

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 October 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr J Beesley – Chairman

Cllr L Williams – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr M F Brooke, Cllr D Butt, Cllr L Fear, Cllr A Filer,
Cllr S McCormack and Cllr T Trent

26. Apologies

At the commencement of the meeting the Chairman welcomed new members to the Committee and recorded his thanks for past service and contribution from Councillors Marcus Andrews, Mike Cox, Beverley Dunlop and Mike White who were standing down.

The Chairman also welcomed the recently appointed BCP Council Monitoring Officer, Susan Zeiss, to her first meeting of the Committee.

Apologies were received from Councillor David Brown.

27. Substitute Members

There were no substitutions.

28. Declarations of Interests

Councillor Lawrence Williams declared an interest as a Trustee of a Care Home in Westbourne.

29. Confirmation of Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting on 10 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

30. Public Issues

There were no public issues.

31. 2019/20 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman annual report

The Director of Organisational Development presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Committee was reminded that the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) provided an independent and impartial service to

investigate complaints about Councils, or actions taken by another body on behalf of the Council.

It was explained that the LGSCO provided a report annually which detailed the number of enquiries, investigations and resolved complaints for each authority in the past financial year. BCP Council's annual report had been circulated to the Committee.

The 2019/20 report showed that the number of enquiries to the LGSCO had risen slightly, as had investigations, but that there had been a fall in the number of investigations upheld by the Ombudsman to 50%. The report included an analysis of the complaints subject to detailed investigation and a summary of the financial implications arising.

It was reported that there were no identifiable trends in the subjects of complaints and that all recommendations had been actioned to the Ombudsman's satisfaction. There were no major concerns relating to LGSCO findings and BCP Council was performing well in relation to the national picture.

Members raised questions about comparison with previous years. It was explained that direct comparison with previous years was difficult as the earlier figures related to the three legacy Councils rather than to BCP Council although, going forward, year by year outcomes and trends would be a key part of the annual reporting process.

The Committee requested that they receive clarification of certain identified data within the report and the detailed Ombudsman report in addition to the summary already supplied to them. Undertakings were given to provide the information requested.

RESOLVED that Members of the Audit and Governance Committee note the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Reports for 2019/20.

Voting: Unanimous

32. Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2019/20

The Director of Organisational Development presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Committee received the 2019/20 Equality & Diversity report which provided an overview of the work undertaken by BCP Council to meet its responsibilities under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty.

It was reported that BCP Council's equality commitments were embedded throughout the Council's corporate strategy and delivery plans and equality and diversity actions were captured in a council-wide Equality & Diversity Action Plan. The Plan had been circulated with the report and was built

around the requirements for achieving the 'excellent' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government and the Council.

Progress was described as good against the 152 identified individual actions. Members were also reminded of the recent appointment of Councillor Bobbie Dove as Cabinet Lead on Equalities and the opportunity for her to be involved in future monitoring by the Committee was identified.

The Chief Executive chaired the Strategic Equality Leadership Group as part of the agreed governance framework with the objective of strengthening strategic direction and monitoring performance. The Equality and Diversity Action Plan had been submitted to the Equality Action Commission in September 2020 and challenge by the Commission was expected to strengthen performance.

Members highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Action Planning process reflected what was being achieved across the whole Council and an undertaken was given to provide the Committee, in due course, with assessment of action elsewhere in the Council that was also making a contribution but not shown in the central Action Plan. There was reference to particular initiatives in progress across the BCP Council that would need to be potentially referenced within the Action Plan.

The Committee also highlighted the potential for a more detailed examination of the subject at a future 'extra' Audit and Governance Committee meeting where the Lead Member could also be involved. This was also identified as a process for identifying any further information and governance focussed issues that the Committee might consider should be included within the Action Plan. Undertakings were given to discuss this and report back on progress to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

RESOLVED that the Audit and Governance Committee

- a) note the Equality & Diversity 2019/20 End of Year Performance Report.**
- b) note the changes to the Equality & Diversity Governance Framework.**
- c) give further consideration at a future meeting to identification any further equality and diversity information that the Committee might require.**

Voting: Unanimous

33. Governance of Corporate Health & Safety and Fire Safety

The Health and Safety Manager and the Fire Safety Manager presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report detailed progress made on the delivery of Health & Safety and Fire Safety governance arrangements for BCP Council highlighting particularly the steps taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the

ongoing subsequent progress towards recovery. The report also explained the framework of governance arrangements in place and the process for reporting of health and safety and fire safety issues to the Health & Safety and Fire Safety Board. Progress on development of essential corporate procedures within the new BCP Council context was explained and an appraisal of the human resources available within the team was also presented.

It was reported that, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the Health & Safety and Fire Safety Board scheduled for July had been postponed and instead, an interim report provided to the Director's Strategy Group to ensure governance of Health & Safety and Fire Safety was reported and discussed. During that meeting, it was agreed that the next Health & Safety and Fire Safety Board would take place on 28th September 2020 and remain quarterly moving forward.

The current development schedule and progress against each objective was reported. It was clear that significant progress on delivery of safety arrangements had been made notwithstanding the pandemic and the Committee recorded their appreciation of the work being undertaken behind the scenes to ensure that these essential arrangements were fit for purpose.

A note about the Fire Safety Bill, introduced into the House of Commons in March 2020, had been circulated and the intention of new legislation was to bring into effect regulations recommended through the Grenfell Tower inquiry relating to buildings in multiple occupation.

RESOLVED that

- a) Health & Safety and Fire Safety on-going governance arrangements are reported annually to the Audit and Governance Committee.**
- b) Audit and Governance Committee note the continued progress in implementing the Health and Safety and Fire Safety governance arrangements, along with the significant contributions made towards managing the risks from the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Voting: Unanimous

34. Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Annual Update (from November 19 to October 20)

The Head of Audit and Management Assurance presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Committee received a comprehensive high-level overview of the scale and nature of the COVID-19 response, from a governance perspective and

emergency planning and business continuity activity in BCP Council over the reporting period had been dominated by COVID-19.

The specific responses were set out and explained and leadership and management had been successfully delivered in line with established corporate planning and business continuity arrangements. The specific implementation of overview within service areas was also described. In Social Care these included strategic level co-ordination provided through a multi-agency group overseeing Adult Social Care. There were also key roles within the context of Local Outbreak Management Plans and through bodies such as the Dorset Civil Contingencies Unit.

It was clear that plans already in place had worked well and that many of the practical lessons learnt during the pandemic could be carried forward and incorporated as part of future emergency planning processes. The report also explained the work undertaken through the Dorset Resilience Forum and listed a wide range of sub-groups and workstreams in which officers from BCP Council had played a significant participating role.

The report also set out the environment of business as usual which had continued in parallel and identified concurrent and future risks. Significant work had been undertaken by the Emergency Planning Team on a revised resilience governance framework for Emergency Planning generally and this now represented a clear statement of roles and responsibilities across the BCP Council. The full framework document had been circulated with the agenda. The report also highlighted additional challenges and aspirations going forward.

RESOLVED that Audit and Governance Committee

- a) note the significant emergency and business continuity response to COVID-19 to date undertaken by BCP Council alongside multi-agency partners.**
- b) note the new resilience governance framework.**
- c) note the forward issues identified for the remainder of the year.**

Voting: Unanimous

35. Risk Management – Corporate Risk Register Update

The Risk and Insurance Manager presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'E' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided an update for the Committee on the BCP Council Corporate Risk Register and in particular the comprehensive review of the Risk Register to incorporate the COVID-19 risks and to reflect the whole BCP Council picture within a single plan.

Members were reminded of the Committee's specific contribution through a useful workshop session held during the summer and the issues highlighted then had now been incorporated. The register would now need to be reviewed again to reflect the second phase of the pandemic. The importance of setting out clearly the identified mitigation measures for each risk was underlined.

RESOLVED that the Audit and Governance Committee note the update provided in relation to the Corporate Risk Register.

Voting: Unanimous

36. Internal Audit - Quarterly Audit Plan Update

The Head of Audit and Management Assurance presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'F' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

To provide assurance about the effective management of corporate risks, the report detailed progress made on delivery of the 2020/21 Audit Plan for the period July to September (inclusive) of 2020.

The Committee was advised that eight audit assignments had been completed during the reporting period including one 'Substantial' and six 'Reasonable' summary opinions and one Consultancy Review.

Twenty-two audit assignments were reported to be in progress and implementation of audit recommendations was satisfactory.

This work had been achieved within the context of the pandemic although assurances were provided that, notwithstanding this, all instances or allegations of fraud, theft or financial wrongdoing had continued to be thoroughly investigated.

For six weeks during the period, the entirety of the Internal Audit team had been re-tasked to undertake verification work in association with the COVID 19 discretionary grant process although this work was now completed.

The Committee was also referred to the recently published 'Redmond Report' into the oversight of local audit and transparency of financial reporting and a link to the report and its recommendations had been set out in the agenda.

RESOLVED that Audit & Governance Committee note progress made and issues arising on the delivery of the 2020/21 Internal Audit Plan.

Voting: Unanimous.

37. Annual Review of Register of Declarations of Outside Interests and Receipts of Gifts & Hospitality by Officers (2019/20)

The Head of Audit and Management Assurance presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'G' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

It was explained that the 'BCP Council - Declaration of Interests, Gifts and Hospitality for Policy (for Officers)' had been introduced on 1st April 2020 and made provision for retrospective 'base' declarations dating back to the start of BCP Council on 1 April 2019. This replaced the arrangements for the first operating year of BCP Council when legacy Council policies and procedures had been followed by officers.

It was reported that an effective corporate wide roll-out of the new policy had taken place and assurance was provided that senior managers (tier4 officers and above) were complying with the requirements of the new Policy. The operation and effect of the new arrangements was explained, including a helpful example of the form of declaration required and this now represented a significance piece of the corporate governance framework.

It was noted that there had been no internal or external identified instances, whistleblowing or reports by any other means, where an un-declared interest had led to any disciplinary action or to reputational damage.

RESOLVED that Audit & Governance Committee note the annual review of Register of Declarations of Outside Interests and Receipts of Gifts & Hospitality by Officers (2019/20).

Voting: Unanimous

38. External Audit - Progress Report & Sector Update

The representatives from External Auditors, Grant Thornton, presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'H' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The reported provided an update on the External Auditor's progress to date in delivering their responsibilities and there was reference particularly to the difficulties faced nationally in completion of audits within the context of the national pandemic.

The report included a summary of emerging national issues and developments that may be relevant to the Council and an additional presentation covering the independent review by Sir Tony Redmond into the effectiveness of local audit and the transparency of financial reporting was also provided. Grant Thornton expected that the recommendations arising out of the Report would serve to make external audit much more useful to Councils whilst maintaining a robust audit regime and driving up quality.

RESOLVED that Audit & Governance Committee notes the External Auditor’s progress to date in delivering their responsibilities and the sector update provided including the review of the Redmond Report.

Voting: Unanimous.

39. Audit & Governance Committee Forward Plan (refresh)

The Head of Audit and Management Assurance presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'I' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report set out the reports to be received by the Audit & Governance Committee for the 2020/21 municipal year.

For new members of the Committee, the Chairman explained the style and purpose of the ‘extra’ meetings referred to in the Plan and the Chairman invited members of the Committee to suggest future items for consideration at those meetings. In the meantime, subjects initially included were further examination of the governance of ‘BH Live’ and also a consideration of the roles of members in Outside Bodies inherited from the legacy Councils. It was agreed that the number of ‘extra’ meeting issues ultimately identified would determine the number of meetings required during the next Municipal Year.

The Committee noted that the report from the Constitution Review Working Group completing its current tranche of review work would be submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee at its next meeting on 26 November 2020. The Chairman repeated his intention to canvas all members of Council to identify further issues for consideration by the Working Group going forward.

The Chairman also referred to the importance of ensuring that members of the Committee were as well trained as possible to most effectively consider the issues that came before the Committee. Members with particular ideas for training, including specific subject areas, areas of weakness or areas of future focus were invited to raise these with him. In the meantime, the Chairman was addressing this subject with the Monitoring Officer and undertook to report back to the Committee.

The Head of Audit and Management Assurance reported the intention to provide an awareness session later in the year for the Committee around the subject of detection of fraud. He also referred to the CIPFA best practice model for Audit and Governance Committees as previously used by the Committee for self-assessment of its performance in certain areas of its work.

RESOLVED that, subject as above, the Audit & Governance Committee approves the forward plan set out at Appendix A.

Voting: Unanimous

40. Annual Report of Internal Audit Counter Fraud Work and Whistleblowing Referrals 2019/20

The Head of Audit and Management Assurance presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'J' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report detailed counter fraud work carried out by Internal Audit to provide assurance on the Council's response to combating fraud and corruption.

It was reported that Internal Audit have investigated all allegations of suspected fraud or financial irregularity in a proportionate manner. Four whistleblowing referrals for the Council had been received and investigated by Internal Audit during 2019/20.

RESOLVED that Audit & Governance Committee note

- a) The counter fraud work & investigations carried out by Internal Audit during 2019/20.**
- b) The whistleblowing referrals received during 2019/20.**

Voting: Unanimous.

The meeting ended at 8.08 pm

CHAIRMAN