

Extract from the minutes of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 17 October 2017

75. Review of the Council's Ethical Governance Policies

Andrew Weavers, Monitoring Officer, introduced the report which requests that the Committee review the revised ethical policies and recommend them to Council so that they can be approved for inclusion in the Council's Policy Framework.

Andrew Weavers informed Committee members that the Income and Debt Policy has been added to the Ethical Governance policies after a recommendation made by the Governance and Audit Committee in March. Michelle Tarbun, Income and Corporate Debt Manager, and Samantha Preston, Customer Solutions Manager, attended the meeting to provide information to Committee members regarding the policy. Michelle Tarbun informed the Committee that there had been a minor amendment to the policy in relation to the housing benefit overpayment process.

Committee members raised concerns that accepting cash payments from residents was not included within the Income and Debt policy and that it should be added. In response, Michelle Tarbun informed the Committee that the focus is on other forms of payment, however cash payments directly into Lloyds Bank are accepted and widely used. Customers without a bank account could also use a Post Office card account. In exceptional circumstances cash payments can be accepted directly by the Council.

A further query was raised about whether the Council could reduce the amount of irrecoverable debt written off by taking further steps to ensure business rates are paid. Michelle Tarbun confirmed that the business rate regulations are strict in terms of what can be done for recovery and that there are a number of existing business loopholes. The Council processes a high number of accounts and works well with existing businesses who pay their business rates.

Andrew Weavers then provided the Committee with a summary of the changes to the other policies in the report. This included updating the Senior Management role titles following the recent review, as well as terminology changes for the Code of Practice on Covert Surveillance. Andrew Weavers also highlighted that new data protection regulations had recently been released by the Government. A review of the existing Data Protection policy will be required to ensure that it meets the new regulations.

In response to Committee members questions, Andrew Weavers firstly confirmed that the number of instances where the policies had been invoked during 2016/17 were higher than in previous years. In response to a second query, Andrew Weavers stated that the new data protection regulations would come into force in May 2018 and the Council is currently undertaking an impact assessment of the new regulations. If changes are required to the Data Protection policy, the policy would come back to the Governance and Audit Committee for review in due course.

Andrew Weavers also confirmed that Colchester Borough Councillors are advised to register with the information commissioner as a controller if they hold any casework information and that the Whistleblowing policy only relates to Councillors and staff and not members of the public.

RESOLVED;

- a) That the Governance and Audit Committee reviewed the Ethical Governance Policies
- b) To *RECOMMEND* to Council that the they be approved for inclusion in the Council's Policy Framework