

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee held on 30 October 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), Lynn Worrall, Gary Collins, Elizabeth Rigby, James Thandi and Cathy Kent (Substitute) (substitute for Kairen Raper)

Charles Clarke, Co-Opted Member
Jasdeep Singh Nijjar, Co-Opted Member

Apologies: Councillor Kairen Raper

In attendance: Asmat Hussain, Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Gary Clifford, Chief Internal Auditor
Lucas Critchley, Mears
Lee Henley, Head of Information Management
Andy Owen, Corporate Risk and Insurance Manager
Chris Seman, Intelligence and Performance Manager
Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director Housing and Development
Mohammed Ullah, Repairs & Planned Maintenance Manager, Adults, Housing & Health
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Luke Tucker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

59. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

60. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

61. Verbal Update - Housing and Waste Complaints

Following the Annual Complaints Report that was presented to committee in September 2023, housing and waste were part of the top 10 complaint themes. Members requested for officers to come and attend this committee to talk about some of the complaints within their respective areas.

A verbal update was provided to members on Housing repair complaints. This update can be viewed from the following link:

The following points were raised:

- Member stated her surprise not to see damp and mould within the report with no mention of legal challenges from residents who had taken this through their solicitor and gone through the ombudsman.

At 7.16pm, Charles Clarke arrived into the meeting.

- Member referred to the cutbacks being made within the council and questioned whether the speed of the work undertaken by Mears, or the council had slowed down processes when being called out.
- Member questioned whether new tender contracts were due for renewal.
- Member questioned whether there were any other structural problems in regard to concrete beginning to show in buildings that the council was responsible for.
- Member questioned whether similar complaints were being raised due to the failing of the same things and that the root cause needed to be investigated as to why similar complaints were coming forward.
- Members agreed that learnings should be made from complaints.
- Members also agreed that governance needed to be in place.
- Member questioned whether there had been any increase in complaints against private landlords.
- Members were informed the 7 days to complete a repair was from when the job was issued to Mears as the contractor to the completion date.
- Members were informed that Mears had a jeopardy report that would focus on those complaints that had exceeded timelines.
- Members were informed the top three common housing complaints were carpentry, plumbing and electrical that covered 80% of the work received by Mears.
- Member noted there was a good core area of communication and a follow up process in place to bring the overall number of complaints down.

The Chair noted and stated his disappointment that no officers from waste had attended this evening to provide their update on waste complaints.

At 7.32pm, Ewelina Sorbjan, Chris Seman, Lee Henley, Mohammed Ullah and Lucas Critchley left the meeting.

62. Review of Risk and Opportunity Management and the Strategy, Policy and Framework Report

The report sought Members comments on the Council's proposed new Risk and Opportunity Management Strategy, Policy and Framework which is attached as Appendix A. The report provided details of the review of the Council's Risk and Opportunity Management arrangements to address the

points raised in the Best Value Inspection Report and the key areas for improvement identified from the self-assessment against good practice.

The following points were raised:

- Members agreed the risk management arrangements should be embedded across the council.
- Member questioned how long it would take to have risk management reports embedded in those key areas across the council.
- Member questioned how risk was quantified and assessed and what systems were being used for scoring such formula. Member also questioned whether this was a standard approach as used in other local authorities.
- Member questioned what IT systems were going to be embedded.
- Member also questioned whether the ISO31 was the general guidance used for risk management used by other local authorities.
- Member referred to the detailed summary points within the report and asked for reassurance that a timeline and plan for delivering those was in place. Members asked for this item to be added to the work programme to report back on progress.
- Member questioned whether the BVI had changed the council's risk appetite.
- Member referred to staff recruitment and whether any market testing had been undertaken to ensure the right people were being attracted.
- Member questioned the purpose of the IT system whether they were for reporting purposes or used for calculating risk.
- Co-opted member questioned what teams would be involved in assessing and deciding the level of criteria as to whether likely, marginal or critical as this would have a big impact on topics.

Action:

- Add the Review of the Risk and Opportunity Management and the Strategy Policy and Framework Report to the work programme for updates.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Standards and Audit Committee comment on and endorse the Council's Risk and Opportunity Management Strategy, Policy and Framework (Appendix 1).**
- 2 That Standards and Audit Committee note the improvements to address the recommendations for risk management included in the Best Value Inspection report (see 3.7 of report).**
- 3. That Standards and Audit Committee note the improvement activities to be undertaken during 2023/24, including workshop with Senior Leadership Team to refresh the Strategic/Corporate**

Risk and Opportunity Register (see 3.7 of report and page 8 of Appendix 1).

- 4. That Standards and Audit Committee note a report is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet 13 December 2023 for consideration and agreement of the Risk Management Strategy, Policy and Framework.**

63. Internal Audit Progress Report 2023/24

The report presented was the first progress report since the 19 July 2023 meeting and covered final reports issued, draft reports issued and work in progress.

The following points were raised:

- The chair thanked officers for the report and how good it was that the report was going out to a much wider audience and demonstrated that internal audit was working. It was the duty of this committee to bring those departments responsible back to this committee for members to check what actions were being achieved and to move forward and not make the same mistakes.
- Member referred to the key findings of the internal audit work and questioned the number of waivers and whether this was normal.
- Member questioned the process where there may be only one bidder and was this dependent on what was being bid for.
- Member questioned how they could feel confident that a broader market search had been undertaken for any of the contracts to ensure best value was achieved.
- The Chair requested the officer responsible for procurement to attend a meeting in the new year.
- Member questioned how procurement evidence was presented and whether there was an opportunity to scrutinise this and make other suggestions.
- Members were provided with information on what “exceptional circumstances” was when referred to in the Action and Responses section of the key findings.
- Members discussed the timeframes for completion for recommendations made, this was dependent on whether the recommendation was a high or medium rating.
- Co-opted Member referred to the actions that were due for completion by September 2023 and questioned whether these had been followed-up.

Action:

- Democratic Service to arrange for the finance officer responsible for procurement to attend in the new year.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Standards & Audit Committee considered the work being carried out by Internal Audit in relation to the 2023/24 audit plan.**
- 2. That the Standards & Audit Committee agreed changes to the protocol for the circulation of final internal audit reports**

64. Public Sector Internal Audit Standards Self-Assessment 2023

The report presented was in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, for the Chief Internal Auditor to provide an annual opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control and governance processes.

The following points were raised:

- The Chair thanked officers for the report.
- Officer confirmed standards were applied consistently across all local authorities.
- Members discussed resources and recruitment and as part of the financial restructure, the team will increase in capacity with more resources being brought in.
- Member referred to the self-assessment of the report where on three occasions it had referred to the section 114 notice and questioned whether the 114 notice had impeded or stopped the internal audit work required to undertake the assessment. So that resources and ability were there for the department to work as efficiently as it had in the past.
- Co-opted member questioned the timeline on when a full complement of staff would be ready to undertake the tasks to be carried out.
- Member questioned the timeline for the Quality Assurance Improvement Plan.

RESOLVED

That the Standards & Audit Committee considered the work being carried out by Internal Audit in relation to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards Self-Assessment.

65. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme and agreed that additional meetings should be arranged for January and March 2024 to ensure all reports on the work programme were heard.

Members agreed to invite Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director Finance, in early 2024 to provide members with an update on procurement.

Member agreed to add the Review of the Risk and Opportunity Management and the Strategy Policy and Framework Report to the work programme for updates in the next municipal year.

A full recording of the meeting can be viewed from the following link:

[Standards and Audit Committee - Monday 30 October 2023, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 8.51 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**