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General Purposes & Audit Committee

Meeting of held on Thursday, 10 June 2021 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Karen Jewitt (Chair);

Councillor Paul Scott, Chris Clark, Joy Prince, Stuart Millson and
Jan Buttinger

Apologies: Councillor Steve Hollands

PART A

83/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

84/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

85/21 **Oracle Audit Presentation**

The Committee received a presentation to update Members on progress towards addressing the Oracle security.

Victoria Richardson, Head of HR and Finance Service Centre introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

a) Tools for large organisations: Following a question from a Member, the Officer explained that it is recommended to use a tool designed for a larger environment with complex role structures, as basic office tools were not optimal. It was important for the Council to make a decision around what was the best route forward to manage the risk

b) Timeline: Following a question from a Member, the Officer noted that the Auditor found the Oracle Audit complex, and forecast a decision date for the Autumn. There was approval in principle for the business case but it was subject to further license negotiations with Oracle regarding the cost benefit analysis

c) Reference to background papers: Members highlighted issues around knowing the context of the Oracle system, and noted that it may be helpful in future to note any background papers which could be read in advance of report consideration. It was noted that the Committee may be

made up of different Members from meeting to meeting. The Officer noted these comments.

The Committee noted the presentation and thanked Officers.

86/21

Terms of Reference

The Committee received a report detailing a review of the terms of reference, membership, dates and frequency of meetings of the General Purposes and Audit Committee.

Asmat Hassain, Interim Executive Director of Resources introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

a) Whistleblowing Policy: Following a question from a Member, the Officer confirmed that the Council did have a standing Whistleblowing Policy which was considered annually by the Ethics Committee. There had been low numbers of whistleblowing concerns raised within the Council which meant the reasons behind it happening had not been investigated. This was a proposal to bring a refresh of the policy and procedure

b) Independent Chair: The Officer noted that the Committee was moving to having an Independent Chair. It was common practise to have one independent person as well as Committee Members so the Chair would follow the standard criteria in the absence of the two independent member posts

c) Training for Members: Members raised concerns regarding the turnover of Members forming makeup of the Committee, and highlighted the potential benefit of regular training to bring new Members up to speed so that they could offer positive contributions and ongoing expertise. The Officer noted that it was common practise to have Members of the Committee brought in on an annual basis, but this could be considered and brought back to Committee.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1.1 Considered and reviewed its Membership (including the role of the co-opted members), Terms of Reference, together with dates and frequency of future meetings as set out in Appendix 1, 2 and 3 of the report respectively;

1.2 Considered to recommend to full Council that the Terms of Reference be amended to include review of the Council's use of our policies in relation to Whistleblowing and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act;

1.3 Agreed no next steps were required;

1.4 Noted that any changes to the Constitution and associated requirements would need to be referred to Full Council for final consideration.

Update on Independent Chair for General Purposes and Audit

Asmat Hassain, Interim Executive Director of Resources presented a verbal update, highlighting that:

- The job description had been finalised and sent to external recruitment agency, Starfish who were going to assist in the candidate search, which would be going to advert the week after the evening of the Committee meeting
- It would take a couple of months from start to finish to shortlist and undertake interviews, which would be done in accordance with the Appointments Committee process. This was a Member-Appointment with Officers acting as observers in the process
- The role of independent Chair was common within public bodies but unique to Local Authorities. It was positive that Croydon would be one of the first London Borough Council's to have an independent Chair

The following matter was raised by Members:

- a) Job profiling: Members asked whether they were able to receive a copy of the job description and person specification for the vacancy, as well as the remuneration figure. The Officer agreed to circulate all relevant paperwork to Committee Members
The Committee noted the update and thanked Officers.

Report in the Public Interest Action Plan - Progress Update

Asmat Hassain, Interim Executive Director of Resources introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by the Committee:

The Committee received a report providing the Quarter 1 update of progress made responding to the Council's Report in the Public Interest.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) Completed Items: Members highlighted that it may be beneficial to add the date of completion so that delivery could be compared with planned actions
- b) Children in Care: Members highlighted the section under children in care being marked as complete. Following a question from a Member, the Officer explained that this work was consistently on-going, and that 'complete' mean that it had gone through all of the relevant processes within the service
- c) Access to Budget Savings Tracker: Following a question from a Member, the Officer explained that access to the Budget Savings Tracker was not usually given to individuals. This was because it was a live

working document and varied day to day. Instead, Members could expect to be updated upon its contents regularly.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1.1 Noted and agreed the progress the Council had made in regard to achieving the recommendations set out by external auditor in the Report in the Public Interest (appendix 1 of the report) with 55 out of 99 actions complete;

1.2 Noted the beginning of work to properly evidence what had been achieved so far and the intention to carry out an internal audit of actions delivered to provide full assurance to members and residents on the change achieved;

1.3 Noted the Refreshed Action Plan, which incorporated recommendations made by GPAC as per 2nd December 2020 meeting. This was approved by Cabinet 12th April 2021 and reviewed by the Head of Internal Audit.

89/21

Update on Council Whistleblowing

With the agreement of the Chair, this Item was deferred due to it being dependent on the Committee agreeing its Terms of Reference. It would be brought to the next Committee Agenda for consideration.

90/21

Anti-Fraud Update Report

The Committee received a report providing an update on the Council's Anti-Fraud activity.

David Hogan, Head of Anti-Fraud introduced the report.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1.1 Noted the Anti-fraud activity of the Corporate Anti-Fraud Team for the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021.

91/21

Corporate Risk Register

The Committee received a report providing the updated contents of the Corporate Risk Register.

Malcom Davies, Head of Insurance, Anti-Fraud and Risk introduced the report.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1.1 Noted the contents of the corporate risk register as at 6 June 2021.

92/21

Work Programme

Asmat Hassain, Interim Executive Director of Resources introduced the report.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1.1 Agreed the Work Programme 2021/22.

The meeting ended at 9.08 pm

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