

**Minutes of the Audit Committee  
25 June 2015**

**Present:**

Councillor M.J. Madams (Chairman)  
Councillor A.C. Harman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

H.R.D. Williams

**Apologies:** Councillors S.A. Dunn, D. Saliagopoulos and H.A. Thomson

**155/15 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2015 were approved as a correct record.

**156/15 Disclosures of Interest**

There were none.

**157/15 Internal Audit Annual report**

The Internal Audit Manager outlined the Internal Audit Annual Report 2014/2015 which demonstrated how the authority fulfilled its statutory requirements to 'maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal control in accordance with proper internal audit practices.'

The Committee queried the issue of members of staff receiving up-to-date job descriptions with regards to the review and restructure of the organisation. The Committee also requested information regarding the frequency of when job descriptions were updated for staff. The Deputy Chief Executive reassured the Committee that as part of the standard annual appraisal process a question is included in the self-assessment forms asking all members of staff whether they required an updated job description and any changes are made.

**Resolved** to note the Internal Audit Annual Report 2014/15.

**158/15 Corporate Risk Management**

The Internal Audit Manager reported that the Corporate Risk Register had undergone its regular quarterly review and update by the Corporate Risk Management Group and Management Team to ensure that actions were being taken to deal with the identified risks. She explained that Cabinet would now receive the Corporate Risk Register on a quarterly basis to ensure that significant issues and risks affecting the authority are highlighted to the Cabinet and relevant Portfolio Holders.

The Internal Audit Manager summarised the risks affecting the Council, as outlined in the report specifically the business continuity plans, service planning, the Towards a Sustainable Future (TaSF) project, the amount of projects, staff morale and the procurement and contracts of the authority.

She explained that the Council currently had 26 projects ongoing and indicated that Management Team in collaboration with the Cabinet must continue to assess the capacity of the Council to achieve and develop new projects and manage the potential revenue implications associated. Furthermore she indicated that the TaSF project required a higher level of overview to oversee the development of the project in its entirety, but she acknowledged that the Internal Audit Team recognises that the Head of Customer Services provides an overlooking aspect to the project.

The Committee was concerned with the amount of ongoing higher level projects and questioned whether they were reviewed. The Internal Audit Manager agreed that there were a large number of projects for the size of the authority, but reassured the Committee that regular project management update reports used to highlight issues were being reported to Management Team and Cabinet and constant discussions were taking place.

The revised register was considered to be an accurate reflection of the high level risks affecting the Authority and progress on actions was documented on the register.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) The contents of the Corporate Risk Register be noted and accepted;
- 2) That the Corporate Risk Register be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

### **159/15 Corporate Risk Management - Grounds Maintenance Contract**

The Head of Streetscene gave an update on the provision of internal horticultural expertise to manage the grounds maintenance contract and tree maintenance works. She provided a historical background of developments surrounding the Council's horticultural knowledge and accepted that an element of expertise was necessary to manage the contract.

She explained that significant developments had been made as a result of the issues highlighted within the Corporate Risk Register and since the

intervention of the Audit Committee. She explained that she successfully completed a Royal Horticultural Society course in horticultural standards in 2014 and since then has created a booklet, detailing what works need to be completed and when annually. The booklet informs Enforcement officers on the ground, who are inspecting the parks and open spaces of the Borough, what they need to be looking out for and what time of year certain works need to be accomplished. For instance, why grass cutting takes place at a certain time of year, what pests and diseases to be aware of and what trees to look out for to determine whether maintenance may be required. She informed the Committee that a detailed spreadsheet and timetable had also been created for the enforcement teams to use to identify what maintenance needs to occur on an annual basis.

In addition she explained to the Committee that an inspection programme had been developed which ensured a full inspection of every park and open space at least once every three months.

She also explained that she attended a number of courses to further extend the team's horticultural knowledge on plant design, weed control, an IOSH course regarding contractors and clients and a course on trees, grounds and caterpillars. She explained that the knowledge acquired has been passed on and shared with team members.

The Committee queried how the new team had responded to learning and retaining the horticultural information. The Head of Streetscene reassured the Committee that the new team had fully embraced the issues and were very active at learning and practicing the horticultural information.

The Committee thanked the Head of Streetscene for alleviating the risks associated with horticultural expertise and the grounds maintenance contact and tree maintenance works.

**Resolved** that the contents of the grounds maintenance update be noted.

#### **160/15 Exempt Business**

**Resolved** to move the exclusion of the Press and Public for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 and by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006.

#### **161/15 Exempt - Corporate Risk Management - Business Continuity**

Paragraph 7 - Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

And on the basis that publication of this report and appendix would not be in the public interest because disclosure to the public might afford an opportunity to defeat the purpose for which the prevention of crime is being made.

**Resolved** that the contents of the business continuity update be noted.

### **162/15 Committee Work Programme**

The Committee considered its Work Programme for the current 2015-2016 Municipal year.

The Committee noted that Council had agreed on 26 February 2015 to reduce the amount of Audit Committee meetings to three per year and that the December meeting would no longer take place. The Chairman reassured the Committee and officers present that if there was important business that warranted an additional meeting, a further meeting would be scheduled.

**Resolved** to note the Committee Work Programme 2015-2016.

### **163/15 Chairman's thanks to the Head of Audit Services**

The Committee thanked Deanna Harris, Head of Audit Services for her services to the Audit Committee and her work managing the Council's Internal Audit over the past 18 years and wished her a happy and healthy retirement.

The Head of Audit Services addressed the Committee and thanked them for their support to the Internal Audit Team. She gave a special thanks to Punita Talwar, the Internal Audit Manager and Nighat Sheikh, the Senior Auditor for their support to her over the years and the positive contribution they make to internal audit. She had every confidence in the future of internal audit and thanked them for their professionalism and competency.

She also thanked the Deputy Chief Executive, Terry Collier for his support over the years.