

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee held on 4 February 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillors Yash Gupta (MBE) (Vice-Chair), Cathy Kent and Brian Little Rhona Long, Co-Opted Member Jason Oliver, Co-Opted Member
Apologies:	Councillors Simon Wootton (Chair) and Terence Hipsey Chris Harris – Head of Internal Audit (Baker Tilly)
In attendance:	Sean Clark, Head of Corporate Finance Christine Connolly, Ernst and Young Gary Clifford, Client Manager for Audit Services Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing, Investment and Development Ian Cousins, Serco Paul Milmore, ICT Client Services Lead Ann Osola, Head of Service Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

29. Minutes

The Minutes of Standards and Audit Committee, held on 09 December 2014, were approved as a correct record.

30. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

31. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest

32. Disaster Recovery Plans for IT

The Head of Housing, Investment and Development and Corporate Commercial Services briefly introduced the report to the Committee explaining that it was her understanding that at the December meeting it was requested by Members to receive a report on disaster recovery.

Members were advised that officers were currently starting the process to update both the Council's disaster recovery and business continuity plans. It was further explained that 60% of disaster recovery was managed by Serco.

The Committee expressed its concern that Members hadn't seen a report on disaster recovery for two and half years and that within the report it didn't cover the 40% of

disaster recovery that was managed by the Council, including Housing, Adult Social Care and Children's Services. Officers explained that they would bring a report back to the Committee and would include the arrangements in place for the Councils disaster recovery.

It was sought as to whether the Council still had an offsite location where backup tapes were held. Members further enquired as to the review of both disaster recovery and business continuity plans and what were officer's action plan and timeframes. Officers confirmed to the Committee that the offsite location was the culver centre, the Head of Housing, Investment and Development and Corporate Commercial Services also clarified that Officers would bring back a report in the new municipal year and would include the review plan for Members information.

Members queried as to when the last tests of the plan had been undertaken, as according to the plan history within the report there hadn't been any updates or tests completed since 2011. Officers informed the Committee that the systems were backed up daily and taken offsite weekly.

During discussions it was agreed by the Committee to include an additional recommendation in that officers would undertake testing of the disaster recovery plan and to report those findings back to the Committee at the first meeting of the municipal year.

RESOLVED That Standards and Audit Committee:

- 1. Noted the attached Serco ICT Disaster Recovery Plan;**
- 2. Agreed to a full and detailed review of both business continuity and ICT Disaster Recover arrangements be undertaken as outlined in section 3;**
- 3. Receive at the first meeting of the Committee in the new Municipal Year this report, together with costed options to improve the Council's overall business continuity and ICT disaster recovery approach.**
- 4. Request that officers undertake testing of the disaster recovery plan and report their findings back to the Committee at the first meeting of the municipal year**

33. Bridge Maintenance Inspections

The Head of Transportation and Highways introduced the report explaining that it showed the findings from an Audit of the Bridge Maintenance Inspections undertaken by the internal audit team in October 2014. The Head of Transportation and Highways continued to highlight the main points within the report which included:

- The Council had complied with government guidance to undertake two yearly General Inspections, however, the six yearly Principal Assessments had not been undertaken due to insufficient funding for bridges;
- It was explained, that Thurrock Council as the highway authority had statutory duties to maintain the public highway and associated structures in a state that is safe and fit for use;

- Officers informed the Committee that they were working on a recovery programme which was recommended to meet the objectives outlined within the audit;
- Members were further advised that Officers were planning to bring in a new computer system, along with this Officers had also invited specialist resources to assist with improving the service;
- The Committee were notified that moving forward; officers were working on more robust KPIs and were also going to take a detailed report to the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the new municipal year.

Following discussions the Committee sought a number of queries and clarifications these were:

- The difference between the two year General and the six year Principal Assessments;
- If the Council hasn't been carrying out the 6 yearly Principal Assessments did this mean that as an authority, Thurrock Council would be liable for any incidents as they were not compliant with statutory legislation;
- Would it be possible for Officers to gain funding through the Government in a similar way they could for tar mucking roads

Officers responded to the Committees questions explain that the difference between the two inspections was that the 2 yearly were a visual inspection and a brief update. The 6 yearly Inspections were a more detailed inspection with Officers looking at long term issues. It was clarified for the Committee that it was not the fact that Officers had not been carrying out the 6 yearly assessments, they had merely lapsed. Officers continued to explain that, bridges were included within the national code of practice which was part of the Highways Act 1980 and assured Members that the Council was not non-complaint.

It was further confirmed that Officers were working very hard to bid on the Competitive Challenge Funding, provided by the government and were currently working on detailed business cases.

Members sought assurance from the Head of Transportation and Highways that despite the challenges facing the service and the fact that Thurrock's population was increasing; there were no reasons to be concerned as to the safety. The Head of Transportation and Highways assured the Committee that there were not the structures within the borough that could cause catastrophic damage; she continued to assure Members that there were no risks.

It was confirmed by Officers following an enquiry from the Chair, that in terms of management, officers accepted the finding from the Audit . The service has recently been brought back in house, the risks were being managed new systems were in place. The Internal Audit Manager, further confirmed to Members that as the audit resulted as a red assurance then Internal Audit would be revisiting the service and the results would be included in the Audit progress update.

During discussions it was agreed by the Committee to include an additional recommendation in that Officers would report back to the Committee at the first meeting of the municipal year with an update report of the improvements made.

RESOLVED that the Standards and Audit Committee:

1. **Noted the contents of the report**
2. **Receive an update report on Bridge Maintenance Inspections in according to the recent audit.**

34. Report from Ernst and Young Certification of Claims and Returns Annual Report 2013-14

The Head of Corporate Finance introduced the report to the Committee informing Members that the external auditors were required to certify two claims. He further notified the Committee that the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Subsidy claim for 2012/2013 required additional work in respect of issues identified from the audit undertaken last year, however improvements were still being made.

The External Auditor continued to inform Members that as of next year it would only be the Housing Benefits claim that would require to be certificated. She advised the Committee that Ernst and Young were asked to separately audit the Teachers' Superannuation return and the works were completed with no significant issues reported.

It was highlighted that improvement had been made and this was shown by the reduced fee.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards and Audit Committee noted the report attached at Appendix 1 and the agreed actions.

35. Standards & Audit Committee Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme for the last meeting of the municipal year and the following reports were agreed:

17 March 2015

- Internal Audit: Red Reports - As required
- Fraud Report
- Review of ROM Policy
- Draft Internal Audit Plan
- Ernst and Young – Audit Plan 2014/2015
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

The meeting finished at 8.10 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**