

Audit Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Audit Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **1st October 2019**.

Present:

Cllr. Krause (Chairman);
Cllr. Link (Vice-Chairman);
Cllrs. Campkin, Hayward, Mulholland, Smith, C Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (c) Councillor Campkin attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Wright.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Shorter, Wright.

Also Present:

Cllr. Bell.

Director of Finance & Economy, Head of Finance and IT, Head of Audit Partnership, Audit Manager (Interim), Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Investigation and Enforcement Support Manager, Governance & Data Protection Officer, Member Services Officer.

Engagement Lead – Grant Thornton UK.

147 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 30th July 2019 be approved and confirmed as a correct record, subject to the deletion of the words 'Audit Manager' in the title of Minute Number 98 Declarations of Interest.

148 Internal Audit Charter

The Head of Audit Partnership advised that the Charter set out the purpose, authority and responsibility of the Council's internal audit service. The Charter was agreed a year ago and was before the Committee for an annual review. There were no significant changes. Once the Charter had received Member endorsement, it would confirm the ability of Auditors to have full, free and unrestricted access to all works, records, property and personnel as required.

Resolved:

That the Committee approves the Internal Audit Charter.

149 Enforcement Support & Investigations Team Annual Report 2018/19

The Investigation and Enforcement Support Manager introduced the report. The layout of the report had been amended and highlighted the savings direct to Ashford Borough Council. She advised that the Council received a grant from the East Kent Authorities for £46,000 and this would be used to perform investigations for those authorities.

In response to a question the Investigation and Enforcement Support Manager advised that the Team did not support the Winter Night Shelter, however, they worked to ensure that sublet properties or those that were misused were returned to the Council's stock to be used by those in need. A 'Key Amnesty' had been undertaken which had resulted in 10 keys being returned which would allow those properties to be released for people on the waiting list. The Director of Finance & Economy drew attention to the Homelessness Reduction Act and the areas of responsibility for the Council and that the Team also worked with the Housing Service to ensure that applications under the act were valid. The Investigation and Enforcement Support Manager further advised that if someone presented as homeless, the Team operated alongside the Housing Team and would carry out their investigation alongside the process. There would be no delay in the process by the undertaking of their investigation.

The Team has been working to combat Rogue Landlords and there was work ongoing in respect of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) to ensure that the correct licenses were in place, as part of their duty to tenants.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

150 Corporate Risk Register

The Compliance and Data Protection Manager introduced the report. Given this was the first time it had been presented to the Committee since the election, she highlighted the approaches taken to risk in respect of strategic, financial and operational areas. A recent audit had highlighted the requirement for further training on risk and building risk reporting into Cabinet reports, both of which would be carried forward. The Director of Finance & Economy clarified the differences in risk pertaining to the Council's Risk Registers and those that were perceived as a risk to an audit.

A Member questioned whether the role of the Committee included the assessment of risks prior to decisions taken on projects by the Cabinet. The Director of Finance & Economy advised that the risk of any project would be included within the report to the Committee taking that decision. Officers, when preparing the report, would undertake a risk assessment, assess the risk register and incorporate such risks into the report itself. The Head of Audit Partnership further explained that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held the remit for examining decisions taken should there be

concerns. The Audit Committee's role was to ensure the controls in place were true and correct.

In response to a question, the Compliance and Data Protection Manager advised that the 'downturn in economy' had been on the risk register for a considerable period. This was a long term risk that was continually tracked. The Head of Finance & IT added that Ashford was no different from other towns in respect of the slow down of the economy. There were other factors to consider, including the political climate and the EU exit. The Council had been planning for the UK leaving the EU and a presentation would be given to Members prior to the Cabinet meeting later in the month. Officers worked closely with ArlingClose, the Council's treasury advisors, and managed the debt portfolio. There were risks to the Council in the event of a downturn, namely Council Tax, car parking and homelessness. Whilst these could not be fully safeguarded against, there were plans in place to mitigate the impact.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Risk Register, the assessments and key controls to manage the risks be noted.

151 2018/19 Annual Audit Letter

The Engagement Lead – Grant Thornton UK drew attention to the Annual Audit Letter, which summarised the outcome of the Audit. The only changes to note were the date on which the opinion had been issued and the additional fees and work undertaken.

The Chairman wished to put on record his support for the findings and conclusions within the letter and felt that this reflected the work undertaken by the Finance Team. This was a 'clean bill of health' and was satisfying for all.

Resolved:

That the 2018/19 Annual Audit Letter be noted.

152 Report Tracker for Future Meetings

The Member Services Officer drew Members' attention to the Tracker. The item on Brexit would remain on the agenda for the foreseeable future at the request of the Committee.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Meetings be noted.

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