

Minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee Meeting held on 23 March 2015

Present: Keith James (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair)

Attendance

Derek Davis, OBE	Alison Spicer
Janet Eagland	Diane Todd
Michael Greateorex	Caroline Wood
Philip Jones	

Also in attendance: Kevin Jackson

Apologies: Mike Worthington, Derrick Huckfield, Martyn Tittley and Conor Wileman

PART ONE

93. Declarations of Interest

Ms Alison Spicer and Mr Kevin Jackson recorded their membership of the Staffordshire Pension Fund.

Ms Alison Spicer recorded her employment with the Stoke on Trent City Council.

94. Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 December 2014

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

Arising thereon:–

Minutes No. 84 – Mr Kevin Jackson asked that his membership of the Staffordshire Pension Fund be recorded.

95. Proposed Changes to the Constitution - Revised County Council Petitions Scheme

Members considered a report of the Director for Democracy, Law and Transformation on proposed revisions to the Petitions Scheme, as detailed in the appendix to the report, and the necessary amendments to the Constitution.

Members discussed the proposed amendments in detail and considered that consideration of the report be deferred pending consultation with the Leader of the County Council and the Leader of the Major Minority Party in order to ascertain their views on the proposals. A further report would then be submitted to the Audit and Standards Committee for consideration.

Following a show of hands it was -

RESOLVED – That consideration of the report on proposed changes to the constitution be deferred pending consultation with the Leader of the County Council and the Leader of the Major Minority Party and that a further report be then considered by the Audit and Standards Committee.

(Note – Mr Michael Greatorex voted against the proposal)

96. Information Governance Annual Report

Members considered a report of the Director of Law, Democracy and Transformation on the Information Governance Annual Report.

Information Governance was the practice that allowed the County Council to manage its information in an appropriate, efficient and secure manner that balanced the importance of maintaining confidentiality and individual privacy at the same time as promoting openness and transparency. It contributed to the management of risk, in protecting the Council's reputation, the avoidance of statutory penalties and instilling confidence in the citizens of Staffordshire.

There was a comprehensive and complex legal information landscape within which the County Council had to operate including compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and other statutes. In addition, there were a number of further requirements contained within Codes of Practice and Regulations dealing with a number of provisions.

The County Council had identified and promoted an Information Governance Framework available to staff through the Council's intranet pages.

The report detailed information on the following – Freedom of Information; transparency; data protection; privacy; information security; governance; training; record management; and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

Members were informed that the authority was committed to assisting the Police and Crime Prosecution Service in their investigations and the County Council had signed up to a national protocol to expedite Police and CPS requests for information in child safeguarding investigations known as Annex C requests. The County Council had made a commitment that an Annex C request under the protocol would be answered within 14 days, however, in practice this would often be done within 7 days. Since April 2014 some 108 Annex C requests and 109 Section 29 requests had been responded to.

Members discussed the problem of obtaining information on incidents of child abuse that occurred within their electoral division and the Head of Information Governance explained that general information would be available but detailed information on individual cases would only be released with the individual's consent. Members were reminded that if they had any concerns relating to issues of child abuse they could refer the matter to the Multi Safeguarding Hub.

A Member commented that on Appendix A "information requests January 2014 to December 2014", it would be useful to have the previous figures for comparison

purposes. It was pointed out that the information had not printed clearly and the Information Governance Officer undertook to re-circulate the appendices.

RESOLVED – That the Information Governance Annual Report be accepted as a current reflection on the provision of Information Governance assurance for Staffordshire County Council.

97. External Audit Plan 2014/15

Mr Richard Bacon, PricewaterhouseCoopers presented the External Audit Plan 2014-2015, which covered – audit approach; risk of fraud; the PWC Team; and audit fees.

A member queried if PWC had challenged the savings projected by the County Council particularly as this would be central to the MTFs. Mr Richard Bacon, PWC, explained, that as previously reported at the last meeting, they had looked at the arrangements to the delivering of the County Council's plans for savings and had considered that the targets had been achievable at that point in time. Now that the position had been crystallised they would re-evaluate the situation and report to the Committee at the June meeting.

RESOLVED – That the External Audit Plan 2014/15 be received and noted.

98. Staffordshire Pension Fund - External Audit Plan 2014/15

Mr Richard Bacon, PricewaterhouseCoopers, presented the County Pension Fund – External Audit Plan 2014/15.

The plan covered – the audit approach, risk of fraud, PWC Team, and audit fees.

RESOLVED – That the County Council Pension Fund External Audit Plan 2014/15 be received and noted.

99. Protecting the Public Purse - Fraud Briefing (2013/14 Exercise)

Members received a presentation, illustrated by slides, by Mr Richard Bacon, PricewaterhouseCoopers, on protecting the public purse – fraud briefing 2013/14 exercise.

The presentation covered areas including – interpreting fraud detection results; total detected cases and value 2013/14; social care fraud 2013/14 detected cases; school's fraud 2013/14 detected cases; disabled parking (blue badge) fraud 2012/13 detected cases; council tax discount fraud 2013/14; and other fraud detected in Staffordshire during 2013/14.

Members commented that it would be useful to have a breakdown of cases of detected council tax fraud within individual electoral districts. The Chief Internal Auditor said that this information was available and she undertook to circulate the previous report considered by the Committee containing the details, which might be of interest to members.

RESOLVED – That the presentation on the Protecting the Public Purse – Fraud Briefing, be received and noted.

100. Launch of the North West Staffordshire Fraud Hub

Members received a presentation by the Chief Internal Auditor illustrated by slides, on the launch of the North West Staffordshire Fraud Hub.

The presentation included information on – the audit commission’s fraud estimate tool; the bid; fraud hub aim; publicity and the next steps.

The North West Staffordshire Fraud Hub aimed to strengthen the County Council’s counter fraud arrangements incorporating areas of improved technology, additional resources and access to different prosecution routes. Current areas targeted included blue badge usage, payroll and pensions fund data, insurance claims and new direct payments data. New potential areas to be considered included; procurement, local welfare assistance, economic and third sector support fraud, failure to work required hours, and recruitment fraud.

RESOLVED – That the presentation on the launch of the North West Staffordshire Fraud Hub be received and noted.

101. Work Programme for the Audit and Standards Committee/ Member Training Update

Members considered a report of the Director of Finance and Resources on the indicative work programme for the Audit and Standards Committee with specific reference to the next meeting on 30 June 2015.

RESOLVED – That the Indicative Work Programme for the Audit and Standards Committee be received and noted.

102. Exclusion of the Public

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 paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 as indicated below.

103. Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 December 2014

(Exemption Paragraph 3)

RESOLVED – That the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

104. Internal Audit Reports - High Risk Reviews plus Limited Assurance Reviews plus Special Investigations

(exemption paragraph 3)

105. Independent Futures

106. Claims Management Regulation Unit - Use of Purchase Cards and Travel Expense Claims

Chairman