

MINUTES of the meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee held on 19 September 2013 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Tunde Ojetola (Chair), Yash Gupta, Cathy Kent and Simon Wootton

Co-opted Members: Rohna Long and Jason Oliver

Apologies: Councillor Martin Healy, Councillor Terry Hipsey

In attendance: Sean Clark – Head of Corporate Finance
Chris Harris – RSM Tenon Director
Gary Clifford – RSM Tenon
Fiona Taylor – Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Gavin Dennett – Head of Public Protection
Debbie Hanson – Ernst and Young
Kenna-Victoria Martin – Democratic Services

18 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Standards and Audit Committee, held on 18 July 2013, were approved as a correct record.

The Chair took the opportunity to pay tribute to Councillor Diana Hale who had recently passed away.

19 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no such items.

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interested declared.

21 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT ON CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Head of Public Protection introduced the report to the Committee, explaining that an internal audit had highlighted concerns within Health and Safety at Thurrock Council. It was explained to Members that the original audit had been given a red opinion; these were addressed by an audit action programme designed by the Corporate Health and Safety team and a follow up audit taken on the 2nd September was given a Green opinion.

Members of the Committee queried as to the action that had been taken and whether there were any deadlines which Officers had to follow. Officers

informed the Committee that there were deadlines for the actions to be taken and that most of these had already been dealt with. It was explained to Members that a number of concerns had been updated and that the Health and Safety team had risk rated all of the concerns, higher risks would be visited more frequently.

Furthermore the original audit showed old audit trails, dates were changed to bring forward high risks and fewer risks were pushed back. Officers also informed the Committee that they have, had to republish timescales for reporting accidents, as it is difficult to log accidents when serious accidents were not being reported promptly.

The Committee enquired as to whether steps were in place to correct the concerns with regards asbestos. Officers assured members that the Corporate Health and Safety team had already started to look at updating the asbestos register.

Resolved that the Standards and Audit Committee:

- i) Noted the content of this report and the RSM Tenon audit report**
- ii) Satisfied itself that the actions taken by the Council in response to the Audit report are proportionate and appropriate.**
- iii) Noted the content of the RSM Tenon follow up audit report**

22 HEAD OF INTERNAL AUDIT'S ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

The report was introduced by the Director for RSM Tenon, who explained that Internal Audit was required to bring an annual report to the Committee. He further explained that page 38 of the agenda was a key page as it informed the Committee of internal audits opinion regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of Thurrock Council's arrangements for governance, risk management and control.

Members were informed that the opinions given to Thurrock Council were the same as the previous year. Any red opinion reports would go to the Committee and a Head of Service would be in attendance to present the report.

The Chair of the Committee queried that Members had seen four red reports; however there had been no update report to the Committee regarding ICT and asked if the area had been revisited. Officers informed the committee that ICT had been revisited and that the follow up was included within the progress report taken to the Committee.

Resolved:

- i) That the Standards & Audit Committee received and noted the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report for 2012/13.**
- ii) That more details are included in Follow-up reports with regards to red opinion reports, in order that the Committee has confirmation as to how the issue is being resolved.**

23 AUDIT RESULTS REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2013

The Councils External Auditors, introduced the report to the Committee and informed the Committee that they were pleased to report that the Audit was complete, however further improvements could be made.

The Committee were informed that the external auditors were responsible for forming an opinion on financial statement, looking at the council's value for money arrangements and undertaking any other work specified by the Audit Commission.

Members enquired as to whether Officers were satisfied with the audit and whether they were confident it would continue. Officers informed Members that they were very pleased with the result of the audit, it was explain that for many of the finance team it was the first time they had carried out this work.

It was queried as to whether there would be a reduction in the fee, the External Auditor explained to the Committee that there had already been 40% reduction from last year's fee, however lots of work still had to be carried out. The Committee were informed that the Audit Commission set the audit fees.

Resolved that the Standards and Audit Committee:

- i) Considered the comments of our external auditors as set out in the attached report and noted their findings.**
- ii) Noted the hard work carried out by the Finance Department.**

24 2012/13 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The Head of Corporate Finance introduced the report to the Committee explaining that they were asked to approve the financial statement, Annual Governance statement and the letter of representation.

The Head of Corporate Finance took Members through the amendments of the financial statement which he circular to the Committee at the beginning of the meeting. Members of the Committee talked through the report and its appendices, in particular discussing the Housing Revenue Account, Pensions and Earmarked Reserves.

The Chair of the Committee queried as to the total value of assets the council owned, Officers informed the Committee that the Council had Long Term Assets totalling £831,451.

Resolved that the Standards and Audit Committee:

- i) Note the issues contained within, and approve, the Annual Governance Statement;**
- ii) Having consideration to the comments within the Audit Results Report considered earlier on the agenda, approve the Financial Statement subject to any further changes presented to the committee; and**
- iii) Approve the letter of representation on behalf of the Council to be signed by the Chair of the committee once the audit is near completion.**

25 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report and informed the Committee that Training has taken place with regards to RIPA which included attendance by Directors and that the Council was due to have a RIPA Investigation in October 2013.

Resolved that the Standards and Audit Committee:

- i) Noted the statistical information relating to the use of RIPA from January 2012 to June 2013.**
- ii) Approved the further amendments to the Corporate RIPA policy, to incorporate the Magistrates Authorisation process enforced under sections 37 and 38 of the Protections of Freedoms Act 2012, as set out at Appendix B, and to update the details of recently appointed Directors.**

26 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERSHIP TO MEMBERS ADVISORY PANEL 2013-14

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report to Members of the Committee and explained to the Committee that Members sitting on the Members Advisory Panel would hear breaches of the Code of Conduct, Code of Conduct for Members, to hear reports from the investigating officer and to suggest recommendations to the Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Kent nominated Councillor Gupta and the Chair of the Committee nominated Councillor Wootton, who both agreed to take on the roles along with Mr Oliver and Ms Long the co-opted Members on the Committee.

Resolved that the Standards and Audit Committee appointed Councillors Wootton and Gupta along with Mr Oliver and Ms Long to the Members Advisory Panel to serve until the next local elections.

27 WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed the work programme for the municipal year and the following was agreed:

- That the deferred items noted on page 114 of the agenda be taken to the November meeting.
- To move the Annual Audit Letter from the February meeting to the November meeting
- To remove the Audit Certificate and WGA Certificate as this will be included in the Annual Audit Letter at the February meeting.
- There was a possibility of an Internal Audit report with a Red option.
- That a report on Business continuity be taken to the November meeting.
- That an Internal Audit Progress report be taken to the November meeting.

The meeting finished at 9.05pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail kmartin@thurrock.gov.uk**