

Committee: Governance, Audit and Performance Committee

Date:

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Title: Governance, Audit and Performance Committee Annual Report

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Summary

1. There is a requirement under the Council's Constitution for the Chairman of the Committee to report annually to Full Council.
2. This report summarises the key work of the Committee in 2018/19.

Recommendations

3. The Committee approves the report.

Financial Implications

4. None

Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

None

Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	The report is being considered by Governance, Audit and Performance Committee members ahead of Full Council
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal	None

Implications	
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

7. There is a requirement under the Council's Constitution for the Chair of the Committee to report annually to Full Council. This occurs at the April Full Council meeting.
8. The information below will form the report the Chair will give to the meeting and summarises the key work of the Committee in the 2019/20 year.

External Audit

9. BDO has been appointed as the Council's auditors following the expiry of the previous external audit contract with EY
10. BDO undertook the audit of the 2018/19 accounts.
11. The Council received an unqualified opinion on the financial statements for the 10th consecutive year. BDO found that the Council has proper arrangements in place to secure value for money in its use of resources.
12. The Council published its draft accounts by the 31 May deadline and the final Statement of Accounts was approved at a meeting of the committee on 30 July 2019. This had been adjourned from 25 July due to an outstanding issue that required additional consultation and clarification between the actuary and auditors, relating to the pension fund.
13. The annual audit of the Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim was completed by BDO and presented at the March 2020 committee meeting.
14. For the second year, the error rate was so low that the Council actually gained subsidy payment rather than having to repay the Department for Work and Pensions due to processing and calculation errors. The Council's accuracy rate was just under 99 per cent on a total claim value of £13.7 million.

Internal Audit

15. During the course of the year the Committee has reviewed the work of Internal Audit through quarterly monitoring reports and received the Audit Manager's Annual Report and Opinion, which concluded that risks material to the achievement of the objectives for the audited areas identified by Internal Audit were satisfactorily managed and controlled. The Committee considered and approved the Annual Governance Statement for 2018/19 which is published with the Council's Statement of Accounts.

16. During the 2019/20 year the Committee also received:

- The Internal Audit Strategy and Programme 2019/20
- A report on Internal Audit Counter Fraud and Corruption work and the Annual Fraud Plan
- The 2020 Internal Audit Charter and draft work programme for the forthcoming year

17. Due to the May 2019 election and the number of new members on the committee, a self-assessment exercise was not carried out in 2019/20.

Constitutional and Electoral Matters

18. During 2019/20 the Committee were asked to consider two such matters.

19. The results of a Polling District and Polling Places Review were presented to the Committee for approval. Under the Electoral Registration and Administrations Act 2013, councils have a statutory duty to carry out a review every five years.

20. The purpose of the review is to:

- seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
- so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled

21. Following public consultation in late summer and Autumn 2019, a revised Scheme was approved by the Committee in January 2020.

22. Also in January 2020, the Committee discussed a report containing recommendations from a Planning Committee working group to enhance public participation in Planning Committee meetings.

23. As public participation rights form part of the Council's constitution, changes are reserved for Full Council on recommendation from the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee.

24. The recommendations, which had been trialled at Planning Committee since August, were to:

- extend the maximum period of time allowed for town/parish council representatives to speak
- extend the maximum period of time allowed for public speakers
- remove the limit on the number of public speakers

- introduce a maximum period of time for applicants/agents/developers to speak
 - allow town/parish council representatives to clarify statements of fact made by applicants/agents, and
 - allow a limited number of town/parish council representatives to attend and participate in site visits
25. Committee members added to the working group's recommendations by extending the right to clarify statements of fact made by applicants/agents to include district and county councillors.
26. The Committee's recommendations regarding Planning Committee meetings were adopted by Full Council on 10 March 2020.

Performance and Risk

27. The Committee undertakes detailed quarterly monitoring of the Council's key performance indicators and a further set of supporting indicators. Service performance in 2019/20 has in the main remained strong. Areas of discussion during the year have included planning application processing time, upheld planning appeals and recycling rates.
28. The committee also reviews on a bi-annual basis the Council's Corporate Risk Register. The main issues raised were around the financial and staff resource risk to not having an approved Local Plan and whether risks relating to governance were featured prominently enough in the Register, and whether they were scored appropriately.

Procurement

29. The Committee has continued to receive bi-annual summaries of procurement activity in the Council, including details of contracts let over £50,000 and instances where exceptions to Contract Procedure Rules had been requested.

Ombudsman Annual Review

30. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual review letter was presented to the Committee in September 2019. The Committee noted the Ombudsman had received nine complaints about the Council in the year ending 31 March 2019. In four cases the complaints were closed after initial enquiries and three were determined 'not upheld' with the Ombudsman deciding there was no fault against the Council.
31. The remaining two cases were referred back for local resolution as they were considered premature by the Ombudsman.

Cyber Security

32. From April 2019 councils were required by the Local Government Association to report regularly on work undertaken in respect of cyber security.

33. The Governance, Audit and Performance Committee now receives bi-annual updates on the work being done in this area. In addition, the council was required to appoint a lead member to be responsible for oversight of cyber security. Cllr de Vries was appointed by the Committee to this role.
34. During the course of the year, the Council successfully bid for funding of £11,400 to improve cyber security. The money was used for staff training to develop departmental business continuity plans, a cyber exercise for ICT staff and senior managers and for further cyber-specific training and enhanced security software.
35. As a result, the Council's rating on an annual self-assessment undertaken each summer improved from Amber-Amber to Amber-Green.