

Minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee Meeting held on 22 March 2022

Present: Mike Worthington (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Edgeller
Bernard Peters

Janice Silvester-Hall
Arshad Afsar

Also in attendance: Lisa Andrews, Debbie Harris, Chris Ebberley and Mark (Ernst Young (external auditors)) Kathy Maitland (for minute no. 153), David Walters (for minute no. 154), Kerry Dove and Sarah Getley (for minute no. 155) and James Cartwright and Tim Cooper (for minute no. 156(a)).

Apologies: Carolyn Trowbridge, Ross Ward, Bernard Williams, Richard Ford, Philippa Haden, Phil Hewitt and Graham Hutton

PART ONE

145. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interests on this occasion.

146. Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 February 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

147. External Audit Plan 2021/22

Mark Russell from Ernst Young, External Auditors, reported that their audit of the 2020/21 accounts was expected to be completed around the beginning of April however nationally an issue had arisen regarding the treatment of Infrastructure Assets on Balance Sheets. A determination was awaited from CIPFA, which, depending on its complexity could cause a delay in the sign off of all accounts. This, in turn, affected the ability to share an audit Plan for 2021/22.

RESOLVED - That the position be noted and Ernst Young be requested to submit their 2021/22 Audit Plan as soon as possible.

148. Staffordshire Pension Fund Audit Planning Report 2021/22

Mark Russell, External Auditor, reported that, as for the County Councils final accounts, the Staffordshire Pension Fund Audit for 2020/21 was affected by the need to await a determination from CIPFA in relation to the treatment of Infrastructure Assets on Balance Sheets, and the possible actions resulting from that determination. Until the 2020/21 Accounts were signed off it was not possible to provide a 2021/22 Audit Plan.

RESOLVED – That the position be noted and Ernst Young be requested to provide the 2021/22 Audit Plan for the Staffordshire Pension Fund as soon as possible.

149. Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit & Standards Committee

The Director for Corporate Services reported on CIPFA Guidance on assessing the extent to which an Audit and Standards Committee achieved its key purposes of being a leading component in its Councils governance arrangements, monitoring the effectiveness of the risk management and internal control systems in use and protecting the integrity of the financial reporting processes. The guidelines also set out the knowledge and skills required of Committee members to be able to successfully achieve these objectives.

The Director submitted the results of a detailed assessment of this Committee highlighting changes and advances made under an Action Plan devised after similar exercises in 2018 and 2019. Changes included the production of an annual report on the committee's work. Members noted the importance of them having the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles and welcomed the proposed use of the CIPFA knowledge and skills framework to identify training and development needs.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and a further assessment be undertaken in 12 months' time.

150. Audit and Standards Committee Forward Plan 2021/22

RESOLVED – That this Committee's Forward Plan for the period to May 2022 and the proposal to increase the number of meetings held in 2022/23 to better accommodate the anticipated workload, be noted.

151. 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 (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 as indicated.

The Committee proceeded to consider the following items:

152. Exempt minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee 22 February 2022 (exemption paragraph 3)

153. Counter Fraud Report - Cash Purchase Card Transactions (Quarterly Report) (exemption paragraph 3)

154. Progress Report on the recommendations contained in the Infrastructure & Contract Quality Systems (exemption paragraph 3)

155. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion - Final Position Statement (exemption paragraph 3)

156. Internal Audit Reports on Climate Change (exemption paragraph 3)

a) Climate Change Final Report

b) Reactive Fraud Investigation – Whistleblowing Climate Change Action Fund Scheme & Breach in Standards of Public Life

Chairman