

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held in the Council Chamber at the Guildhall, Gainsborough on Thursday 20 November 2014, commencing at 6.30pm.

Present: Councillor Giles McNeill (Chairman)

Councillor Gillian Bardsley
Councillor Chris Day
Councillor David Dobbie
Councillor Anne Welburn

Alison Adams (Independent Co-opted Member)

In Attendance:
Ian Knowles Director of Resources and S151 Officer
James O'Shaughnessy Business Improvement Manager
Katie Coughlan Governance and Civic Officer

Also in attendance :
Tony Crawley External Auditor - KPMG

Apologies: Councillor Sue Rawlins (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Ken Bridger
Councillor Malcolm Leaning
Peter Walton (Independent Member)

45 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

46 MINUTES

Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on 25 September 2014

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on 25 September 2014 be approved and signed as a correct record.

47 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

48 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE SETTING OUT CURRENT POSITION OF PREVIOUSLY AGREED ACTIONS AS AT 12 NOVEMBER 2014 (GA.30 14/15)

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 12 November 2014.

In respect of the green item (access to Minerva for lay members) Officers confirmed this action was now completed. However, lay Members advised that in light that they were currently excluded from the "provision of IT kit for Members Policy", accessing the site may prove difficult for them. In responding Officers confirmed that for the next civic year the possibility of extending the Policy to include lay Members was being investigated and in the interim options were also being investigated, including the loan of devices, once the current migration was completed.

RESOLVED that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule as set out in report GA.30 14/15, be received and noted.

49 EXTERNAL AUDIT'S ANNUAL LETTER (GA.31 14/15)

Consideration was given to a report from the Authority's Auditor KPMG, which presented their Annual Audit Letter to the Governance and Audit Committee.

In presenting the report the Auditor outlined the headline findings to the Committee as detailed on pages 2 and 3 of the report. As a whole, the picture was a much more positive one than that of previous years, and this was reflected in the fees charged to the Authority for the year when compared to that of the previous one, as set out on page 5 of the report.

In the ensuing debate, as a whole the Committee welcomed the much more positive position. However, Members picked up on the Auditor's comment, in relation to Value for Money (VFM) Risk Areas that the Authority now needed to ensure the revised framework was embedded and sought indication as to how they would get assurance this was happening.

In response Officers outlined the practises and measures which had been put place, to assist with the embedding process, including the introduction of an ACOP (Approved Code of Practice) for Project Management, the implementation of a new programme board structure designed to monitor timescales and budgets of projects very closely and revised reporting through the progress and delivery reports, which now included a specific projects report.

Furthermore Project Management workshops were planned over the next 3 – 6 months for all Service Managers and Team Managers to assist in developing their

understanding. Finally the Director of Resources advised of the ongoing structure review at a Head of Service level, and indicated that the new Strategic Lead formation had also been designed with this in mind.

The Chairman wished to place on record his thanks to the Business Improvement Manager for the work he had undertaken in preparing the AGS, which had been much more positively received.

All present commented on the transparent approach which had been taken in addressing the issues which had been identified and welcomed this. There was a view that sometimes from difficult situations, good learning and positive culture was borne. The Committee felt they had learnt a lot over the past year or so and urged that this continue, particularly with the potential for new Members for the elections in May.

Finally Members commented on the training workshop which had been facilitated by KPMG and commented that this had been some of the most beneficial training the Committee had ever received. The Committee urged that this session was re-run early on in the new Civic Year for the new Committee once appointed.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the report be received and noted.

50 OVERVIEW OF GOVERNANCE RELATED ACTIVITY AND REPORTING ACROSS THE COUNCIL (GA.32 14/15)

Consideration was given to a report which provided Members with an Overview of governance related activity and associated reporting across the Council.

Members were further provided with an Assurance mapping Matrix template, which was currently being developed, and welcomed this simplified way of seeking assurance.

It was suggested that Risk Appetite be built into the template.

Overall the report was well received and viewed as a good sound future reference guide.

The Chairman advised that independent member; Mrs Alison Adams had taken on the informal appointment of Risk Champion for the Authority. A report would be submitted to Leaders Panel to advise of the role and promotional material would be put on the Extranet.

RESOLVED that the governance overview report be welcomed.

51 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW (GA.33 14/15)

Consideration was given to a report which provided an update on the training undertaken by Members to date in 2014/15.

The report generated much debate and in the discussion which ensued the following points were raised: -

Members commented that the report was slightly misleading in identifying attendance levels as not all sessions were open to all Members, Officers undertook to reflect this in future reports.

There was a need to ensure training was arranged at appropriate times ie to accommodate for those Members who worked. Also it was felt that greater use should be made of the videoing and webcasting equipment; with sessions being recorded and placed on the extranet for review at Members' convenience, or as an alternative that they somehow be able to link into the sessions remotely whilst they were happening live.

All were in agreement they would like the Audit training referred to earlier in the debate to form part of the induction training for any Members appointed to serve on, or interested in serving on a future Governance and Audit Committee.

The introduction of a buddying system was suggested.

There was also a suggestion that in the future some sort of testing, post training should be introduced to ensure Members' knowledge was increasing as a result of attending sessions.

Greater use of on-line module based training was also welcomed, along with the possibility of opening relevant training sessions up to Town and Parish Councils.

It was further suggested that retiring Members should be asked to return to impart their previous knowledge and experience.

In responding to Members' comments, Officers outlined initial proposals in terms of the induction plan for May 2015 and confirmed it would include more generic sessions around how the Council operates, the Corporate Plan, how decisions were made as well as an overview of all the Committees and the Constitution. More committee specific training would also be incorporated and Officers were giving careful consideration to such things as timings and training methods. An outline of the Induction Plan would be presented to the Committee at their next meeting for initial comment.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the update be received and noted; and

- (b) Members' comments, raised throughout the course of the debate, and detailed above, be taken into consideration in preparing the Induction Plan.

Note: Councillor David Dobbie declared a non-pecuniary interest in the above item of business as the Vice-Chairman of Gainsborough Town Council's Planning Committee.

52 WORK PLAN (GA.34 14/15)

Members considered their work plan for meetings during the ensuing year.

RESOLVED that the work plan as at 12 November 2014 be noted.

53 REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION – DISCUSSION ITEM (GA.35 14/15)

Members had been provided with two sections of the Constitution, namely: -

- Section 3 – Codes and Protocols – Protocol on Operational Conventions; and
- Section 5 – Rules of Procedure – Council Procedure Rules

and were asked to review their content and feedback any comments to the Monitoring Officer for consideration in undertaking his annual review of the Constitution.

In the ensuing discussion no comments were passed on Section 3, however in respect of Section 5, the following comments/ suggestions were offered: -

- Paragraph 18.1 (relating to standing to speak) – paragraph to be revised to reflect the way we operate or removed.
- Paragraph 5.1 (relating to time and place of meetings) – paragraph to be amended to reflect how we operate ie at annual council each committee will determine its normal commencement time.
- Paragraph 29.1 (relating to Constitution being given to Members) – paragraph to be amended to reflect how we operate ie not necessarily hard copy now.

Members requested that the constitution be available on the Members Extranet

- Paragraph 23.1 (relating to Chairman of Committees) – suggested an additional paragraph be included regarding all Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen commit to undertaking training within a specified period. Whilst it was acknowledged that this was implicit with regulatory committees. Members were of a view that Policy Committee Chairmen also needed to make the same undertaking.
- Paragraph 23.2 (restrictions) – paragraph to be removed.

RESOLVED that the comments made throughout the course of the discussion, as detailed above, be borne in mind by the Monitoring Officer in completing his annual review of the Constitution.

54 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT – FORTHCOMING TRAINING

The Chairman gave advance notice of forthcoming Treasury Management Training, which would be held prior to the commencement of the Committee's next meeting (8 January 2015). Exact timings and further details would be provided to Members in due course.

The meeting concluded at 7.59 pm.

Chairman