

CIVIC AFFAIRS

16 September 2015
6.00 - 8.00 pm

Present: Councillors McPherson (Chair), Benstead (Vice-Chair), Cantrill, Robertson and Sinnott

Officers Present:

Chief Executive: Antoinette Jackson

Head of Internal Audit: Steve Crabtree

Business and Development Manager: Jenna Buividas-Varga

Electoral Services Manager: Vicky Breeding

Democratic Services Manager: Gary Clift

Principal Accountant (Technical & Financial Accounting): Charity Main

Committee Manager: Sarah Steed

Others Present:

Director of Ernst & Young: Mark Hodgson

Independent Person: Sean Brady

Deputy Independent Person: Rob Bennett

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

15/44/Civ Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Holt and Councillor Pitt attended as the alternate.

15/45/Civ Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

15/46/Civ Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 26 June 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

15/47/Civ Public Questions

There were no public questions.

15/48/Civ Statement of Accounts 2014-15

The committee received a report from the Principal Accountant (Technical & Financial Accounting) regarding the external audit conclusions and approval of the statement of accounts.

In response to members' questions the Principal Accountant (Technical & Financial Accounting) and the Director of Ernst and Young said the following:

- i. In relation to note 34 what constitutes a financial instrument is laid down in accounting standards and CIPFA guidance. In relation note 34, the financial instruments were specifically categorised and were specific to an asset when over classification was looked at.
- ii. Not all debtors and creditors were defined as financial instruments.
- iii. Some items that were included as financial instruments in the disclosure note in the draft accounts should not have been, for example deferred receipts in respect of housing redevelopment schemes. The restatement had no impact on the core financial statements.
- iv. Closing systems had been good, and the issues in respect of budgetary forecasting had no impact on closing the accounts. This was addressed in the audit letter last year.
- v. The Principal Accountant (Technical & Financial Accounting) had prepared a good set of working papers. When substantial knowledge was held by one individual this did represent a key person dependency but as closing the accounts was specialist in nature this was not uncommon. The Head of Finance added that the future development of a Finance shared service could help to address these concerns.
- vi. Business rate appeals for doctor's surgeries had been settled in excess of those amounts previously envisaged in the draft accounts.
- vii. Compared to other Councils, the City Council's accounts in terms of robustness and quality were in the upper quartile.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Receive the audit findings presented by Ernst and Young.
- ii. Approve the Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2015.
- iii. Authorise the Chair of the meeting to sign the Letter of Representation and Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2015 on behalf of the Council.

15/49/Civ Internal Audit Plan 2015 / 2016: Progress

The committee received a progress report from the Head of Internal Audit regarding the Internal Audit Plan 2015/16.

In response to members' questions the Head of Internal Audit said the following:

- i. The audit of Safeguarding: Use of Volunteers had reviewed the vetting process that volunteers went through.
- ii. Significant progress had been made to resolve and finalise outstanding issues, particularly in relation to actions designated high importance.
- iii. The audit plan would start to include an estimate for the number of days set aside to review an issue compared to the actual number of days actually taken to resolve the issue.
- iv. Agreed to ensure that Executive Councillors were kept informed of outstanding audit actions.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Note progress against the original audit plan together with the associated assurance levels established.
- ii. Note the proposed amendments and re-phasing of the audit plan
- iii. Note progress on the delivery of prior agreed actions by management.

15/50/Civ Annual Complaints Report 2014-15

The committee received a report from the Business and Development Manager regarding the Annual Complaints and Feedback Report 2014-15.

In response to members' questions the Business and Development Manager and the Chief Executive said the following:

- i. Use of the GovMetric system started 3 years ago, this began with a touch screen method to rate services offered face to face, this was then extended to the telephone system and then to the website. The Council had received over 5000 positive comments and negative comments were assessed as to whether these should be escalated as formal complaints.
- ii. From the 1 April 2015 the responsibility for the content of webpages fell to individual departments to ensure these were kept up to date.
- iii. The Web Team had re-launched the Council's website so that the web pages contained information which was task based after feedback from customers.

- iv. Whilst an increase in complaints had been recorded this was thought to be due to the fact that the Council had made it easier for customers to provide comments for example through the GovMetric system.
- v. The number of complaints were still at low levels when the volume of complaints were considered against the number of transactions that the Council undertook.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Approve the draft Annual Complaints Report for 2014/15 for publication on the Council's website.

15/51/Civ Individual Electoral Registration/Review of 2015 Elections

The committee received a report from the Chief Executive regarding a review of the elections held in May 2015 and an update on Individual Electoral Registration.

In response to questions from Councillor Gehring the Chief Executive said the following:

- i. The Returning Officer exercised her judgement when considering whether to accede to a request for a re-count. There was no minimum percentage of voters which would trigger a re-count, the legislation required her to decide whether the request was reasonable. In this instance because of the size of the majority and the checks and balances that were undertaken as part of the count process she did not consider it to be reasonable to undertake a re-count.
- ii. The agents at the count were advised that the only option available to the challenge the decision of the Returning Officer was to submit an electoral petition.

In response to members' questions the Chief Executive and the Electoral Services Manager said the following:

- i. A mini count system was used in the May 2015 elections. Changes in legislation meant that counting could start in one ward before the whole of the verification process had been completed for all of the wards.
- ii. New Councillors were contacted to make them aware that they could request updated copies of the electoral register provided that the request was made in writing.

- iii. The City Council maintained links with other councils to share good practice, which included Oxford City Council. Oxford City Council removed approximately 10,000 electors who could not be verified in 2014 therefore the percentage of electors who were removed from the electoral role in 2015 looked smaller. The City Council had not removed people in 2014 so the numbers looked bigger now.
- iv. A lot of work had been done to encourage students from Cambridge University and Anglia Ruskin University to register to vote.
- v. Work had also been undertaken with care homes to develop electoral registration packs so that residents in care homes could register to vote.
- vi. In relation to residents that were at risk of domestic violence, the issue as to who had authority to authorise anonymous voting will be raised with the Cabinet Office.

Members requested that a further report on individual electoral registration was brought to the next Committee meeting. It was also requested that a report on the relocation of the election count venue was brought to Committee and this should include the positives, negatives and costings to use a different venue.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Note the issues raised in the report with regard to the Elections in 2015 and the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).
- ii. Ask the Returning Officer to bring a further report on individual electoral registration to the next Committee meeting. It was also requested that a report on the relocation of the count venue was brought to Committee and this should include the positives, negatives and costings to use a different venue.

15/52/Civ Meeting Calendar Report

The committee received a report from the Democratic Services Manager which sought views on the Council's meeting calendar for the Municipal Year 2016/17.

In response to members' questions the Democratic Services Manager said the following:

- i. The proposed Housing Scrutiny date in September 2016 would be moved to avoid a clash with the Liberal Democrat Party conference.
- ii. Area Committees dates were not shown on the calendar as Area Committees set their own dates. However a calendar had been produced

which included proposed dates for Area Committees and joint meetings with South Cambridgeshire District Council and the County Council and this could be circulated to members.

An amendment was proposed and unanimously approved in relation to recommendation 2ii that the calendar of meetings continued to go to Civic Affairs for approval.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. To delegate final approval of the calendars to the Chief Executive in consultation with Group Leaders no later than 31 October 2015.
- ii. To confirm that for future years the calendar of meetings should still be approved by the Civic Affairs Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

CHAIR