

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PANEL held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 23 July 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor G J Harlock – Chairman.

Councillors E R Butler, K J Churchill, R Harrison, P Kadewere, P G Mitchell and R J West.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor M G Baker.

80. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 14th May 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

81. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

82. IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREED AUDIT ACTIONS

Further to Minute No.14/73, the Panel received 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 would 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 as a priority.

With regard to the progress of the new Governance Boards, Members were assured that they and the Overview and Scrutiny Panels would be kept informed of their development.

83. INTERNAL AUDIT AND RISK MANAGER JOB DESCRIPTION

By way of a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members were advised of the requirement under the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards to report the job description and grade of the post of Internal Audit & Risk Manager to the Panel.

Having been advised of the outcome of the job evaluation process for the post, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be received and the job description and grade for the post of Internal Audit & Risk Manager be noted.

84. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE - PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of actions taken in response to recent discussions and decisions.

Members noted that it was the intention to submit a report on the arrangements in place to support the achievement of value for money (VFM) to the Panel's November meeting to reflect the conclusions of the 2013/14 VFM being undertaken by the External Auditors.

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 and the final version reviewed and approved by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Governance Panel. Members were advised that the document will continue to evolve and will be more readily accessible to staff in its new format. Given its change in nature, it is not considered necessary or expedient to include the document in the Constitution. Having been advised that the Head of Paid Services would determine any future changes to the Handbook and that these would be reported to the Employment Panel, Members

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to remove the Code of Conduct (to be known as the Employee Handbook) from the Constitution.

85. OFFICE OF THE SURVEILLANCE COMMISSIONER- RIPA INSPECTION 4TH JUNE 2014

With the aid of a report by the Corporate Fraud Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel were acquainted with the outcome of an inspection by the Office of Surveillance Commissioner which was undertaken on 4th June 2014.

In introducing the report, the Fraud Manager reported that the Inspector had endorsed the favourable conclusions of the 2011 report that the Council's use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act was of a satisfactory level. He then drew the Panel's attention to areas which had been identified for improvement, together with the actions taken in response to the proposed recommendations. In that respect Members noted that "Authorising Officers", including the RIPA Senior Responsible Officer, would be identified once the new senior management team was in place. Having indicated their wish to receive details of these appointments at their next meeting, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the Office of Surveillance Commissioner's report be noted; and
- (b) that the actions taken and proposed by the Council in response to the Office of Surveillance be endorsed.

86. FRAUD WORKING GROUP

RESOLVED

that Councillors M G Baker, E R Butler, K J Churchill, G J Harlock and P G Mitchell be appointed to the Fraud Working Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

87. PREPARING THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

With the aid of a report by the Internal Audit & Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was apprised of the action taken to review the Code of Corporate Governance.

Members also considered a number of issues identified as significant for inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement. It was anticipated that the draft statement would be finalised shortly. Members would then be given the opportunity to review and comment upon the statement prior to its submission to Panel in September.

The Panel raised concerns with the Internal Audit & Risk Manager regarding recent internal audit reports they had received and questioned why he had not expressed any opinions following the review of the Code of Procurement and staff recruitment. In response to which, the Internal Audit & Risk Manager explained that this was due to the limited volume of testing undertaken.

Members also expressed concerns about the outcome of the debtors review and the possibility that this may also be deemed a significant issue for the Annual Governance Statement.

Having noted that the Internal Audit & Risk Manager would discuss with the Managing Director the inclusion of corporate surveys in future statements, the Panel

RESOLVED

that the following governance issues be recorded as being significant in the annual governance statement:

- 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.

88. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE - INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

Having regard to a report by the Internal Audit Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Panel was given the opportunity to consider and comment upon the Internal Audit & Assurance Plan which sets out key features of the internal audit plan process for the period commencing April 2014. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents and resourcing of the Internal Audit Plan for 2014/15 be approved; and
- (b) that the Internal Audit & Risk Manager, after consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to make minor amendments to the Plan with any significant changes being reported to the Panel.

89. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME - VARIATION TO SUPPORT GUIDELINES

The Panel received and noted the content of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing 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.

Given some uncertainty over the inclusion of a reference to an allowance for personal broadband in the guidelines, the Panel suggested that this point be clarified with the Chairman prior to the report's submission to Council

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that 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 approved by the Cabinet to the level of IT support etc to be provided to Councillors by the Council and that the Council be recommended to approve the appropriate adjustments to the Constitution.

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

Consideration was given to a report by the Internal Audit & Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of the Licensing Panel / Committee which had been undertaken at the request of the Panel by a Working Group made up of three Licensing Committee Members.

Members noted that the review had concluded that the Panel was generally acting effectively in discharging their responsibilities. The Panel was also made aware of a number of issues 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.

Having been advised that the report had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Licensing Committee and no objections were raised to the conclusions reached by the Working Group, the Panel

RESOLVED

- (a) that the results of the outcome of the Working Group's review of the effectiveness of the Licensing Panel/Committee be noted; and
- (b) that a review of the effectiveness of the S106 Agreement Advisory Group be undertaken during 2014/15.

91. WORK AND TRAINING PROGRAMME

By way of a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members were acquainted with a work programme for the Panel for 2014/15. In noting arrangements to hold a formal training day for the Panel in September, Members agreed that the event be promoted with other authorities.

92. MR C MEADOWCROFT

The Panel was informed that this would be the last meeting that Colin Meadowcroft would attend in his role of Head of Legal and Democratic Services, prior to his retirement on 31st July 2014. The Chairman extended his appreciation for the contribution made to the Panel by Mr Meadowcroft and extended the Panel's best wishes to him for a happy and healthy retirement

Chairman