

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 Wednesday, 25 September 2024

PRESENT: Councillor C H Tevlin – Vice-Chair.

Councillors J A Gray, A R Jennings, D J Shaw, C H Tevlin and P Webb.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M Burke, P J Hodgson-Jones and I P Taylor.

IN ATTENDANCE: P Webb.

26 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

28 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - GLATTON AND CONINGTON PARISHES

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 a request from Glatton Parish Council to undertake a Community Governance Review to review the boundary between Glatton and Conington parishes.

By way of background, the Elections and Democratic Services Manager reported that the main reason for the review was to change the anomalous boundaries to reflect current local identities and facilitate effective neighbourhood plans. Glatton Parish Council had approached Conington Parish Council twice since November 2022 but at both meetings Conington Parish Council concluded that they did not wish to make any changes to the existing arrangements. A formal request was therefore made by Glatton Parish Council to the Council to consider undertaking a Community Governance Review. The Committee's attention then was drawn to the two recommendations contained within the report which proposed to either proceed with the review or decline it.

Councillor A R Jennings queried the number of Community Governance Reviews undertaken by the Council to date, together with the number of reviews which had resulted in parish boundary changes. In response, it was reported that under

the current legislation none had resulted in boundary changes but that all parish boundaries had previously been subject to a full boundary review. Having expressed sympathies with both parishes, a suggestion was made by Councillor J A Gray to undertake a full review of all parish boundaries across the District. The Elections and Democratic Services Manager responded that this would be a large undertaking, with each parish being considered on its own merit and would also require a review of electoral arrangements across all three tiers of local government. It was then suggested that the Committee might consider an option to respond back to Glatton Parish Council requesting them to seek the views of the electorate via a petition. A Community Governance Review might then be considered by the Council if the requisite number of signatories had been obtained from the electorate. The Chief Executive made comment that this option would provide the Council with greater confidence that the proposal was reflective of the wider parish views. Additionally, she concurred that undertaking a full review of parish boundaries across the District would be very resource intensive but that she would undertake to request a call for boundary anomalies to be raised via the Town and Parish Conference in October 2024.

A number of other matters were discussed which included whether parishes were able to put forward neighbouring parish areas into their Neighbourhood Plans, the impact of the proposal upon the potential loss of Community Infrastructure Levy or Section 106 funding upon Conington together with the contrary view of Glatton not being able to benefit from such funding from a development that might happen close to their boundary. In respect of the former, it was reported that Neighbourhood Plans could only include areas within their own parish boundary.

Following discussions, the Committee expressed their support for a suggestion made by Councillor J A Gray to amend option b of the recommendation to include reference to Glatton Parish Council obtaining a petition of the requisite number of signatories from the electorate expressing their support for the proposed boundary change or if Glatton Parish Council were able to reach an agreement with Conington Parish Council.

In response to a subsequent question raised by Councillor D Shaw querying whether the petition should extend out to Conington residents, the Chief Executive responded that at this stage, only the views of Glatton residents would be required but that if the electorate agreed to the boundary change, Conington Parish Council might wish to raise the matter with their parishioners too.

Whereupon, it was duly moved and seconded that the Committee

RESOLVED

to decline to instigate a Community Governance Review requesting that Glatton Parish Council either seeks to reach an agreement with Conington Parish Council and/or submit a petition to the Council with the requisite number of signatories from the area to which a community governance petition relates expressing support for the proposed boundary change.

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which provided an annual summary and update of completed or 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 & Deputy Monitoring Officer drew the Committee's attention to the table at 3.1 of the report which provided detail on four complaints which had been submitted and dealt with under the Monitoring Officer Protocol. The cases had been consulted with the Independent Person appointed by Council.

Referring to case number 24/63, a question was raised by Councillor J A Gray querying whether an individual could join another Council following their resignation from another Council and prior to any formal investigation being undertaken. The Chief Executive reported that a similar matter had been discussed at the Standards Board for England which had concluded that it was in the public's interest for the individual concerned to stand for election again.

RESOLVED

that the Committee note the progress of any outstanding Code of Conduct complaints and the conclusion of the cases resolved to date.

30 USE OF SURVEILLANCE UNDER THE REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (RIPA) - INSPECTION REPORT UPDATE

A report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) providing details of the Council's recent inspection by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Officer (IPCO) and the recommendations received together with details of the follow up actions to be undertaken by the Council.

Following an introduction to the report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager the Committee were pleased to note the Inspector had been impressed by the professional attitude that had been displayed with regards to compliance with the legislation. Attention was then drawn to the areas for action identified to further enhance and improve the Council's working practices together with a number of planned activities relating to training and awareness and policy and record keeping.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee has considered and commented on the content of the report and noted the activities planned.

31 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

A report by the Corporate Director (People) was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing the Committee of the Council's Corporate Risk Register.

In introducing the report, the Chief Executive reported that the risk register had been discussed with the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance. She also mentioned the forthcoming arrival of the new Director for Finance and Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer who would be able to offer a new perspective to corporate risks going forward.

In response to a request made by Councillor A R Jennings, the Chief Executive undertook to ensure that future reports included an exception report to enable Members to better identify any movement and/or actions undertaken to mitigate risks since the previous meeting.

Councillor J A Gray then queried what activities had been undertaken by the Council in respect of cyber security which was regarded a significant risk to the Council. The Chief Executive reported that testing of the Council's systems and practices had been undertaken in May 2024, with additional resources put in place at the weekends. Phishing emails were regularly sent to staff, which would result in additional training if links were clicked on by staff that were unable to recognise the signs. Councillor D Shaw reported that this matter had recently been discussed with Overview and Scrutiny Panel Members. The Chief Executive undertook to provide further detail on what mitigations were in place for this risk at the Committee's next meeting.

RESOLVED

that the Committee has considered the report and noted the risks to the organisation and whether they are being managed in line with the Risk Management Strategy.

32 INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received and noted a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) informing the Committee of the work completed/undertaken by the Internal Audit Service.

The Internal Audit Manager reported that four audits had been completed since arriving in post in July 2024 which included Vehicle Maintenance, Budgetary Control, Code of Procurement and Small Works Contracts. In respect of the former two audits, the Committee were pleased to note that both areas demonstrated good control environments. With regard to the Code of Procurement audit, it was reported that significant work was required to improve the control environment and an action plan to this effect would be in place prior to the Committee's next meeting. In responding to questions raised by Councillor D Shaw, the Internal Audit Manager reported upon the need for the Council to update its Code of Procurement rules whilst also awaiting the release of the new rules from the Government on public sector procurement. The latter would also refer to local procurement and work would be undertaken in conjunction with the Council's Economic Development Team on how to better publicise the procurement opportunities available to the District's economy.

Following a request made by Councillor A R Jennings, the Internal Audit Manager undertook to include service manager responses to audit actions in future reports. The Chief Executive then explained the involvement of Senior

Leadership Team in the internal audit process as a means of ensuring corporate and organisational accountability and ownership of audit actions.

RESOLVED

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

33 IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIONS

A report by the Internal Audit Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) updating Members on the implementation of audit actions.

As at 17th September 2024, 16 actions had not been implemented by the due date, 3 actions had been implemented and closed off in a rolling 90 day period, 66 actions had been closed off in a rolling 12 month period and 18 audit actions remained open.

In response to a question raised by Councillor J A Gray, the Internal Audit Manager reported upon his immediate priorities which included closing off outstanding audit actions through effective engagement with service managers and staff, putting an action plan in place and actively working on it in response to the BDO quality assurance report on Internal Audit and identifying areas for audit in the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26.

Other matters that were discussed and responded to at the meeting included whether an update was forthcoming in respect of the action relating to Corporate Enforcement Policy 2021/22 which had not been updated since March 2024, the timescales for recruiting to the Risks and Controls Officer post and the work to be undertaken with the Director of Finance and Corporate Services to close off the actions relating to Risk Management.

RESOLVED

that the Committee has considered the report and commented upon the progress achieved to date.

34 WHISTLEBLOWING (POLICY, GUIDANCE AND CONCERNS RECEIVED)

Consideration was given to a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing the outcome of a review of the Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance.

The review found that no changes were required to the Policy and Guidance and detailed one whistleblowing allegation which related to a disclosure received internally.

Whereupon, the Committee

RESOLVED

that the review of the Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance be endorsed as still fit for purpose.

35 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 action relating to Internal Audit Service – Progress Report would be removed now that the matter had been resolved. The Committee were also apprised with the outcome of recent meetings of the Constitution Working Group.

36 CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PEOPLE)

The Committee extended their best wishes to Mr O Morley, Corporate Director (People) on his impending departure from the District Council on 27th September 2024 to pursue a Masters Degree at University College London. Members placed on record their thanks and appreciation to him for his hard work and contributions to Huntingdonshire during his time at the District Council.

Chair