

Audit Committee and Audit Committee (Advisory) - 15 November 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee and Audit Committee (Advisory) held at Islington Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 15 November 2022 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillors: Nick Wayne (Chair), Flora Williamson (Vice-Chair), Janet Burgess MBE and Sara Hyde,

Independent members: Alan Begg and Alan Finch

Councillor Nick Wayne in the Chair

27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

None.

28 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

None.

29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

None.

30 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

Matter arising

Minute 18 (e) – Review of Audit Committee’s terms of reference – Noted that the updated terms of reference had not yet been circulated to members of the Committee for further review and approval before the Council meeting in December 2022. The clerk undertook to follow this up with the Committee Services Manager.

31 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES - FINSBURY PARK WARD (Item B1)

RESOLVED:

(a) That the changes to polling districts and polling places detailed in paragraph 3.6 of the report of the Director of Law and Governance be approved.

(b) That the comments/representations received from councillors and residents, also detailed in paragraph 3.6 of the report, be noted.

(c) That thanks be expressed to the Election Team for their work and in particular the efficient running of the Elections held in May 2022.

32 THE COUNCIL'S USE OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS (Item B2)

The Committee noted the following:

- The good progress to date against the actions in the action plan and that the last audit had been undertaken in July 2021 by the Housing Investigations Team. As a result of that particular audit, the manager had checked all the data, reduced hard copies and ensured that electronic RIPA data was available
- That training had taken place across the Council, with an emphasis on reaching as many officers in different services as possible.
- That the pandemic had been a major factor in the reduction of the number of cases of direct surveillance in the past two and a half years. Council officers were now resuming its use.
- That ultimate responsibility for ensuring that proper checks were in place where RIPA authority should have been sought, lay with the FRO. This ensured no breaches. Safeguards were in place to ensure the use of RIPA if required in the case of prosecutions.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the level of directed surveillance undertaken by the Council and detailed in the report of the Corporate Director of Resources be noted.

(b) That the recent developments in the Council's arrangements to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, also detailed in the report, be noted.

33 ANNUAL STANDARDS AND MEMBERS' CONDUCT REPORT (Item B3)

Members asked particular questions in relation to complainant 2 and 4, detailed in paragraph 3.9 of the report of the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, as to what further enquiries had been made to elicit further information from those complainants. They also asked about support offered to a member of the public who wished to make a complaint about a councillor, including a member of the public who had been known to make vexatious complaints against the Council/councillors and possibly had a restraining order preventing them from approaching the Council. The Senior Lawyer (Governance), who was in attendance, undertook to provide responses to Members outside of the meeting.

Councillor Hyde detailed the greatly expanded programme of training opportunities for councillors, all facilitated by the recently appointed Member Development Officer. This included bespoke requests from councillors and external courses covering such topics as licensing law, data protection, scrutiny and safeguarding. The councillors' training programme would develop in the coming years and was part of the programme to have a leading Council providing good services to residents.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report of the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, detailing standards of member conduct, a summary of complaints received under the Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure and their outcome, information on member training and development and declarations of interest, be noted.

34

UPDATE ON THE LOCAL AUTHORITY EXTERNAL AUDIT MARKET AND APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS FROM 2023 (Item B4)

The following points were noted during discussion:

- A question was asked as to whether the rise in fees would also apply to the audit of the Pension Fund and what the likely cost would be. The Deputy Director of Finance undertook to check this, noting that the costs would be recharged to the Fund
- The PSAA anticipated that fees were likely to increase by up to 150% from the previous year to ensure that the audit process was robust and provided assurance to the public and that the audit was conducted in a timely manner
- Although no additional services would be provided by KPMG, the provisionally appointed auditor to the Council, it was anticipated that their services would be of better quality and timely

The Director of Finance detailed progress on the 21/22 audit process by Grant Thornton, the current Council auditor. The Council was supplying the required information to the auditor as swiftly as possible, but the levels of thresholds for the auditors to meet to satisfy themselves that the accounts were in order had increased, meaning that their work was taking longer. The aim was to have the accounts available for consideration at the Audit Committee on 30 January 2023.

RESOLVED:

(a) That it be noted that KPMG had been proposed as the new audit firm from 2023/24 for both the Council and the Pension Fund.

(b) That it be noted that the scale of fees was anticipated to rise by approximately 150%, meaning an increase from approximately £180k to £450K and from £250k to £625k for variations in 2021.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

CHAIR