

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held as a Remote Meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, 30 September 2020.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors S M Burton, E R Butler, Dr P L R Gaskin,
D A Giles, K P Gulson, P Kadewere, H V Masson,
L W McGuire, R J West and Mrs S R Wilson.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor J P Morris.

14 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23rd July 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs S Wilson declared a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No 20/20 as Ward Member for Godmanchester and Hemingford Abbots.

16 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.

The Elections and Democratic Services Manager advised that a report would be submitted to a future meeting on the new model Member Code of Conduct which would be considered at the LGA Assembly in the Autumn. In noting details of the allegations/complaints received, Councillor D A Giles requested for details of the paragraphs within the Code where breaches had been reported to be circulated around to the Committee. With reference to case number 20/40, it was confirmed that the complaint had been dismissed for investigation as it was out of time meaning that it related to conduct over six months before. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the progress of outstanding complaints and the conclusion of cases resolved since the meeting in January 2020 be noted.

17 UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT AND REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

With the aid of a report prepared by the Member Support Assistant (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee were updated 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.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

18 REVIEW OF FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY 2019/20

Consideration was given to a report by the Corporate Fraud Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing the work undertaken by the Corporate Fraud Team in 2019/20 which included the number of investigations undertaken, types of investigation and the value of the fraud identified. Members were required to review the work of the Team as part of the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.

Members were encouraged to note that during 2019/20, the Team had:

- Received 546 referrals;
- Investigated and closed 348 cases, identifying a fraud value of £671,310;
- Recovered 6 social housing properties with two more pending;
- Carried out 5 prosecutions;
- Administered 147 Council Tax penalties giving an income of £10,000; and
- Administered 4 administrative penalties giving an income of £3,500.

Additionally, it was reported that the Council had made three applications for Directed Surveillance under the powers of the Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) regarding fly tipping matters and the deployment of covert cameras.

Having raised a number of questions relating to how the District Council's fraud levels compared nationally, whether COVID-19 would result in an increase in fraud cases, the cross agency work being undertaken with the National Fraud Initiative, the need for Member Training on RIPA and the level of publicity undertaken by the Council on successful prosecutions, the Committee commended the Corporate Fraud Manager and her team for the production of a comprehensive report and the performance levels achieved.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted, which outlines the work undertaken by the Corporate Fraud Team during 2019/20, be received and noted.

19 WHISTLEBLOWING (POLICY, GUIDANCE AND CONCERNS RECEIVED)

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Acting Audit 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.

Members' attention was drawn to the whistleblowing allegations received in the year ending March 2020. Seven internal allegations had been received over the year which related predominantly to health and safety matters.

In noting that a publicity campaign on the policy and guidance would be undertaken with staff via the Council's intranet, particularly at a time with increased home working due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee

RESOLVED

- (a) that the results of the annual review of the whistleblowing policy be noted; and
- (b) that the updated Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance, as attached as appendices to the report now submitted, be approved.

20 SINGLE TENDER AWARDS

With the aid of a report prepared by the Assistant Directors for Corporate Services and Transformation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee were notified of single tenders/quotes approved by Heads of Service/Assistant Directors since the January 2020 meeting. Having been informed of the requirement within the Council's Constitution, under the Code of Procurement, to report such matters to the Committee and in receiving a response from the Assistant Director, Corporate Services on the Council's joint ownership of Bridge Place Car Park with RGE, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be noted.

21 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.

22 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - SPECIAL MEETING

It was noted that a special meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday, 25th November 2020 at 7:00pm. The meeting would consider the approval of the 2019/20 final accounts.

Chairman