

Minutes of a Meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held at Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on 26 November 2018

+ Cllr Oliver Lewis (Chairman)
+ Cllr Jonathan Lytle (Vice Chairman)

+ Cllr Rodney Bates
+ Cllr Edward Hawkins
- Cllr Paul Ilnicki

Cllr Rebecca Jennings-Evans
+ Cllr Bruce Mansell

+ Present
- Apologies for absence presented

Officers Present: Adrian Flynn, Chief Accountant
 Karen Limmer, Head of Legal
 Leigh Lloyd-Thomas, BDO
 Kelvin Menon, Executive Head: Finance

5/AS Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 23rd July 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6/AS External Audit

The Committee received a report setting out the audit programme that the Council's External Auditor's intended to follow during the coming year.

The Committee was informed that following the conclusion of a national procurement exercise BDO had replaced KPMG as the Council's External Auditors. It was noted that changes were made every five years to every local authority in England to ensure that a Council's external audit function remained independent and objective.

It was noted that BDO would receive the audit files from KPMG in December and once these had been received a full audit plan would be developed and brought to the Committee's meeting in March 2019.

It was clarified that the Jersey Property Unit Trust (JPUT) which owned Camberley town centre, was audited by PWC in Jersey and that BDO would work closely with them as part of their audit of the Council's accounts.

The Committee noted the report.

7/AS Annual Standards Report

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the outcomes of any matters dealt with under the Council's Code of Conduct during the past twelve months.

It was reported that one formal investigation into a complaint brought against a Borough Councillor had found that there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct. Two further

complaints were currently being investigated; the outcome of these investigations would be reported to the Committee in due course.

It was noted that, in line with previous years, the majority of issues raised with the Monitoring Officer during 2017/18 related to planning matters and in particular when interests needed to be declared. It was acknowledged that there was a lack of understanding amongst the public in relation to the requirements governing the declaration of interests and this had contributed to the number of referrals made.

The Committee was informed that the Social Media Protocol was being reviewed and updated and a briefing note providing practical guidance would be produced to support the Protocol.

It was acknowledged that delineating between private personal messages on social media and those intended for a wider public audience was an ongoing concern. The Committee agreed that the public did not generally differentiate between Councillors' public and private posts consequently it was considered incumbent on Councillors to act professionally at all times when interacting with social media. It was agreed that further guidance and clarification on the use of social media would be welcomed.

The Committee noted the report.

8/AS Independent Persons Protocol

The Committee considered a report providing an update on work to appoint Independent Persons to assist with matters pertaining to the Code of Conduct as required by the Localism Act 2011.

It was reported that in May 2016, the Council had joined a consortium of Surrey local authorities which had appointed six people to act as Independent Persons across the consortium. It was reported that the current arrangements, which would expire in May 2019, had worked well and seven of the Surrey local authorities, including Surrey Heath, had expressed a desire to continue with the joint arrangements.

If the proposals were approved then the participating local authorities would simultaneously advertise the opportunity to join the Independent Persons Pool for a five year period. The Monitoring Officers from each local authority would then agree a shortlist of candidates for interview by an Appointments Panel, which was expected to include some chairmen of the local authorities' standards committees. The Appointments Panel's recommendations would then be referred to each Council for approval.

It was noted that a number of the current cohort of Independent Persons had expressed an interest in continuing in the role. It was requested that the Committee raise awareness of the opportunity through their networks.

RESOLVED that:

- i. The requirements of the joint arrangements be noted.
- ii. The Committee approves in principle the proposed joint arrangement and that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to progress the arrangements for appointing Independent Persons as set out in the report.

9/AS Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee would take place on Monday 25th March 2019 at 7pm.

Chairman