

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

held on 7 March 2019
Present:

Mrs C Storey (Chair)
Cllr M A Whitehand (Vice-Chair)

Cllr S Ashall Cllr I Johnson
Cllr J E Bond

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Committee held on 29 November 2018 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R Mohammed.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Officer Procedure Rules, the Head of Democratic and Legal Services, Peter Bryant, declared an interest in any items under which the Thamesway Group of Companies, Brookwood Cemetery or Duke's Court were discussed, arising from his position as a Director of the subsidiary companies. The interest was such that speaking was permissible.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Urgent Business.

5. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - PROTOCOL FOR COMPLAINTS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS STA19-001

Peter Bryant, Head of Democratic and Legal Services, introduced the report which recommended that the Council adopt a Protocol that provided for Members complaints against other Members to be confidential to the Members concerned and the limited number of persons who received notification under the Council's arrangements for dealing with Standards allegations under the Localism Act 2011. The Protocol had been raised at the meeting of the Committee on 20 September 2018, following which consultation had taken place with the Councillors, the Independent Co-Opted Member / Chairman of the Standards and Audit Committee and the Independent Person.

It was noted that the Protocol only covered Members complaints and the wider area of Social Media Policy would be subject to a report to the Executive during the year ahead. In the event that a Member breached the Protocol by speaking with the press or commenting on social media, a provision could be included in the Social Media Policy to ensure that any breaches of the Protocol were subject to the Members Code of Conduct.

Following questions, it was clarified that when a complaint was received the relevant Group Leader was advised, along with the Chairman of the Standards and Audit Committee and the Chief Executive. In addition, all Group Leaders were advised that a complaint was being considered for investigation by the Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Bond expressed concern that the Policy would limit Councillors in their work and prevent openness in the Council, and would not apply to members of the public. Peter Bryant stated that a higher standard of behaviour would be expected from Members of the Council and there had been occasion where details of a Members complaint had been available in the press before having been submitted to the Monitoring Officer, which necessitated the need for the Protocol.

The recommendations in the report were put to a vote, which was carried by three votes in favour to one vote against.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL That

- (i) the draft Protocol appended to the report be adopted; and**
- (ii) the adopted Protocol be subject to Paragraph 2.6 of the Members' Code of Conduct.**

6. EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN STA19-002

Leigh Clarke, Finance Director, introduced the report which explained that the Committee had been due to receive the External Audit Plan, however the new Auditors Moore Stephens was currently involved in a merger with another firm, BDO. The Council considered the merger to be a positive move and expected the transition to be smooth, noting that the Audit work would be transferred to BDO. It was noted that it had not yet been possible for the Auditor to complete the Plan due to the merger. A new lead contact, Leigh Lloyd Thomas, had been appointed and an initial meeting was to be held on Monday to discuss the findings of their work so far.

A statement from BDO had been tabled at the meeting which provided assurance that the audit work had been initiated and would be completed within the normal timescales. It was noted that it would take time for BDO to develop its understanding of the Council's policies and processes.

The proposal was for the Plan to be completed by the end of March 2019 and then circulated to members of the Committee. Members agreed that a provisional date should be sought for a Committee meeting to receive the Plan, if required.

RESOLVED That the proposals for the consideration of the 2018/19 External Audit Plan be agreed.

7. INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY AND PROPOSED 2019/20 PLAN STA19-003

James Graham, Head of Internal Audit, introduced the Audit Plan 2019/20 which had been prepared following discussion with the Council's Corporate Management Group and consideration of the previous Audit Register, past Internal Audits and wider local government issues.

Regarding the Audit for Risk Management, the question was asked as to whether it extended to contract procurement and partnership working and noted that the Audit would deal with all risks to the Council, including any identified under those two areas. Members noted that the Selective Licensing Audit had been deferred to the next financial year and was likely to begin in the second quarter.

RESOLVED That the Internal Audit Strategy and the indicative Audit Plan for 2019/20 be approved.

8. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT STA19-004

James Graham introduced the report which set out the Internal Audit activity and performance from 20 November 2018 to 25 February 2019 and stated that during the reporting period there had been no draft or final reports issued with a negative assurance opinion, with five outstanding recommendations beyond their due date of which none were of a high priority.

Following questions by Members, it was agreed that the table set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report would be amended to remove the word 'completion' to just read 'percentage' and noted that the high priority recommendations arising from the SekCheck internal audit had been completed. Summary final reports arising from the Internal Audits were available on the Members' Ipads.

Start dates for the remaining three Audits not yet begun had now been agreed (Asset Management, IT Strategy and FlexiRoute Application), with the latest start date being April 2019, resulting in them being carried forward to the next financial year.

RESOLVED That the report be received and progress against the 2018-19 Internal Audit Plan and implementation of Internal Audit recommendations be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.00 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____