

CIVIC AFFAIRS

19 March 2014
6.00pm - 7.27 pm

Present: Councillors Rosenstiel (Chair), Benstead, Boyce, Herbert, Pitt and Ashton

Officers present:

Chief Executive: Antoinette Jackson
Director of Business Transformation: Ray Ward
Head of Legal Services: Simon Pugh
Head of Internal Audit: Steve Crabtree
Principal Auditor: Bridget Bishop
Committee Manager: Glenn Burgess

Director of Ernst & Young (External Auditors): Mark Hodgson
Deputy Independent Person: Rob Bennett

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

14/9/CIV Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Cantrill. Councillor Boyce attended as the alternate.

14/10/CIV Minutes of previous meeting

It was noted that Councillor Boyce had been omitted from the attendance list.

With this minor correction the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2014 were signed as a correct record by the Chair.

14/11/CIV Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

14/12/CIV Public Questions

There were no public questions.

14/13/CIV External Audit Plan

The committee received a report from the Director of Ernst & Young regarding the External Audit Plan.

In response to members' questions the Director of Ernst & Young said the following:

- i. An appropriate sum had been allocated in the budget for rating appeals.
- ii. The financial risks identified for Cambridge City Council would be applicable to any local authority across the country. However property values in Cambridge were more susceptible to change due to a more buoyant market.
- iii. A risk assessment had been undertaken on financial resilience and had not identified any significant risk. Therefore no additional audit fee had been proposed.
- iv. The External Audit Team work closely with the Council's Internal Audit Team.
- v. The Council had set its budget for 2014/15 and encountered no issues with the new process. Therefore no additional audit checks were proposed.
- vi. Property valuations had increased from last year but a net bottom line impact was not expected.

The committee noted the External Audit Plan.

14/14/CIV Internal Audit Plan & Strategy 2014 / 2015

The committee received a report from the Head of Internal Audit regarding the Internal Audit Plan & Strategy for 2014 / 2015.

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

- i. Whilst a restructure of the service had led to a reduction in posts (estimated days reduced from 891 to 678) the Audit Team were confident of completing all activities in the Plan.

Resolved (unanimously) to

- ii. Approve the Internal Audit Plan and Strategy 2014/15.
- iii. Note the internal documents on Internal Audit provision – the Audit Charter, Code of Ethics and Performance Indicators – as identified in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

14/15/CIV Constitution - Legislative Update

The committee received a report from the Head of Legal Services proposing an amendment to the Constitution to ensure compliance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014. The Regulations required that the minutes of Council budget meetings must record the names of those voting for or against decisions or who abstain from voting.

The Head of Legal Services circulated a further version of the recommended changes, which excluded references to precepts.

In response to members' questions the Head of Legal Services said the following:

- i. The need to record votes only applied to decisions of Full Council when setting the budget and Council tax. It did not apply to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- ii. Acknowledged Councillor Herbert's request for more information for Councillors about the nature of votes to which the new procedure applied prior to Full Council making a decision on 3 April 2014.

The committee requested the removal of references relating to 'members standing up' (32.1) and 'members rising in their places' (32.2). This was noted by the Head of Legal Services.

Resolved (unanimously) to

- i. Recommend that Council agrees to the changes to Part 4A of the Constitution set out in the Council agenda.

14/16/CIV Review of Standards Regime

The committee received a report from the Head of Legal Services reviewing the Council's standards regime.

Code of Conduct

An amended version of the Cambridge City Council Code of Conduct was circulated for comment. This replaced the earlier "ten principles of public life" with the seven principles now advocated by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The amended version also clarified points and corrected cross-references but did not make further substantive changes to the Code.

In response to members' questions the Head of Legal Services said the following:

- i. Agreed with Councillor Herbert that additional guidance for Councillors on potential 'danger zones' relating to the Code of Conduct may be beneficial. It was agreed that this would be included in the induction sessions for new Councillors. Existing Councillors would also be encouraged to attend for a refresher session.

The Chief Executive asked for views on the use of social media and if additional guidance for Councillors would be beneficial.

In response the committee made the following points:

- ii. Social media was a useful tool for engaging with the public and encouraging participation at meetings.
- iii. Raised concerns about inappropriate use of social media during meetings and the affect this may have on the debate in the Chamber.
- iv. There was an expectation from the public that Councillors use some form of social media and engage with residents via different mediums.
- v. If the Council filmed its meetings this may reduce the need for the use of social media during the debate.

- vi. The use of social media could be viewed differently depending on the type of meeting in which it was being used i.e. Council, Scrutiny or Regulatory.
- vii. Whilst strict rules for Councillors on the use of social media were not necessary, clearer guidance on the possible pitfalls would be beneficial.

The Chief Executive suggested that social media be covered as part of the 'danger zones' induction for Councillors. It was also suggested that good practice from the LGA Networked Councillor Programme could be shared with all Councillors.

Procedure on complaints

In response to members' questions the Head of Legal Services said the following:

- i. In July 2012 Council agreed that the Standards Sub Committee would consist of two Liberal Democrat Councillors and two Labour Councillors. Membership did not have to be restricted to those sitting on the Civic Affairs Committee.
- ii. A meeting of a Sub Committee had not yet been required.
- iii. The Sub Committee hearing process would be agreed at its first meeting.
- iv. The Independent Person would have an input into any hearing of the Standards Sub Committee.
- v. A few complaints had been received from members of the public and, to date, two formal investigations had been undertaken. On neither occasion had a breach of the Code of Conduct been found.
- vi. Agreed that members of the Sub Committee would need to be carefully chosen to avoid close links with the member whose conduct was the subject of complaint.
- vii. Agreed that additional guidance for all Councillors on the process would be beneficial.

In response to member's questions the Deputy Independent Person said the following:

- i. The process was working well and a good dialogue had been established with the Head of Legal Services.
- ii. Promoting the Code of Conduct to new Councillors was important.
- iii. Would be happy to meet informally with Councillors prior to a future Civic Affairs Committee meeting.

Dispensations

In response to member's questions the Head of Legal Services said the following:

- i. The Independent Persons would be consulted prior to any dispensation being granted.
- ii. The reasons for which a dispensation might be granted were included in the Localism Act and were very broad.

Resolved (unanimously) to

- i. Extend a formal invitation to the Council's Independent Persons, appointed under the Localism Act 2011, to attend, and contribute to, its meetings.
- ii. Recommend that Council amends the Code of Conduct by incorporating the seven principles of public life set out in section 3 of the officer's report and the additional changes set out in the Council agenda

The meeting ended at 7.27 pm

CHAIR