

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 Wednesday, 2 October 2019

PRESENT: Councillor L W McGuire – Chairman.

Councillors S M Burton, E R Butler, Mrs S Conboy, Dr P L R Gaskin, P Kadewere, D N Keane and H V Masson.

APOLOGY(IES): Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D A Giles, J P Morris, D J Wells and J E White.

IN ATTENDANCE: (delete if not needed)

CORPORATE TEAM MANAGER AND HEAD OF RESOURCES

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chairman informed the Committee that it would be the final Corporate Governance Committee that Adrian Dobbyne, Corporate Team Manager and Clive Mason, Head of Resources would attend as they were both due to leave the Council's employment in October 2019.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman expressed appreciation to Mr Dobbyne and Mr Mason for their support and contribution and wished them both the very best for the future.

26 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th July 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

28 CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS - UPDATE

By means of a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer (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 on 17th October 2019 to consider the report produced by the Independent Investigator. Having been informed of the timeline for each of the complaints, it was

RESOLVED

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

29 POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW - CONSULTATION OUTCOME

Pursuant to Minute No. 19/20 and with the aid of a report prepared by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members were acquainted with details of the process involved with a review of polling districts and polling places as required by Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

Members noted that the formal consultation exercise had concluded on 14th August 2019 and that a total of 21 responses had been received. Arising from the representations made, it would not be necessary to make any changes to the polling districts and polling places but that comments had been received on polling stations which would be investigated further. In noting that the review was a legal requirement required to be completed by 31st January 2020, the Committee

RESOLVED

- (a) to note the outcome of the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review and consultation undertaken; and
- (b) that Council be recommended to approve the Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019 as appended at Appendix B of the report now submitted.

30 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - HOLME PARISH COUNCIL

A report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) considering a request from Holme Parish Council to increase the size of the Council from 7 to 9 Members.

Members were acquainted with the background to the request, together with the consultation and timetable for implementation. The Committee welcomed the request for a Community Governance Review and noted the proposal to complete the review within a shorter period to enable the election to be combined with the Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2020. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee be recommended to

- (a) agree the request from Holme Parish Council for a Community Governance Review to increase the number of Parish Councillors from 7 to 9;
- (b) agree, with or without amendments, the draft terms of reference of the review as detailed in Appendix A; and

- (c) authorise the Elections and Democratic Services Manager to agree a timetable in consultation with Holme Parish Council.

31 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS - BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Pursuant to Minute No 19/21, the Committee considered a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the best practice recommendations as a benchmark of good ethical practice as detailed in the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) review. The review undertook to compare the Council's current processes to establish whether any changes would be necessary.

Members' attention was drawn to Appendix A which outlined the best practice recommendations and issues for the Committee to consider. In receiving details of the action required for each of the best practice recommendations and in noting that Members would be reminded to register any gifts and hospitality received each quarter, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the best practice recommendations of the Review of Local Government Ethical Standards and proposed changes to the Council's processes be noted.

32 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2018-19

A report by the Corporate Team Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing Members with information on complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) and those received by the Council between the period April 2018 to March 2019.

The Committee were informed that the LGO had been advised of 17 complaints of which there had been four detailed investigations, one of which had been upheld. The latter referred to a planning matter and although the Council had been found to be at fault, an apology had been issued which was deemed a suitable remedy for the limited injustice caused.

With regards to internal complaints, it was noted that the number of Stage One complaints had decreased when compared to the previous year. The majority of complaints related to missed bin collections which attributed to 224 of the 565 Stage One complaints received. Having regard to Stage Two complaints, 22 had been received, which reflected positively upon the Council as it indicated that a number of complaints were largely resolved at Stage One.

Having been informed that the complaints tracker was widely used by staff across the Council and having been apprised with details of some compliments which had been received, the Committee requested future reports to include information around the compliments received.

In receiving responses to questions on the definition of a complaint in respect of missed bin collections, the Council's policy for dealing with unreasonable complainants, the process by which the Call Centre logged complaints and an update from Councillor E R Butler on the complaints received in the Development Management service over the last three years, it was

RESOLVED

(a) that the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council and the data relating to formal Stage One and Stage Two complaints be received and noted; and

(b) that future annual reports include data around compliments.

33 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2019/20 AND INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER

With the aid of a report prepared by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee gave consideration to the Internal Audit Plan 2019/20 and the Internal Audit Charter.

In introducing the report, the Internal Audit Manager drew attention to minor amendments to the report and advised that owing to sickness absence and the recent restructure of the team, 70 audit days had been lost in the first half of the year to deliver the agreed audit plan. He then went on to explain the impact this might have if further days were lost and the ability to deliver a robust Internal Audit Opinion.

Between October 2019 and March 2020, 150 audit days were available for the delivery of the audit plan. This would enable 12 audit reviews to be undertaken together with quarterly reviews of the main financial systems. In noting the requirement for an external independent review of the Internal Audit Service to be undertaken at least once every five years as required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, Members noted that this was overdue and had now been postponed beyond December 2019.

Councillor H V Masson raised a number of queries and received responses from the Internal Audit Manager and Head of Resources. Matters that were discussed included the need to ensure that the Internal Audit Service would not be outsourced, the use of artificial intelligence and flash reports, lone working which included working from home and the audit management process. Concerns were raised by the Committee over the level of resources available within the Internal Audit Team and the underlying impact this would have upon the delivery of sound quality assurance processes and the risk of it potentially affecting the Council's reputation. Comment was made that the level of risk was further exacerbated by the loss of a number of Senior Officers within the Council. The Head of Resources responded by informing the Committee that complying with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards was not a legislative requirement and that this was often the topic of debate between himself and the Internal Audit Manager.

Having thanked the Internal Audit Manager for the delivery of a comprehensive report, the Committee

- (a) approved the Internal Audit Plan for the period October 2019 to March 2020; and
- (b) approved the Internal Audit Charter as attached at Appendix 2 of the report now submitted.

34 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.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

35 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - SPECIAL MEETING

It was noted that a special meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday, 13th November 2019 at 7:00pm. The meeting would consider the external audit of the 2018/19 final accounts.

Chairman