



Minutes of the meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 25 July 2024 when there were present:-

Chair: Cllr N Harvey

Cllr L Breading
Cllr J Huntman

Cllr D Silk
Cllr B Wimbledon

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs N Benson, A Edwards and A Harbinson.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Hutchings	- Chief Executive
C Adlem	- Director, Corporate & Customer
B Brook	- Assistant Director, Policy Performance & Customer
A Law	- Assistant Director, Legal & Democratic Services
A Barnes	- Head of Internal Audit
S Worthington	- Democratic Services Manager

38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

39 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

40 HEAD OF INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director, Finance & Procurement providing the Head of Internal Audit's audit opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk management, control and governance processes.

In response to a question as to who receives the reports from audits taken, officers advised that audit reports were considered by management in the first instance; a summary of audit findings were presented to the audit committee.

This was an annual report and therefore there were no audit reports presented to the Committee; however, future meetings of this committee would receive progress reports on how the annual audit plan was being delivered and the results of completed audit reports would also be presented to the committee.

In response to a supplementary Member question as to how long it would take to embed changes introduced as part of the lessons learned as a result of the audit of senior management pay and conditions, officers confirmed that many of the identified actions had already been implemented. The restructure of the organisation had changed the way that senior management was operating; there was still work to be undertaken in respect of updating policies and presenting them to Members for approval to ensure that the Council was satisfied with all employment policies.

Officers advised, in response to a Member query about staff working remotely, that they were unable to confirm whether staff lived at some distance away from the council offices; remote working could result in a cost saving for the Council in terms of the Council consolidating its accommodation. However, there could be costs involved in terms of providing staff with equipment to enable them to work remotely. There was refurbishment taking place of the council offices currently to ensure that there were the right officers delivering the right service in the right place and at the right time.

Responding to a supplementary Member question as to how staff's work was monitored while working remotely, the Chief Executive advised that line managers monitored the work of staff and reported back to the Assistant Directors; there was therefore operational visibility of the work undertaken. Staff work was undertaken in a hybrid manner, with staff in the office some days. Many staff were peripatetic so were out and about and not necessarily office-based. Hybrid working gives a work-life balance to staff and enables the Council to move towards a smaller office footprint, freeing up office space for hire by third parties, thus providing additional income to the Council assisting in subsidising the cost of accommodation. The equipment used by staff was logged into the Council's network, which means that it's possible to see when staff are working. Staff have one to one meetings with their line managers on a 4-6 week basis and there were regular hybrid and in person team meetings, all of which facilitates management oversight. Internal Audit test all this when they audit service delivery and performance.

Resolved

That the Head of Internal Audit's report for 2023/24 be noted and that the assurance provided be used to support the approval of the Annual Governance Statement.

41 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director, Policy

Performance & Customer seeking approval of the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24.

In response to a Member question as to what was being done to address the issue of consistency across service areas, officers advised that, as a result of the restructure, there were Assistant Directors in place who were clear about the standards expected. The Assistant Directors were undertaking service reviews and writing new service plans for their service areas. They were responsible for ensuring, for example, that there were business plans, risk registers and the monitoring of service performance in place.

Responding to a Member query relating to business continuity, officers advised that this related to what arrangements the Council had in place to ensure continuity of service in the event of an incident such as a failure of the road or rail network or cyber attack which meant that staff could not get into work or the Council's systems were down. Each of the Council's service areas had in place a business continuity plan which were required to be kept up to date. The business continuity plan identified which were the key services that needed to be up and running first after any disruption.

Resolved

To approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 and, subject to any further amendments from external audit, approve its inclusion in the financial statements for 2023/24.

The meeting closed at 7.30 pm.

Chair

Date

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