

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

Meeting of Audit Committee

Date: Wednesday, 25th October, 2023

Place: Committee Room 1 - Civic Suite

Present: Councillor M Terry (Chair)
Councillors O Carley (Vice-Chair), L Burton, P Collins, *T Cowdrey,
M Dent, N Folkard, J Harland, M O'Connor and K Pandya

*Substitute in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 31.

In Attendance: Councillors T Cox and J Moyies
A Barnes, R Harris, P Bates, S Dutton, C Fozzard and V Smith

Start/End Time: 6.30 pm - 9.00 pm

9 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stafford (substitute: Cllr Cowdrey).

10 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this meeting.

11 Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th July 2023

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

12 Annual Report on Comments, Complaints and Compliments 2022/23

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change) presenting:

- Performance information about general comments, complaints and compliments received across the Council for 2022/23.
- An annual report concerning compliments, concerns and complaints received about the Council's Children and Adults' social care functions.
- The findings of certain Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigations.
- Assurance that the above complaints systems are effective.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers.

Resolved:

1. That it be noted that the Council has the necessary structures in place to manage complaints received through the General and Children's and Adult Social Care statutory complaint processes.
2. That it be noted that the Council has the necessary structures in place to manage comments, compliments and concerns received.
3. That the contents of the annual letter of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, be noted.
4. The summary of complaints upheld by the Ombudsman, be noted.
5. That it be noted that compliance with timescales in all types and stages of complaints requires improvement and the Governance Board will be asked to drive improvement across the organisation.
6. That the timeliness of remedial actions agreed with the Ombudsman requires improvement and that the Governance Board will be asked to drive improvement across the organisation, be noted.
7. That it be noted that the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman are jointly consulting on a proposed Complaint Handling Code which if adopted will require amendment to the Council's current general complaints process and a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee on any amendments arising from the joint consultation.
8. That quarterly progress reports be presented to future meetings of the Audit Committee to update on complaints, compliments and comments, including details of any trends/common themes.

13 Information Governance Update and Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) Annual Report 2022/23

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) presenting a summary of the Council's key actions in regard to information governance and management during 2022/23.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers.

Resolved:

1. That the submitted report of the Senior Information Risk Owner on Information Governance for 2022/23, be noted.
2. That it be noted that the Council has the necessary structures in place to manage information lawfully as demonstrated by the compliance with the Data Security and Protection Toolkit and cyber security audits.
3. That it be noted that officers have good external networks ensuring good practice is shared regionally and implemented within the Council.

4. That it be noted that in response to the Corporate Peer Review the Council has introduced a Governance Board as a means of providing oversight of the information framework.

5. That it be noted that training and awareness tools are available to officers and Councillors, however, participation while adequate could be improved and the Governance Board will be asked to improve the cascade of training throughout the organisation.

6. That it be noted that the fulfilment of Freedom of Information/Environmental Information requests and Subject Access Requests requires improvement and the Governance Board will be asked to drive improvement across the organisation.

7. That it be noted that officers across the Council are participating in a major drive to move information to a better structured and more secure environment as part of the Shared Data Migration project led by ICT.

14 CIPFA Financial Management Code Action Plan Progress Report

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting an update on the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's Financial Management Code and to report on progress against the action plan that resulted from the Council's previous self-assessment undertaken in March 2023.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers.

Resolved:

1. That it be noted that the Council's latest mid-year self-assessment continues to demonstrate overall compliance with CIPFA's Financial Management Code.

2. That the progress against the Financial Management Code action plan that was reported to the Audit Committee on 26 April 2023, be noted.

3. That it be noted that the next annual self-assessment of the Council's compliance status against CIPFA's Financial Management Code will be undertaken and reported to the Audit Committee in April 2024.

15 Deloitte: Report to the Audit Committee on the audit for the year ended 31 March 2022

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting the summary of the results of the work completed to date for the 2021/22 financial year with regard to the opinion on the Statement of Accounts and the commentary on the Council's Value for Money arrangements conclusion.

Resolved:

That the Report to the Audit Committee on the audit for the year ended 31 March 2022, be accepted.

16 Deloitte: Auditor's Annual Report for 2021/22 to the Audit Committee

This matter was deferred and will be considered at the Audit Committee meeting to be held on 10th January 2024.

17 Adoption of the final Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 and Statement of Accounts 2021/22

The Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22 was presented to Audit Committee on 20 July 2022 and approved, subject to any further views expressed by External Audit. This report is to recommend the final Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22 (which incorporates only minor changes requested by External Audit) to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive for authorisation and signature.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers and the external auditors.

Resolved:

1. That the Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22 be recommended to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive for authorisation and signature, and incorporation in the Statement of Accounts 2021/22.

2. That the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 be adopted and approved for publication, subject to any final review and amendments required, as a result of the remaining audit matters outstanding.

18 Deloitte: Planning Report to the Audit Committee for the year ended 31 March 2023

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting the External Auditor's Audit planning report for 2022/23 to the Audit Committee.

Resolved:

That Deloitte's Audit planning report for 2022/23, be noted.

19 Counter Fraud & Investigation Team Quarterly Performance Report

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting an update on the progress made by the Counter Fraud & Investigation Team (CFIT) in delivering the Counter Fraud Strategy and Work Programme for 2023/24.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers. On consideration of the report the Leader of the Council gave his commitment that where there is a critical business need the resources/funding would be made available to ensure the CFIT have the necessary resources and tools.

Resolved:

That the performance of the Counter Fraud & Investigation Team over the last three months, be noted.

20 Internal Audit Service Quarterly Performance Report

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) presenting an update on the progress made in delivering the Internal Audit Strategy and Plan for 2023/24.

The Committee asked questions which were responded to by officers.

Resolved:

That the progress made in delivering the 2023/24 Internal Audit Strategy and Plan, be noted.

Chair: _____