

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Tuesday, 21 January 2020 - 2.00 pm

PRESENT Councillor P Hackett (Chair)
Councillors C Hodson, R Craigie, K Hepple and M Clarke

ALSO PRESENT	K Brown	- Democratic Services Officer
	S Hearse	- Strategic Manager (Resources)
	A Davies	- Engagement Manager - Grant Thornton
	R Hutchins	- Devon Audit Partnership Manager
	T Vanstone	- Senior Electoral & Democratic Services Officer
	C Dobbs	- Service Improvement Officer
	A Walling	- Engagement Lead - Grant Thornton
	S Toon	- Customer Support Manager

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

111. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hutchings and Councillor Rossi.

112. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 22 October 2019 were presented.

Minute 95

The Strategic Manager (Resources) has received a letter from Devon County Council in regard to the funding strategy for the pension strategy requesting any comments. The Strategic Manager (Resources) has contacted Mark Gayler - DCC asking if we can comment on the investment strategy rather than the funding strategy. Mark Gayler confirmed we can comment and also offered to present to the A&G committee.

The Chair confirmed that they would invite Mark Gayler to the next meeting.

Minute 98

Cllr Hodson asked for update on the number of councillors who had carried out GDPR training. The Strategic Manager (Resources) confirmed that 59% of councillors had carried out the training.

It was agreed that The Strategic Manager (Resources) will draft an email to councillors reminding them of the safeguarding training dates for Councillor Hodson to send to members.

It was proposed by Councillor Craigie, seconded by Councillor Hodson and –

Resolved:

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(Vote: For 4, Abstentions 1)

113. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

114. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

The agenda as circulated was agreed.

115. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

There were no urgent matters brought forward.

116. CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Service Improvement Officer presented the report and explained the purpose and content. The Service Improvement Officer confirmed that the Code of Corporate Governance would be published once approved by the Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor Hepple and –

Resolved:

That the revised Code of Corporate Governance be approved.

(Vote: For Unanimous)

117. AGS - REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The Service Improvement Officer presented evidence to support the Annual Governance Statement. At the Chair's request the committee looked at evidence of

progress on Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimize the achievements of the intended outcomes; D3 is about optimizing achievement of intended outcomes.

During the discussion Councillors questioned the officer's report that Torridge do not monitor D3.4 Ensuring the achievement of 'social value' through service planning and commissioning.' The Service Improvement Officer confirmed that he would bring back examples to the next meeting of how the Council mitigates this principle.

It was duly noted that committee members were happy with report.

118. GRANT THORNTON UPDATE REPORT

The Engagement Lead provided an update to committee members on the work carried out up to 9 January 2020 and discussed the plan for the Annual Audit. The Engagement Lead also introduced Andy Davies who will be Torridge's new Engagement Manager.

The report was discussed and committee members duly noted the report.

119. MANAGING THE RISKS OF FRAUD AND CORRUPTION.

The DAP Partnership Manager explained the purpose of the report which was produced annually to assess the effectiveness of TDC's processes and management of the risk of fraud corruption. The DAP Partnership Manager confirmed that the estimated fraud costs in the public sector are around £40 billion annually with £8 billion being specifically in local government. The DAP Partnership Manager concluded that overall systems at Torridge are effective however Torridge must ensure that they do not get complacent as the risk of fraud will always be there.

Members noted the report.

120. AUDIT REPORTS ISSUED TO DATE

The DAP Partnership Manager confirmed that 7 audit reports had been issued to date:

- Council Tax
- Sundry Debtors
- GDPR Compliance
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Planning Enforcement
- Section 106 Agreements
- Creditors

The DAP Partnership Manager confirmed that the opinion for the creditors audit was high standard with the remaining 6 reports were of the good standard opinion at the time of publication.

During discussions regarding Section 106 Agreements, Councillor Craigie raised that she was worried what Section 106 monies are available in each ward. The Strategic Manager (Resources) has confirmed that the information had been provided in the Members Bulletin and that he would request that the Planning and Economy Manager circulate an update to Members of what funding remains and the length of time to spend the Section 106 money.

The report was duly noted.

121. PROGRESS WITH AGREED ACTIONS

The purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an update on progress with implementing agreed actions and to ensure the actions are completed.

The report noted that since the A&G meeting in October 2019, 46 new actions have been identified in internal reports with 32 actions being completed by management.

The Customer Services Manager discussed the Safeguarding Action which was listed as outstanding. The Customer Services Manager reassured councillors that there were mechanisms in place however a section 11 audit has not had to be submitted for 3 years. The Strategic Manager (Resources) suggested that the item be removed from the outstanding issues however Councillor Hodson felt that a protocol should be developed so that all agencies have a clear understanding of information sharing requirements.

It was agreed that the DAP Manager review the action to establish whether circumstances have changed since the implementation of GDPR (as the action pre-dates a lot of the GDPR work) to determine whether a specific protocol is still required.

Should it be the case that it is still required then the matter will be further raised at the Devon Safeguarding Leads meeting to progress and should that not progress matters then it was agreed that the Audit & Governance Committee write to Mark Williams – Chief Executive of East Devon who represents districts councils on the board to highlight that this protocol should be developed.

The report was duly noted.

122. WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Service Improvement Officer presented the updated whistleblowing policy and explained to members that the policy has been refreshed and updated to ensure it remains up to date and fit for purpose.

Councillor Hodson congratulated the Service Improvement Officer for the thorough and easy to read guide.

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor Clarke and –

Resolved:

That the updated Whistleblowing Policy be approved.

Vote: For (Unanimous)

123. RIPA

The Strategic Manager (Resources) provided a verbal update and confirmed to members that currently there are no surveillance currently being undertaken.

Members duly noted the update.

124. COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES

The Customer Services Manager provided an update to members on the activities the Revenue team carry out to identify fraud, error and evasion within the service.

Following the update from the Customer Services Manager, members were reassured by the work that was being carried out to identify fraud.

Members duly noted the report.

125. PREPARATION FOR THE 2019/20 ACCOUNTS

The Strategic Manager (Resources) provided a verbal update on the preparation for the 2019/20 accounts. The Strategic Manager (Resources) confirmed that he had met with Grant Thornton to discuss the timing of the audit.

Torrige's timetable is to deliver the accounts by 31st May.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) confirmed that with the introduction of IFRS16 to the accounting framework the council will have to identify the accounting treatment of the changes of the council's lease properties.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) confirmed work has already started on the asset valuation for the audit.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) raised that a new HR payroll system was being implemented.

126. AUDIT FORWARD PLAN 2019-20

It was confirmed that the Audit fee letter, pension fund and safeguarding will be included for the next meeting.

127. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

It was proposed by councillor Hackett and seconded by Councillor Hodson and –

Resolved:

That under Section 100(a) (4) of the Local Governance Act 1972 (as amended) the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 1 of Part 1 and Paragraph 10 of Part 2 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Vote: For - Unanimous

128. PART II (CLOSED SESSION) CORPORATE ASSURANCE RISK REGISTER - JANUARY 2020

The Strategic Manager (Resources) provided an update on the Corporate Assurance risk register with members. Following discussion of the update the members duly noted the report.

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor Clarke and –

Resolved:

That the meeting leave Part II.

Vote: For – (Unanimous)

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 3.53 pm

Chair:

Date: