

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm on Tuesday, 25 July 2023

Present: Councillor Mark Munday (Chair)
Councillors McMillan (Vice-Chair), Allen, Barrass, Francis, Lidstone, Sankey and White

Parish Representatives: Councillor Mackonochie

Independent Members: Messrs Elliott and Turner

Officers in Attendance: Ghufran Ahmed (External Audit Manager), William Benson (Chief Executive), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities), Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer), Katherine Woodward (Head of Mid Kent Audit) and Emer Moran (Democratic Services Officer)

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

AG107/23 The Chair opened the meeting, introduced Committee members and officers in attendance, and outlined procedural matters of the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

AG108/23 Apologies for absence were received from Parish Councillor Barry Edwards.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

AG109/23 No declarations of interest were received.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK (IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 18):

AG110/23 There were no members of the public or visiting members registered to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE DATED 14 MARCH 2023

AG111/23 The minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee dated 14 March 2023 were submitted.

An amendment was requested to the wording under the External Audit and Value for Money Report March 2022 under point 4 which now stated.

It was acknowledged that TWBC had received 13 clean audit reports which was considered a remarkable achievement. It was considered that the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council plan agreed at full council needed to have priorities, cost and timetables set so that it satisfied auditors and resulted in continued clean reports.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee dated 14 March 2023 along with the above amendment be approved as a correct record.

FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME AS AT 14 MARCH 2023

AG112/23 The Committee's work programme was presented for members' information. Since publication of the agenda the Work Programme was updated to inform Members of the upcoming Strategic Risk Register owners to come to future meetings and scheduled training.

RESOLVED – That the Future Work Programme as at 14 March 2023 along with additional information, be noted.

EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2022 2023

AG113/23 Ghufraan Ahmed, External Audit Manager presented the report as per the agenda.

Member questions and Officer clarification included:

- i. The report was taken as read.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Annual Audit Plan for 2022/23, be agreed.

STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

AG114/23 William Benson, Chief Executive introduced Paul Taylor, Director of Change and Communities and Nick Dufton, Human Resources Manager.

Mr Benson presented the report as per the agenda with the aid of a presentation.

Risk Scenario 8: Workforce

Questions from Members and Officer clarification included:

- i. Officers provided an in theory and in practice explanation on how through an online booking system staff used hot desking, bookable individual or team spaces and focus spaces daily and how that optimised the office space. The workspaces had adapted and improved over time based on employee feedback. Further details on how the booking system worked was provided.
- ii. The suggestion box was internal and most common themes were around room etiquette and kitchen facilities.
- iii. An update related to Town Square was provided and it was hoped that show space would be available in September 2023.
- iv. Officers considered that the proposed café and the opportunity to work with other local employers were among the many benefits to current Council staff.
- v. Officers advised that the details of the apprenticeship scheme had not been finalised and it was due to be part of the actions for the New People Strategy. The aim was to develop a scheme that was both flexible for people at the start of their career and gave them the support and training they needed. Human Resources (HR) and larger services such as Environmental Health and Planning

- had benefited from staffing apprenticeships.
- vi. A discussion was had about the age profile of employees.
 - vii. It was advised that recruitment was advertised at all grades.
 - viii. Officers considered that the shared services had brought benefits in terms of cost savings and staff opportunities.
 - ix. The Council actively encouraged work experience staff and welcomed the suggestion of an internship.
 - x. It was important to highlight the great work the Council did such as housing people, in The Amelia Scott staff dealt with people who are fleeing domestic violence, provided children their first experience of reading and theatre.
 - xi. In response to concerns raised about recruitment issues and whether a fully programmed people strategy should be in place before setting up academy's or internships, Officers advised that the Council conformed with best practice and sought continuous improvement with data and feedback.
 - xii. It was advised that out of the 59 Officers from Planning that left the Council, the exact amount of those that were from Planning Enforcement could be provided after the meeting.
 - xiii. Members considered it important for HR to be more proactive and aware of the Heads of Department, to keep those people close know what their future ambitions were. Officers addressed this and it was advised that the appraisal process had changed to focus on succession planning, knowing where people were on their career journeys, to look at them as individuals and to see if the Council can develop those opportunities for them, so they were not lost.
 - xiv. Planning as a departments was in a constant state of flux given the amount of changes to planning policies over the last decade. It was acknowledged that there was a high paying private sector to compete with.
 - xv. Officers advised that there was a first draft for the people strategy, and it was hoped that the final draft would be available in February 2024.
 - xvi. As well as the best companies process, which it was acknowledged may need revising in itself, the Council carried out ongoing pulse surveys, looked at the national picture and compared partners and other sources of data which ensured staff were understood.
 - xvii. Mr Dufton, HR Manager gave a positive insight into his first 2 months working at the Council.
 - xviii. It was confirmed that at Finance and Governance Committee on 11 June 2023, the date of September was a draft report to first start coming through the approval process.
 - xix. It was stated that Planning as a whole was not in a good state nationally however, the Council was doing relatively well relative to elsewhere in terms of career paths.
 - xx. It was acknowledged that the Council could not compete with the planning private sector on money however it gave people an opportunity to make a difference to where they lived and the local area and TWBC Council's reputation attributed to that.
 - xxi. It was advised that shared services was matter for members. There was a council representative that sat on the Mid Kent Services Board.

Mr Benson presented the report as per the agenda.

Risk Scenario 7: Council Accessibility

Questions from Members and Officer clarification included:

- i. In response to a question about who came up with questions for surveys, it was advised that it varied on a case by case basis. An example was the Borough Wide Survey the questions were drawn from the old Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) and a huge amount of work went into that.
- ii. A more rigorous format for putting consultations forward was suggested.
- iii. Officers gave an explanation on how they sought to provide advice on the format of the questions to help make sure they were fair and intelligible and gave a further explanation on how the surveys were created.
- iv. The whole purpose of the consultation was to get as much engagement as you can from the public to help them understand what the Council was trying to achieve.
- v. Officers advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was the most appropriate Committee to approach with regard to creating a framework and a policy around consultations to make sure that they were built rigorously each and every single time.

Mr Benson presented the report as per the agenda.

Risk Scenario 10: Demographic and Service Change

Questions from Members and Officer clarification included:

- i. The risk was taken as read.

A question related to Risk Scenario 1: Shortfall of Government Funding was responded to:

- i. The risk was reduced down by virtue of the fact that the government had given forward guidance that next year settlement was likely to follow the settlement for the current year, so that was taken as no further risk that we need to perform because we were already managing the current settlement.

RESOLVED:

1. That the strategic risk register and the arrangements for managing strategic risk, be noted.

VALUE FOR MONEY PROGRESS REPORT

AG115/23 Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Governance presented the report as per the agenda.

Member questions and Officer clarification included:

- i. The report was taken as read.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress in addressing the improvement recommendations from the auditor's value for money conclusions, be noted.

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT AND OPINION 2022 2023

AG116/23 Katherine Woodward, Head of Mid Kent Audit presented the report as per the agenda.

Member questions and Officer clarification included:

- i. In relation to Planning Enforcement the lowest recommendation related to procedure notes for new starters. The medium risk recommendation was believed to refer to follow ups to those procedural notes and the approach taken to deliver that. Resource issues were the reasons why the risks had not been implemented and were still outstanding.
- ii. It was considered important that the Borough Council was seen to do the right thing by enforcement.
- iii. It was confirmed that safeguarding audit was in this year's plan and was approved at the Audit and Governance meeting on Tuesday 14 March. Work had started on safeguarding audits across all three of the three partners and was expected to be completed over the Summer.
- iv. It was confirmed that the medium risk related to consultations ensured that consultations followed a consistent practice. The Audit team were in the process of following that up with Departments and advised they would feedback so that it may be shared with the Overview and Scrutiny meeting as suggested.
- v. It was confirmed that the low risks were easier to complete. Audit liked to accompany actions and recommendations with timeframes to be completed In however it was advised that was not always possible to stick to mainly due to resources.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Head of Audit Partnership opinion, be noted.
2. That the work underlying the opinion and the Head of Audit Partnership's assurance of its independent completion in conformance with proper standards, be noted.

URGENT BUSINESS

AG117/23 There was no urgent business for consideration.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING TUESDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

AG118/23 The next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 19 September 2023.