

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held as a Remote Meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, 24 March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, J C Cooper-Marsh, Dr P L R Gaskin, D A Giles, K P Gulson, P Kadewere, H V Masson, J P Morris and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors L W McGuire and Mrs S R Wilson.

COUNCILLOR J W DAVIES

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, Members held a moments silence to mark the passing away of Councillor J W Davies, Chairman of the Council.

31 MINUTES

(During discussion on this item, Councillor P Kadewere took his seat at the meeting).

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27th January 2021 were approved as a correct record.

In respect of Minute No. 20/25, the Chairman reported that he had consulted Group Party Leaders about the low level of returns from Members in relation to third party disclosures with a view to achieving a 100% return rate.

32 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

33 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - ALCONBURY & ALCONBURY WESTON PARISH COUNCIL

(During discussion on this item, Councillor J Cooper-Marsh took his seat at the meeting and was welcomed to his first Committee meeting by the Chairman).

With the aid of a report prepared by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee gave consideration to requests from Alconbury and Alconbury Weston Parish Councils to group the two parishes to allow a common Parish Council to be formed.

Members were acquainted with the background to the request, together with the consultation and timetable for implementation. The proposals would seek to enable the two communities to work closely together on common issues such as the sharing of facilities, flooding and Speedwatch whilst maintaining their own

civil identities. If pursued, the changes would take effect from May 2022 when Town and Parish Council elections were scheduled to take place throughout the District.

Questions that were raised related to the arrangements that would be in place to raise the precept for the 2022/23 financial year, the continuation of the two existing Parishes until the Reorganisation Order was in place and whether the two Parishes historically struggled to fill any vacant seats.

In welcoming the proposals and having been informed of a change to recommendation (a) of the report to reflect that the number of seats of the newly formed Parish Council should be determined following community feedback from the consultation, the Committee

RESOLVED

- (a) to agree the request from Alconbury and Alconbury Weston Parish Councils for a Community Governance Review to group the two parishes to allow a common Parish Council to be formed with the number of seats to be determined following community feedback from the consultation;
- (b) to agree the draft terms of reference of the review as detailed in Appendix A of the report now submitted, subject to amendments to be made to reflect recommendation (a) above; and
- (c) to authorise the Elections and Democratic Services Manager to agree a timetable in consultation with Alconbury and Alconbury Weston Parish Councils.

34 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2019/20

A report by the Business Change 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 April 2019 to March 2020.

The Committee were informed that the LGO had been advised of 23 complaints of which there had been four detailed investigations, two of which had been upheld. The latter cases referred to parking and benefits. 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 161 of the 280 Stage One complaints received. Having regard to Stage Two complaints, 17 had been received, which reflected positively upon the Council as it indicated that a number of complaints were largely resolved at Stage One.

In noting that the Complaints Tracker site had been updated during the course of the year and having had their attention drawn to the appendices within the report, specifically Appendix 4 and 5 which detailed compliments received and how Huntingdonshire compared with its neighbouring authorities respectively, it was

RESOLVED

that the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council and the data relating to formal Stage One and Stage Two complaints for 2019/20 be received and noted.

35 DATA PROTECTION COMPLIANCE: UPDATE ON ACTION PLAN

A report by the Information Governance Manager and Data Protection Officer was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing a status update on the actions identified as part of the Data Protection gap analysis review which had been discussed at the Committee's last meeting.

In noting that the report would no longer be submitted as a standing item at each meeting but that instead a future report would appear before the Committee once all actions had been concluded successfully, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be received and noted.

36 SINGLE TENDER AWARDS

With the aid of a report prepared by the Assistant Director for Transformation and Head of 3C ICT (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 last Committee meeting. Having been informed of the requirement within the Council's Constitution, under the Code of Procurement, to report such matters to the Committee, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be noted.

37 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2021/22 & INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER

With the aid of a report by the Acting Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee gave consideration to the Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22 and proposed changes to the Internal Audit Charter 2021.

In introducing the report, the Acting Internal Audit Manager reported that in light of the position with resources within the Internal Audit Team, the Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22 had been based on a priority list of assurance activities whilst also offering the flexibility to review and amend the Plan as any new or high priority risk areas emerged during the course of the year.

Questions were raised around the resources available to achieve the Plan, where it was noted that an annual plan had been prepared instead of two six monthly plans because resources would not be equal across the two half years and levels were not yet known. In response to comments made around the ambitious nature of the Plan, the Committee received assurances that the activities shown as green on the Plan were achievable but very dependent on resourcing especially if the team were to provide support to the Council's risk

management function. It was further reported that an interim progress report would be submitted to the Committee at its September 2021 meeting.

In noting that only minor changes had been made to the Internal Audit Charter, the Committee

RESOLVED

- (a) to approve the Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22 as submitted as Appendix 1 of the report;
- (b) to agree that changes can be made to the Internal Audit Plan following consultations between the Internal Audit Manager and Section 151 Officer and the Chairman of the Corporate Governance Committee; and
- (c) to approve the Internal Audit Charter 2021 as submitted as Appendix 2 of the report.

38 IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIONS

With the aid of a report prepared by the Acting Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee were updated on the implementation of audit actions.

Since the Committee's last meeting, the Acting Internal Audit Manager reported that discussions had been held at the Risk & Control Group and with the Council's Senior Leadership Team on the 100% target for the implementation of 'agreed internal audit actions to be introduced on time'. The consensus was that the target should remain given that they had been agreed with service managers at the time. Since the first meeting of the Risk & Control Group there had been a flurry of activity to update audit actions which had been encouraging to note.

Comment was made over the number of outstanding audit actions relating to 3C ICT and whether the relevant Executive Councillor had been sighted on the content of the report. Having regard to the former, it was reported that discussions had been held and that work was now being undertaken by the service to address its audit actions. Councillor D A Giles expressed his disquiet at the lack of progress which had been made to complete audit actions which had been raised on numerous occasions at previous Committee meetings and in doing so, the Chairman expressed his view that that the Committee should enable the Risk & Control Group sufficient time to bed in within the organisation before taking any further action.

Other matters that were discussed included the suggestion to set the scene to service managers from the outset on the importance of completing audit actions together with the role of the Committee in monitoring progress, confirmation that the audit actions relating to 3C ICT solely related to Huntingdonshire District Council and did not include other partner authority actions and a suggestion to receive a further update report on progress at the next Committee meeting. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the report now submitted be noted; and
- (b) that a further update be provided at the Committee's June 2021 meeting.

39 PROGRESS ON ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2019/20 - SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

A report by the Acting Internal Audit Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing an update on progress against significant governance issues as reported in the 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement.

Having had their attention drawn to Appendix 1 which provided an update on the 10 significant governance issues which had been identified, Members were encouraged to note that action continued to be undertaken on all the issues reported. Having received assurances that ICT training was moving in the right direction and in thanking the Acting Internal Audit Manager for the production of a clear, concise and comprehensive report, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Committee note the progress which has been made against the significant governance issues identified from the Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report now submitted; and
- (b) that further update reports be submitted as a standing item at future Committee meetings.

40 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.

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services reported that following feedback from Officers on the use of the Code of Procurement Waiver Procedure, minor amendments had been made with one use of the waiver procedure being utilised in relation to the Fish Weir Construction in Godmanchester. Records were being retained to document use of the procedure which would be reported to the Committee at future meetings. Finally, it was noted that the procedure had now been in operation for 3 months.