

AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Meeting - 17 January 2019

Present: D Anthony (Chairman)
L Hazell, P Hogan and R Sangster

Apologies for absence: G Hollis

86. MINUTES

The minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 27 September 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

88. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON

The Committee received a report recommending that the term of office of one of the Council's Independent Persons, Mr Trevor Dobson be extended until 31 March 2020. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that Mr Dobson's current term of office finishes in July 2019. The process for recruiting new independent persons required the Council to advertise this role in the local press which was costly and interest from the public had previously been very limited. Due to the proposals for local government re-organisation in Buckinghamshire it would only be feasible to offer the role to any new recruit until the end of the Shadow Period on 31 March 2020. Extending Mr Dobson's term of office for a further 9 months would ensure that the Council continued to have two experienced Independent Persons available to deal with any complaints received and to comply with the requirements of the Employment Procedure Amendment Regulation 2015 (dismissal of statutory officers). The Council appointed Mr Hopkins as the second Independent Person in January 2017 and his term of office would continue until the new Unitary District Council commenced on 1 April 2020.

RECOMMENDED that Full Council agree to extend the terms of office of Mr Trevor Dobson until 31 March 2020.

89. STANDARDS WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the Standards Work Programme. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that because the May elections had been postponed for a year the report on standards training for new Members had been deleted. However, if Committee Members would value a training refresh they should inform Democratic Services. At the next meeting the final Work Programme would be presented leading up to the new authority in 2020.

A Member asked whether it was possible to have a by-election with the current Parliamentary process for a new Unitary District Council and was informed by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services that a by-election could be arranged up until 30 September 2019. If a casual vacancy occurred after this date then an election cannot be held unless one third of the seats remained vacant. If any new Members were elected then induction training would be organised.

A Member referred to complaints monitoring and it was noted that a report was submitted to the Committee annually on the number and type of complaints including breach of the Code and any investigations. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that it had been a busy year for complaints (10 complaints) but that number related to a similar issue. Reference was made to a Parish Council complaint and Members were informed that a response to this would be made by end of January 2019.

RESOLVED that the Standards Work Programme be agreed.

90. **INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee received the Internal Audit Progress Report 2018/19. Chris Harris, TIAA Internal Auditors presented the report. He made one amendment with regard to point two in the report on progress against the 2018/19 Annual Plan - the final sentence should say that three audits were finalised in the period and there was only one priority 2 recommendation. He informed Members that some changes had been made to the audit plan for 2018/19 as some audits were no longer required as they were being covered by other reviews. Members noted that the current risk procedures/guidance was being reviewed. With regard to budgetary control a draft report had been issued on 20 December 2018.

A Member referred to the terminology with regard to a reasonable or substantial evaluation. This terminology highlighted in generic terms the seriousness of the audit findings and what sort of escalation was required to provide a level of assurance. The Member then asked a further question on sickness absence and whether this had improved. The Director of Resources commented that this information was reported to the Joint Staffing Committee but figures at the end of December 2018 showed a great improvement. In response to another question he also commented that there had been no impact on staff turnover since the unitary announcement.

Reference was made to the use of purchase cards which were a high risk area. Chris Harris TIAA Internal Auditors emphasised the importance of the appropriate amount of checks and balances being undertaken by Senior Officers and that staff should be reprimanded if they mis-used their card.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

91. **INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL AND STRATEGIC PLAN 2019/20**

The Committee received the Internal Audit Annual and Strategic Plan 2019/20. Chris Harris, TIAA Internal Auditors reported that this would be the last Plan before the new Unitary District Authority was in place. A Member asked about final audits before the transition to a new Council. Chris Harris TIAA Internal Auditors reported that all Councils would have to produce their final accounts and the normal audit process for that would take place to produce a final auditing position which would highlight any concerns regarding any weaknesses in control. New audit arrangements would be made by the new Unitary District Authority.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

92. **AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Audit Committee Work Programme was noted. The External Auditors reports on the Certification of Claims and Returns Annual Report and the Annual Audit Plan would be submitted to the March meeting. The Programme of Work in the lead up to the new Authority would be reduced.

The meeting terminated at 6.25 pm