BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

AUDIT, STANDARDS & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

4.00pm 24 SEPTEMBER 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor West (Chair) Guilmant (Group Spokesperson), Baghoth, Gauge, Mackey, Meadows and Hewitt

PART ONE

15 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

15a Declarations of substitutes

15.1 Councillor Hewitt was present as a substitute for Councillor Grimshaw.

15b Declarations of interests

15.2 There were none.

15c Exclusion of the press and public

15.3 In accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Committee considered whether the public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item of business on the grounds that it is likely in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during it, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act.

15.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting.

16 MINUTES

16.1 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 June 2024 be approved and signed as the correct record.

17 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

17.1 The Chair provided the following communications:

"First of all, while we don't normally take apologies for absence, as most members will arrange a substitute, I have received apologies from Independent councillor Peter Atkinson. Peter is having a challenging kitchen refit experience which has left him without a kitchen for 3 weeks and this afternoon is the only time he has pinned the builder down to meet with him. Peter is quite distressed to be missing the committee as he does take his member responsibilities seriously. Peter, I hope you get a good result today!

May I welcome a number of new members to the committee. And, I hope the recent session, which forms part of our on-going member training, was helpful to all able to attend.

There is an undoubted complexity and heavy technical nature to much of the committee's audit business - it can take a while for members to get their eye in - so don't be daunted by this. Officers are always more than ready to help build understanding, and as Chair I'm keen to ensure members have the time they need to explore questions about our business in meetings.

We take a positive approach to our oversight of internal audit and anti-fraud - activities that strive to help the organisation maintain and improve performance and reduce financial loss through dishonesty.

Our work also aims to help maintain and improve standards in public life - and as members of this committee we act as ambassadors for this as well as giving oversight. We have a regular report on progress with member standards complaints, and will be considering draft improvements to the initial assessment process that Cllr Guilmant and myself have been working on with officers.

Since May the committee has also taken on responsibilities for considering policy developments that would be inappropriate for the cabinet or other committees to set. I'm pleased to say we have our first taste of this new work before us today as we will be considering the draft new anti-bullying, harassment and victimisation policy - an important development in the Council's support for staff.

Our work is important to the good governance of the city council, and I hope you all find our work fulfilling, if not always that exciting! Finally, I'd like to welcome Cllr Taylor, lead Cabinet Member for finance, who is attending today and will be available to help answer our questions when we discuss our first two reports. Thank you."

18 CALL OVER

18.1 The Democratic Services officer called the agenda items to the committee. All items were reserved for discussion.

19 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

19.1 No public representations were received.

20 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

20.1 No member representations were received.

21 EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2023-24

21.1 The committee considered the audit findings report that set out the findings of the 2023/24 audit by the council's appointed external auditor, Grant Thornton. It included the key messages arising from the audit of the financial statements and the results of work undertaken to assess the Authority's arrangements to secure value for money in its use of its resources.

21.2 Councillors Gauge, Guilmant, Meadows, and West asked questions and contributed to the debate of the report.

21.3 **RESOLVED –**

That the Audit, Standards, and General Purposes Committee note the findings set out in the 2023/24 Audit Findings Report and ask questions of the auditor as necessary and raise any other matters relevant to the audit of the 2023/24 financial statements.

22 AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023-24

22.1 The committee considered the report providing information on the audit of the council's 2023/24 Statement of Accounts and recommends approval of the 2023/24 audited accounts and the Letter of Representation on behalf of the council. The accounts should be viewed alongside the council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which is also approved by the Audit, Standards & General Purposes Committee.

22.2 Councillors Guilmant and West asked questions and contributed to the debate of the report.

22.3 **RESOLVED –**

That the Audit, Standards, and General Purposes Committee:

1) Notes the findings of the external auditor Grant Thornton as set out in their audit findings report.

2) Notes the results of the public inspection of the accounts.

3) Approves the Letter of Representation on behalf of the council.

4) Approves the audited Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 subject to any final amendments.

5) Delegates authority to the Chief Finance Officer for any final wording or immaterial adjustments to the accounts prior to publication

23 INTERNAL AUDIT AND COUNTER FRAUD QUARTER 1 PROGRESS REPORT 2024/25

23.1 The committee considered the report on all internal audit and counter fraud activity completed during quarter 1 (2024/25), including a summary of all key audit findings. The report also includes an update on the performance of the Internal Audit Service during the period.

23.2 Councillors Guilmant, Meadows, and West asked questions and contributed to the debate of the report.

23.3 **RESOLVED –**

That the Audit, Standards, and General Purposes Committee note the report.

24 NEW BULLYING HARASSMENT AND VICTIMISATION POLICY AND PROCEDURE

24.1 The committee considered the approval of a new Anti Bullying Harassment and Victimisation Policy and Procedure to replace the existing Dignity and Respect at Work Policy and Guidance documents.

24.2 Councillors Baghoth, Gauge, Guilmant, Hewitt, Mackey, Meadows, and West asked questions and contributed to the debate.

24.3 **RESOLVED –**

That the Audit, Standards, and General Purposes Committee:

1) Agrees the new Anti Bullying Harassment and Victimisation Policy and Procedure to replace the existing Dignity at Work Policy and Guidance.

2) Delegates authority to the acting Corporate Director – Corporate Services to take any action necessary to implement this on or after the 1st October 2024.

25 STANDARDS UPDATE

25.1 The committee considered a report on an update on standards-related matters, including on the progress of complaints alleging that Members have breached the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and a proposed update to the procedure for dealing with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members.

25.2 Councillors Gauge, Guilmant, Meadows, and West asked questions and contributed to the debate of the report.

25.3 The committee voted in favour of the report recommendations, Councillor Meadows abstained.

25.3 **RESOLVED –**

That the Audit, Standards, and General Purposes Committee:

1) Note the contents of this report, including the data provided on member complaints at Appendix 1.

2) Approve the proposed changes to the initial tests against which member complaints are assessed as set out in Appendix 2 and give the Monitoring Officer delegated authority to update the Council's Constitution to incorporate those changes, including by making any changes considered necessary or incidental to give effect to the proposal.

26 ITEMS REFERRED FOR COUNCIL

26.1 No items were referred to Full Council for information.

27 ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

27.1 No items were requested for the next meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6.10pm

Signed Chair

Dated this day of