

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 26 February 2015, commencing at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillor Giles McNeill (Chairman)

Councillor Gillian Bardsley
Councillor Ken Bridger
Councillor Chris Day
Councillor Ian Fleetwood
Councillor Malcolm Leaning
Councillor Anne Welburn

Alison Adams (Independent Co-opted Member)
Peter Walton (Independent Member)

In Attendance:

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| Ian Knowles | Director of Resources and S151 Officer |
| Alan Robinson | Strategic Lead – Democratic and Business Support |
| Tracey Bircumshaw | Group Accountant |
| James O’Shaughnessy | Business Improvement Manager |
| Jeanette Anderson | Corporate Systems Development Team Manager |
| Katie Coughlan | Governance and Civic Officer |

Apologies: Councillor Sue Rawlins (Vice-Chairman)

69 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

70 MINUTES

Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on 8 January 2015

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on 8 January 2015 be approved and signed as a correct record.

71 MEMBERS’ DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

72 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE SETTING OUT CURRENT POSITION OF PREVIOUSLY AGREED ACTIONS AS AT 18 FEBRUARY 2015 (GA.46 14/15)

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 18 February 2015.

In respect of the green item (Corporate / Internal Fraud) the Chairman indicated that he had spoken in depth with the Director of Resources regarding this matter and had received appropriate assurances and was satisfied that the confidential nature of the matter was appropriate and should be maintained.

RESOLVED that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule as set out in report GA.46 14/15, be received and noted.

73 COMBINED ASSURANCE REPORT 2014/15 (GA.47 14/15)

The Committee gave consideration to a report which presented the Council's Combined Assurance Report for 2014/15.

The purpose of the Combined Assurance Report was to produce a record of assurances against the Council's critical activities and risks. It provided an overview of assurance across the Council making it possible to identify where assurances were present, and their source, and where there were potential assurance 'unknowns or gaps'. It offered a tri-angulated view of assurance with separate opinion provided by management; corporate and/or third party assurance and Internal Audit.

The report detailed the methodology that had been used and the levels of assurance that the Council currently had. The methodology had been amended slightly from that used in last year's report; whereby the number of components contained within the report had been rationalised resulting in fewer components for assessment. For example Council Tax had previously broken down into its core elements (seven), whereas this year it had been assessed as a single entity.

It appeared that there had been a reduction in the percentage of critical activities that had been assessed as 'green' in nature, when compared to last year's findings (61%: 71%). However this had been brought about as a result of the rationalisation detailed above. If the same methodology had been adopted for this year's report, it had been calculated that 73% of critical activities would have been calculated as 'green'.

The findings of the report would be used to inform Internal Audit's work plan for 2015/16.

Referring to page 9 of the report and the 13% unknown element, specified within the graphs, it was noted that this equated to one project only, namely the Leisure Review which was in its infancy.

Members welcomed the contents of the report and commented on its “easy to understand” nature, commending Officers for its presentation.

RESOLVED that having reviewed the Combined Assurance Report 2014/15 its contents be approved.

Note: Members were provided with a copy of the draft assurance map and asked to take the document away to review and provide any feedback to Officers. This document would form a formal agenda item at the Committee’s April meeting.

74 SCRUTINY OF DRAFT TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2015/16 (GA.48 14/15)

The Committee were asked to scrutinise the Draft Treasury Management Strategy with a view to recommending its inclusion within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

It was noted that the Draft Treasury Management Strategy was being re-presented to the Governance and Audit Committee due to the changes to the proposed Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2019/20 previously presented. Whilst these changes had not had an impact on the overall strategy it did have an impact on the Prudential Indicators contained within the Strategy and therefore required further consideration by the Governance and Audit Committee.

The Council’s Commercial Strategy required significant capital investment to deliver the required outcomes. Housing renewal and regeneration was considered a key investment opportunity and would also meet wider corporate objectives and deliver social benefits for the district.

The proposed Capital Programme now included £9.9m of investment in housing and associated infrastructure which would be funded from Prudential Borrowing and thus the Treasury Management Policy now included a borrowing strategy and associated prudential indicators.

It was noted that the Policy and Resources Committee was responsible for approving capital expenditure based on robust business cases and assurance that any borrowing was prudent, affordable and sustainable.

Members questioned why the Council was considering borrowing funds when it was considered capital rich. In responding assurance was offered that borrowing would only be undertaken when it was considered prudent, affordable and sustainable. By including a borrowing strategy within the Treasury Management Strategy this afforded the Council the option to borrow, but it did not mean they necessarily would. Examples were given as to when borrowing may be more prudent, for example if a project could generate a good income, it could in effect cover the cost of any loan whilst maintaining the Council’s capital. The strategy aimed to develop a mixed economy within the organisation and further reassurance was offered in that any proposal to borrow would be subject to a robust business case and decision by the appropriate body.

Officers confirmed the risk assessment related to both borrowing and investing.

RESOLVED that having scrutinised the draft Treasury Management Strategy it be **RECOMMENDED** to Full Council for inclusion within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

75 REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS OF MINERVA (GA.49 14/15)

Consideration was given to a report which reviewed the effectiveness and appropriateness of Minerva and which advised of future developments within the SharePoint software, as previously requested by Members.

Members were provided with background and contextual information as to why SharePoint had been introduced into the organisation and what it aimed to deliver. The reasons as to why the original project did not meet the main objectives were also detailed with the report.

Further information in respect of its re-launch as a corporate system and the sites current uses, content; usage figures and future developments was also provided.

Debate ensued with Members thanking Officers for the report which aided their understanding as to what Minerva was aiming to achieve.

The need to further embed training was recognised and the “need and desire” to use the site needed to be further developed. Members commented that the latter had not always been present, stating that the information had not always been of interest or had been out of date, hence using other methods to obtain information had been the preferred choice.

Members suggested by withdrawing certain services, for example the e-mail circulation of committee reports, this would encourage greater usage of the whole site and mandate its use an information tool and library for members. The intake of new members in May 2015 was seen as an opportune time to make changes.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the Committee received assurance from the Director of Resources that Minerva departmental champions have been appointed; and
- (b) Corporate Leadership Team be encouraged to endorse Minerva as a corporate system and mandate the use of it

76 COUNCILLOR INDUCTION PROGRAMME (GA.50 14/15)

Members gave consideration to report which presented the draft proposed 2015 Councillor Induction Programme for approval.

Members welcomed the document and congratulated Officers on its content, which was much more comprehensive and advanced than previous induction programmes. The inclusion of repeat sessions at varying times in the day was much appreciated.

It was suggested that informal buddying arrangements should be encouraged

In responding to Members comments, whilst it would be made clear that there was an expectation that all new Members should attend the regulatory training sessions, to ensure that they had a good grounding of Council business, Officers indicated that they could not mandate Members and sought assistance from the Groups to set out the expectations of its Members.

In light of further comments made, Officers undertook to extend the contact list within the document to include details of those internal Officers undertaking training sessions as part of the induction process. It was confirmed that sessions where possible would be filmed and made available on the Members' Portal for future reference. There was no intention to hold weekend sessions, and it was confirmed that the timetable had been included within Candidate Packs and would be handed to those successfully elected on the announcement of the result of Poll.

RESOLVED that the draft proposed 2015 Councillor Induction Programme be approved subject to the extension of the contact list as detailed above.

77 WORK PLAN (GA.51 14/15)

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

RESOLVED that the work plan as at 18 February 2015 be noted.

The meeting concluded at 7.45 pm.

Chairman