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Corporate Governance and Audit Committee

Friday, 25th March, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor N Walshaw in the Chair
Councillors G Almass, J Bentley, M Foster,
P Grahame, P Harrand, J Illingworth,
J Shemilt and P Truswell
Independent Member – Linda Wild

74 Election of the Chair

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maqsood...Councillor Walshaw attended the meeting as her named substitute.

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Walshaw was nominated as Chair of the meeting.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Walshaw act as Chair for this meeting.

75 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

76 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

The agenda contained no exempt information requiring the exclusion of the press and public.

77 Late Items

There were no late items.

78 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

79 Minutes

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held 4th February 2022 be approved.

80 Matters Arising

Minute 69 – The Committee noted that the requested benchmarking data had been circulated by the Data Protection Officer on 7th February 2022.

Minute 71 - Mr Gareth Mills, External Auditors (Grant Thornton), provided an update on the work of the Auditors, noting receipt of some of the outstanding information required to complete the LCC audit, however the Auditors were also tasked with other non-Council related work which required prioritisation. The Committee noted the intention to complete the LCC work by week commencing 27th June 2022, once the remaining outstanding information was provided and once the Auditors work for the NHS was complete.

Mr Mills also highlighted additional work necessitated by the ongoing Valuation of Infrastructure Assets where the Regulator had identified some issues with some Local Authority's accounting of infrastructure assets and the subsequent audits.

81 Annual Assurance Report on Customer Contact

The Director of Resources submitted a report providing the Committee with assurance over the control environment in place for customer contact and customer satisfaction. The report covered the following areas:

- Face to face services
- Contact centre and digital services for customers
- Compliments and complaints

The terms of reference of the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee require the Committee to consider the adequacy of the Council's policies and practices to ensure compliance with statutory guidance and the adequacy of the Council's corporate governance arrangements.

The Head of Shared Services presented the report and highlighted the extent to which the standards, policies and procedures in relation to customer contact and satisfaction have been complied with during the reporting period from January 2021 to December 2021. Information was also provided for the period from January 2020 to December 2020 for the purposes of comparison.

The Head of Shared Services provided detail in respect of the following areas: Face to Face Contact - This includes the services that the Communities Housing and Environment directorate provide such as the Community Hubs, Libraries, Jobshops and Customer Services. During 2021, new community hub developments have been completed, there has been a review of community hub and library opening hours and some community hub sites have been used as vaccination venues during the year.

Contact Centre – This remained very often the first point of contact for service users. 1.4 m calls and 250,000 emails had been handled during 2020/21. It was noted that the average time waiting for calls to be answered had lengthened and work was being done to address this, looking at digital contact options and staff recruitment to improve responsiveness and the Committee was assured that work was being done with the Digital Inclusion Service to assist customers who need non-digital options for contact.

Satisfaction – A new survey was launched for the Contact Centre in January 2022 and the results for the month of January 2022 were provided as an indication of current satisfaction levels, acknowledging this was outside the period of assurance detailed in the report. Complaint volumes increased in 2021 compared to 2020, by around a quarter at both stage 1 and stage 2.

The following matters were considered during discussion:

Telephone contact – Several issues were raised by Members, including:

- One Member identified this as an area of weakness, citing those customers who could only telephone the contact centre during work breaks/lunchtime and as waiting times for calls to be answered had increased, some callers may not be able to wait.
- One Member queried whether the Contact Centre hours could be extended.

The Committee heard that a robust improvement plan was in place to understand the root cause of contact and to recruit to vacancies in the Contact Centre. Work was being done across Services to promote a “Get it Right first time” approach to reduce the need for calls and follow up calls. Although there were no plans to extend the Contact Centre hours, a review of the rotas/call contact peak times to ensure there was sufficient cover was being done.

- Figures from pre-pandemic were requested for comparison purposes
- Insight on the reasons for staff leaving the Contact Centre was requested.
- How the complexity of calls was assessed
- Why one third of callers were making repeat calls to the Contact Centre

The Committee heard that information gleaned from exit interviews showed a key reason for staff leaving was their promotion within the Council as Contact Centre staff are well trained and have an understanding of many LCC services therefore have transferrable and desirable skills for the rest of the authority. Development of career pathways across Shared Services was being considered in order to retain staff, but it was also reported that receiving abuse from callers was another factor.

In terms of the complexity of call responses increasing, average handling times showed that generally calls were taking longer to resolve, this was attributed to backlogs in service provision/catch up from Covid-19 and re-scheduling issues.

In respect of repeat calls, work was ongoing to address this issue and it was acknowledged that some customers abandon first attempt calls and make a repeat call at other times.

Digital inclusion – In response to a query, the Head of Shared Services confirmed that some lines do carry a script for call handlers to ask callers if they are aware of digital contact options. Some lines also have an IVR on the call waiting message to direct callers to the digital options.

Additionally, responding to comments regarding the accessibility of the LCC website and on-line reporting format, the Head of Shared Services confirmed that there were approximately 60 different on-line reporting forms on the website, but that these were progressed to the relevant service for action. Bins/replacement bins make up 48% of web form contact, the reporting forms have been simplified and relaunched this year and there were indications that

the redesign work has had a positive impact, as there had been fewer complaints.

Data Poverty – One Member highlighted that some customers without internet access at home use their mobile phones to access the LCC website to report on-line and advocated the development of an App which would use less mobile data and be more user-friendly. The Head of Shared Services welcomed the suggestion and agreed this would be further discussed with IDS.

Complaints responded to within target – It was acknowledged that responses within target were lower during 2021 and had been impacted by the pandemic. One Member requested the monthly reporting figures be provided to the Committee in order for Members to assess the success of the improvement plans developed to support service recovery.

Organisation of Communications – One Member cited an example where operatives installing heat pumps were providing a helpline number to tenants which was not resourced and unintentionally providing mis-information on “Green Doctor” work and advocated better organisation and resource for communications. Details of this issue to be provided to the Head of Shared Services for investigation.

Libraries data – Clarity was provided to the statistics in Table 5 revealing that although less library visits were recorded, more books were borrowed during the reporting period due to Libraries operating a “click and collect” service.

RESOLVED -

- a) To note the assurances provided that
 - the appropriate systems and procedures are in place in respect of the Council’s control environment for customer contact and satisfaction; and
 - there are robust plans in place for improving the customer experience.
- b) To note the intention for Committee Members to be provided with the requested information as detailed above.

82 Approval of Local Code of Corporate Governance

The Chief Officer Financial Services submitted a report presenting a revised Local Code of Corporate Governance (the Code) for approval. The report set out how the Code will underpin the Council’s governance arrangements, and that the principles and commitments set out in the Code meet the requirements of the CIPFA Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016) (CIPFA’s Framework) which is established proper practice for local authorities.

Members noted that corporate governance arrangements seek to ensure the sustainable delivery of the Council’s strategic ambition within the resources available, and that innovation would form part of this approach.

RESOLVED

- a) To approve the Local Code of Corporate Governance as attached at Appendix A of the submitted report
- b) To note the arrangements proposed for reporting annually on monitoring and compliance.

(Councillor Shemilt left the meeting at this point)

83 Internal Audit Update Report December 2021 to February 2022

The Chief Officer Financial Services submitted a report which provided a summary of the Internal Audit activity for the period December 2021 to February 2022.

The report provided assurance that the internal control environment is operating as intended through a summary of the Internal Audit activity during that period and also highlighted the incidence of any significant control failings or weaknesses.

The report also included information relating to the monitoring of urgent decisions to enable timely consideration of these matters by Committee as agreed following consideration of the annual decision-making assurance report at the meeting held 30th July 2021. 6 audit reports (excluding external work) during the period from 1st December 2021 to 28th February 2022.

The Senior Audit Manager presented the report, highlighting the following key issues:

- The changes made to the Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 and work undertaken to analyse priorities, including the external sources of assurance which could be used for evaluation purposes.
- Delivering on priorities with the resources available will ensure the Council is in a better place to implement the Audit Plan 2022/23.
- The outcome of an audit of the Data Protection Impact Assessments processes.
- Where available, more information on the outcomes following audit work and recommendation tracking had been included in the report with plans to include feedback from departments in future reports.

During discussions the Committee focused on the following matters:

- Reasons for the removal of the audit work in respect of Children and Families Commissioning from the 21/22 Audit Plan – noting that a new post had been introduced to review the joint LCC & NHS commissioning and the impact of the forthcoming implementation of the new West Yorkshire Integrated Care System.
- Reasons for the removal of the audit work in respect of Housing Disrepair Services from the 21/22 Audit Plan – noting that no major issues had been found during the previous audit a watching brief would monitor the Disrepair service. The Directorate had requested assurance on Housing Voids which had therefore assumed priority over the Disrepair Service.

- A request for more detail on DPIA findings for each Directorate.
- In respect of CSQ returns, one member queried the reference to external. The Senior Audit Manager advised that this referred to organisations where LCC provided an audit service through a contractual obligation and it was vital to receive feedback from them.
- In respect of the crisis in Ukraine, no specific audit work was being undertaken currently, however work is being undertaken to support a project looking at the systems in place to make payments to sponsors of refugees fleeing the conflict. Additionally a review of risks in relation to Ukrainian refugees was being undertaken by the Intelligence and Policy Manager.

In conclusion the Committee received assurance that a satisfactory annual audit opinion would still be delivered for the 2021/22 year given the work undertaken using all the appropriate assurances available.

RESOLVED -

- a) To receive the Internal Audit Update Report covering the period from December 2021 to February 2022 and note the work undertaken by Internal Audit during the period covered by the report;
- b) To note that there have been no limitations in scope and nothing has arisen to compromise the independence of Internal Audit during the reporting period.
- c) To receive the report providing information relating to the Monitoring of Urgent Decisions covering the period December 2021 to February 2022.

84 Internal Audit Plan 2022-23

The Chief Officer Financial Services submitted a report presenting the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2022-2023 for review and approval. The report also included a summary of the basis for the plan which had been developed in consultation with the Council's senior management and highlighted that the Committee retained responsibility for reviewing the adequacy of the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements.

Addressing the report the Senior Audit Manager provided an overview of the consultation undertaken with relevant parties to ensure the plan reflected the Council's current risks and priorities.

Members were informed of the following areas of work which had been identified as priorities with the team resource planned accordingly:

- Financial risks
- Cloud based solutions and Cyber
- Business Transformation
- Adults and Childrens Services
- Fraud and Corruption

Members were advised that any amendment to the Plan would be reported to the Committee.

During discussions, the Committee received the following additional information:

Covid-19 Grants – Noting concern regarding fraudulent grant claims, it was reported that Omicron support grants were still being paid and an update would be included within the bi-annual report. Members noted that fraudulent claims were reported to West Yorkshire Police as appropriate. Current information could be provided directly to Committee Members.

Team resources – Noting the ongoing service review focussing on active productivity, Members were advised that the increase in productivity did not entirely rest on further recruitment. Members were also assured that, at the current time, the team would be sufficiently resourced to deliver the Plan

RESOLVED – Having reviewed the documents, the Committee approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2022-23.

85 Corporate Governance and Audit Committee Work Programme 2021-22 and 2022-23

The Chief Officer Financial Services submitted a report which set out the proposed Work Programme for the 2022-23 municipal year, setting out future business for the Committee's agenda, together with details of when items will be presented. The Committee noted the intention to include two additional reports into the 2022/23 timetable:

- Governance Arrangements for implementation of Best City Ambition and review of strategic framework, and
- Assurance report on Estate Management Arrangements.

In response to CIPFA's Position Statement and a query regarding measuring the Committee's effectiveness against CIPFA's recommendations, it was agreed that further information would be presented alongside the Annual Report of the Committee to be considered in June 2022.

RESOLVED – To note the future meeting dates and to approve the Work Programme for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

86 Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the date and time of the next meeting is proposed as Friday 24th June 2022 at 10.00 am.

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