

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee held on 14 March 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Tony Fish (Chair), Russell Cherry (Vice-Chair), Oliver Gerrish and Barry Johnson

Apologies: Councillor Ben Maney

In attendance:

Gary Clifford, Chief Internal Auditor
Lee Henley, Strategic Lead, Information Management
Andy Owen, Corporate Risk and Insurance Manager
Michael Dineen, Senior Manager & Senior Appropriate Officer (POCA)
Lisa Clampin, Binder Dijke Otte (BDO) Representative
Simiso Ngidi, Binder Dijke Otte (BDO) Representative
Wendy Le, 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.

30. Minutes

Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer, said that Councillor Johnson asked for an amendment to be made in section 25 of the minutes in which he had made a declaration of interest. The minutes would be amended to read as follows:

Councillor Johnson declared a non-pecuniary interest as he sat on the board for Thurrock Regeneration LTD in a non-paid position and he was the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

The minutes of the Standards and Audit Committee held on 13 December 2018 were approved subject to the amendments.

31. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

32. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

33. External Audit Plan 2018/19

The report was introduced by Gary Clifford, Chief Internal Auditor. The external audit was undertaken by the newly appointed external auditor Binder, Dijke, Otte (BDO). Paragraph 2.4 pointed out the identified risks which were common across most local authorities.

The BDO Representative, Lisa Clampin, walked the Committee through the BDO audit in appendix 1 which had taken into account files from Thurrock Council's previous external auditor. A safeguard had also been implemented in regards to family members and relationships within Thurrock Council.

Thanking BDO for the summary, Councillor Gerrish asked if there had been any major changes from the previous year. Lisa Clampin confirmed that there had been no major changes identified that would impact on the framework. When there was a change in auditors, methods would usually change but BDO had worked closely with Thurrock Council's Finance Department to ensure the change was seamless and efficient.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

34. Certification of Claims and Returns Report 2017/18

Gary Clifford presented the report which showed that there were no significant issues to report. Paragraph 3.2 had identified a minor amendment and this represented 0.007% of the total claim.

The Chair was impressed at the small amount of the amendment identified in paragraph 3.2. He questioned the process for this. Offering an answer as an external auditor, Lisa Clampin gave an outline in that auditors had to follow a Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) process in which 20 cases were selected from the prescribed cases from PSAA or Department for Work and Pensions. Claimants' benefits were looked at over a 1 year period and checked that they complied with national guidance. Some cases may have small differences which are extrapolated across the total grant value to arrive at an overall figure.

Councillor Johnson arrived 19.20.

RESOLVED:

That the report attached at Appendix 1 is noted.

35. Counter Fraud and Investigation Quarterly Update

As stated, this item was moved up the agenda to take place before the Complaints and Enquiries Report – April 2018 to September 2018.

The Counter Fraud and Investigation Quarterly Update report was presented by Michael Dineen, Senior Manager and Senior Appropriate Officer (POCA), which outlined the performance of the Counter Fraud and Investigation Department (CFID) over the last quarter for Thurrock Council as a whole as well as the work that the team has delivered nationally for other public bodies. The reported statistics in paragraph 3.1 showed that good progress had been made in delivering the 2018/19 counter fraud work plan over the last year.

Councillor Gerrish sought more detail on paragraph 4.3 in regards to the joined up work between council departments. Michael Dineen replied that the CFID was communicating with several departments in the Council to try to get a better picture of the intelligence picture. This included work with teams such as Street Scene and Licensing and would enable the CFID to locate certain people.

Councillor Cherry questioned whether there were reports on fly tipping to the CFID. In response, Michael Dineen said that fly tipping was not within the remit of CFID but that dialogue had begun with the Waste Team to check where locations of fly tipping occurred. Councillor Cherry went on to question how fly tipping issues could be resolved if the fly tippers happened to be council residents who were running fly tipping as a business and receiving benefits. Explaining that fly tipping was a criminal act, Michael Dineen went on to say the issue would be resolved through the enforcement team and possibly the Anti-Social Behaviour Team. The perpetrator would not be removed from the area as it was not legally allowed but fly tipping would be stopped.

On paragraph 5.2, Councillor Gerrish welcomed the working relationship between the Council and commercial companies.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards and Audit Committee noted the performance of the Counter Fraud & Investigation Department.

Michael Dineen left at 19.30.

36. Complaints and Enquiries Report - April 2018 to September 2018

The report was presented by Lee Henley, Strategic Lead of Information Management, which set out the Council's complaints statistics for the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018. In that period, compliments had increased from the previous year.

The Committee was satisfied with the report.

RESOVLED:

That the Committee noted the statistics and performance for the reporting period.

37. Annual Review of Risk and Opportunity Management and the Policy, Strategy and Framework

Andy Owen, Corporate Risk and Insurance Manager, presented the report which gave details on how the Council's ROM arrangements compared against good practice, outlined the current ROM activity, the proposals to maintain/improve the practice across the organisation and included the updated ROM Policy, Strategy and Framework.

The Committee was satisfied with the report.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the Standards and Audit Committee noted the results of the review, the current ROM activity and proposals to maintain and improve the practice across the organisation.

1.2 That the Standards and Audit Committee noted and approved the updated ROM Policy, Strategy and Framework.

38. Internal Audit Strategy 2017/18 to 2019/20 and Annual Internal Audit Plan 2019/20

Gary Clifford introduced the report and provided information on the Internal Audit Plan for 2019/20 which had been rolled forward and represented the third year of the three year strategy.

On Brexit, Councillor Gerrish noted that it was a developing theme and asked how the risks of Brexit would be addressed as it developed. Gary Clifford answered that the technical view of the potential risks could only be taken into account and it was a matter of 'wait and see' of the Brexit outcome.

Councillor Johnson queried whether three years for the plan was long enough and whether it needed an extension to five years. In response, Gary Clifford said that 3 years was a good amount of time considering the amount of changes that would be taking place. The plan that the service started out with would not necessarily be the same at the end.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards & Audit Committee received and agreed the Internal Audit Strategy 2017/18 to 2019/20 and the Annual Internal Audit Plan 2019/20.

39. Internal Audit Progress Report 2018/19

Presented by Gary Clifford, the report outlined the work that had been undertaken since the last Internal Audit Progress Report 2018/19. Future reports would be coming to the Committee on the current works in progress.

The Committee was satisfied with the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Standards & Audit Committee considered reports issued and the work being carried out by Internal Audit in relation to the 2018/19 audit plan.

40. Work Programme

As this was the last Standards and Audit Committee meeting for this municipal year, there were no reports added to the work programme.

The Committee thanked the Officers for their reports and work.

The meeting finished at 7.46 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