

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

30 OCTOBER 2018

Present:- Councillor Fox (Chair), Councillor Chuah, Councillor Davidson, Councillor Higgins, Councillor Whitehead and Councillor Willetts

Substitutes:- Councillor Dundas for Councillor F. Maclean

127. Minutes

RESOLVED as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2018.

128. Equality and Safeguarding - Annual Update Report

Councillor Tina Bourne and Lucie Breadman, Assistant Director of Communities, attended the meeting to present the Council's Annual Update Report on Equality & Safeguarding. The report requests that the Committee review the progress made in meeting the Council's legal duties and objectives in regard to both Equality and Diversity, and Safeguarding, and endorse the approach set out in paragraph 7 of the report.

Councillor Bourne addressed the Committee and informed them that she felt the annual report demonstrated how the Council takes their duty seriously and proportionally. Lucie Breadman then highlighted some key changes that have been made in the last year which included publishing a range of gender pay gap figures, working on inter-agency guidance with regards to safe-guarding children and focusing on imbedding knowledge and giving support into the front line teams. This has been helped by having a steering group with representatives from each service who discuss and share ideas and look at practical examples to help see if we can live up to our aspirations. Key practical highlights have been distribution of the Voluntary Welfare grant to some of the most vulnerable people in Colchester, working with Dementia Friends and Alzheimers Society and also arranging a special early bird entrance at Colchester Castle for people who suffer with Autism.

Lucie Breadman also introduced two new lead officers to the Committee, Sonia Carr and Joanne Besant and explained that they will be working as part of the Safer Colchester Partnership.

In response to questions from the Committee, Cllr Bourne explained that they were working hard with regards to the Homelessness Strategy and they were hoping to half the amount of rough sleepers by 2020. The current number of rough sleepers in the town centre was 20. Councillor Bourne also informed the Committee that winter shelters have opened earlier this year and will remain open for 5 months following the receipt of Government Funding.

The Committee expressed their thanks and praise to Lucie Breadman and staff on a very detailed report.

RESOLVED that;

- a) The Governance and Audit Committee reviewed the Annual Update Report on Equality & Safeguarding and agreed to endorse the approach as set out in paragraph 7 of the report.

129. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman – Annual Review Letter 2017/2018 and Corporate Complaints Policy

Hayley McGrath, Corporate Governance Manager, introduced the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2017/2018 and Corporate Complaints Policy report on behalf of Andrew Weavers. The report requests that the Committee note the contents of the letter and endorse the Council's revised corporate complaints policy.

Hayley McGrath provided a summary of the report and informed the Committee that a total of 21 complaints had been made in the last year, which was similar to the previous year's total. Out of those 21, five were investigated and only one was upheld but this did not cause any injustice. Hayley McGrath also highlighted that the new complaints policy simplified the process for customers to make a complaint on line.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The Committee notes the contents of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for 2017/2018.
- b) Endorses the Council's revised corporate complaints policy.

130. Mid-Year Internal Audit Assurance Report 2018/19

Hayley McGrath, Corporate Governance Manager, and Alan Woodhead, Senior Manager of Mazars, attended the meeting to present the Mid-Year Internal Audit Assurance Report 2018/19. The report requests that the Committee review and comment on the Internal audit activity for the period 1 April – 30 September 2018 and also the performance of internal audit by reference to national best practice benchmarks.

Hayley McGrath addressed the Committee and informed them of the key messages that had come from the report. Hayley explained how the report shows the effective internal audit service which has been provided during the first half of the 2018/19 financial year. The Visitor Information Centre (VIC) Cash Up, Discretionary Housing Payments and Exceptional Hardship Payments, Council Tax, and Housing Benefits and Local Tax Support Scheme audits have achieved a Full assurance rating. Two priority one, nineteen priority two and five priority three recommendations have been made and all those recommendations have been accepted by management.

The Committee questioned why information on the two priority one recommendations on the Community Hub audit had not been included within the report. Hayley McGrath informed Committee members that the review of the Community Hub was not a formal audit meaning that no assurance level has been assigned and that information on recommendations would not be included within the report. Hayley McGrath stated that the audit was conducted following a request from management to assess how the hub worked with partners, the physicality of the building and to ensure customer and staff safety was paramount.

In response to a further question regarding the commercial companies, Hayley McGrath

informed the Committee that they are audited by the same team who audit Colchester Borough Council and are included in the five year programme and will be incorporated into the rolling process. Hayley McGrath explained that Colchester Borough Council provide all the financial support services to the commercial company and that Audit would look at the functions of the commercial companies at the end of year. Hayley McGrath also highlighted that whilst the commercial companies are able to act differently, governance is managed by Colchester Borough Council. It was also confirmed that Colchester Borough Homes has a separate Audit contract, and that whilst Garden Communities is outside of the audit remit, this is reviewed at year end.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the Committee considered and commented on the Internal audit activity for the period 1 April – 30 September 2018
- b) the Committee reviewed and commented on the Performance of internal audit by reference to national best practice benchmarks.

131. Annual Health and Safety Review 2018/19

Hayley McGrath, Corporate Governance Manager, and Carl Free, Corporate Health and Safety Officer, attended the meeting to present the Annual Health and Safety Review 2018/19 report. The report requests that the Committee review the Health and Safety Policy to ensure that it is still appropriate to the Council's needs, and continues to be effective in identifying and mitigating health and safety risks.

Hayley McGrath explained to the Committee that the Annual Health and Safety report was not a statutory requirement but as it is part of risk management framework they felt it was good practice to bring to the Committee on a yearly basis. The report provides information on internal Health and Safety issues, as well as how Colchester Borough Council ensures that staff and visitors are kept safe within our buildings and when providing services.

Hayley McGrath informed the Committee that within the last four years the Health and Safety process has been revamped and in the last two years a substantial assurance rating has been achieved from internal audit which highlights the improvements made. Hayley McGrath then highlighted the work that Carl Free and the team had undertaken in 2017/18, with a key issue being working on improving arrangements for lone workers, which included the introduction of a new monitoring system that includes both GPS tracking and alarms. Initial feedback following the rollout of this system has been positive.

The Committee asked for the possibility of a fire drill taking place at a Full Council meeting as they have never been part of a fire drill at that time before. It was also suggested that when Councillors are first elected to the authority, they are shown evacuation points as part of their training.

RESOLVED that;

- a) The revised Health and Safety Policy for 2018/19 be agreed and to **RECOMMEND** to **COUNCIL** that it be included in the Council's Policy Framework.
- b) The Committee considered and commented on the Council's progress and performance in managing Health & Safety during the period October 2017 to September 2018.

132. Work programme

Councillor Adam Fox, introduced the Work programme report, which requests that the Committee note the work programme for the ensuing municipal year.

The Committee requested that an item on the Commercial Company be added to the work programme, which could look at the companies' performance, level and financial controls. Ann Hedges, Chief Operating Officer, stated would arrange for a report to be brought to the Committee in future.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2018-19 be noted.