

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 12 July 2017.

PRESENT: Councillor M Francis – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs S Conboy, Mrs L A Duffy, T Hayward, P Kadewere, Mrs R E Mathews, R J West and J M Palmer.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, D B Dew, D M Tysoe and D A Giles.

12. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24th May 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

13. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connections with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

15. REVIEW OF RISK BASED VERIFICATION POLICY

Consideration was given to a report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) reviewing the Council's use of the Benefits Risk Based Verification Policy in the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

In response to a question by a Member on how the risk groups were defined, the Committee was informed that all councils that administered Benefits provided monthly case data to the Department for Work and Pensions and the company that owned the Benefit system software for analysis and identification of the characteristics of cases where errors were likely to arise. The characteristics of the three risk groups were never disclosed to councils.

Having noted that 97% of claims now were made online and that an audit had established the Policy approach had a very low level of errors, it was

RESOLVED

that the continued use of the Huntingdonshire District Council Benefits Risk Based Verification Policy appended to the report now submitted be endorsed.

16. RE-ADMISSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

17. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT: SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

With the aid of a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members gave consideration to the significant governance issues to be included in the 2016/17 Annual Governance Statement (AGS). Various matters were considered and, following discussion on the Commercial Investment Strategy and on the Combined Authority, it was agreed that although they did not at present constitute significant governance issues, reference should be made in the AGS to the fact that they would be monitored.

With regard to cyber security, while the views of Management were taken into account, Members were of the opinion that despite the fact that work was underway the Council had not yet reached the position it ought to be in. It was, therefore, concluded that the AGS should include reference to the need to improve incident management plans in this respect as a significant governance issue.

The Internal Audit and Risk Manager then drew Members' attention to the requirement that any significant governance issues that arose in the period to 30th September would be included in the AGS. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the following matters be included in the 2016/17AGS as significant governance issues:

- the failure to introduce a key corporate system, the Financial Management System, by 1st April 2017 and its on-going delay;
- continued improvements to the shared service governance arrangements;
- improvements to safeguarding arrangements and the complaints system to deliver better outcomes for customers, and
- improvements to cyber security incident management plans.

18. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager to which was appended the Committee's draft Annual Report to Council for the year ending 31st March 2017. Copies are

appended in the Minute Book. Members were reminded that following changes to its terms of reference in March 2017, the Committee now was required to submit an Annual Report to the Council on how it had discharged its responsibilities.

Having commented on the positive effect of the introduction of the new approach to managing the implementation of audit actions, Members noted the intention to establish a reporting process once the new arrangements had become established.

RESOLVED

- a) that the Corporate Governance Committee Annual Report to Council for the year ending 31st March 2017 be approved for submission to the Council;
- b) that the Internal Audit and Risk Manager be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, to make any minor amendments to the Report, and
- c) that the Internal Audit and Risk Manager be requested to consult the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on the terms of a work plan.

19. SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

Pursuant to Minute No. 17/8, consideration was given to a report by the Internal Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the findings of analysis of Members' self-assessment of their skills and knowledge in areas within the Committee's remit and resulting proposals for training. Having been informed that three external expert organisations had agreed to provide training free of charge, it was decided that a training day should be held on the values of good governance, external audit and internal audit on 12th September 2017. The training would have the additional benefits of enhancing the dynamics between Members of the Committee and of ensuring they were more challenging towards Officers.

20. 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 the Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness Review and in relation to audit of parishes that had adopted their own version of the Code of Conduct. It was agreed that the item on Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness should remain in the report.

21. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THRESHOLDS - DISPOSALS AND ACQUISITIONS POLICY

The Committee gave consideration to a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the thresholds included in the Disposals and Acquisitions Policy: Land and Property. Owing to the relatively low use of the Policy over the previous twelve months, and following consultation with the Executive Member for Strategic Resources, it was proposed

that the thresholds should remain unaltered.

In light of recent experience in relation to the disposal of sites, Members commented that the existing Policy provision in relation to informing Overview and Scrutiny of disposals and acquisitions should be retained and implemented in the manner employed to date.

RESOLVED

- a) that the report be received and noted, and
- b) that the Disposals and Acquisitions Policy be reviewed in 24 months' time.

22. GOVERNANCE BOARDS - EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the effectiveness of the Council's Governance Boards. The report had been submitted in compliance with an Internal Audit recommendation following a review in July 2016. Having received clarification of Appendix 1 in terms of the evolution of the Governance Boards and of their Terms of Reference, Members concurred with a suggestion that in furtherance of the objectives of the Mosaic transformation programme, the Our People and Customer Experience Governance Boards should be dissolved and their responsibilities transferred to the People and Customer work streams. It was further agreed that the Health and Safety Governance Board should be dissolved and its responsibilities given to the Business Team within the Community section.

Having noted that the remaining Governance Boards, namely Programme and Projects, Information Management and Finance and Procurement, would continue, a decision by management to establish a new Safeguarding Governance Board was endorsed. Importantly, the new Governance Board would carry out a fundamental review of the Council's approach to safeguarding and new safeguarding procedures would be implemented by October 2018. More generally, in response to requests for assurances that the Governance Boards were effective and being monitored with sufficient frequency, the Internal Audit and Risk Manager undertook to consult the Head of Resources and the Transformation Board on their routes for reporting to Members.

RESOLVED

that the report be received and noted.

23. UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT AND REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

By means of a report by the Monitoring Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee was 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. All of the 71 Town and Parish Councils had adopted a Code of Conduct, with 56 based on that adopted by the District Council, eleven had opted for the Code

promoted by the National Association of Local Councils and the remaining four Councils had adopted their own version of the Code.

44 Town and Parish Councils had published their full Register, which comprised the Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) forms of all Councillors. The remaining 27 Councils had vacancies in their Memberships. In terms of individual DPIS, 600 of a total of 650 had been received from Parish Councillors, two were outstanding and 48 were vacancies. The forms of all District Councillors had been published.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

Chairman