

By way of background, the Elections and Democratic Services Manager informed the Committee of the legislative requirement to undertake the review which was currently out for public consultation closing on 14 August 2019. Members noted that the consultation had also been sent to a wide range of stakeholders including County and District Councillors, MPs, Town and Parish Clerks, Returning Officers for the Constituencies of Huntingdon and Peterborough, the Returning Officer for Cambridgeshire County Council, political agents/parties and local disability groups.

Having had their attention drawn to a minor textual amendment to Appendix A and in noting that final proposals would be submitted to Council for adoption at its meeting on 9th October 2019, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the process involved in the review of polling districts and polling places, proposals and timetable for consultation be noted.

21 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS - A REVIEW BY THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

A report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing a summary of the review undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life on ethical standards and review of the effectiveness of the arrangements introduced by the Localism Act 2011.

Attention was drawn to the best practice recommendations directed to local authorities, where it was noted that a further report would be submitted at the Committee's next meeting. In doing so, a question was raised by the Chairman querying when the gifts and hospitality register was last reviewed by the Council. The Elections and Democratic Services Manager confirmed that a review would be timely as it had last been considered in 2012 and that consideration should also be given to Member training in this respect. Following brief debate on whether candidates standing for or accepting public offices should not be required publicly to disclose their home address, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the report of the review of Local Government Ethical Standards undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life be noted; and
- (b) that a further report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee reviewing the best practice recommendations for local

authorities and identifies any changes necessary to the Council's processes.

22 APPROVAL FOR PUBLICATION OF THE 2018/19 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND THE ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

(Mr Suresh Patel, Ernst Young LLP, was in attendance for consideration of this item).

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining the process for finalising and publishing the Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and the Annual Finance Report (AFR) for 2018/19.

Pursuant to Minute No. 19/16, the Head of Resources confirmed the position with regard to the unaudited accounts and drew attention to Appendix C which outlined the draft Notice of Publication for the Statement of Accounts 2018/19. With reference to the draft Annual Governance Statement outlined in Appendix A, the Finance Manager reported that an additional risk around environmental pressures had been included. Despite this, the Committee were assured that the governance arrangements and the internal control environment were considered to be operating effectively. Attention was then drawn to the key financial highlights where it was noted that the Council had achieved an underspend of £0.248m against a budget of £17.282m.

Mr S Patel of Ernst Young LLP, offered his sincere apologies to the Committee, the Head of Resources and his team for failing to deliver audited accounts by the required deadline. He then went on to explain the significant resource issues he was experiencing within his organisation and the challenges that remained to successfully attract, recruit and retain employees within the audit sector. The Committee were reminded of the meetings held between Ernst Young LLP, the District Council and Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) to discuss the issue of the unaudited accounts. In his concluding remarks, Mr S Patel reassured the Committee that the audit process would commence in August with a view to reporting back to Members at their October 2019 meeting.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman placed on record his disappointment at the impact the unaudited accounts were having upon the Council and the additional pressures it was placing upon staff over the summer holiday period. Members raised a number of questions with Mr S Patel and received a response to each. Matters discussed included assurances on completing the audit over the summer holiday period, whether financial penalties were incurred, the potential impact this might have upon the Council's reputation, the current contract with PSAA, whether additional resource would be necessary to meet the demands of the external audit and if these costs could be recovered and the views of the Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team at the Council. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Annual Governance Statement attached at Appendix A of the report now submitted be approved and the Executive Leader and Managing Director be authorised to sign the Statement on behalf of the Council;

- (b) that the Unaudited Annual Financial Report as attached at Appendix B of the report now submitted be approved; and
- (c) that the Notice of Publication as attached at Appendix C of the report now submitted be approved.

23 IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIONS

By way of a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and in accordance with the Framework agreed by the Committee in 2017, Members were presented with the outstanding internal audit actions as at 30th June 2019.

It was noted that there were 14 audit actions not implemented by their original target date, of which 3 actions were 2 years or more older. Of particular concern to Members was the nature and number of outstanding audit actions falling under the responsibility of 3C ICT. Having expressed their disappointment at the lack of progress made, the Chairman suggested that the Committee might wish to invite Officers to their next meeting if progress had not been delivered over the summer period. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the report now submitted be noted; and
- (b) that the Head of Resources be requested to submit an email update to the Committee in September 2019 on the status of outstanding audit actions to enable Members to determine which Officers to invite to its October 2019 meeting.

24 DISPOSALS AND ACQUISITIONS POLICY: LAND AND PROPERTY - UPDATE ON THRESHOLDS

The Committee were acquainted with a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing an update to Members on the Disposals and Acquisitions Policy. Having had their attention drawn to the thresholds outlined in the policy and the outcome of consultations with the Executive Member for Strategic Resources, the Committee

RESOLVED

- (a) to receive and note the report now submitted; and
- (b) to review the acquisition and disposal policy thresholds in 24 months' time.

25 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. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

Chairman