

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 07 September 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr M Andrews – Chairman

Cllr E Connolly – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr J Beesley, Cllr B Castle, Cllr A Chapmanlaw, Cllr R Herrett,
Cllr M Phipps and Cllr C Weight

Also in attendance: Cllr M Cox

19. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence on this occasion.

20. Substitute Members

There were no appointed substitutes.

21. Declarations of Interests

Councillor J Beesley declared an interest in Minute No. XX (External Audit – Auditor’s Annual Report 2021/22 & 2022/23 (Value for money arrangements report)). Councillor Beesley remained present and made the following statement.

‘For transparency, at item 6 on the agenda, the External Auditor has referenced a property owned by a client of mine in his report, although it is not a matter in which I am involved for my client.’

22. Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

23. Public Issues

Members were advised that there had been no statements or petitions submitted on this occasion but that two questions had been received from a member of the public.

Question from Alex McKinstry

The report on the Constitution, which backdrops Item 7 on tonight's agenda, looks at rebranding the Corporate and Community O & S Committee, renaming it "the Overview and Scrutiny Board" and increasing its meetings from five to ten in any municipal year. So we are told on page 81 of tonight's reports pack (paragraph 16, third bullet point). But then, in the "proposed

model" on page 88 and in the proposed rewording of the Constitution, Article 6.3.1(a), we are told that meetings will increase to twelve in any municipal year. Can the Chair confirm which is the correct proposed figure - ten or twelve?

Response by the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee, Councillor Andrews

Thank you for question Mr McKinstry. I can confirm that the reference to ten meetings in paragraph 16 to this report is incorrect and that this should read twelve meetings, in line with the remainder of the report.

Question from Alex McKinstry

The same report states that the cost of additional meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, excluding any increase in the Chair's SRA, would be £14,700 per year. But then in paragraph 27 we read that "if the wider changes to committees are introduced", the additional costs would rise to something like £56,000 per year. I'm assuming - though correct me if I'm wrong - that these "wider changes to committees" comprise the proposed changes to the Planning Committee, community engagement, models of governance and Traffic Regulation Order decision-making, all alluded to in paragraph 11 of the report. Can the Chair confirm whether this is correct and can we also have a description of what changes are being considered for these other committees and processes, as this is the first I've heard of them?

Response by the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee, Councillor Andrews

Thank you again for your question Mr McKinstry. The additional costs highlighted in paragraph 27 would support the potential changes to the Planning Committee and traffic regulation order decision-making arrangements. The details of these arrangements have not yet been determined and do not form part of these papers. It would not be appropriate to speculate at this stage on these matters but I can advise that it is the intention that a separate report will be brought to this committee in November for consideration.

24. External Audit - Auditor's Annual Report 2021/22 & 2022/23 (Value for money arrangements report)

The Chairman introduced the 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.

Following the introduction from the Chairman the External Auditor provided further background.

Members were advised that the External Auditor, Grant Thornton for BCP Council, is required to consider whether the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness its use of resources.

In relation to this Members were advised that auditors are required to report their commentary under specific criteria, namely financial sustainability,

governance and improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness. They are required to report on any significant weaknesses they identify.

Members were informed that the External Auditor had produced a 2021/22 and 2022/23 Annual Report which had identified the following weaknesses:

| Criteria | Risk assessment |
|---|---|
| Financial sustainability | Risks identified relate in the main due to uncertainties in relation to the Councils Medium Term Financial Plans and associated transformation programme and delivery of savings. |
| Governance | Significant risks identified in Governance in relation to leadership, partnerships and the Transformation programme |
| Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness | Risk identified because of the inadequate rating issued by Ofsted in respect of children in care |

Five significant weaknesses have been identified and have resulted in 5 key recommendations being made.

A further 13 improvement recommendations have been made. The Council has provided the External Auditor with management responses to all the recommendations.

The External Auditor has made a contextual comment that the May 2023 election has resulted in a change of political administration and an apparent change in financial strategy which will set a new tone from the top and will be an opportunity to address some of the issue raised in their report.

Members of the Audit and Governance Committee discussed the report specifically around the identified weaknesses and the proposed improvements.

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the findings, recommendations and management comments in relation to the External Auditor's Annual Report 2021/22 and 2022/23 (Value for Money arrangements report) were noted; and**
- (b) the unusual approach of reporting both the 2021/22 and 2022/23 years as an agreed pragmatic approach to resolve and 'catch-up' on recent historic delays within the external audit process was noted.**

Voting: Unanimous

25. Review of the Council's Constitution - Recommendations of the Constitution Review Working Group

The Head of Democratic Services 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.

Members were requested to discuss the issues considered by the Constitution Review Working Group and the series of recommendations which had arisen.

In relation to this Members were advised that the recommendations included the proposed changes to the overview and scrutiny arrangements.

Further to this Members were informed that any recommendations arising from the Committee shall be referred to full Council for adoption.

Following the introduction, the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, Councillor Margaret Phipps highlighted the main areas of discussion raised by the Working Group and in proposing the recommendations set out within the report proposed an additional recommendation (a)(ii) as follows: -

(a)(ii) subject to approval of a(i) above, authority to agree the calendar of meeting dates for the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the remainder of 2023/2024 be delegated by Council to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

The Committee discussed the recommendations in detail and in relation to this requested that each of the recommendations be discussed and voted on separately.

In relation to recommendation (c) Members stressed that the presumption was still against the altering of meetings but that the proposal sought to clarify when it may be appropriate to alter the date, time or venue of a meeting of council and the process to be followed.

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) (i) in relation to Issue 1 (Overview and Scrutiny Structure and Arrangements) the proposed amendments to Parts 2, 3, 4 and 7, as set out in Appendix 3 to this report, be approved with an implementation date of 29 September 2023;**
- (ii) subject to approval of a(i) above, authority to agree the calendar of meeting dates for the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the remainder of 2023/2024 be delegated by Council to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.**
- (b) in relation to Issue 2 (salary Sacrifice Scheme for Councillors): -**
 - (i) the proposed amendment to insert a new Section 8 into Part 7 (Scheme of Members' Allowances), as set out in paragraph 35 to this report, be approved;**
 - (ii) the Chief Executive be delegated authority to determine from time-to-time which benefit schemes are to be made available to councillors;**

- (c) in relation to Issue 3 (Schedule of Council Meetings – Change of Date, Time and Venue), the amendment to Part 4D, Procedure Rule 1, as set out in paragraph 39 to this report, be approved; and**
- (d) any necessary and consequential technical and formatting related updates and revisions to the Constitution be made by the Monitoring Officer in accordance with the powers delegated.**

Voting: (a) – (d) Unanimous

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm

CHAIRMAN