
Corporate Governance Panel

Report of the meeting held on 23rd July 2014

Matters for Decision

1. PROGRESS REPORT – EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

In receiving a progress report on recent discussions and decisions, attention was drawn to the Employee Handbook which had replaced the formal Employees' Code of Conduct. It was reported that the Handbook had been considered by the Employment Panel (Item No.6 of their Report refers) and the final version reviewed and approved by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Governance Panel.

It is the intention that the Handbook will continue to evolve and will be more readily accessible to staff in its new format. Given its change in nature, it is no longer necessary to include the document in the Constitution. With this in mind, the Panel

RECOMMEND

that the Employee Handbook be removed from the Constitution.

2. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME – VARIATION TO SUPPORT GUIDELINES

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 considered an amendment to paragraph 10 of the Members Allowances Scheme and minor changes to the Members' IT and Telephone Support Guidelines appended to the scheme to reflect a move towards electronic delivery of agenda for Council meetings.

Members were advised that the changes have arisen as a result of the Cabinet's decision to withdraw IT equipment and broadband connections for Members and offer, as an alternative, the opportunity to purchase iPads from Member Allowances.

Following the Panel's discussions and clarification outside the meeting, the Guidelines have subsequently been updated – a copy of the updated version is attached to this report.

RECOMMEND

that the Council approve the appropriate adjustments to paragraph 10 of the Members Allowances Scheme and the Members' IT and Telephone Support Guidelines appended to the Scheme be updated to reflect the changes to the level of IT support etc to be provided to Councillors by the Council.

Matters for Information

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREED AUDIT ACTIONS

The Panel was provided with reassurances from the Managing Director that a culture of compliance was being promoted throughout the authority. Members were informed that the implementation of agreed audit recommendations will be routinely overseen by Management Team. Furthermore, the Managing Director reported that the new Management Team would be in place by the end of September and would be charged with the delivery of these key actions.

At the same time, the Panel were updated on progress of the new Governance Boards. The Panel was assured that they and the Overview and Scrutiny Panels would be kept informed of their development.

4. INTERNAL AUDIT & RISK MANAGER'S JOB DESCRIPTION

Under the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Panel was provided with a copy of the job description and grade of the post of the Internal Audit & Risk Manager.

5. OFFICE OF THE SURVEILLANCE COMMISSIONER – RIPA INSPECTION

The outcome of an inspection by the Office of Surveillance Commissioner was reported to the Corporate Governance Panel. The inspection was undertaken on 4th June 2014 and endorses the favourable conclusions of the 2011 report that the Council's use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act is of a satisfactory level. Members' attention was drawn to areas identified for improvement. The Panel has noted the actions taken in response to the proposed recommendations.

6. FRAUD WORKING GROUP

Councillors M G Baker, E R Butler, K J Churchill, G J Harlock and P G Mitchell have been appointed by the Panel to the Fraud Working Group.

7. PREPARING THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Panel was provided with an opportunity to comment upon the action taken to review the Code of Corporate Governance. Having had their attention drawn to the Annual Governance Statement, the Panel has endorsed the recording of the following governance issues as being significant:

- to develop the themes and aims in the Corporate Plan through service plans and performance measures;
- to review partnership working including benefits/outcomes and the contribution partnerships make to the Corporate Plan;
- to publicise the vision statement and strategic themes and outcomes; and
- continued compliance with the Code of Procurement.

The Panel has queried whether the issues identified in last year's review have been dealt with and raised concerns that the Internal Audit & Risk Manager had not expressed any opinions following the review of the Code of Procurement and staff recruitment. It was explained that this was due to the limited volume of testing undertaken. Concerns were also expressed about the outcome of the debtors review and the possibility that this may also be deemed a significant issue for the Annual Governance Statement.

8. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE – INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

The Panel has approved the Internal Audit Service – Internal Audit and Assurance Plan which sets out key features of the internal audit plan process for the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015. The Plan has been developed to provide adequate coverage and scope across the Council's systems. Any future significant changes will be reported to the Panel for information.

9. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LICENSING AND PROTECTION PANEL/COMMITTEE

The outcome of a review of the effectiveness of the Licensing Panel/Committee was reported to the Panel. The review was undertaken at the request of the Panel by a Working Group made up of three members of the Licensing Committee.

The review had concluded that the Panel/Committee were generally acting effectively in discharging their responsibilities although a number of issues were raised by the Working Group relating to training, the potential out-sourcing/sharing of Legal Services, the composition of the Committee and attendance at Sub-Committees.

At the conclusion of their discussions, the Panel has agreed to review the effectiveness of the S106 Agreement Advisory Group next.

10. WORK PROGRAMME AND TRAINING

The Panel has noted details of their anticipated work programme in 2014/15. A formal training day is to be held in September for all Members involved in the Audit Process across Cambridgeshire.

G J Harlock
Chairman