



Minutes of the meeting of the **Corporate Governance & Audit Committee** held in Virtually on Monday 14 March 2022 at 2.00 pm

**Members Present:** Mr F Hobbs (Chairman), Dr K O'Kelly (Vice-Chairman), Miss H Barrie, Mr J Brown, Mr A Dignum, Mr T Johnson, Mr D Palmer and Mr P Wilding

**Members not present:**

**In attendance by invitation:**

**Officers present:** Mr N Bennett (Divisional Manager for Democratic Services) and Mr J Ward (Director of Corporate Services)

**131 Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman led the Committee in a moment of silence in respect of the ongoing situation in Ukraine.

There were no apologies received.

**132 Approval of Minutes**

**RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

**133 Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

**134 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**135 Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

**136 Progress Report - Audit Plan 2021/22 and Audit Plan for 2022/23**

The Chairman invited Mr James to provide an update on the performance of the Audit Plan for 2021/22.

Mr James noted that three audit reports and one position statement had been completed since the previous committee and drew members attention to the details of the reports shown in Appendix 1.

Mr James noted that the Creditors had a Limited Assurance and both the Business Rates and Council Tax had Assurance given. With regards to the Limited Assurance, one high risk exception had been raised relating to purchase orders continuing to be raised retrospectively. A medium risk exception had been raised relating to late payment charges, and a low risk exception relating to the completion and certification of reconciliations.

Cllr O'Kelly raised a concern relating to late payment charges, referring to page 12 of the Creditors 2021/22 report. Mrs Belenger responded that the Council would only pay the charges if the amount were demanded.

The Chairman welcomed Councillors Johnson and Palmer to the meeting, and the Committee agreed to note the report.

Mr James drew members attention to the audit plan for 2022/23, noting that due to unforeseen staffing issues within the Internal Audit Team and across the services to be reviewed, several audits have been moved to next year's audit plan detailed in section 3.2 of the progress report.

The Chairman raised a concern from the report in relation to credit card usage. Mrs Belenger confirmed that the new credit card system goes live from 1 April 2022.

## **RESOLVED**

The Committee agreed and noted the performance against the audit plan for 2021-22 and the new Audit Plan for 2022/23.

### **137 Governance Arrangements**

The Chairman invited Mr Bennett to outline recommendations relating to new Corporate Governance arrangements.

Mr Bennett explained the purpose of this item is to agree how the council (as a whole) proceeds with its arrangements for governance and set out the recommendations as follows:

That the Corporate Governance Committee:

- 2.1 Recommend to full Council changes to the constitution on questions to the executive.
- 2.2 That the corporate governance committee recommend to Cabinet terms of reference for the new Housing and Communities Panel.

2.3 Recommend to full Council a politically balanced method of allocation of membership to all Panels and the membership requirements for all Panels including the new Housing and Communities Panel.

2.4 Recommend to full Council that Panels continue to be held as internal meetings rather than in public, but that the Constitution be amended to establish that Chairmen can agree to hold meetings publicly in consultation with the Monitoring Officer.

#### Recommendation 2.1:

There was considerable debate amongst members in relation to the 8 options detailed in section 6.1 of the report. Members discussed the position in the agenda of Questions to the Executive, whether questions should be submitted in advance, the specificity of questions asked, and the length of time allotted for these questions.

With regards to the length of time allotted Mr Bennett advised that other authorities typically allow 15 or 20 minutes.

The debate was resolved as follows:

- That Questions to the Executive will remain at the same position in meetings (with a discretionary option for the Chair, Mr Ward or Mr Bennett to move them as required)
- The time allotted for Questions to the Executive will be reduced from 40 to 30 minutes
- That the Chair should show robustness in encouraging adherence to a time limit for each question.

#### Recommendation 2.2

Mr Bennett outlined for the committee the terms of reference for the new Housing and Communities Panel. **Document attached to the final minutes.**

Cllr Dignum highlighted that the emphasis should be on policy development as distinct to scrutiny.

Mr Bennett confirmed that the formal statutory role of Scrutiny should not be affected by the role of panels.

Cllr O'Kelly raised a query in relation to certain areas affecting housing seemingly omitted from the terms of reference, specifically relating to social housing.

The Chairman indicated that this was a broad set of terms, from which the panel itself could evolve and members agreed the terms of reference as a starting point for the new panel.

#### Recommendation 2.3

There was considerable debate amongst members relating to the number of members appointed to sit on the new Housing and Communities panel, and on other existing panels.

The discussion considered equitability in the importance of each specific panel, the operational needs of each panel and fairness in member representation on panels more generally (particularly in relation to minority parties).

The Chairman proposed and members agreed that the new Housing and Communities panel be made up of 10 members, alongside 10 members of DPIIP and 8 members each for the Economic Development and Environment panels respectively. The Committee also noted that all panels should, where possible, be politically balanced.

#### Recommendation 2.4:

The Chairman indicated that if the Committee moved towards complete transparency in making panel meetings public, difficulties could arise if circumstances required a retraction from this. A better resolution would be to keep panel meetings private with discretionary powers to the Chair to make meetings public where applicable.

Cllr O'Kelly noted the use of the word 'briefing' in paragraph 6.5 seemed erroneous as the content is referencing Panels. It was agreed by Mr Bennett that the Committee could omit the word.

For clarity the Chairman summarised the recommendations. In a vote the recommendations were agreed as follows:

1. Questions to the Executive will be 30 minutes long and remain in the same position in meetings
2. The beginning of a thread of questions should be followed up with the Chair showing greater robustness in the length of time members are speaking giving as many people as a possible the opportunity to ask questions to the executive
3. The Terms of Reference should remain broad in objective and be policy led rather than scrutiny led
4. Membership of panels is to be made up of 36 members (specific membership as detailed earlier)
5. The Committee recommends that Panel meetings are to remain private as a default, but that the respective Chairs of each Panel should move to turn their meetings into public meetings, subject to discussion with the monitoring officer.

## 138 **Corporate Governance and Audit Committee Work Programme 2022-2023**

The Chairman asked Mrs Belenger to lead on presenting the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee Work Programme for 2022/23.

Mrs Belenger confirmed that the Statement of Accounts for 2020-21 would be added to the agenda for the forthcoming July meeting or subject to a special meeting before that date.

Cllr O'Kelly suggested that the review of any governance changes could be added to the Work Programme in March 2023 Mrs Belenger accepted that such a review could be brought forward to the March 2023 meeting.

The Committee agreed the Work Programme for 2022/23, subject to the changes discussed at this meeting.

139 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There were no exempt items requiring exclusion of the Press and Public.

140 **Late items**

There were no late items.

The meeting ended at 3.46 pm

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CHAIRMAN

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Date: