

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

Meeting of Audit Committee

Date: Wednesday, 10th January, 2024

Place: Committee Room 1 - Civic Suite

Present: Councillor M Terry (Chair)
Councillors L Burton, P Collins, M Dent, N Folkard, J Harland,
M O'Connor and Mr K Pandya

In Attendance: Councillors D Cowan, T Cox and J Moyies
A Barnes, R Harris, S Dutton, C Fozzard, K Sawyer, C Shuter,
V Smith and J Chesterton

Start/End Time: 6.30 pm - 9.45 pm

21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cartey and Stafford (no substitutes).

22 Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared at the meeting.

23 Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 25 October 2023

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 25 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

24 Deloitte: Final report to the Audit Committee on the audit for the year ended 31 March 2022

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting the summary of the works completed for the 2021/22 financial year with regard to the opinion on the Statement of Accounts and commentary on the Council's Value for Money arrangements.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers and the external auditor.

Resolved:

That the final report on the 2021/22 audit, be accepted.

25 Deloitte: Auditor's Annual Report 2021/22 (deferred from last meeting as paper circulated at that meeting)

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting the External Auditor's Annual Report for 2021/22 that was deferred at the meeting held on 25th October 2023.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers and the external auditor.

Resolved:

That the External Auditor's Annual Report for 2021/22, be approved.

26 Deloitte: External Audit 2022/23 Status Update

The Committee received a verbal report from the External Auditor providing a brief overview of the work on the 2022/23 audit taking place with the Council's finance officers, which is on track to be finalised over the next two months to be presented to the Audit Committee in March 2024.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers and the external auditor.

Resolved:

That the update on the status of the 2022/23 external audit, be noted.

27 Transformation update

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change) presenting an overview of the delivery of the transformation programme and the associated risks and opportunities.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers.

Resolved:

That the report setting out the need for transformation, the oversight mechanisms required and being established, the approach to developing the transformation delivery plans (including resourcing), as well as the associated risks and opportunities, be noted.

28 Complaints, SARs, FOIs, and Data Breach Update

The Committee received a verbal report presenting an update on the measures taking place to improve performance on Complaints, SARs and FOIs and a brief summary of a recent data breach.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by the officers. The Committee also commented on their expectations to see improvements against performance in the quarterly report at its meeting in April 2024. Officers also undertook to provide a monthly update bulletin to the Committee.

Resolved:

That the verbal update be noted.

29 Treasury Management Policy for 2024/25

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting the Treasury Management Policy for 2024/25 for scrutiny, prior to approval by Council as part of the annual budget process.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers. ON consideration of the report the Committee proposed a number of minor amendments to the Policy.

Resolved:

That, subject to minor amendments/changes, the Treasury Management Policy for 2024/25, comprising the following documents, be endorsed and recommended to Council for approval as part of the annual budget process:

- Treasury Management Policy Statement for 2024/25;
- Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25; and
- Annual Treasury Management Investment Strategy for 2024/25.

30 Homes England compliance report for 2022/23

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Environment and Place) presenting the findings from the Homes England Compliance Audit work for 2022/23.

Resolved:

That the findings from the Homes England Compliance Audit work for 2022/23, be noted.

31 Counter Fraud & Investigation Team Quarterly Performance Report

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting an update on the progress made by the Counter Fraud and Investigation Team (CFIT) in delivering the Counter Fraud Strategy and Work Programme for 2023/24.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers.

On consideration of the report the Committee requested that the money-laundering and fraud awareness training be made mandatory for all Council employees/staff.

Resolved:

That the performance of the Counter Fraud and Investigation Team over the last three months, be noted.

32 Internal Audit Service Quarterly Performance Report

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting an update on progress made in delivering the Internal Audit Strategy and Plan for 2023/24.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers. On consideration of the report the Committee proposed some minor amendments/changes to ensure that the strategy and plan aligns with the new Corporate Plan.

Resolved:

That, subject to minor amendments/changes, the progress made in delivering the 2023/24 Internal Audit Strategy and Plan be noted.

33 Internal Audit Report on Appointments and Disciplinary Committee

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting the findings of the audit review requested by the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee at its meeting on 27th July 2023.

During consideration of the matter, the Committee resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting (confidential session) to enable questions and comments to be made on the confidential aspects of the matter.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers. On further consideration of the report the Committee proposed amendments/changes to recommendation 2 and 3 set out in the Internal Audit Services Report (Appendix 1).

(In accordance with Standing Order 26.1 Councillor Dent had his name recorded against the decision to exclude the public and press).

Resolved:

That the findings of the audit review requested by the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee at its meeting on 27th July 2023, be noted, and the recommendations made in the internal audit report, subject to the following amendments to recommendations 2 and 3, be endorsed:

Recommendation 2:

'Update the Constitution to reflect that where a Committee Chair wants to introduce an additional item of business, they need to have appropriate support and advice from suitable subject matter expert officers and appropriate legal advice, and for them to be in the meeting to enable them to do so.' This change relates to all items not just new ones introduced, e.g. the need to have proper office advice throughout the whole meeting.'

Recommendation 3:

Use the A&DC, as that involves all the political Group Leaders, to set and review the objectives for the Chief Executive, *and any public statements arising*, in collaboration and raise any performance related issues with the Chief Executive.

Chair: _____