

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, 28 September 2022

PRESENT: Councillor N Wells – Chairman.

Councillors A M Blackwell, J Clarke, J E Harvey, S A Howell, P Kadewere, T D Sanderson and I P Taylor.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, J A Gray, P J Hodgson-Jones and R J West.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor S Ferguson.

17 HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

The Committee stood in a Minutes Silence to reflect upon and remember the life and reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who passed away on 8th September 2022.

18 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13th July 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

20 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2021/22

Councillor S Ferguson was in attendance for consideration of this item.

The Committee gave consideration to a report (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 2021 and March 2022.

Having had their attention drawn to some minor amendments relating to the reported statistics within the report, the Committee were informed that that LGO had received 15 complaints of which there had been five complaints investigated, four of which had not been upheld. The upheld case related to Community and the latter cases referred to Community, Planning Enforcement, Test & Trace Support Payment and Covid/Business Grants.

The Committee were advised that the LGO was an external and independent body that may investigate complaints about Councils once a Council's complaints process has been concluded.

With regards to internal complaints, it was noted that the number of Stage 1 complaints had increased to 233 from 109 when compared to the previous year. Of these, 33 had escalated on to Stage Two complaints of which 15 of these related to Development Management & Growth. It was reported that 90% and 71% of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints respectively had been resolved within time against targets of 90%. Late responses for Stage 2 complaints were mainly attributed to the Planning Service.

Two customers continue to be managed under the Council's Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy. Finally, the Committee were encouraged to note the number of compliments which had been received over the reporting period.

The Executive Councillor for Customer Services advised the Committee that he would be regularly meeting with the Business Change Manager to look at and improve services through intelligence obtained through the complaints process.

In response to a question raised by Councillor P Kadewere, it was confirmed that a majority of the Council's complaints were predominantly received via the online complaints form.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman local authority report for Huntingdonshire District Council and the data relating to formal Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints for 2021/22 be received and noted.

21 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

With the aid of a report prepared by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee gave consideration to the proposed Annual Governance Statement 2021/22.

Following a brief explanation from the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources and having been informed by the Corporate Director (People) that the statement encompassed both internal and external risks, the Committee

RESOLVED

to approve the Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 as outlined in Appendix A of the report now submitted and authorised the Executive Leader and Managing Director to sign the Annual Governance Statement on behalf of the Council.

22 IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIONS - OUTCOME OF MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Pursuant to Minute No. 22/10 and with the aid of a report by the Corporate Director (People) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee gave consideration to the outcome of a review of outstanding audit actions by the Senior Leadership Team.

In introducing the report, the Corporate Director (People) reminded the Committee of the background to the report and drew the Committee's attention to the recommendations contained within it. With reference to the recommendation relating to the inclusion of a management response to all future audit reports, it was reported that this was a practice adopted by other local authorities, in particular London Borough authorities. The Committee's attention was then drawn to a number of audit actions which now had been closed. He then went on to state that the proposals would seek to encourage the Council to be proportionate and efficient with the resources available and referred to a recent example where the HR team had taken over responsibility for training, an action which previously had sat with the 3C ICT team. In his concluding remarks, comment was made that a number of open audit actions sat within Corporate Resources and that the Director for Finance and Corporate Resources would endeavour to make progress on these actions going forward.

In response to a question raised by Councillor J E Harvey, it was confirmed that the Senior Leadership Team had undertaken a review of all audit actions line by line. In doing so, Councillor J E Harvey commented that the Chair, herself as Vice-Chair and the Audit Team could have contributed to shaping the final report and proposed that a further report be brought back to the November 2022 meeting providing more specific detail on the proposals. In concurring with this suggestion, Councillor S A Howell requested that the assurance level for each audit action also be included in the report to which the Corporate Director (People) indicated that he would consider the suggestion made. The Internal Audit Manager proposed that the audit opinion could be included within the table as a way forward.

At their request, the Corporate Director (People) undertook to circulate an excel version of the appendix to Members of the Committee outside of the meeting. Following discussion on the matter and having put the recommendations to vote by way of a show of hands, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that recommendations 1, 2 and 3 of the report now submitted be not approved; and
- (b) that the report be revisited with additional clarification on the changes to processes recommended by Senior Leadership Team to include detail on what and when items will be considered by Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Governance Committee respectively, for submission to the Committee's 30th November 2022 meeting.

23 IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIONS

With the aid of a report 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 latest data now revealed 57% of actions being introduced on time (including those with late implementation) and 34 overdue audit actions remained outstanding. It was further reported that 26 actions had not been implemented. The target for the completion of audit actions to be implemented by the agreed date remained at 100%.

The Internal Audit Manager reported that 44 actions had been closed in the past year with all red actions having been closed. It was noted that a period of 1 months grace would be given for overdue audit actions which was agreed by the Committee. Overdue audit actions continue to be reported monthly to Senior Leadership Team.

At the request of Councillor I P Taylor, the Democratic Services Officer undertook to circulate to him copies of the Council's Treasury Management and Commercial Investment Strategies outside of the meeting.

A question was then raised about Council to Council borrowing and Councillor I P Taylor queried whether the Council had entered into any such agreements with other authorities. It was confirmed by the Director for Finance and Corporate Resources that one such loan did exist which was due for repayment in October 2022. Furthermore the Corporate Director (People) assured the Committee that Council to Council borrowing was a fairly common practice amongst authorities.

At the request of Councillor S A Howell, the Internal Audit Manager agreed to include a list of closed audit actions in future reports. Other matters that were discussed included the progress of audit actions relating to Purchase Order compliance to which the Committee received an update from the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources on progress thus far. Assurances were delivered that the actions would be progressed and that operational teams would be engaged with a view to improving current practices. The Internal Audit Manager also reported that her service would also be reviewing the use of purchase cards with a view to generating efficiencies in this area as well as providing tighter and clearer rules on their use.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the content of the report now submitted be noted.

24 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. In doing so, the Democratic Services Officer advised that there had been no uses of the Code of Procurement Waiver Procedure since the previous meeting.

Chairman