

Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Governance and audit Committee meeting of 22 November 2022

337. Review of the Council's Ethical Governance Policies

The Committee considered a report requesting that it review Colchester Borough Council (the Council)'s updated Ethical Governance policies. These were the key policies which set out the standards of conduct and integrity that the Council expects of councillors, staff, partners, suppliers and customers when conducting Council business. They contained procedures for dealing with breaches of the policies and processes to be followed.

Andrew Weavers, Strategic Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer, attended the meeting to introduce the report, and assist the Committee in its deliberations. The Committee heard that breaches of the Policies would be pursued, and procedures were in place to enable any person to raise genuine concerns about the conduct of anyone acting for or on behalf of the council. The Committee had last considered the Council's Ethical Governance Statement at its meeting in November 2021, and an updated Statement was presented to the Committee which had been amended to take account of changes to the leadership of the Council.

The Ethical Governance Policies had last been considered by this Committee in November 2021, and the Policies had subsequently been approved by Full Council and adopted into the Council's Policy Framework. The attention of the Committee was drawn to information in the Officer's report showing the number of times the Policies had been invoked in recent years, and none of the Policies had been invoked in the past year. The Policies had been reviewed, and it was confirmed that they were up to date, reflected best practice and remained fit for purpose. An additional Policy, the ICT Password Policy was included in this years review and would form part of the Ethical Governance suite of Policies in future years.

The Committee heard that the Monitoring Officer wrote annually to Councillors and Officers, reminding them of their responsibilities in respect of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing Policies, and training had been provided recently on data protection and cyber security. The Council's internal auditors had reviewed all the Policies, and were satisfied that they remained fit for purpose and up to date.

The Income and Debt Management Policy had been reviewed by the Council's Customer Team, and an amendment had been made to this to reflect the fact that the Council was a referring partner to the Money and Pension Services, which would help and support customers who were in debt. The Council complied with the governments

'Breathing Space' scheme in relation to managing debt, and write-off limits had been increased for Officers and Managers, and it was hoped that these changes would assist customer during the current cost of living crisis.

A Committee member requested that every Policy reflected the up to date name of the Council, should it be changed to Colchester City Council at the forthcoming Full Council meeting, and suggested that the use of job titles, and not staff names, be used throughout the documents to ensure that the Policies remained current if there was a change in the holder of a role.

A Committee member expressed surprise that none of the IT Policies had been invoked during the past three years, and requested some more detail on what sort of checks and tests had been carried out during this time.

RESOLVED that:

- It be recommended to Full Council that it adopts the statement of intent in relation to ethical governance.
- The following revised policies had been reviewed:
 - Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy
 - Whistleblowing Policy
 - Anti-Money Laundering Policy
 - Covert Surveillance Policy
 - Data Protection Policy
 - Acceptable Use Policy
 - Information Security Policy
 - Retention Policy
 - Processing of Special Category & Criminal Convictions Personal Data Policy
 - Password Policy
 - Income and Debt Management Policy

and that it be recommended to Full Council that they be approved for inclusion in the Council's Policy Framework.