

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 16 JANUARY 2023

Present: Cllrs Richard Biggs (Chairman), Susan Cocking (Vice-Chairman), Belinda Bawden, Simon Christopher, Robin Legg and David Gray

Apologies: Cllrs Barry Goringe and Bill Pipe

Also present:

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

John Miles (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice), Marc Eyre (Service Manager for Assurance), David Bonner (Service Manager for Business Intelligence and Performance), David Trotter (Risk and Resilience Officer), Angela Hooper (Principal Auditor SWAP), Neil Gorman (Service Manager (Finance) Corp Policy & Comp), Heather Lappin (Head of Strategic Finance), Richard Ironside (Senior Accountant), Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Antony Littlechild (Sustainability Team Manager), Chris Matthews (Interim Head of HR) and Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

88. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Bill Pipe and Barry Goringe.

89. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

90. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made at the meeting.

91. Public Participation

There were no public statements and questions to report.

92. Minutes of the Audit & Governance Sub-committee

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November were received and noted.

93. SWAP Update Report

The Principal Auditor introduced the report and updated the committee on work undertaken by the Internal Auditors.

Whilst a follow up of the Premises Health & Safety significant risk had not yet been undertaken, Internal Audit had been advised that work was progressing to implement the actions but that these may take longer than originally anticipated. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee were scheduled to investigate the reasons to understand the circumstances around this issue. There were also concerns raised that issues similar to that identified during the audit could be replicated elsewhere.

Cllr Susan Cocking thanked officers for the work undertaken to date.

Noted

94. Council Decision Making- Building in Climate and Ecological Considerations

The Sustainability Team Manager outlined the Climate and Ecology Impact Assessment Tool.

The aim of the tool was to provide a robust, transparent, accessible, and measurable process to support the delivery of the climate and ecological strategy and council plan.

Report authors would be able to use the tool to determine the impact of decision making to ensure that climate and ecological impact assessments were integrated as part of Dorset Council's democratic decision-making process.

In response to questions the committee was advised that a similar tool had been adopted by Cornwall Council. Training would be offered to officers and councillors and once the process was imbedded the areas of health & wellbeing and social equality could potentially be added to the process. Initially the tool would be used for the development of committee reports and the Council Plan.

Decision: that the integration of the climate and ecology decision tool into the democratic decision-making processes, be supported.

95. Quarterly Risk Management Report

The Service Manager for Assurance set out the risk management update.

Members were advised that following a resourcing review, it had been agreed that the risk function be moved from Assurance Service to Business intelligence and Performance Team. This would more closely align with performance management and enable the existing business partner model to function as the conduit with directorates.

Members noted that there were currently 11 information compliance risks identified in the risk register, with the majority ranked as medium risk.

The detail of the two outstanding high-risk areas and proposed response was also set out within the report.

Cyber security was raised, and Dorset Councils security was also discussed by members.

Noted

96. Review of Agency & Consultancy Spend

The Interim Head of Human Resources introduced the report that set out assurance and measure in place to manage the use and spend on agency workers and consultants.

It was noted that the issue around vacant posts continued to be a challenge, engaging agency workers had enabled the council to continue to deliver services within areas where there were challenges in recruitment. There were also national skills shortages within these areas.

Members acknowledged that to retain social workers it was important to ensure that they were offered good working conditions, manageable caseloads, and a safe place to work.

In response to questions, the Interim Head of Human Resources indicated that the council continued to work across all areas to look for opportunities to recruit permanently and retain and reduce dependency on agency workers.

Responding to a further challenge, the Corporate Director for Care and Protection confirmed that agency staff had the same support package, including training as an employee of the council. The service had also taken on several apprenticeships in an effort to “grow your own” qualified employees.

Alternative methods of advertising, including social media was also being used to attract permanent employees.

Members noted current levels of use and spend on agency works and consultants and the effort being undertaken to improve the visibility and governance around their use.

Noted

97. Co-opted Member for Audit and Governance Committee

The Head of Legal Services sought the committee’s view on whether members would support the principle of co-opting members to audit and governance, in line with CIPFA guidance.

The Local Government Authority (LGA) recommended having independent co-opted members on committees. For example, the Police and Crime Panel

and Harbours Committee already operated with independent membership alongside elected members.

Those members who sat on these committees confirmed that the independent representative offered skills and knowledge of working practices and enriched the committee's decision-making.

However, the success of the process would depend on the individual's expertise, and whether they would be required to have an audit and finance background.

Following much discussion members agreed that further investigation in this potential proposal would be welcomed.

Decision:

That a detailed report on the impact of the introduction of independent membership to the Audit and Governance Committee be presented to a future meeting of the committee.

98. Updates from the Monitoring Officer on the Constitution

The Head of Legal Services gave a verbal update on recent constitution changes taken by the Monitoring Officer under delegated powers.

The Monitoring Officer exercised his delegated power on 12th December 2022 for an amendment to Article 7: Overview Committees and Scrutiny Committees, Para 7.2 (d) to clarify that both the People and Health Overview Committee and the Scrutiny Committee include education representatives.

The Monitoring Officer exercised his delegated power on 22nd December 2022 for an amendment to the Officer Scheme of Delegation to clarify that the Executive Director of Place delegated power [132 – disposals, acquisitions, and other property transaction] includes use of compulsory purchase powers and that the delegation can be used for matters over £500,000 where Cabinet have already given approval.

Noted

99. Forward Plan

Subject to a minor amendment the Forward Plan was received and noted.

100. Urgent items

There were no urgent items to report.

101. Exempt Business

There were no exempt items to report.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 11.34 am

Chairman

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