

CIVIC AFFAIRS

14 July 2021
5.30 - 6.23 pm

Present: Councillors Sargeant (Chair), Dalzell, Davey (Vice-Chair), Dryden, Flaubert and O'Reilly

Officers:

Head of Shared Internal Audit Service: Jonathan Tully

Electoral Services Manager: Vicky Breeding

Committee Manager: Claire Tunnicliffe

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

21/19/Civ Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Gehring, Councillor Dalzell attended as the alternate.

Apologies were also received from Robert Pollock, Chief Executive, Rob Bennett, Independent Person.

21/20/Civ Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

21/21/Civ Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 May and 27 May were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21/22/Civ Public Questions

No public questions were received.

21/23/Civ Review of Elections 2021

The Committee received a report from the Electoral Services Manager regarding the Review of Elections 2021

In response to the report the Committee thanked the Electoral Services Manager and the Electoral Team for the mammoth effort it had taken to organise the four elections during COVID-19, the hard work was appreciated.

The pandemic had disrupted the usual planning of the electoral process and staff were to be commended for the way in which they had ensured the delivery of a successful election(s). It was noted the additional work that had been carried out, the mitigation measures in place to safeguard both staff, politicians, and voters, making sure of social distancing at the polling booths and the count, the introduction of new ways of working while having to deal with the usual workloads.

The Electoral Services Manager confirmed the virtual briefings and staff training had worked well and welcomed the introduction of the timed delivery of nomination papers.

Confirmed that the Presiding Officer had the power to remove disruptive individuals off private land, whether inside or outside. If those individuals were on public land outside of the private boundary it would become a police matter.

The count venue had been relocated out of the Guildhall and feedback received from staff and election agents had been largely positive. Any negative feedback had stemmed from measures in place because of COVID-19 so could be addressed and dealt with in time for the next election count.

Due to the boundary changes there were relationships which were yet to be established with the administrators of the new polling stations, but these would develop with time.

In response to a question why residents living opposite St Philip Howard Polling Station could not use it. The Electoral Services Manager advised this would be looked into and a response given outside of the meeting.

Committee Manager note: St Philip Howard polling station was not a polling station on 6 May, as the Council had been refused use of it during the pandemic. This meant electors living nearby needed to be relocated to the next closest station. Following the polling district review, it was identified as the polling station for those in the immediate vicinity and barring no further

refusal by St. Phillip Howard, it will be those elector's polling station in May 2022.

The Electoral Services Manager asked for her thanks to be recorded for the work of Andrew Grant, Returning Officer (RO) and the support provided by the County RO. Also emphasised the resilience of the counting staff, and especially the count supervisors, who worked such long hours and maintained COVID-19 measures.

The Committee

NOTED the report.

21/24/Civ Internal Audit Plan 2021/22

The committee received a progress report from the Head of Internal Audit regarding the Internal Audit Plan 2021/2022 and current opinion on the control environment based on work from the last six months.

The Committee Manager read out a question on behalf of the Independent Person regarding duplicate payments. The Head of Internal Audit acknowledged there was an increased risk of duplicate payments during the pandemic with remote working. The Council had recently submitted payments data to the Cabinet Office through the National Fraud Initiative exercise and would investigate any potential duplicated payments. In addition, the Council was investigating ways to carry out more routine data matching using the IT systems already in place.

The financial statements and value for money position of local authorities, which the City Council shares services with, are reviewed by the External Auditors. Internal Audit will review shared services risks and systems where they are the lead authority. Assurance is provided in the Annual Governance Statement, and any significant issues would be reported.

Following a discussion on cyber security risk, the Head of Internal Audit agreed this was one of the biggest areas of risk. The assurance is provided by Huntingdonshire District Council as the lead authority for ICT. Different reviews were undertaken regularly to ensure robust measures were in place`.

Audits offered an opportunity to challenge, look for improvements and determine if working practices needed to be changed.

Noted the comment on partners, shared services, third parties and trading companies and the risks they presented to the City Council. This was a complex area due to the variety of different governance arrangements in place. The Council completes assurance mapping which evidences sources of assurance from partners as part of the Annual Governance Statement process

The Committee:

Resolved (unanimously) to:

- i. Approve the draft Audit Plan and Strategy; and
- ii. Approve the supporting Charter and the Code of Ethics.

The meeting ended at 6.23 pm

CHAIR