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General Purposes & Audit Committee

Meeting of held on Wednesday, 16 February 2022 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Karen Jewitt (Vice-Chair in the Chair);

Councillors Chris Clark, Clive Fraser, Lynne Hale, Ola Kolade, Stuart Millson, Paul Scott, Margaret Bird (In place of Ian Parker), Pat Clouder (In place of Nina Degrad) and Sean Fitzsimons (In place of Joy Prince)

Also Present: Dr. Olu Olasode

Apologies: Councillors Nina Degrad, Ian Parker, Joy Prince

PART A

11/22 **Minutes of Previous Meetings**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 January 2022, and the Minutes of the meetings held on 26 April 2021 and 8 July 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

12/22 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

13/22 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

14/22 **Appointment of External Auditors**

The Committee received a report asking for its agreement to recommend to Full Council that the external auditor for the Council and for the pension fund for the audit years 2023/2024 to 2027/2028 should be appointed by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd.

Dave Phillips, Head of Internal Audit, introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) **New External Auditor:** Members highlighted the issues the Council had faced with its current External Auditor. It was noted that the problems currently being faced would remain to be solved even if a new Auditor was appointed
- b) **Rotation:** Members highlighted the benefits of a potential rotation of External Auditors. Although it was noted that this would come with its own set of hindrances, including inconsistency of service, Members suggested it might be in the Council's best interest to implement such a recommendation. The Officer explained that by going out to tender every 5 years, whereby there is fair competition, even if the current contractor is again successful it is not the same as simply extending an existing contract. Notwithstanding, he did acknowledge members concerns regarding rotation of the external auditor
- c) **Role of PSAA:** Members asked a question around what may have happened if you were dissatisfied with service provided. The Officer explained that the PSAA were wholly responsible for the contract management of the External Auditor from the Council and would deal with any concerns had regarding its function.

Councillor Paul Scott proposed additional wording be added to the recommendation requesting for a rotation so that a new External Auditor would be appointed.

This was seconded by Councillor Stuart Millson and agreed unanimously by the Committee.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Agreed to recommend to Full Council that the external auditor for the Council and for the pension fund for the audit years 2023/2024 to 2027/2028 should be appointed by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA), which was a subsidiary of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) which was wholly owned by the Local Government Association, with a request for a rotation so that a new External Auditor would be appointed.

15/22 **Internal Audit Report**

The Committee received a report detailing the findings of the Internal Audit Report.

Dave Phillips, Interim Head of Internal Audit introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) **Timeframe:** Following a question from a Member, the Officer explained that there was not a specific timeframe by which it was expected to see an improved culture. It was noted that culture change was a process that took time. There had been a lot of movement already, led by CMT actions. Another factor was with new Council staff being appointed, who brought culture in from their previous local authorities, thereby helping improve Croydon's culture.
- b) **Audit Workshops:** Members noted the recent Audit Workshops held by CMT and asked whether they could access the actions and timeframes produced within them. The s151 Officer confirmed that this could be put into place subject to the removal of any Part B sensitive information
- c) **Placement Deposits Audit:** Following a request from a Member, the Officer agreed to circulate the Placement Deposits Audit to Committee Members and ensure it was published online
- d) **FoI/SARs Audit:** The update response detailed in the report to the FoI/SAR report was discussed. Noting that the Council used Power BI to complete a number of tasks and functions, particularly in holding individual teams and services to account for accuracy and providing performance reporting, the update response was queried and clarification was requested.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Agreed to note the Internal Audit Report to 31 December 2021 (Appendix 1 of the report).

16/22 **Care Cubed**

The Committee received a report providing an update on the procurement, implementation and effectiveness of the CareCubed costing tool for working age adult and children's social care placements.

Richard Eyre, Head of Improvement introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) **Projected Savings:** Following a question from a Member, the Officer explained that it was not possible to predict at that moment how much money may be saved overall
- b) **Staffing:** Members highlighted pressures in staffing, particularly within the disability teams. The Officer agreed to note that four critical vacancies had recently been recruited to, including a number of experienced team managers who had taken post
- c) **Report:** It was noted that it would be beneficial for colleagues in Children's Services to bring an update on their area to a future Committee, and for the responsible Cabinet Member to attend. This

would give the Committee more insight and detail on the progress of works and savings.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Agreed to note the progress of implementation; and identified for a Committee in Period 6 of 2022/23 for a further progress update

17/22 **Work Programme**

The Committee received a report detailing the Work Programme for forthcoming meetings of the Committee.

Sarah Keeble, Democratic Services and Governance Officer, introduced the report, highlighting that the report contained an Item for 3 March meeting titled 'Report in Public Interest Action Plan' which should be amended to read: Fairfield Halls: Report in the Public Interest Action Plan.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) **Subject of Deep Dive:** The Independent Chair highlighted that the Committee had been asked what it would like to see on the next Deep Dive. Members noted that it may be possible to make a more informed decision on what they would like the Deep Dive to report on following the next presentation of the Corporate Risk Register, which was scheduled to come to the meeting of the Committee on 3 March
- b) **Pre-Council Meeting:** Members highlighted the importance of each Group's Pre-Council Meeting. There had been a recent clash in scheduling of a Special Committee meeting which had caused issues for the Majority Group. It was requested that once the Chief Whip from each party had nominated their Pre-Council Meeting date that it be formally put in to the Council diary to avoid any clashes in the future.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Considered the agreed work programme for the Committee in 2021/22.

The meeting ended at 8.58 pm

Signed:

Date:

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