

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee held on 9 December 2014 at 7.00 pm**

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- Present:** Councillors Simon Wootton (Chair), Yash Gupta (MBE), Cathy Kent and Brian Little
- Jason Oliver, (Co-Opted Member)
- Apologies:** Councillors Terry Hipsey  
Rhona Long – Co-Opted Member
- In attendance:** Sean Clark, Head of Corporate Finance  
Christine Connolly, Ernst and Young  
Gary Clifford, Client Manager for Audit Services  
Chris Harris, Head of Internal Audit  
Lee Henley, Information Manager  
Andy Owen, Corporate Risk Officer  
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **20. Minutes**

The Minutes of Standards and Audit Committee, held on 16 September 2014, were approved as a correct record.

### **21. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **22. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest

### **23. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 – Quarterly Activity Report**

The Information Manager introduced the report to the Committee, notifying that during the period of July 2014 to September 2014 the Council had processed 3 RIPA authorisations, 2 were fraud related and the other relating to Trading Standards.

It was explained to the Committee that there had been requests made to the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN) for Communication Data requests. These requests were broken into two types, Service Data, information held by

a telecom or postal service provider including itemised telephone bills and/or outgoing call data and Subscriber Data, this included any other information or account details that a telecom provider holds for example billing information. Members were informed that there were 2 Subscriber Data requests received between the reported time.

The Information Manager informed Members that at the previous meeting of the Committee it was reported that there had only been 3 fraud related RIPA authorisations for 2013/2014. Following the meeting it had been identified that during 2013/2014 the Council authorised 2 additional requests for Trading Standards. Members were updated via email as soon as the correct figures were identified.

Members were notified that Trading Standards followed the correct process and sent the requests to Legal Services. The requests were dated 7 November 2013 and 16 January 2014, both requests were authorised by an Authorising Officer in line with process and Legal Services ensured that the requests were authorised by the Court in line with process.

Members enquired as to whether the Monitoring Officer signed off all RIPA authorisations and whether she kept a record of the amount of authorisations that were carried out. Officers explained that the Monitoring Officer did sign off RIPA authorisations as did other Authorising Officers of which the Head of Corporate Finance was one. With regard to recording the authorisations, Members were informed that the Information Manager kept a log for the Council.

It was sought by the Committee as to the outcomes of the 3 cases. Officers notified Members that one case was fraud related and was being dealt with by Legal Service, another was being handled by the police and the last no further action was taken.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. To note the statistical information relating to the use of RIPA from July 2014 to September 2014.**
- 2. To report a revised figure for 2013/14 RIPA requests, and to summarise the reason for the change in these figures**

**24. Complaints Report – April to September 2014**

The Information Manager introduced the report to the Committee explaining that this was the first of the biannual reports being presented to Members. He then went on to explain to those present the difference between a concern and a complaint. The Committee were notified that all concerns and complaints were logged by the complaints team and that for 2014/2015 there had been a total of 1916 concerns and complaints logged with 99% of complaints being responded to within the timeframe.

Members were advised that Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) enquires were being responded to within 15days, this was well within the Councils deadline of 21 days and the LGOs deadline of 28 days. The Committee were further informed that that of 1487 Councillor enquires 99% were responded to within timeframes and of 296 MP enquires 95% were responded to within timeframes.

Members enquired the following from Officers:

- Who decided whether an issue was a concern or a complaint
- Since the process of complaints had changed to include concerns, it was queried as to whether officers has changed its timeframes;
- Were residents aware of the status of their enquiry and the difference between a complaint and a concern.

Officers responded to the Committees queries and explained:

- That it was the Information team who decided whether an issue was a concern or a complaint depending on the seriousness of the nature of the issue;
- There was still a 3 stage complaint system, stage 1 gave 14 days to issue the resident with a response, stages 2 and 3 gave 28days for a response to sent and concerns had 5 calendar days to be solved.;
- That the Information team attempted to contact residents as soon as possible to explain the status of their concern/ complaint.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the Standards and Audit Committee note the statistics for the reporting period April to September 2014.**

#### **25. Review of the Strategic - Corporate Risk and Opportunity Register, In Quarter 3 Report**

The Corporate Risk Officer introduced the report to the Committee explaining that under the Terms of Reference of the Constitution one of the functions of the Standards and Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance that the Authority's risk management arrangements are adequate and effective. To enable the Committee to consider the effectiveness of the Council's risk and opportunity management arrangements, Members are presented with this report on a bi annual basis which provides details of how the key risks and opportunities facing the Authority are identified and managed.

The Committee were informed that any risks or opportunities that were rated at 16 or 12 automatically became in focus and any that were rated 9 or 8 would be considered on a case by case basis for the in focus report. It was further explained that the Council compared its Strategic/Corporate Risk and Opportunity Register against Zurich Municipal's assessment of the key risk/challenges facing the local government sector. Members were notified that there had been a good match between the Council's register and the

Zurich Municipal's assessment, although it was identified that there was a gap against the fraud risk category the Committee were informed that at present this was had not been identified as a significant corporate risk facing the authority but is an area that is getting some focus with the review of the Fraud Strategy and Counter Fraud Team.

Members thanked the Corporate Risk Officer for his detailed report and for presenting the report in such a way that was straightforward to understand.

**RESOLVED:**

1. **That Standards and Audit Committee note the items and details contained in the Dashboard (Appendix A).**
2. **That Standards and Audit Committee note the 'In Focus' report (Appendix B), which includes the items identified by Corporate Risk Management, Performance Board and Directors Board that Standards and Audit Committee should focus on this quarter.**
3. **That Standards and Audit Committee note the information outlined in Appendix C and section 3.6 of the report, which compares the Council's Strategic/Corporate Risk & Opportunity Register against Zurich Municipal's assessment of the key risks/challenges facing the local government sector.**

**26. Internal Audit Progress Report 2014-2015**

The Internal Audit Manager introduced the report to Members informing them of the following:

- That to date, 17 reports had been issued as final, 9 reports at draft or debrief stage and 8 reviews that were work in progress;
- One report had been issued with a Red assurance opinion, had been discussed at Directors Board and was to be presented to the Committee at their next meeting;
- Reports on Treasury Management and Members Allowances received a Green assurance rating;
- An Electrical Testing report received an Amber/Green assurance rating;
- Internal Audit carried out an advisory review of the Troubled Families Programme, at the request of the client. It was explained to Members that an assurance opinion on advisory reports was not produced. Although there were 7 high and 2 medium recommendations which were reported to and agreed by management.

Members were notified that Internal Audit continued to support three internal investigations involving staff directly employed or contracted to the Council; however these were now being dealt with by Human Resources.

The Committee were informed that a further detailed report of the Troubled Families Programme advisory review was included within the appendix to the main report. It was explained that this was the first year for the new programme and unfortunately there was not enough information provided. Members were informed that all actions within the action plan were being followed up and a follow up report would be reported to the Committee at the next meeting.

It was sought by the Committee as to whether the claims stated within the Troubled Families Programme report be incorrect would the financial loss be to Thurrock Council or to the residents. Officers explained that as long as the information provided was correct and the process followed correctly there should not be an issue, however as the programme was grant funded any financial loss would be to Thurrock Council.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Standards & Audit Committee:**

- 1. Consider reports issued by Internal Audit in relation to the 2014/15 audit plan.**
- 2. Note progress against the Internal Audit Plan for 2014/15.**

**27. Thurrock Annual Audit Letter 2013-2014**

The Head of Corporate Finance introduced the report informing Members that the report offered a summary of the information that the Committee had seen at previous meetings. He continued to confirm to Members that the accounts had been signed off within the timeframe.

The external auditor notified Members of the Committee that the report was an account summary of the 2013/2014 accounts, she continued to inform Members that on 30 September 2014 an unqualified value for money conclusion. It was confirmed that on 3 October 2014 the external auditors issued their audit completion certificate.

The Committee praised the superb work and dedication of the finance department. It was asked that the Committee's appreciation be passed to the teams for their hard work.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Standards and Audit Committee consider the comments of our external auditors as set out in the attached report and note their findings.**

**28. Standards & Audit Committee 2014-2015 - Work Programme**

Members discussed the work programme for the municipal year and the following reports were agreed:

4 February 2015

- Internal Audit: Red Reports (x2)
- Fraud Report
- Audit of Grant Claims
- Disaster Recover

17 March 2015

- Review of ROM Policy
- Draft Internal Audit Plan
- Ernst and Young – Audit Plan 2014/2015
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

**The meeting finished at 8.15 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**