

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee held on 27 September 2018 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Tony Fish (Chair), Oliver Gerrish and Barry Johnson

Apologies: Jason Oliver, Co-Opted Member

In attendance: Gary Clifford, Chief Internal Auditor
Lee Henley, Strategic Lead, Information Management
David Kleinberg, Assistant Director, Fraud and Investigation
Jonathon Wilson, Assistant Director, Finance

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.

12. Minutes

The Minutes of the 19 July 2018 meeting were approved as a true and correct record.

13. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

14. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of Interest.

15. Internal Audit Progress Report 2018/19

The Chair invited the Officer Gary Clifford, Chief Internal Auditor, to introduce the report. The Officer stated that of the Audits completed in period; all outcomes had been either green or amber-green. The Officer then stated that Audits in progress were detailed on page 16 of the Agenda and summarised that there had been some learning from a complaint in relation to Housing, and that the audit of the Troubled Families Service were proving to be resource intensive.

Councillor Gerrish asked what "amber-green" was, as this had not previously been part of the Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating system. The Officer clarified that it had been pointed out that a service could be rated amber even if it was almost red or almost green, and therefore "amber-green or amber-red" had been added to indicate how close the service was to falling into another rating.

Councillor Gerrish asked what had progressed in terms of developing the Council's Debt Recovery approach. The Officer stated that due to some changes in management this had not yet been advanced however new managers were in place and this was being picked up.

Councillor Johnson stated that as this crossed into his Portfolio he was aware of the challenges but was confident these were being addressed now the new manager was in post.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards and Audit Committee considered the reports issued and the work being carried out by Internal Audit in relation to the 2018/19 audit plan.

16. Counter Fraud & Investigation Quarterly Update

The Chair invited the Officer David Kleinberg, Assistant Director for Fraud and Investigations, to present the report. The Officer provided a short overview of the report and highlighted the positive news that the Fraud Team had been invited to speak at a national conference in recognition of their work. The Officer went on to explain that the work programme for the year was on page 27, and that the team was fully resourced and on target to deliver.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report. There were no questions.

RESOLVED:

The Standards and Audit Committee noted the performance of the Counter Fraud and Investigation Department.

17. Thurrock Annual Audit Letter 2017/18

The Officer Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director for Finance, introduced this item, stating that there had been only one charge added above the initial quote, which had been for a whistleblowing investigation. The additional charge was for £3120.

The Officer further stated that all leases were now being treated as Financial Leases and would be reflected in the financial reporting.

RESOLVED:

The Standards and Audit Committee considered and noted the report of Thurrock's External Auditors.

18. Annual Access to Records Report 2017/18

The Chair asked the Officer Lee Henley, Strategic Lead for Information Management, to introduce the report. The Officer explained that the report

covered Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests and Subject Access Requests (SAR). The Officer went on to state that FOI volumes remained comparable to the previous year, with an increase of just 10 in this period. The Officer stated 96% of these had been responded to in timeframe which was down 1% on the previous year, and that 293 had been rejected.

The Officer stated SAR performance had remained the same however volumes had decreased.

Councillor Gerrish asked if there had been any impact from the publicity around Rights of Access. The Officer responded that this had been the case, and most significantly in that the Council is no longer able to charge for providing this service.

RESOLVED:

The Standards and Audit Committee noted the statistics for the year 2017/18.

19. Annual Complaints & Enquiries Report April 2017 to March 2018

The Chair again invited the Officer Lee Henley, Strategic Lead for Information Management, to introduce the report. The Officer provided a brief summary of the report highlighting that complaint volumes had reduced significantly, performance had dipped by 4% and the percentage of upheld complaints had increased upon last year. The Officer then stated that for Members Enquiries 94% had been responded to in timeframe and that there had been room for improvement in responding to MP and MEP Enquiries, where performance had hit 77%.

The Chair asked why there had been such a dip in performance. The Officer stated that there was a significant volume of activities being undertaken in terms of Complaints, Enquiries, SAR's and FOI's; and that this was impacting officer capacity.

Councillor Gerrish queried the lifecycle of a complaint, and where specifically in the cycle was the delay occurring. The Officer stated that a number of factors had caused apparent delays, including a reduction in the timeframe and the volume of activities being sent to services. The Officer also stated that he felt the performance target of 95% was too high. Lastly, the Officer noted that performance was up this year, although not in the period which the report covered.

Councillor Johnson stated that he felt "percentage upheld" was a poor measure of performance, as 1 upheld complaint, out of a total of 1 complaints would show as 100% of complaints upheld, and this would be misleading. The Officer stated that the service level "Dashboards" in the Appendices provided a more accurate breakdown and measure of performance, and that percentage upheld was used to provide a general overview.

Councillor Gerrish commented that the volume of complaints around bin collections had increased, as had the percentage of upheld complaints. The Councillor asked if this was showing any signs of improvement. The Officer stated that there had been no improvement and more work was required in this area.

RESOLVED:

The Standards and Audit Committee noted the statistics and performance for this reporting period.

20. Work Programme

No changes to the proposed Work Programme were requested.

The meeting finished at 7.27 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**