

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, CAMBS, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 9 July 2024

PRESENT: Councillor M J Burke – Chair.

Councillors J A Gray, D J Shaw, I P Taylor, C H Tevlin and P Webb – Independent Member.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P J Hodgson-Jones, A R Jennings and T Sakhrani – Independent Member.

13 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29th May 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

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

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 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. Of the 71 Town and Parish Councils' Registers of Disclosable Interests, 35 were published in full, 36 had vacancies and 10 had Disclosable Pecuniary Interest Forms awaiting completion.

In response to a question by Councillor Taylor, the Monitoring Officer outlined the terms of the Protocol which had been adopted for dealing with complaints about parish councils. Complaints should be dealt with at the local level if at all possible, but they could be referred to the District Council if complainants remained dissatisfied. The District Council had to consider cost and public interest when reviewing complaints. Whereupon, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

16 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLIANCE WITH THE INFORMATION RIGHTS ACTS (FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT, ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REGULATIONS AND GDPR) AND INFORMATION GOVERNANCE

The Committee received the annual report by the Information Governance Manager and Data Protection Officer on the Council's compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation Act 2018. Information was also received on the Council's performance regarding protecting personal data in the period April 2022 to March 2023. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book.

Members' attention was drawn to the introduction of a new request management system half way through the year, the provision of updates to the Joint Information Governance and Security Board, the high quality of responses to enquiries and the significant increase in the number of FOIAs received.

Following questions by Councillor Shaw, it was reported that timeframes for Data Rights Requests were prescribed for the Council and that detailed analysis of the performance data had identified lessons in relation to the need to interrogate a number of different systems in order to provide full responses. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the report by the Information Governance Manager and Data Protection Officer on compliance with the information rights acts (Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations and UK GDPR) and on Information Governance be received and noted.

17 REVIEW OF FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY 2023/24

By means of a report by the Corporate Fraud Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee were provided with a summary of the activity of the Council's Corporate Fraud Team in 2023/24. Having been reminded of the legal requirement annually to submit the report to the Committee, Members' attention was drawn to the value of the activities of the Team. Using the National Fraud Initiative's methodology the cases proven were valued at £255,048. It was pointed out that it was difficult to put a value on tenancy fraud, but that the Team had recovered nine properties. The outcome of a recent inspection of surveillance activity would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Taylor commended the recovery of social properties and then enquired why there was no reference to fly tipping. The Committee was informed that although fly tipping took place, the Council had to decide how it responded to it. Only covert surveillance was covered by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

Following a comment by Councillor Shaw about the recruitment of a Corporate Fraud Manager, the Revenues and Benefits Manager outlined the options that had been assessed to fill the role before deciding to recruit to the post. Whereupon, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

18 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Chief Finance Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached the External Audit Planning Report for the year ended 31 March 2024. It was planned that the Audit would start on 9th September 2024. In introducing the Plan, C Mellons, Partner, Ernst & Young LLP, outlined the potential for changes by the new Government, but confirmed the audit should be completed by the end of the calendar year. She also referred to the Risk Dashboard and, in particular, the valuation of land and buildings, and materiality levels.

In response to a question by Councillor Gray, it was confirmed that the Audit would focus on the value of both Property, Plant and Equipment and Investment Properties. Councillor Gray drew attention to the significant problem of obtaining valuations represented for the Council. Following a further question by Councillor Gray, the considerations taken into account when deciding how to use the National Audit Office's guidance when carrying out evaluations were outlined. Having drawn attention to the fact that there had been a significant increase in the scale fee, Members were informed that most of the required work was built into the audit and that they would be formally notified of any variation. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that the Audit Planning Report 2023/24 attached as an Appendix to the report now submitted be received and noted; and
- b) that the timetable for reports and updates to the Committee leading to the Auditor's Annual Report as set out in paragraph 4.6 of the report now submitted be endorsed.

19 INTERNAL AUDIT PEER REVIEW CHALLENGE ACTIONS - UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), which provided an update on progress made against the actions identified during the Local Government Association Internal Audit Peer Challenge Review in 2023. The report contained details of five further actions that had subsequently been identified. Members' attention was drawn to a number of the actions, in particular the conduct of a risk maturity assessment, the outcome of which would be reported to the Committee.

In response to a question by P Webb, Independent Member, it was confirmed that training for Committee Members had been rescheduled for September. Furthermore, in accordance with one of the additional actions, a further skills audit would be undertaken. Having noted the interim S151 Officer arrangements, it was

RESOLVED

- that the report be received and noted.

20 IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIONS

With the aid of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee were updated on the implementation of internal audit actions. As at 27th June 2024, 11 actions had been implemented and closed in the last 90 day rolling period, 14 actions had not been implemented by the due date, 18 audit actions were open and 70 actions had been closed in the last 12 month rolling period. Members were informed that the new Internal Audit Manager had been challenged to capture progress more effectively. Examples of why this was necessary were external developments relating to the Corporate Enforcement Policy and the S106 Priorities and Processes, which had both recently been reviewed by external bodies and meant the audit actions needed to be revisited. The Committee would be informed accordingly.

In response to a question by Councillor Shaw, it was agreed to provide the Committee with an update directly on the recruitment of a Programme Manager before the next meeting. Following further questions by Councillor Taylor, a commitment was made to introduce more rigorous version control of policies and the Committee was informed that the revised Corporate Enforcement Policy would be produced by a number of key Officers led by the Chief Operating Officer. Having noted that more effective ways of managing audit actions were being considered, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

21 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER UPDATE

With the aid of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee reviewed the Corporate Risk Register. The Register identified those areas where action should be taken to mitigate the Council's exposure to risk and informed the Annual Plan for Internal Audit. The Corporate Director (People) informed Members that the Risk Register had been reviewed to ensure it was consistent with the new Risk Strategy. It was decided last year to make risk core to service planning and further work would be undertaken to map and score service risks.

Following a question by Councillor Gray about inherent and residual risks in relation to Risk Ref 350 in the Risk Movement Report, it was agreed the report would be revised for the next meeting. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- a) that the report be received and noted, and
- b) that it be confirmed that risks to the Council are being managed in line with the Risk Management Strategy.

22 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2023/24

Consideration was given to the Committee's draft Annual Report to Council for the year ending 31st March 2024. The report had been prepared by the Chair of the Committee during the period covered by the report and was scheduled to be presented at the next full Council meeting. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Corporate Governance Committee Annual Report to Council for the year ending 31st March 2024 be approved for submission to the Council; and
- (b) that the Chair of the Committee be authorised to approve any amendments to the draft Report.

23 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received and noted a report on progress of actions in response to discussions and decisions taken at previous meetings. A copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book. It was agreed that those items marked for deletion from the list need not appear in the report at future meetings. In addition and following detailed discussion on the public availability of information on pension funds and the potential uses to which it might be put, it was also agreed to delete the item entitled "Unaudited Statement of Accounts 2022/23".

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

24 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

25 CYBER SECURITY

The Cyber and Information Lead for 3C ICT delivered a presentation on cyber security. The presentation covered the order and nature of potential risks and the measures in place to mitigate them. Members asked to a range of questions on the presentation and discussed the answers received.

RESOLVED

that the information presented be received and noted.

Chair