
Corporate Governance Panel

Report of the meeting held on 27th November 2013

Matter for Decision

20. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS CO-OPTED MEMBERS

By way of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is reproduced as an Appendix), the Panel has been acquainted with the outcome of a review of the involvement of external co-optees on the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

The review had concluded that instead of making permanent appointments to the Scrutiny Panels, there was merit in inviting individuals who had specialist knowledge or expertise to contribute to particular study areas. It was reported that there was currently three vacancies for the position of co-optee and the terms of office of two others would end naturally in February. It was therefore proposed that all appointments should finish at that time.

Having noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairmen have been consulted and support the proposal, the Panel

RECOMMEND

that the following words be deleted from paragraph 2 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution:

“Each Overview and Scrutiny Panel shall comprise two co-opted persons appointed for a four year period without voting rights. The co-opted persons shall not be paid an allowance”.

Matters for Information

21. EXTERNAL AUDITORS: ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2012/13

The Panel has formally received the Annual Audit Letter from the Council's External Auditors, PricewaterhouseCooper for 2012/13. A number of recommendations had been made to strengthen the budgetary control and financial planning process for the medium and

longer term and discussion on these and on monitoring of savings and the implications of zero based budgeting also have taken place.

In discussing the findings of the Auditor's review into the LGSS HR Contract and their opinion of project management, procurement and contracting, the Panel expressed disappointment that the report lacked any Officer response to the issues raised. Owing to their concerns, the Assistant Director, Finance and Resources has agreed to circulate information on the actions taken and planned to address the auditor's comments, including timescales, to Panel Members.

22. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT, ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REGULATIONS AND DATA PROTECTION ACT

The Panel has received a report on the number of requests received by the Council under the Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection Act. In discussing the cost to the Council of complying with these legislative requirements, Members were advised that a high level of requests were for general information and that alternative methods of making such data available to the public was being considered, including making maximum use of the Council's website.

24. CORPORATE BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING

An update on current progress to review the Council's corporate business continuity arrangements has been presented to the Panel. The Business Continuity Plan has been updated and an exercise to test its robustness undertaken, as a result of which a number of issues were identified. In noting the success of the event, Members were advised that the exercise will become an annual event to help ensure that the Plan remains a "living" document.

It has been confirmed that agreement in principle had been reached with Huntingdon Library to provide alternative accommodation for face to face services in the event of Pathfinder Customer Centre becoming inaccessible. This arrangement will be tested over the next 12 months.

25. ANNUAL REVIEW OF WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Panel has endorsed changes to the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance which have been revised to reflect legislative changes arising from the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 (EERA). The changes narrow the definition of "protected disclosure", remove the requirement that a worker or employee must make a protected disclosure in "good faith", introduces personal liability for co-workers who victimise whistleblowers and extends the meaning of "workers". The new policy also aims to prevent employees from

making whistleblowing claims around spurious issues by introducing a requirement that the alleged disclosure should relate to a public interest.

26. OFFICER GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUPS

The Panel has noted a proposal to introduce Officer Governance Working Groups to raise awareness of the importance of good governance throughout the authority. The approach has been prepared by the Chief Officer Management Team following concerns raised in the External Auditor's report over the lack of compliance in some areas.

Six working groups will be created, reporting to an Officer Governance Board consisting of Chief Officer's Management Team, the Monitoring Officer and the Internal Audit and Risk Manager. In considering the main elements to be considered by the groups, the Panel has commented on the level of commitment expected from officers and expressed concern that the groups will be led by a Head of Service or Service Manager who has not got responsibility for that service area as part of their normal role.

27. WORK AND TRAINING PROGRAMME

Members of the Panel have received details of their anticipated work programme over the ensuing year.

A Member of the Council Programme Group has questioned the process when dealing with a Notice of Motion at Council and reference was made of the need to review the Council's Procedure Rules. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that the Deputy Leader has also suggested that such a review be undertaken by the Panel and that he would be discussing this further with him. In the meantime and given the complexity of the Council's Constitution, it was suggested that a presentation be held at the start of the next meeting on the various sections of the Council's Constitution.

28. INTERNAL AUDIT – PAY REVIEW

(The following item was considered as a confidential item under Paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

The Panel was apprised of the outcome of a review by the Internal Audit Manager into the job evaluation and pay review process.

In discussing the job evaluation methodology being used to evaluate the posts, Members have questioned the basis for Inbucon's assertion that their scheme was equality compliant. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that Inbucon had considerable experience in such matters and had been engaged by

the authority to provide a legally compliant scheme. In these circumstances and in the event of any successful challenge to the adopted scheme, the Council would be able to seek redress from Inbucon. The Assistant Director, Finance and Resources added that the scheme has been considered by the Equality Commission, who had raised no concerns.

E R Butler
Chairman