

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC SUITE, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, CAMBS, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 9 June 2021

PRESENT: Councillor G J Bull – Chairman.

Councillors J C Cooper-Marsh, Dr P L R Gaskin, D A Giles, K P Gulson, P Kadewere, R J West and Mrs S R Wilson.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, H V Masson, L W McGuire and J P Morris.

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 24th March and 19th May 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

6 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. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the progress of outstanding complaints and the conclusion of cases resolved since the meeting in January 2021 be noted.

7 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.

In noting that Guidance was still awaited from the Local Government Association on the new model Code of Conduct which was expected imminently, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

8 REVIEW OF FRAUD INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY 2020/21

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 2020/21 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 2020/21, the Team had:

- been seconded to help with the award of business grants;
- been involved in 13 separate business grant schemes;
- verified and checked businesses bank accounts and active status to determine eligibility to grant payments; and
- assisted in the award of over £50 million worth of grants over the last 14 months.

In response to questions raised by the Committee, the Corporate Fraud Manager confirmed that there was currently one live business grant scheme which would close on 30th June 2021 and that all grants would be subject to taxation. HMRC would be making contact with grant recipients in the near future for this purpose. It was further reported that lessons had been learnt from the initial business grants scheme launched in April 2020 which had raised numerous fraud alerts at the time. The National Fraud Initiative were now actively sending information through to the Council and helping to identify serious organised crime.

In noting that the Corporate Fraud Team comprised 3 members of staff, it was reported that the level of resources within the Team remained under constant review over the reporting period. The Team possessed very specialist skills, which were required to deliver the various grant schemes which was a number one priority for the Council. Whilst the Team's normal investigative work had been put on hold over the last 14 months, it was hoped that this work would resume over the next few months.

Having commended the Corporate Fraud Manager and her Team for the production of a comprehensive report and the performance levels achieved, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted, which outlines the work undertaken by the Corporate Fraud Team during 2020/21, be received and noted.

9 IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIONS

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

The Internal Audit Manger reported that over the last 12 months, 34 actions had been introduced of which 20% had been implemented on time. This figure rose to 85% when including those actions implemented at a later date. Since the Committee's last meeting, there had been an active drive to push for progress and 10 now only remained outstanding which the Committee was pleased to note.

In referring to the outstanding audit actions outlined in Appendix 1 and in response to a question which had been raised, it was reported that the impact of COVID might have been a contributory factor towards some of the delays. A detailed discussion then took place on the outstanding audit action relating to Data Protection and Information Management. The Committee were assured that developments were ongoing and that overall, this was classed as a low to medium risk for the Council. To aid Members going forward, it was agreed to include a column identifying the risk score for each outstanding audit action in future reports. A suggestion was then made by a Member to breakdown this audit action into sub-actions to provide greater visibility on the progress made.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the report now submitted be noted; and
- (b) that a further update be provided to the Committee at a future meeting.

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

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

Members were encouraged to note that actions were progressing well and that a further update would be provided as part of the Annual Governance Statement 2020/21 due to be presented to the Committee at its July 2021 meeting.

Other matters that were discussed included an update on the recruitment campaign for the vacant post within the Internal Audit Team, a suggestion for a policy on the issue surrounding Network Access Management Control and the latest position with the delivery of capital schemes following the appointment of the Programme Delivery Manager.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

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.

11 WHISTLEBLOWING (POLICY, GUIDANCE AND CONCERNS RECEIVED)

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Internal 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 no changes were required to the Policy and Guidance.

Members' attention was drawn to the whistleblowing allegations received in the year ending March 2021 where it was reported that four internal whistleblowing allegations had been received but there were no concerns that needed to be drawn to the Committee's attention. There were also two external allegations which were passed on to relevant service areas to deal with.

RESOLVED

that the results of the annual review of the whistleblowing policy be noted and it be acknowledged that the Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance is still fit for purpose requiring no changes.

12 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

Consideration was given to a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was appended the Committee's draft Annual Report to Council for the year ending 31st March 2021.

In acknowledging that a Review of the Effectiveness of the Committee had not been undertaken since 2018, the Chairman suggested that this should be undertaken within the current Municipal Year. Attention was also drawn to the Information Governance Training session for Members due to be held on 15th June 2021. All Members were encouraged to attend.

RESOLVED

(a) that the Corporate Governance Committee Annual Report to Council for the year ending 31st March 2021 be approved for submission to the Council; and

(b) that the Chairman of the Committee be authorised to approve any amendments to the Report.

13 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 the Code of Procurement Waiver Procedure had been used once since its inception and that a new Procurement Officer joins the Council shortly.

In noting that there was a constitutional requirement to review the Code of Financial Management annually each year, it was reported that the Chief

Finance Officer had conducted a review and confirmed that no changes would be required to the Code this year.

Chairman