

MINUTES

AUDIT

22 MARCH 2023

Present:

Councillors: Riddick (Chairman)
Tindall
Townsend
Chapman
Elliot

Officers: F Jump Head of Financial Services
T Angel Corporate & Democratic Support Officer

Others: Philip Lazenby (TIAA)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Symington. Councillor Tindall substituted for Councillor Symington.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES AND ACTIONS

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by the members present and then signed by the Chairman. The Chairman felt that the previous minutes were presented well and were very concise. He thanked T Angel.

There were no outstanding action points from the previous meeting.

Before moving on to the next item the Chairman went through the previous minutes, highlighting that he had asked five questions, Councillor Silwal had asked two questions and Councillor Townsend had asked twenty questions. He said he would appreciate members streamlining their questions as the discussions were very complex and some of the queries could have been put to the officers when the agenda had been published. He requested that any intricate questions should be put to officers' prior to the meeting to give them time to provide a comprehensive response.

He thanked members for their understanding on this matter.

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

5 SUMMARY OF INTERNAL CONTROL ASSURANCE (SICA) REPORT

P Lazenby referred to page 11 and advised there was just one report and the actions had been accepted and implemented already.

He moved to page 19, appendix B, which was progress against the annual plan. He drew attention to the report titled management systems which was draft in December but had been escalated and was expected to be finalised shortly. Housing rents was listed as in progress and housing repairs and maintenance was rescheduled and was expected to be undertaken the following month. Procurement and contract management was expected at the end of next week and governance and risk management was delayed at the councils request until June. Follow up is ongoing and to support that was appendix C. He said this was a process that will be increasingly tightened as he approaches preparations for his Head of Internal Audit Opinion Statement and that will be partially informed by any outstanding actions that haven't received an update.

Councillor Tindall referred to page 23 and asked if the medical checks for drivers were now up to date. F Jump advised that work was ongoing in the service to ensure they were up to date. She believed that the responsible service asked for an extended implementation date for this recommendation which was the end of this month. An update would be provided at the next audit committee meeting. Councillor Tindall felt this matter was very serious and needed to be treated with urgency. To provide some additional assurance P Lazenby advised that this would form part of the two year rolling plan so there would be an additional audit to make sure that the underlying root causes of the issue were addressed.

The Chairman asked if the drivers would undergo regular health checks, for example every 12 months. P Lazenby replied there would be a process of rolling medical checks.

Councillor Townsend referred to the recommendations and implementation timetable. He asked if they should be concerned that some of the original target dates hadn't been met. He then asked if P Lazenby was confident that the revised dates would be achieved. P Lazenby advised that if he was to profile Dacorum against other councils he provided services to the follow up at Dacorum was pretty good in totality. In respect of individual actions that had been highlighted there was always a risk that matters get passed from date to date and that was why there was an assiduous follow up process between P Lazenby and F Jump in place with the additional audits to provide assurance. He said it was possible that some of the dates would slip, however he took assurance that Dacorum had an open and transparent reporting system where regular updates are provided and that was above and beyond the reporting system seen in a lot of other organisations. F Jump added that a list of outstanding recommendations was presented to the relevant service lead on a monthly basis for them to comment on that information.

Councillor Townsend commented that there had been significant improvement in comparison to 2010. The Chairman agreed.

Outcome

The report was noted.

6 AUDIT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

F Jump introduced the report and said she wanted the opportunity for the committee to understand what the current terms of reference were as per the constitution. She said any suggested amendments would be noted and taken forward to Full Council for consideration and approval.

The Chairman assumed these were fairly standard terms of reference throughout local authorities. F Jump responded that our terms of reference were very similar to those of other audit committees. She referred to appendix 2, CIPFA's (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) position statement for audit committees in local authorities, and advised those expectations were covered in our terms of reference.

Councillor Tindall asked if there was a potential timescale for the implementation of the new terms of reference. F Jump explained that if she received feedback from this meeting she would bring a revised terms of reference to the next audit committee in June.

Councillor Townsend questioned if the document was consistent with other local authorities terms of reference. He said he was expecting the document to be more detailed, however having less detail was helpful and did make it very clear. F Jump felt that the document was fit for purpose but suggested there was potential for further refinement if required. She said members may wish to add some detail about the independent member and when they would appoint them.

Councillor Townsend said he understood it that the issue of whether the committee should have an external appointee would be discussed as a separate agenda item to this one. F Jump confirmed that was correct. She proposed that once the Elections had taken place she would bring a report to the committee on that topic along with the revised terms of reference.

Councillor Tindall noted the recommendation that there should be two independent members. F Jump advised that CIPFA's recommendation was that it was best practice to have two independent members but this can be discussed in more detail at the next committee meeting.

Councillor Chapman expressed his gratitude to the staff and auditor's for all their brilliant work and to another successful year. This was echoed by all members of the committee.

Councillor Riddick was also thanked for his efforts as Chairman.

The Meeting ended at 7.51 pm