

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

**10TH SEPTEMBER 2020, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), A. J. B. Beaumont, J. E. King, A. D. Kriss, C. J. Spencer and K. J. Van Der Plank

Observers: Mr. Jackson Murray, Mr. Neil A. Preece (Grant Thornton) and Councillor G. N. Denaro

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. A. Bromage, Ms. J. Willis and Mr. M. Bradley

Democratic Services Officers: Ms. A. Scarce and Mrs. J Gresham

13/20 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Due to problems with connectivity apologies were received from Councillor S Baxter and Councillor P Whittaker with no named substitutes.

14/20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

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

15/20 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22ND JULY 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee held on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020 be approved as a correct record.

16/20 **GRANT THORNTON - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Engagement Lead, Grant Thornton presented the Bromsgrove District Council District Council Progress report and in doing so highlighted the following to Members:

- Due to the delay in the preparation of the Financial Statements Audit the dates of the audit procedure had changed and the audit process was due to commence towards the end of September.
- The Value for Money Conclusion would be part of the Audit Findings Report received towards the end of November.
- The National Audit Office had completed their consultation on a new code of practice and future audits may look very different as a result of the changes. Any changes going forward would be reported to the Committee at a future meeting.
- The Redmond Review had recently been published and detailed the effectiveness of local audit and the transparency of local authority financial reporting. This review would be considered by the Committee at a future meeting.

The Executive Director of Finance and Resources reported to Members that her team and Grant Thornton were meeting every day to ensure that everyone was clear of the process and timelines. She apologised for the delay in the preparation of accounts and explained that this had been a challenging and unprecedented time for the teams. The Engagement Lead, Grant Thornton clarified that remote audits took longer and therefore this meant that, although the aim was to get the accounts completed by the middle of September with a view to then commencing the audit process, the timelines were still not guaranteed. Members were assured that extra resources were being utilised to ensure that the audit would be completed in good time.

The Chairman thanked Grant Thornton and the Executive Director of Finance and Resources for their report.

**RESOLVED** that the Grant Thornton - Progress Report be noted.

17/20

### **INTERNAL AUDIT - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented the Internal Audit – Progress Report and reported to Members that since the update at the last meeting things had started to progress.

Members queried the impact of Covid-19 and associated lockdown on the overall delivery of the Audit Plan. The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service explained that Quarter 1 of the audit plan was stalled due to the

lockdown however the plan recommenced as of 1st June 2020. It was noted that two reviews that were planned for Quarter 4 were being risk assessed and may need to be rolled over to the 2020/2021 Audit Plan.

Members were informed that remote audits had proved to be a learning curve for the service and that officers were working their way through the new ways of conducting a remote audit and the extended length of time they took.

**RESOLVED** that the Internal Audit - Progress Report 2020/21 be noted.

18/20

### **INTERNAL AUDIT - SAFEGUARDING VERBAL UPDATE REPORT**

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service and the Head of Community and Housing Services presented the verbal update in respect of the Safeguarding Audit update. It was clarified that several recommendations as a result of the audit had been satisfied and although there were areas that needed to be further embedded the progress that had been made was positive and that the service was on the right track to ensure that the risks were being mitigated.

The Head of Community and Housing Services provided the Committee with further clarity on the recommendations that had appeared in the previous Follow Up Report on Safeguarding and in doing so highlighted the following to Members:

- The Team Brief was a tool that was used to inform officers of Safeguarding leads and safeguarding policies that were adopted by the Council. In addition to this Net Consent was used as a way of cascading Safeguarding policies to all office-based staff. For non-office-based staff face-to-face training was provided.
- DBS check procedures had changed and there was no set period and no guidance provided when they had to be renewed. This meant that good supervision was needed, and an annual check carried out to ensure that the checks were still current.
- That new Members undertook annual Safeguarding as part of their induction.
- The service we good at retaining necessary information and went over and above in the day-to-day activities however were poor at providing evidence but the picture was improving.

The Chairman thanked the head of Internal Audit Shared Service and the Head of Community and Housing Service for their update. A number of these points were also picked up in the Risk Champion's report.

**RESOLVED** that the update in respect of the Safeguarding Audit verbal update be noted.

19/20

### **INTERNAL AUDIT - HEALTH AND SAFETY VERBAL UPDATE REPORT**

The Senior Health and Safety Advisor presented the Health and Safety Update to Members and, in particular, drew their attention to the following:

- Since the last meeting, a review of the Health and Safety Policies had taken place and these policies were now available on The Orb.
- Fire Risk Assessments would always be 'in progress' as they were an ongoing and statutory requirement.
- A significant amount of work had been carried out in respect of Covid secure measures and their implementation including one-way systems, signing in and out of Council buildings.
- Health and Safety training had been introduced as part of the induction training and this could be delivered in person or virtually.

Members queried some of the areas in the update and were particularly interested in the levels of staff in buildings and whether there were adequate numbers of first aiders and fire wardens. They were assured that there were adequate resources to ensure staff safety and the caretakers were aware of all procedures in place including cleaning of the buildings and Covid-secure measures that were needed.

There was discussion regarding what the protocol was in case of a terrorist attack and it was reported to Members that Business Continuity Plans were currently being updated and terrorist attacks were included in these plans.

The Chairman thanked the Senior Health and Safety Advisor for the comprehensive update.

**RESOLVED** that the Health and Safety update be noted.

20/20

### **RISK MANAGEMENT GROUP MONITORING UPDATE - VERBAL UPDATE REPORT**

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources updated Members on the Risk Management Group Monitoring Group and in doing so highlighted the following:

- Business Continuity Plans were being updated
- The risk appetite and how risk policy was looked at was being considered
- The risk of Covid-19 and the associated lockdown

It was agreed that the updated Risk Register would be considered at the next meeting including Covid-19 and Brexit.

The Chairman acknowledged that this was the Executive Director, Finance and Resources final meeting with the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and thanked her for all her hard work and wished her luck for the future. This was echoed by the Committee.

**RESOLVED** that the Risk Management Group Monitoring verbal update be noted.

21/20

**RISK CHAMPION - VERBAL UPDATE REPORT (COUNCILLOR K. VAN DER PLANK)**

Councillor K Van der Plank, as the Committee's Risk Champion presented her most recent report, following discussions with the Head of Community Services. Councillor Van der Plank explained that her discussions had covered the following four areas and she would provide information on each of these in turn, concluding with a number of recommendations, which she hoped the Committee would support.

- Training
- Policies, procedures and ways of working
- Recruitment
- Role in the community

In respect of training, Councillor Van der Plank had made the following observations from her discussions with the Head of Community Services.

- Clear accountabilities: the Head of Community Services was the safeguarding lead for the Council.

- A detailed piece of work had been carried out some 5 years ago, which mapped all posts and identifying all roles that needed additional safeguarding training or checks.
- The approach taken to Safeguarding was that it was everyone's responsibility so basic safeguarding training had been rolled out to everyone.
- For office-based roles basic safeguarding training was provided through the IT system called NetConsent. This was controlled through access to an individual's PC and if the training was not completed access was denied until the training had been completed.
- For non-office-based staff training was face to face to face, where the training was made, where possible related to the particular role of the staff.
- Certain roles had been identified as requiring additional safeguarding training and this was picked up with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) assistance. Councillor Van der Plank provided a number of examples of where this had happened.
- Consideration was also given to services that were outsourced by the Council, as part of its statutory responsibility.
- All new starters (including volunteers) had to do safeguarding as part of their induction programme
- Elected members were offered training annually, and a briefing paper was also included as part of induction folder new Councillors received. It was noted that this training was not mandatory, and Councillor Van der Plank suggested that due to low attendance at some of these sessions, consideration should be given to how this training was provided.

In respect of policies, procedures and ways of working Councillor Van der Plank highlighted the following areas:

- The safeguarding policy was reviewed and updated annually and was currently being carried out. It was also noted that this was signed off by the relevant Portfolio Holder.
- A new approach had been introduced since lockdown with a Safeguarding champion being appointed as the contact point for each service area. The champions played a key role in ensuring training was up to date and communications were disseminated to everyone in that service area.
- A log was kept of safeguarding referrals and what action had been taken and any outcomes. It was noted that there had been approximately 25 in the last 12 months.
- Clear processes appeared to be in place for handling serious incidents.

- The Council worked closely with WCC which seemed to work well, with Council officers often asking WCC Officers for advice.
- Referrals came from several areas including from Members.

In respect of the discussions Councillor Van der Plank had had with the Head of Community Services around recruitment the following observations were reported:

- The importance of Safer recruitment policies being followed for all recruitment. This included DBS checks where applicable and following up on references. It appeared unclear as to how the Council was compliant in this area and Councillor Van der Plank flagged that there had not been any training on safer recruitment for some time, which she felt needed to be addressed.
- It was noted that references and DBS checks also applied to volunteers.
- For the final section of her report, Councillor Van der Plank highlighted her observations in respect of the role in community:
- As previously stated the Council had good clear links and worked well with WCC on safeguarding on a day to day basis and also more formally through the Corporate Parenting Board and the Bromsgrove Partnership which was also used as a route to the wider voluntary sector.
- There did not seem to be much overlap with Parish Councils in this area other than through a representative from CALC sitting on the Bromsgrove Partnership.

Councillor Van der Plank also noted that there were a number of barriers and issues which impacted on effective working in this area, these included:

- Officer time constraints were the biggest challenge. It was anticipated that as the role of the Safeguarding Champion developed this would improve.
- It was acknowledged that record keeping and recording training was always a challenge. However, general awareness across the organisation would help with this.
- Leadership was important and was felt that it was helpful having the Chief Executive as the District Council's representative on the Safeguarding Board.
- Councillor Van der Plank questioned what plans were in place to improve, and whether there were sufficient resources to achieve the improvements.

After a short debate, the following actions to enable improvement and to minimise risk in some areas (for the Head of Community Services and the Portfolio Holder to consider) and recommendations were agreed by Members.

### Actions

1. Face to face training – consider how testing for understanding could be carried out for example at the end of session follow it up with a quiz or ask some follow up questions to ensure there is an understanding of the training, this could be done in a one-to-one session with the relevant Line Manager.
2. Ensure that records are kept up to date.
3. Review and refresh the safer recruitment training.
4. Check the policy and the process for references to ensure that these are all being requested and followed up in a timely manner.
5. DBS checks – whilst it appeared clear that these were done for new starters it was not clear what happened when staff change roles within the organisation. This needed to be addressed to ensure those relevant checks were carried out.
6. The Head of Community Services, in conjunction with the relevant Portfolio holder consider how best to share areas of improvement and encourage best practice in respect of Safeguarding with Parish Councils including perhaps giving Parish Councillors access to the Council's safeguarding training – especially if an online course for District Councillors was developed.

### **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) the Member Development Steering Group consider making Basic Safeguarding training for Members be mandatory and carried out at least once in 4-year term;
- 2) the Member Development Steering Group consider providing training for both Safeguarding and other types of training in different formats, such as online; and
- 3) the Cabinet and relevant Portfolio Holder considers bringing the updated Safeguarding Policy to full Council due to the length of time since it was last reviewed and as a reminder to Members of its importance.



Members considered the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee's Work Programme for 2020/21.

**RESOLVED** that the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee's Work Programme for 2020/21, be updated to include the items discussed and agreed during the course of the meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.25 p.m.

Chairman