



Minutes of the meeting of the **Corporate Governance & Audit Committee** held virtually on Monday 27 September 2021 at 2.00 pm

Members Present: Mr F Hobbs (Chairman), Miss H Barrie, Mr J Brown, Mr A Dignum, Mr T Johnson and Mr P Wilding

Members not present: Dr K O'Kelly and Mr D Palmer

In attendance by invitation:

Officers present: Mr N Bennett (Divisional Manager for Democratic Services), Ms P Bushby (Divisional Manager for Communities), Mr A Forward (ICT Manager), Mr J Todd (Corporate Investigations Officer), Mr W Townsend (Health and Safety Manager), Mr J Ward (Director of Corporate Services) and Williams-Dorn (Customer Services Centre Manager)

96 Chairman's Announcements

Apologies had been received from Mr Palmer and Mrs O'Kelly advised that she would be late joining the meeting due to a meeting clash.

97 Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

98 Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

99 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

100 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

101 Fraud Prevention Report 2020/2021

Mr Todd provided members with an overview of his report where he explained that it demonstrates the prevention work undertaken by the team to protect the Council from fraud.

Members of the Committee gave praise for the work undertaken by the team and said the team should be congratulated for their efforts. Clarification was sought regarding the Empty Homes Project and the number of empty properties detailed within the report.

It was asked if officers thought that there could be a number of potential fraud cases where if dealt with could cause the Council reputational damage. It was confirmed by Mr Bennett that members would know that within the policies that support this process, there is flexibility built within them. They follow a clear process where officers would evaluate the evidential test and the public interest test within that. Exactly where the line falls for each individual case would be different.

In reference to paragraph 10.2 of the report, it was queried why there was no mention of Housing Benefit figures. It was confirmed that when the government brought in SFIS a single fraud investigation system was introduced, single person discount and council tax benefit was not included within this system. It was solely for housing benefit investigations. The Council kept responsibility for investigating single person discount and council tax, however there is now no legislation for the council to investigate housing benefit fraud, this is done by the DWP. The Council do work closely with the DWP so that should there be an investigation that crosses over one or more of the areas we can assist.

RESOLVED

That the Committee considered this report and the corporate approach to fighting fraud to ensure that they fulfil their stewardship role and protect the public purse.

That the Committee notes the Council will actively pursue potential frauds identified through ongoing investigations by the Corporate Investigations Team (CIT).

102 Corporate Health & Safety and Business Continuity Management Report

Mr Townsend introduced his report and provided members with a detailed overview of his report, where he described a number of activities that had been undertaken to ensure that the Council's Corporate Health and Safety responsibilities were continued to be managed well as well as adapting to the needs of pandemic. The Council's Business Continuity Management plan had enabled it to run continuously throughout the pandemic and provided an update on its current position.

Discussion was had regarding the concerns of future IT viruses and the protocol to ensure that these do not cause any disruption to the back-up server. Mr Forward explained that this server was not 'live', meaning that the team were in control of what was transferred over to the server and when. This would mean that should there be a virus that infiltrated the Council's main servers, the team would ensure that the virus was removed before any information was transferred to the back-up server. He also explained that the critical factor in these scenarios was to ensure that no virus would infiltrate the Council's IT systems in the first place and to reassure members he advised that the recent annual survey that had been completed, resulted in the teams mitigations being documented as excellent and the VPN was of the greatest standard.

In turning to the Corporate Health and Safety detail within the report, members asked several questions, of which have been summarised below;

- In relation to the 6 RIDDOR reportable accidents, more information regarding the Street Operatives who sustained back injuries was requested.
- With staff members working from home had there been reports of injuries where staff may not have had the right equipment e.g. desk, chair. It was confirmed that only 1 incident had been reported since the start of the pandemic and that there had been a full assessment completed by managers and all staff on their workstations at home, where this allowed for us to highlight any areas where improvements need to be made.

Cllr T Johnson arrived at the meeting 14:29pm

Before drawing the discussion to a close the Chairman asked for confirmation on the type of business continuity scenarios testing that was being completed, he explained that given the pandemic and the current petrol shortage being documented in the media he wanted reassurance that the scenarios covered a wide range of possible incidents that the Council may need to react to. It was confirmed by Mr Ward that the testing and scenarios/exercises the teams have discussed in the past had been very varied and thorough.

RESOLVED

That the Committee considered and noted the Council's arrangements in place for monitoring and controlling the risks associated with health and safety and business continuity matters.

103 Annual Partnerships Report 2021

Mrs Bushby introduced her report and advised members that it was very reassuring that partnerships whilst they may have been affected by the pandemic, they had found ways to continue to operate normally.

She explained that the Chichester in Partnership was dissolved as it was felt that the partnership had run its course and that several projects within it could be managed outside of the partnership. The 'Technology doesn't byte' was a good example of this, we still support it, but we don't lead the project. A new partnership had been created this year, the Local Community Neighbourhood Network which is a health partnership. Inclusive of the CCG and PCN's, it is a slow burner, as it is taking its time to establish its priorities and opportunities within the community to ensure that it addresses not only the effects of the pandemic and a focus on cancer screening but also the other needs there may be within the community.

There were no questions asked.

RESOLVED

That the Annual Partnerships report be noted.

Agrees that the partnerships annual report is an appropriate mechanism for ensuring our strategic partnerships have appropriate governance measures in place and should continue reporting to Corporate Governance and Audit committee on an annual basis.

Agrees that the new risk assessment template for partnerships is an appropriate document and should be completed by lead officers for partnerships over the next year.

104 Complaints, Freedom of Information Requests and Data Protection Analysis 2020/21

Mrs Williams-Dorn explained that her report outlined all formal complaints, FOI requests and Data Protection requests that had been received during 2020/21. A total of 103 complaints were received, which was a decrease of 17% overall compared to 2019/20. 84% of the complaints received in 2020/21 were categorised as stage 1 within the council's formal complaints process. 10.7% were stage 2, 4.9% reached the last stage of the process via the Local Government Ombudsman. Of the total number of complaints received, 15.5% were upheld. 17.5% were partially upheld and 67% were not upheld.

She confirmed that lessons had been learnt and improvements made as a result of upheld or partially upheld complaints with clearer guidance being provided to the customer where required and officer training provided where appropriate. Of the complaints that had been sent to the Ombudsman, none were formally investigated, this compared to an average of 32% being investigated and upheld across similar authorities as outlined within the report.

It was also confirmed that the council received 177 recorded compliments across all services thanking staff for their help and assistance. Turning to Freedom of Information requests she advised that the council had received 716 requests that required an answer of which 91% had been answered within the 20-day deadline. She confirmed that the majority of these had been requested by members of the public, with 32.4% and 7% having been requested by commercial organisations and the media respectively.

She explained that under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), the council had received 13 requests from customers to access their personal information held by the council and in addition to this, 13 Police/authority requests had also been received and responded to.

Members then asked a range of questions of which have been summarised below;

- Concern raised regarding the amount of time spent by officers answering FOI requests and could this time be accurately quantified. It was explained by Mr Bennett that the vast majority of the requests were dealt with in approximately 30 minutes, however, due to the vast nature and sometimes level and range of detail required for the remainder the time was significantly longer and not something that could be quantified. He also reassured members that where improvements could be made to the councils website in terms of sign-posting users to areas of information or the content being made clearer, this was

happening and the speed at which this work is completed by the Customers Services Team and the Web Team was testament to their hard work.

- A suggestion was made to consider making FOI responses from organisations and the media chargeable.
- Clarity on what records the council kept in terms of focusing on continuous improvement was sought. It was confirmed that records were kept helping identify trends so that the council can react quickly and ensure that update information is made readily available and accessible to its customers.
- It was requested and agreed that for future updates it included a list of the top 5 requests asked for.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the contents of this report.

105 Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no restricted items.

106 Late items

There were no late items.

The meeting ended at 2.53 pm

CHAIRMAN

Date: