

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

17TH JULY 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors H. D. N. Rone-Clarke (Vice-Chairman), R. Bailes, S. M. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, D. Hopkins, R. J. Hunter (substitute), B. Kumar, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, J. D. Stanley, D. G. Stewart and M. Worrall (Parish Councils' Representative)

Observers: Councillor C. A. Hotham

Officers: Ms M. Howell, Mrs. C. Green, Ms H. Tiffney and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill

16/23 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D. J. Nicholl, whose substitute was Councillor R. J. Hunter.

17/23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

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

18/23 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 1ST JUNE 2023**

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee held on 1st June 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Audit, Standards and Governance Committee held on 1st June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

19/23 **STANDARDS REGIME - MONITORING OFFICERS' REPORT**

The Senior Solicitor presented the report, which set out the key standards regime matters since the previous report to the Committee in June 2023.

In response to a question, the Senior Solicitor undertook to confirm the number of Member complaints received since March. She also briefly explained the role of the Monitoring Officer in dealing with complaints,

pointing out that she could have the support of an Independent Person in considering them. Councillor C Hotham, Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling, reported that the Council would shortly be asked to agree to join with the County and other Worcestershire District Councils in accessing a pool of Independent Persons when dealing with complaints.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

20/23

DISPENSATIONS REPORT - INDIVIDUAL MEMBER DISPENSATIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer that asked the Committee to grant Individual Member Dispensations and Outside Body Appointment Dispensations. This followed a report to the Committee in June 2023 on the subject of general dispensations, which proposed the matter be considered again to enable members to request any specific individual dispensations at this meeting.

During consideration of the report, Councillor C Hotham reminded members that individual councillors had to request that the Committee consider a dispensation. If they did not do so they risked not being able to discuss certain matters at committee/council meetings. The Committee agreed the Chairman's suggestion that Officers write to the Group Leaders asking them to remind relevant councillors of this obligation.

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) 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;
- 3) it be noted that the dispensations referred to at resolution (1), will remain valid until the first meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee following the next District Council Elections in 2027 unless amended by the Committee prior to that date; and

- 4) the Monitoring Officer write to each political Group Leader asking them to remind Members of their obligation to request appropriate dispensations.

21/23

QUARTERLY RISK UPDATE

The Committee considered the quarterly risk update which set out corporate and departmental risks since the report to Committee in June 2023.

In presenting the report, the Head of Finance and Customer Services highlighted that Officers had worked to reduce the number of risks through proactive management. The risk level had moved up from limited to moderate assurance in May 2023.

There had been no changes to the number of corporate risks since the last report. The cyber risk had moved from amber to red due to the increased risk in this area despite all the mitigations put in place. In response to a question about this, the Head of Finance and Customer Services reported that this was an issue across the public and private sectors, not specific to the Council.

In April 2022 there had been 122 departmental risks. Use of the 4Risk system was helping manage and reduce these. At 22nd June 2023 there were 43 departmental risks, one of which was red, relating to 'revenues – performance indicator data is not robust'. The most significant departmental risk currently was safeguarding which would need to be reviewed at the next quarter's meeting to decide whether it should be escalated to a corporate risk.

In response to a question for detail about why the statutory inspection policy referred to in paragraph 3.8 of the report was red, the Head of Finance and Customer Services undertook to provide more detail to Councillor McEldowney outside the meeting. Committee members sought reassurance that the risks involved in this were being managed appropriately and that this could be improved.

Planning Services was showing as Amber in terms of being placed into special measures, and a member of the Committee asked what actions were being taken to improve the service. The same member also asked for more detail about the causes of the increase in fires referred to at paragraph 3.21 of the report.

The Head of Finance and Customer Services responded that the increase in fires had been attributed to electrical equipment. With reference to the planning service, efforts were being made to attract and retain skilled planning officers in a competitive market.

Councillor Evans asked what had caused the increase in the number of amber risks for housing between March and July. He also asked what

had been removed from amber under Community Services. The Head of Finance and Customer Services agreed to provide the relevant detail outside the meeting.

The Committee noted concern expressed by Councillor R A Bailes at the number of housing risks. She referred to discussion at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting where the potential to bring the service into the Council had been considered. She suggested that this approach would itself involve risks.

Other issues raised by the committee during consideration of the report included:

- whether councillors would be accessing the KnowBe4 system; it was noted that training sessions were currently being rolled out to officers and councillors;
- where risks relating to council play equipment were covered. The Head of Finance and Customer Services reported that it was likely to be in risk no. ENV10, but she undertook to check this and confirm. The Committee agreed that its concern that risk assessments and any remedial actions should be up to date would be recorded in the minutes and communicated to officers;
- whether PAT testing of electrical equipment was up to date in the Council; the Head of Finance and Customer Services reported that regular PAT testing did take place, but she would check and confirm the current status of this corporately;
- whether the Council had reviewed its practices in the light of recent reports of vapes and lithium batteries causing fires in bin lorries; this would be reviewed by officers.

RESOLVED that the present list of Corporate and Departmental Risks be noted and additional risk requests considered.

22/23

INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the Internal Audit Progress Report, which summarised progress in the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 as at the end of June 2023. Details of the 6 audits completed since the previous reports were included at appendix 3 to the report.

Several pieces of work were nearing completion, which would finalise the 2022/23 plan. The 2023/24 plan had commenced, and some testing had been carried out.

In response to a question about reference in the report to other key audit work and providing support as a critical appraisal, the Audit Team Leader reported that the Internal Audit team offered a critical review when new systems or procedures were being put in place. This would

provide advice on the control environment and the risks at the start of the project.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

23/23

ACCOUNTING POLICIES REPORT INCLUDING UPDATE ON STATEMENTS OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee considered the Accounting Policies Report which noted, as at the end of June, progress with the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts, the 'budget book' for 2023/24 and key deliverables as required by legislation and government.

Issues raised during consideration of the report included:

- how the update to the TechOne system would improve processes. The Head of Finance and Customer Services explained that the Council had not kept up to date with updates in the past which had led to some issues with the system. The current update would improve its functionality. It was intended to keep pace with upgrades as they happened in future;
- with reference to budget manager closure training, a member asked what percentage of those eligible to attend was represented by the 83 staff members who attended the training. The Head of Finance and Customer Services undertook to check this information;
- it was requested that details of action being taken to address issues relating to recruitment referred to in paragraph 2.10 of the report be reported back to Members.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Progress on the 2020/21 Audit process be noted, and
- 2) Any areas of concern within this key compliance report are raised with Cabinet.

24/23

RISK CHAMPION - VERBAL UPDATE REPORT (COUNCILLOR B. MCELLOWNEY)

Councillor McEldowney did not have an update to provide at this meeting as he was in the process of becoming acquainted with the role of Risk Champion.

25/23

AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee Work Programme was submitted for Members' consideration.

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RESOLVED that the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.53 p.m.

Chairman