

Extract from the draft minutes of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 24 November 2020

233. Review of the Council's Ethical Governance Policies

Andrew Weavers, Strategic Governance Manager, attended to present the report and assist the Committee with their enquiries. The Committee were reminded that the Ethical Governance Policies were the key policies which set out the standards of conduct and integrity that the Colchester Borough Council (the Council) expects from its Councillors, staff and all partners when conducting Council business. In 2018, the Council adopted a statement of intent in relation to both ethical and corporate governance, which gave a high commitment to zero tolerance of fraud, corruption and bribery, and it was now appropriate to review this. The Committee heard that none of the policies incorporated within the Council's ethical governance framework had needed to be invoked during the past year, and following a complete review of these policies no changes were proposed to them, save for the Council's Covert Surveillance Policy. It was explained to the Committee that in March 2020 the Council had been visited by the Investigatory Powers Commissioners Office (IPCO), as had a number of other Local Authorities in Essex. The inspection had been carried out as a virtual inspection rather than a physical one, and policies and procedure had been examined. The policy was found to be sound, but some recommendations had been made as to how the policy could be improved, which had been included in the updated policy document before the Committee.

Councillor Willetts commented on the Income and Debt Management Policy and the fact that the Portfolio Holder wrote off sums of money in unrecoverable business rates every year. Councillor Willetts was not suggesting that the Policy was at fault or inadequate, but he sought clarification on whether or not there were any imminent changes in legislation that would allow this money to be recovered. Councillor King, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources responded to Councillor Willetts, confirming that debt collection action that was taken was as robust as possible within the legislative framework. He pointed out that although the sums that had to be written off would be significant to an individual, they were not significant on an organisational scale to the Council. He praised the award winning revenues team of the Council and their extremely high debt collection rate, but made the point that some revenue simply could not be recovered. In Councillor King's opinion, the Policy was robust and suitable, and supported the Council in delivering its obligation to residents to have the minimum amount possible of non-recoverable debt.

RESOLVED that;

1. It be *RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL* that it adopts the statement of intent in relation to ethical governance.

2 The following revised policies were reviewed, and it was *RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL* that they be approved for inclusion in the Council's Policy Framework.

Anti-Fraud and Corruption

Whistleblowing

Anti-Money Laundering

Covert Surveillance

Information Security

Data Protection

Acceptable Use

Data Retention

Income and Debt