

CIVIC AFFAIRS

17 September 2014

6.00pm - 6.45 pm

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

Officers present:

Chief Executive: Antoinette Jackson

Director of Resources: Ray Ward

Head of Legal Services: Simon Pugh

Head of Internal Audit: Steve Crabtree

Head of Customer Services: Jonathan James

Principal Auditor: Bridget Bishop

Accountant (Projects and Publications): Charity Main

Committee Manager: Glenn Burgess

Others present:

Director of Ernst & Young: Mark Hodgson

Independent Person: Sean Brady

Deputy Independent Person: Rob Bennett

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

14/45/CIV Apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

14/46/CIV Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

It was agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2014 would be brought to the next meeting for approval.

14/47/CIV Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

14/48/CIV Public Questions

It was agreed that a public question from Mr Richard Taylor would be taken prior to the agenda item.

14/49/CIV Implementation of Internal Audit Agreed Actions

The committee received a report from the Head of Internal Audit regarding implementation of Internal Audit agreed actions.

In response to members' questions the Head of Internal Audit, the Principal Auditor and the Chief Executive said the following:

- i. As individual water meters were not present in all Council buildings it was not possible to accurately capture and monitor efficiency targets. This overdue audit action was therefore no longer applicable.
- ii. The lead officer assigned to the Fire Safety Management audit action had now left the Council. This action would be reassigned to the new Head of Service who would be in place by October 2014.
- iii. The lead officer assigned to the Property Security audit action had now left the Council. This action would be reassigned to a new lead officer in due course.
- iv. Internal audit were confident that any revised dates for completion of audit actions were achievable.

The committee thanked officers and welcomed the significant reduction in the number of overdue audit actions.

At the request of members it was agreed that an update on the implementation of agreed Internal Audit actions would be circulated to the committee on a quarterly basis.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Note the progress made on implementation of Internal Audit agreed actions.

14/50/CIV Statement of Accounts 2013/14

The committee received a report from the Accountant (Projects and Publications) regarding the statement of accounts 2013/14.

The committee received a report from the Director of Ernst & Young regarding the external audit conclusions.

In response to members' questions the Accountant (Projects and Publications) said the following:

- i. The following changes since the draft accounts presented to the committee in June have an impact on the Council's usable reserves:
 - £186,000 decrease in General Fund reserves as a result of an adjustment to the carrying value of the Council's LBI deposit.
 - a net £30,000 increase in General Fund earmarked reserves resulting from a £198,000 increase in safety net grant in respect of business rates retention and a £168,000 decrease reflecting an adjustment in respect of new car park equipment.
- ii. The business rates retention adjustment is a timing difference reflecting that whilst the council recognises the safety net payment in 2013/14, the deficit it is funding is recovered from the General Fund in future years. The car park equipment adjustment reflects expenditure which would otherwise have been recognised in 2014/15.

In response to members' questions the Chief Executive said the following:

- i. Despite changes to process and the management of the service the Finance Team had ensured a successful audit with no risks identified.
- ii. Further improvements to financial processes would be progressed by the new Head of Finance in due course.
- iii. Interim shared services with South Cambs District Council had assisted with the process and would help ensure resilience going forward.

The committee specifically thanked the Accountant (Projects and Publications) and welcomed the audit results.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Receive the audit findings presented by Ernst & Young.
- ii. Approve the Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2014.

- iii. Authorise the Chair to sign the Letter of Representation and audited Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2014 on behalf of the Council.

14/51/CIV Annual Complaints Report

The committee received a report from the Head of Customer Services regarding the annual complaints report.

The committee made the following comments:

- i. Whilst welcoming a 14% reduction in the number of complaints received it was noted that, as the reporting method had changed, it was difficult to directly compare against previous years. More useful comparisons would be possible from 2015/16 onwards.
- ii. Emphasised the importance of highlighting trends and identifying areas for organisational learning.

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

- i. Due to differences in demographics it was difficult to compare local authorities against one another with regards to complaints. Whilst no specific benchmarking had been undertaken, Cambridge City Council did not appear to be out of kilter with other authorities of a similar size.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Approve the Annual Complaints Report 2013-14 for publication on the Council's website.

14/52/CIV Constitution-changes to comply with legislation on recording officer decisions and recording meetings

Mr Taylor addressed the committee and made the following points:

- i. Welcomed the recent changes to the law regarding recording Council meetings and encouraged the committee to support the proposed changes to the Constitution.

- ii. Expressed disappointment that the new legislation and the guidance regarding provision for those not wanting to be filmed did not align with one another. Suggested that local authorities lobby the Government in order to address this.
- iii. Highlighted Cambridgeshire County Council's more open and welcoming approach to members of the public wishing to film and report on meetings. Suggested that the City Council's approach could be improved.

The committee received a report from Head of Legal Services regarding constitutional changes to comply with legislation on recording officer decisions and recording meetings.

Councillor Cantrill welcomed the report and supported Mr Taylor's comments. It was important that the Council was as open and transparent as possible and it was suggested that in-house webcasted should be investigated further.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Recommend Council to adopt the revised 'Part 4B- Access to Information Rules' set out in the appendix of the officer's report.
- ii. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to make consequential changes to other parts of the Constitution that refer to recording meetings and public speaking rights.

The meeting ended at 6.45 pm

CHAIR

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