

GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 18 MARCH 2024

Present: Councillor S J Carr, Chair

Councillors: S Paterson (Vice-Chair)
P J Bales
M Brown
R Bullock
G Bunn
R S Falvey
K Harlow
G S Hills
A Kingdon
J M Owen
P J Owen (Ex-Officio)
C M Tideswell
S Webb

52 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor C Tideswell declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 4, due to being a Council Tenant. Minute number 54 refers.

53 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2024 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

54 **AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION**

The Committee considered amendments to the Constitution regarding Portfolio Holders' Responsibilities in relation to the Council's Complaints Service and note the position on members to the Planning Committee and Bramcote Bereavement Joint Services Committee.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), in association with the Housing Ombudsman (HO), issued a draft Joint Complaint Handling Code in October 2023. The aim of the Code was to introduce consistency in the way that both bodies deal with complaints.

On 12 July 2023 Full Council resolved that Members be required to give 28 days' notice and complete a form when referring items to Planning Committee for further consideration. The proposal was to formalise the planning referral process to ensure greater clarity for both Members and Planning Officers, and to fully detail the planning reasons why an application is being referred to Committee.

The draft version of the Bramcote Bereavement Joint Services Committee Agreement has undergone its initial checks through this Council's Legal Team.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the amendments to the Terms of Reference within the Constitution for the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Personnel, be approved.

55 CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

Members considered the creation of a Task and Finish group to undertake a constitutional review.

RESOLVED that the Task and Finish Group be set up with membership of 4 Labour, 1 Independent, 1 Conservative and 1 Liberal Democrat.

56 AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS

The Committee noted progress with the audit of the Statement of Accounts for both 2021/22 and 2022/23 and noted an updated Auditor's Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2022.

Mazars have now completed their work on the Statement of Accounts 2021/22. The auditors published their initial Audit Completion Report for 2021/22, which was considered by this Committee in March 2023. With outstanding matters at a national level now finally resolved, Mazars issued its audit report on 21 November 2023 and gave an unqualified opinion on the 2021/22 accounts.

In July 2023, this Committee received Mazars' Audit Strategy Memorandum –year ending 31 March 2023 setting out their approach to the 2022/23 audit of accounts, highlighting the significant audit risks and areas of key judgements.

The draft Statement of Accounts 2022/23 were approved and presented to the external auditors for review on 31 May 2023, in line with the statutory deadline required by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2022.

57 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24 - ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Members consider the updates made to the Council's accounting policies in relation to the production of the 2023/24 financial statements.

Prior to the completion of the Statement of Accounts 2023/24, it is considered good practice that Members are given the opportunity to discuss and comment on the accounting policies to be used in the production of the financial statements. These policies will be applied to the treatment of all transactions that make up the Statement of Accounts to ensure the accounts present a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2024.

RESOLVED that the Accounting Policies for 2023/24 be approved.

58 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24 - UNDERLYING PENSION ASSUMPTIONS

Members were provided with information regarding the assumptions made by the pension fund actuary in calculating the IAS19 figures to be reported in the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.

IAS19 (International Accounting Standard 19 – Employee Benefits) is one of the financial reporting standards with which the Council must comply when producing its annual Statement of Accounts. The basic requirement of IAS19 is that an organisation should account for retirement benefits when it is committed to give them, irrespective of when they are paid out.

The Council will use the calculated costs and the underlying assumptions based upon the advice of the actuary of the Nottinghamshire County Council Pension Fund, Barnett Waddingham, and the administering authority (Nottinghamshire County Council) in preparing the annual Statement of Accounts.

59 REVIEW OF STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Committee note the amendments to the Strategic Risk Register and the action plans identified to mitigate risks.

RESOLVED that the amendments to the Strategic Risk Register and the actions to mitigate risks as set out be approved.

60 DEBATE NOT HATE MOTION

The Committee the updated from the Officer and Member Task and Finish Groups recommendations having considered the Local Government Association (LGA) 'Debate Not Hate' Campaign objectives in more detail.

On 11 October 2023 a Motion was brought to full Council by Councillor MacRae to sign up to the LGA 'Debate Not Hate' campaign. Council referred the Motion to Governance, Audit and Standards Committee to work with Officers to get a better understanding of what signing up to the LGA 'Debate Not Hate' Campaign would mean and to explore the range of support currently available to deal with Member abuse and intimidation and to consider what further support could be developed.

It was proposed by Councillor S J Carr and seconded by Councillor S Paterson that there be a recorded vote that the vote be recorded. The votes were cast as follows:

For	Against	Abstention
P J Bales		M Brown
R Bullock		G S Hills
G Bunn		J M Owen
S J Carr		
R S Falvey		
K Harlow		
A Kingdon		
S Paterson		
C M Tideswell		

RECOMMENDED to Council that

2. The Council commits to the following:

- a. To signing up to the 'Debate Not Hate' campaign**
- b. To take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse to Councillors and Officers**
- c. To write to the Government to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of politicians and to legislate that Councillors can withhold their home addresses to ensure parity with MPs.**
- d. To work together, across the political groups to promote and uphold exemplary standards public and political debate**
- e. To improve the reporting mechanism to record and monitor incidents of harassment and abuse for Councillors facing intimidation and abuse**
- f. To regularly review the support available for Councillors and Officers who are experiencing intimidation and abuse**
- g. To work with the local police to ensure there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of Councillors and their families**
- h. To include as part of the Member training programme support available and relevant training to Councillors in relation to abuse and intimidation and Councillor safety.**

61 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be approved.