

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

15TH JULY 2021, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors A. J. B. Beaumont, A. D. Kriss, C. J. Spencer,
P. J. Whittaker (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), S. P. Douglas and
Mr. B. McEldowney.

Observers: Councillor. G.N. Denaro – Portfolio Holder for
Finance and Enabling

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr. C. Forrester, Ms. C. Flanagan, Mrs.
J Gresham and Mr J. Galkowski.

1/21 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

A nomination for the position of Chairman was received in respect of
Councillor L. C. R. Mallett.

RESOLVED that Councillor L. C. R. Mallett be elected Chairman of the
Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

2/21 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

A nomination for the position of Vice Chairman was received in respect
of Councillor P. J. Whittaker. In the absence of Councillor L. Mallett, the
meeting was chaired by Councillor P. Whittaker.

RESOLVED that Councillor P. J. Whittaker be elected Vice Chairman of
the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

3/21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. Jenkins, J. E.
King, L. C. R. Mallett, M. Middleton, K. J. Van Der Plank with Councillor
S. Douglas present as substitute for Councillor R. Jenkins.

4/21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest nor of any whipping
arrangements.

5/21

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11TH MARCH 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee held on 11th March 2021 were submitted for consideration by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 11th March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

6/21

INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021

Due to technical issues experienced, Mr. A. Bromage, Head of Internal Audit Shared Service was unable to access the meeting via Microsoft Teams. It was agreed that the Committee would consider the report and that any questions received from Members would be passed on to Mr. A. Bromage. Any answers to the questions should be included as part of the next Internal Audit Progress Report which was due for consideration by the Committee in October 2021.

During consideration of this item Members queried the following:

1. Allocated number of Audit days – Members noted that there was a significant difference between the number of audit days allocated in the 2020-2021 municipal year and the actual number of audit days carried out during that time. It was with this in mind that some Members questioned whether it was more appropriate to allocate fewer days in order to make the target more achievable.
2. Service Productivity – Members noted that within the report it was highlighted that there had been a decrease in Service Productivity from 81% to 62% and that the commentary within the report stated that this was positive. Members queried what metrics were being used to measure a positive outcome given that there had been a decrease in Service Productivity.

RESOLVED that the Internal Audit Annual Report 2020 – 2021 be noted.

7/21

ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN 2021/22

Members considered the Annual Audit Plan 2021-2022 and in doing so agreed that although the Head of Internal Audit Shared Service was not in attendance at the meeting it was important to consider the report. It was reported to Members that the plan being presented was already being followed for this municipal year.

Councillor G. Denaro, who was in attendance in his role as Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling stated that this was a challenging Audit Plan being undertaken in unprecedented times.

There was some discussion by Members regarding the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and how they were measured. The Head of Finance and Customer Services explained that only trends and target requirements were included in the Annual Audit Plan 2021/22 and that the 2021/22 position could only be measured at the end of the municipal year once the plan had been carried out.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Audit Plan be approved; and
- 2) the Key Performance Indicators be approved.

8/21

STANDARDS REGIME - MONITORING OFFICERS' REPORT

The Principal Solicitor presented the Monitoring Officer's report and in doing so, the following was highlighted for Members' attention:

- No complaints had been received since the last meeting of the Committee and any that had been previously reported had been resolved locally.
- Planning refresher training for Members had taken place online earlier in the municipal year.

After consideration of the report Members were keen to understand what the plans were for holding in-person meetings going forward. The Principal Solicitor informed Members that a consultation was currently underway by Central Government in order to better understand the success of virtual and hybrid meetings at a local level. In respect of Health and Safety at in-person meetings it was explained that meetings had been subject to a risk assessment after working closely with the Council's Health and Safety Advisor.

During consideration of this item Members raised some concerns regarding the sound quality at some of the previous meetings. It was explained to Members that testing had been carried prior to in-person meetings including the testing of audio and visual equipment. The Democratic Services Officer present undertook to provide feedback to relevant officers.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officers' Report be noted.

9/21

DISPENSATIONS REPORT

The Principal Solicitor presented the Dispensations Report to the Committee and in doing so explained to the Committee that under the Localism Act 2011 there was a requirement to consider the granting of Individual Member Dispensations. In addition to this, it was necessary to consider General Dispensations (including Budget and Council Tax discussions) and Outside Body Appointment Dispensations. These dispensations would permit a Member to be involved in a debate of a particular subject. Members were informed that it was a matter for the Committee to decide whether the dispensations outlined within the report were reasonable requests.

Following presentation of the report, Members agreed that this was a straight-forward report and thanked the Principal Solicitor for a clear and concise explanation.

RESOLVED that

- 1) (any Individual Member Dispensations (IMDs) and Outside Body Appointments dispensations requested by Members up to the point of the meeting, and as advised by the Monitoring Officer at the meeting, be granted under section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011, to allow those Member(s) to participate in and vote at Council and Committee meetings in the individual circumstances detailed;
- 2) the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee grant a dispensation under Section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011 to allow Members to address Council and Committees in circumstances where a member of the public may elect to speak;

- 3) subject to the caveat set out in paragraph 4.9 of this report in relation to setting the Council's Budget, the Audit, Standards and Committee grants dispensations under Section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011 to allow all Members to participate in and vote at Council and Committee meetings when considering the setting of:
 - a) the Budget;
 - b) Council Tax;
 - c) Members' Allowances; and
 - d) Non-Domestic Rates – Discretionary Rate Relief Policy and Guidance affecting properties within the District;

- 4) it be noted that all dispensations granted by the Committee take effect on receipt of a written request from Members for such a dispensation and where Members may have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the matter under consideration, which would otherwise preclude such participation and voting; and

- 5) it be noted that the dispensations referred to at resolutions (1), (2) and (3) will remain valid until the first meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee following the next District Council Elections in 2023 unless amended by the Committee prior to that date.

10/21

RIPA REPORT 2021-2022

The Principal Solicitor presented the report in respect of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). She explained that this policy gave local authorities powers to conduct covert surveillance under certain circumstances.

Members were advised that there was a requirement that elected members should, at least on an annual basis, review the RIPA policy and review the authority's use of the Act. This enabled the Committee to be informed if any amendments had been made to the policy since it was last considered by the Committee.

During the discussion of this item the following was highlighted for Members' attention:

- The RIPA regime was overseen by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office and inspections of organisations who held powers under RIPA were subject to an inspection, approximately every three years. The last inspection at the Council had taken place in 2018. This was considered a 'light touch' review as no RIPA powers had been exercised by the Council since 2012. It was reported to Members that the RIPA regime was considered resource intensive however it was not possible to 'opt out' even if RIPA powers had not been exercised in a long time.

The Principal Solicitor reported that the only amendment made to the RIPA policy since it was last considered by the Committee in July 2020 was the appointment of Mr. J. Howse, Executive Director of Resources and s151 Officer, as the Council's 'Senior Responsible Officer' for the RIPA regime.

RESOLVED that

- a) the Council's RIPA Policy as updated and reviewed, be endorsed; and
- b) the update on RIPA activity, described in this report, be noted.

11/21

RISK REGISTER UPDATE - VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Finance and Customer Services provided the Risk Register Update for Members' consideration. He explained that currently projects were being undertaken with the Council's insurance provider, Zurich. The projects included looking at best practice and internal policies from a risk perspective in order to improve and ensure robust processes were in place in this area.

RESOLVED that the Risk Register Update be noted.

12/21

RISK MANAGEMENT GROUP MONITORING - VERBAL UPDATE

This item was considered as part of the previous item.

RESOLVED that the Risk Management Group Monitoring Update be noted.

13/21

ANNUAL APPOINTMENT OF RISK MANAGEMENT CHAMPION FOR THE COMMITTEE

The Chairman asked for nominations for the role of Risk Management Champion for the Committee for the remainder of this municipal year.

RESOLVED that Councillor A.J. Beaumont be appointed as Risk Management Champion for the Committee.

14/21

AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.01 p.m.

Chairman