

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee held on 10 July 2014 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Simon Wootton (Chair), Yash Gupta, Terry Hipsey, Cathy Kent and Brian Little

Rhona Long – Co-Opted Member

Apologies: Jason Oliver – Co-Opted Member

In attendance: Debbie Hanson – Ernst and Young
Christine Connolly – Ernst and Young
Sean Clark – Head of Corporate Finance
Chris Harris – Head of Internal Audit
Lee Henley – Information Manager
Andy Owen – Corporate Risk Officer
Kenna-Victoria Martin – 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.

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of Standards and Audit Committee, held on 5 March 2014, were approved as a correct record subject to minor amendments from Members.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest

4. Appointment of Membership to Members Advisory Panel 2014-2015

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced the report to Members explaining that the report was brought to the Committee in September 2013, Members were informed that by sitting on the Members Advisory Panel Members would hear breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members, to hear reports from the investigating officer and to suggest recommendations to the Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Kent recommended that the current panel stay in place and nominated Councillor Gupta and the Chair of the Committee along with Ms Long and Mr Oliver the co-opted Members on the Committee. It was agreed

that the Panel would remain the same and the Democratic Services Officer would write to Mr Oliver to confirm that he was happy to sit on the panel.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards and Audit Committee appointed Councillors Wootton and Gupta along with Mr Oliver and Ms Long to the Members Advisory Panel to serve until the next local elections.

5. Refresh of the Strategic-Corporate Risk and Opportunity Register In Quarter 1 Report

The Corporate Risk Officer introduced the report and informed Members that one of the functions of the Committee under its Terms of Reference was to provide independent assurance that the Councils risk management arrangements were adequate and effective.

It was further explained that corporate risk officer had worked with Services, Department Management Teams, Performance Board and Directors Board between March and May 2014 to refresh the Strategic Corporate Risk and Opportunity Register.

Members enquired as to their role with regards to the report, Officers informed Members that it was the Committees role to provide independent assurance that risks were being managed correctly. The Committee were further informed that the report would be presented to the Committee on a bi annual basis.

The Committee queried appendix A of the report, enquiring what the previous risk ratings were. It was clarified to Members that this was the first report under the revised ROM framework agreed by Cabinet in February 2014. It was explained that as further reviews are undertaken the Committee would see the progress and movement of the risks and opportunities in the dashboard table.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Standards and Audit Committee note the items and details contained in the Dashboard (Appendix A).**
- 2. That the 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.**

6. 2013-14 Complaints, Compliments and Enquiries Report

The Information Manager introduced the report to Members of the Committee explaining that for the year 2013/2014 the Council logged 956 fewer

complaints compared to the previous year. This was primarily due to a change in the complaints process, as a concerns stage had been introduced.

Members were informed that during 2013/2014, 97% of complaints were responded to within the timeframe. The average response time for LGO enquiries had increased to 21 days compared to 15 days during 2012/2013. Member enquiries had improved during 2013/14, with 2023 enquiries received and 98% responded to within timeframe.

The Chair of the Committee suggested that the Committee look at the behaviours and trends of the complaints rather than relying on numbers within the report. He continued to congratulate the Information Team for their hard work with collecting the data presented and the service they provided.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards and Audit Committee note the statistics for 2013/14.

7. 2013-14 Access to Records Report

The report was introduced to the Committee by the Information Manager, who explained that Freedom of Information (FOI) requests had increased compared to 2012/13, despite a number of requests being diverted away from FOI. Members were informed that the Council refuse requests that are estimated to exceed 18 hours to process.

Members were notified that with regards to Data Protection requests (Subject Access Requests), these may appear low in numbers however can be time consuming to process.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards and Audit Committee note the performance and statistics for 2013/14 for both FOI and Data Protection.

8. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 – Quarterly Activity Report

The Information Manager introduced the report to Members of the Committee explaining the reason for the report was following the Council's RIPA inspection last year, it was recommended that a quarterly activity report be brought to the Committee. Members were informed that for January – March 2014 there had been two approved RIPA authorisations in relation to fraud.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards and Audit Committee note the statistical information relating to the use of RIPA from January 2014 to March 2014.

9. Internal Audit Annual Report – Year ended 31 March 2014

The report was introduced to the Committee by the Head of Internal Audit, who explained to Members that the report was internal audits annual report giving their opinion of the last year, it also outline the works completed.

Members were informed that pages 98 and 99 of the report were key as they summarised the overall opinion given to the Council. It was highlighted that the framework was robust as within the different areas the opinion had remained at Green or had improved from Amber to a Green opinion.

The Committee were notified that a report on the Audit Plan for 2014/2015 would be brought to Members.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards & Audit Committee received and notes the Internal Audit Annual Report – Year ended 31st March 2014.

10. Financial Statements and Annual Governance Statement Update

The Head of Corporate Finance introduced the report to the Committee informing Members that it was no longer a legal requirement for Officers to bring a draft copy of the Financial Statement or Annual Governance Statement to the Committee. Members were notified that an electronic copy would be sent to Members, however if they required a hard copy this could be requested.

The Chair of the Committee enquired as to at present all was as it should be. It was confirmed by the Head of Corporate Finance who had as the Section 105 Officer signed the draft statement on 30 June 2014.

RESOLVED:

That Members note that the Draft Annual Governance Statement and Financial Statement have been completed and passed to Ernst and Young for auditing.

11. Work Programme

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

- Disaster Recovery Report – 10 December 2014

The meeting finished at 8.30pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**