

CIVIC AFFAIRS

27 September 2016

6.00 - 7.10 pm

Present: Councillors McPherson (Chair), Gawthrope, Holt, Robertson, Adey and Ratcliffe

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

16/85/Civ Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from the Independent Person and the Deputy Independent Person and Councillors Benstead and Cantrill. Councillors Adey and Ratcliffe attended as alternates.

16/86/Civ Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

16/87/Civ Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16/88/Civ Public Questions

There were 3 public questions submitted by Mr Taylor. The Chair permitted the questions to be put despite Mr Taylor being unable to attend. The reason being that the committee meeting had been re-scheduled from 14 September on account of the External Audit not being completed in time for that date.

The questions were put by the Committee Manger at the time the relevant agenda item was taken.

16/89/Civ Statement of Accounts 2015-16

The committee received a report from the Principal Accountant (Technical & Financial Accounting) regarding the external audit conclusions and approval of the statement of accounts. Two minor alterations to the Accounts since publication of the draft accounts in June were tabled for the Committee's

attention (inclusion of a note regarding the EU Referendum result and reference to the External Audit of Cambridgeshire's Local Government Pension Scheme).

Neil Harris representing the External Auditor Ernst and Young summarised the conclusions of the Audit and that an unqualified opinion will be given and an unqualified conclusion on value for money arrangements. It was a clean audit opinion which reflected well on the Council.

He apologised to the Committee for the inconvenience of postponing the meeting from 14 September by reason of the Audit being incomplete, however steps would be taken to ensure no repetition.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Receive the audit findings presented by Ernst & Young
- ii. Approve the Statement of Accounts for year ending 31 March 2016
- iii. Authorise the Chair to sign on behalf of the Council the Letter of Representation and Statement of Accounts year ending 31 March 2016.

16/90/Civ Internal Audit Plan 2016 / 2017: Progress Report

The committee received a progress report from the Head of Internal Audit regarding the Internal Audit Plan 2016/17.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Note progress against the original audit plan together with the associated assurance levels established.

16/91/Civ 2016 Review of Elections

Question from the public (Mr Taylor) but by committee manager. During the last election I attended the Guildhall to view a nomination form. I was informed by the officer who showed me the form that it would be an offence to photograph it and if I took a photograph of it the returning officer would call the police. I thought this was inappropriate and intimidating and an attempt to deter or obstruct scrutiny and reporting. I suggest councillors stress the importance of public scrutiny of elections and consider attitudes to

transparency when appointing officers to positions which means they are likely to be appointed as returning officers.

Vicky Breading the Council's Electoral Services Manager replied stating that she could not recall the detail of the event as expressed – but she apologised if she appeared intimidating. She advised the committee that the rights to inspect nomination papers varied by election. She was concerned to get across the point that when taking a copy, the individual became responsible for that data and subsequent misuse of it could be reported.

After the incident, she had sought clarification from the Electoral Commission (post elections) that where it is allowed in law to take a copy, they advised taking of a photograph would also be permitted.

The committee received a progress report from the Electoral Services Manager regarding the 2016 Review of Elections.

Members of the committee congratulated the Returning Officer and elections team on running both May combined elections and June Referendum successfully.

There were a number of contributions on the location of the Count Venue for future elections one covering preference to be at the Guildhall as it is central, extra costs associated with more staff and an external venue. The Chief Executive advised the committee that she would take into account the views expressed. As Returning Officer it was her decision rather than one for Members or the Committee. In her view if an external venue meant a quicker count with better facilities for participants, including approved observers, then that would be preferable to the Guildhall.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Note the report

16/92/Civ Polling District Review

The committee received a report from the Electoral Services Manager regarding the review of Polling Districts.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Conduct an interim review only for the necessary purpose of ensuring the proper administrative conduct of the 2017 county council elections.
- ii. Other amendments to polling district boundaries are not taken forward at this time but are included in the next compulsory review in 2018.

16/93/Civ Annual Complaints Report 2015-16

Public question from Mr Taylor put by the committee manager:

I am disappointed the annual complaints report doesn't identify the councillors against whom complaints have been made (and in some cases upheld). Given public money has been spent compiling reports and making recommendations in the cases of complaints against councillors I would like to see such reports published; they could help inform people's votes at future elections. I would like to see the costs of investigations pro-actively published too.

Answer provided by Tom Lewis the Council's Head of Legal Practice and Monitoring Officer. Reporting complaints against councillors, as included in the Annual Report on Complaints, is in line with statute and the Council's Constitution. Expenditure incurred on investigating a complaint over £500 is reported by the Council in line with Open Data.

The committee received a report from the Business and Development Officer regarding the Annual Complaints and Feedback Report 2015-16. A correction was noted on page 16 of the report where the number of stage 2 complaints for city homes should be 3 (not 12). Cllr Robertson stated that it is now two years since the Council has been inviting customers who telephone to make a comment be it a complaint or compliment. The first quarter for 2016/17 has shown a drop in complaints compared to the first quarter of 2015/16.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Consider the draft annual complaints report 2015/16 shown at appendix A and approve for publication on the Council's website.

16/94/Civ Annual Report on Freedom of Information, Data Protection and transparency

The committee received a report from the Head of Corporate Strategy regarding the Annual Report on Freedom of Information, Data Protection and transparency.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Note the Council's performance on transparency issues during 2015/16.

16/95/Civ Findings of the Review into Public Participation in the Council's Decision-Making

The committee received a report from the Head of Corporate Strategy regarding the Findings of the Review into Public Participation in the Council's Decision Making.

Members of the committee supported any new initiatives with young people in addition to what is recommended in the report.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

Accept the suggestions made by the Working Group, shown in the boxes in the paper, and that Executive Councillors for responsibility for areas where the suggestions fall are asked to take them on board and arrange to move them forward.

16/96/Civ Appointing Person: Arrangements for the Appointment of the External Auditor

The committee received a report from the Head of Finance regarding the options available to the Council regarding the adoption of an appointing person arrangement for the appointment of an external auditor for 2018/19 and later years.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

Recommend to Council the adoption of Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) as the appointing person for the Council subject to receiving a satisfactory invitation to opt into the PSAAs appointing person arrangements.

Delegate acceptance of the invitation to the Head of Finance (Council's s151 Officer)

16/97/Civ Meeting Calendar Report

Public question from Mr Taylor put by the committee manager. * I would like to suggest that the rules which apply to full council meetings are changed so that written responses are required to be provided to unreached public questions and that these are published along with the meeting papers on the council's website.

Answer by the committee manager - The Mayor asks Executive Councillors/Chairs to provide answers to those questions that have been not been put because time has run out. The Chair stated that when they were made available officers would put them on the website.

The committee received a report from the Democratic Services Manager regarding the Council's meeting calendar for the Municipal Year 2017/18.

Resolved (unanimously) to:

Delegate final approval to the Chief Executive in consultation with Group Leaders no later than 14 October 2016.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm

CHAIR