

Minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee Meeting held on 9 February 2021

Present: Martyn Tittley (Chairman)

Attendance

Derek Davis, OBE	Ann Edgeller
Carolyn Trowbridge (Vice-Chairman)	David Brookes
Ross Ward	Richard Ford
Bernard Williams	Helen Fisher
Paul Northcott	Philip Atkins, OBE
Susan Woodward	Keith Flunder
Alastair Little	Keith James

Apologies: Stephen Clark (Ernst Young – External Auditors)

PART ONE

48. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

49. Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 December 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

50. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Performance Annual Report 2019/20

The Committee considered the Health, Safety and Well Being Performance Report 2019/20, the reporting period immediately preceding the COVID 19 Emergency. Key areas of activity/successes detailed in the report included:

- the creation of a network of 150+ Mental Health First Aiders across the authority, and completion of a 2 year programme of mental health awareness training for Managers as part of work to embed MindKind into the organisation
- The launch of Well Being action plans to support colleagues in managing their mental health .
- Designed menopause awareness on line training as part of the development of a support network within the authority
- Completion by a newly appointed Fire Officer, of fire safety systems reviews and advanced training/upskilling for premise managers
- From February 2020 dealing with the initial impacts of COVID 19 in schools and playing a key role in the Incident Management Team responding and managing the impact of the virus on SCCs business, adult social care, vulnerable persons within the community, schools and wider community activity.

- Developing a plethora of guidance and support tools and material to assist Managers in implementing COVID restrictions, social distancing measures etc

The report further detailed the core work of the service in improving the health of the workforce, highlighting that, in line with the national trend for local government, there had been an increase in absence rates with the leading causes being psychological ill health and musculoskeletal conditions. The former was the main cause of increased absence in both the public and private sectors.

For 2020/21 the Service would continue to support COVID related activity within the Council, including the management of PPE, and focussing more on the Recovery phase and supporting Local Outbreak Control Management. Resource would also be allocated to developing a number of initiatives which had been held in abeyance during 2019/20. Performance Benchmarking would need to be adapted to reflect the move to home based/smart working.

Discussing the report, members heard that the take up of Mental Health support was being monitored. That support was strengthened by the regular launch of campaigns promoting personal well being initiatives.

RESOLVED – That the Annual report be noted.

51. Local Government Association – Model Code of Conduct for Members – Proposed Adoption by Staffordshire County Council

The Director for Corporate Services (Monitoring Officer) submitted a new Model Code of Conduct for Councillors as produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) and recommended by them for adoption by all Councils to provide a consistent approach nationally.

This Committee's comments to the LGA at the consultation stage for the new Code were also submitted to demonstrate the extent to which members' views were reflected in the final version. Notably this Council's views were being adopted in relation to the Code's application in all circumstances where a Councillor is acting, or giving the impression of acting in the role, and in the use of Social Media.

The Code included the requirement for members to declare (general) pecuniary interest for themselves, their family and close associates. Members discussed the practicalities of being able to identify such interests for the latter two categories.

Compatible with this Committee's views on the threshold for declarations of Gifts and Hospitality the new Code included a requirement to declare anything valued at £50 or over.

The Director proposed the introduction of the new Code following the May 2021 County Council elections.

RESOLVED – That with an amendment to the requirement to declare (general) pecuniary interests of family and close associates to apply to interests 'where known of

by the member', Full Council be recommended to approve the adoption of the new Code with effect from 6 May 2021.

52. Forward Plan

The Committee considered the remainder of the Forward Plan/Work Programme for 2020/21 noting that the document would be developed following the May 2021 County Council elections.

53. Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED – That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated.

- 54. Exempt minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2020 (exemption paragraph 3)**
- 55. CareDirector - Update following Audit Reports (exemption paragraph 3)**
- 56. Third Party Access Policy - Progress Report (exemption paragraph 3)**
- 57. Information Management - Final Audit Report 2020/21 (exemption paragraph 3)**

Chairman