

SWT Audit, Governance and Standards Committee - 25 September 2019

Present: Councillor Sue Buller (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Caroline Ellis, Mark Lithgow (In place of Dixie Darch), Janet Lloyd, Steven Pugsley, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Terry Venner, Sarah Wakefield, Mrs Anne Elder and Bryn Wilson

Officers: Aditi Chandramouli, Geri Daly, Paul Fitzgerald, Paul Harding, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas and Alastair Woodland

Also Present: Councillors Marcus Kravis, Federica Smith-Roberts and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

29. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors L Baker and D Darch.

30. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee

(Minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee held on 31 July 2019 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee held on 31 July 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

31. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Venner	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted

32. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

33. **Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Action Plan**

(Copy of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Action Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Resolved that the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Action Plan be noted.

34. **Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Forward Plan be noted.

35. **Grant Thornton External Audit - Annual Audit Letter 2018/19**

Resolved that the Committee considered and noted the contents of the Annual Audit Letter.

36. **Grant Thornton External Audit - Progress & Update Report**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried whether there were any ramifications for signing the Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) accounts after the July 2019 deadline.
The External Auditor advised that the Council would not incur any penalties for late submission of their accounts. When the accounts were published on the Council website, they had a notice to explain why the audit opinion was not included.
- Councillors queried why there had been a delay with the TDBC accounts.
The External Auditor advised that there were several reasons why the accounts had been delayed which included an objection which had led to additional work.
- Councillors queried whether the accounts had ever been submitted late before.
The Section 151 Officer advised that he was not aware of the accounts being submitted late in the last 10 years. However, the timescales for

submission had changed from September to July in the last couple of years.

- Concern was raised on the timescale given for the objection to be completed.

The External Auditor explained there was no set timescale, however, the objection had to be completed before the audit could be signed off.

- Councillors requested clarification on how the objection was dealt with.
- Councillors queried who the lead officer was on matters that related to Brexit.

The lead officer was Robert Hillier, Head of Communications.

Resolved that the Committee considered and noted the report.

37. **SWAP Internal Audit - Progress Update 2019/20**

During the discussion, the following points were discussed:-

- Councillors queried whether the revised target date for the Bereavement Service Business Plan was achievable.
The Internal Auditor advised that the service managers had set the target dates.
- Councillors requested an update on the Business Plan be presented at the December meeting of the Committee.
- Councillors queried whether the old cemetery/crematorium administrative system would be kept whilst the new system was trialled, to ensure there was a contingency plan set up.
The Internal Auditor advised that the old system did not add any value, so they would not recommend to keep it whilst the new system was being installed.
- Councillors queried how long the new Service Manager had been in post.
The Internal Auditor advised they had been in post for approximately 5-6 months.
- Concern was raised on the follow up audit on Supplier Resilience and Councillors requested an update for the December meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee noted the progress made in delivery of the 2019/20 internal audit plan and significant findings since the previous update in June 2019.

38. **Annual Governance Statement Action Plan Update**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried when the audit on internal arrangements would be presented to the Committee.
The information would be on the agenda for the December meeting of the Committee.
- Concern was raised that items were being pushed back to the December meeting date.

The Monitoring Officer advised that prior to April 2019, officers had been responsible for managing 3 Councils and had worked on getting processes in place for the New Council and were now working on implementing and updating policies, which was the reason for the work being completed for the December meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee noted the progress against the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan for 2019/20.

39. **Corporate Equality Action Plan**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors welcomed the report and requested amendments were made on sections that included information on disabled people ambassadors, apprentices and graduate schemes and training on deaf awareness.
- Councillors wanted to ensure that the Somerset Equality Officer's Group (SEOG) objective that had been omitted, had been included and carried out.
- Councillors queried what work had been carried out on objective 8 for gypsy and travellers.

The Strategy Specialist advised that the SEOG objectives were something that SWT had joined but had not led on, so officers wanted to extend the objectives rather than creating new ones.

Resolved that the Committee:-

- Reviewed and recommended approval of this Plan to the Executive, with the following amendments:
 - To ensure that two disabled people ambassadors (to include one officer and one councillor) were appointed as part of the Action Plan;
 - To remove the word 'free' out of the Wacky Wednesday part of the free to attend public events section;
 - To encourage recruitment of apprentices and graduate scheme posts to include roles at the Depot and business administration; and
 - To amend the timescale for Customer Services to be trained in deaf awareness to 2019/20, provided the budget was available.
- Noted the agreed Equality Objectives and recommend the inclusion of the additional objective referred to within para 4.10 of the report.

40. **Local Government Ombudsman Report**

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors queried whether the amount of complaints received by the Ombudsman was at a normal level as the figures seemed quite low.
The Monitoring Officer advised that the figures were at a fairly normal level compared to other Councils. The figures were low because the Ombudsman wouldn't accept a complaint unless the local complaints procedure had been exhausted.

Resolved that the Committee noted the Local Government Ombudsman reports.

41. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved that the press and public be excluded during consideration of agenda item 14 on the grounds that, if the press and public were present during the item, there would be likely to be a disclosure to them of exempt information of the class specified in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended as follows: The item contained information that could release confidential information that related to an individual. It was therefore agreed that after consideration of all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

42. **Monitoring Officer Update**

The Monitoring Officer gave the Committee an update on matters that had arisen with Town and Parish Councils.

(The Meeting ended at 8.20 pm)