



AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 23rd November 2015

PRESENT : Cllrs. Llewellyn (Chair), Gravells (Vice-Chair), McLellan, Hobbs, Taylor, Patel and Hampson

Others in Attendance

Shirin Wotherspoon, Solicitor

Jon Topping, Head of Finance

Terry Rodway, Audit, Risk and Assurance Manager

Mary Hopper, Homelessness & Housing Advice Service Manager

Sarah Tilling, Senior Client Officer

Darren Gilbert KPMG LLP

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

36. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2015 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

37. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no questions from members of the public.

38. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

39. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered the Action Plan.

The Audit, Risk and Assurance Manager advised the Committee that there had been no change to the status of Minute No. 17 Purchase of Software with a modern stock control facility at The Guildhall. He informed the Committee that Minute No.

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10 would be removed from the Action Plan and that Minute Nos. 28 and 31 would now be marked as completed.

Councillor McLellan suggested the status of Minute No. 17 should be amended so that only the most recent update was included.

RESOLVED that the Action Plan be updated with the suggested amendments.

40. UPDATE ON BENEFITS ACCURACY RATE

The Senior Client Officer updated Members on the benefits accuracy rate. She advised the Committee that the Council's error rate had improved and that further benchmarking had been undertaken to compare the error rate. The Committee noted that daily reports were now produced and could be accessed by staff to monitor the error rate.

The Senior Client Officer advised the Committee that Cheltenham Borough Council did not record errors under £3 as financial errors and that if this approach was adopted the Council's error rate would improve. Councillor Hobbs suggested it was important for the Council to improve the error rate before making a decision on whether a similar policy should be introduced. The Senior Client Officer agreed and confirmed that Cheltenham Borough Council was the only district known to adopt such a policy.

Councillor Patel requested further information on the nature of the errors and questioned whether a system enhancement could be introduced to reduce the error rate. He was advised that the errors were largely due to keying mistakes and that any system enhancement would require significant resource and would be unlikely to improve the accuracy rate as the mistakes were due to human error.

The Senior Client Officer advised the Committee that the errors would be monitored regularly and that further work would be undertaken to continue to reduce the error rate.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

41. UPDATE ON CHOICE BASED LETTINGS AUDIT

The Homelessness & Housing Advice Service Manager provided Members with details of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme and an update on the implementation of the agreed audit recommendations.

Councillor McLellan suggested that some of the concerns raised related to joint working, he commented that further joint working would be expected and stated that it was important to establish guidelines for future joint projects.

The Audit, Risk and Assurance Manager advised the Committee that the Forest of Dean District Council was the host authority for the CBL system and his understanding was that it was the host authority that would normally be responsible for completing an audit of the system controls. However, he had been requested to send them a copy of the Council's internal audit report to consider the issues that

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had been identified, therefore it would appear that it had not been considered as part of their risk based plan.

The Homelessness & Housing Advice Service Manager advised the Committee that there had been no requests for personal data to be removed from the system. It was noted that if a request was received, the Council would have to contact the system provider to have the data removed which would result in a cost.

The Committee noted that the service offered assisted bidding for adapted homes and language line to service users to ensure the allocation of social housing was consistent.

Councillor Gravells requested further information on the measures taken to ensure that social housing was fairly allocated to those living in the districts that were members of the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Partnership. He was advised that the majority of district councils allocated housing using the same policy and processes. An agreement had been made that the Cotswolds and West Oxfordshire District Councils could be included in the partnership whilst operating different policies.

The Committee suggested the difference in policies highlighted a lack of consistency and noted that this was unfair on residents as it provided some with an advantage. Members of the Committee requested clarity on the decision making process in this case, in particular, the City Council representatives involved in agreeing to the variation in policies.

Councillor Hobbs suggested it would be more appropriate to refer the Committee's concerns to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for investigation.

Councillor Patel requested further information on the number of housing assessment appeals that had been received. He was advised that there had been between 40-50 appeals and that very few of these had successfully overturned the initial decision.

The Homelessness & Housing Advice Service Manager agreed to share the Committee's concerns with the Management Board.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

42. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN DECISION

The Monitoring Officer summarised the report from the Ombudsman which detailed a finding of fault or injustice on the part of the Council.

The Monitoring Officer advised that there had been no findings of fault regarding missing payments and that the Ombudsman had determined that the Council had offered a reasonable resolution by inviting the complainant to visit the Council's offices. It was noted that fault had been identified regarding the recovery of council tax specifically with regard to the recovery of fees. Although the Council had deducted the summons costs from the outstanding council tax account it was at fault by not, also, deducting bailiff fees.

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The Senior Client Officer confirmed that in future cases summons and bailiff costs would be deducted from accounts where liability orders had been cancelled.

Councillor Gravells expressed concern at the issues raised by the case, he suggested greater clarity was needed when dealing with members of the public and questioned why the arrears incurred by the complainant had not been pursued sooner.

The Senior Client Officer advised that a recovery payment plan had been set up but had not been monitored by Officers. She informed the Committee that correspondence had been sent to the complainant and her husband on a number of occasions encouraging them to visit the Council's office. The Committee noted that discussions had been held with Civica regarding the monitoring of payment plans and that further assurances would be sought.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

43. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2014/15

Darren Gilbert, KPMG presented the City Council's Annual Audit Letter 2014-15.

RESOLVED that the Annual Audit Letter 2014-15 be received.

44. TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE QUARTER 2 REPORT 2015/16

The Head of Finance summarised the report which provided Members with an update on treasury management activities for Quarter 2, 1 July 2015 – 30 September 2015.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

45. ZURICH RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Head of Finance summarised the Zurich Risk Management review and report, which included ensuing action by Officers to improve the Council's position.

The Head of Finance advised the Committee that the Council had achieved a good standard in the Combined Liability and Property areas, but had been rated below minimum for Motor. The Committee noted Officers were taking immediate steps to address the issues raised and that self-certifying forms had been circulated to all officers for completion by those who use a vehicle for Council business.

The Committee noted that the review had not included the services provided by Amey.

Councillor Gravells requested further information on the areas of improvement suggested for the Council's Fire Control System. He was advised that the servers were currently being reviewed and that it would not be necessary to implement the areas for improvement as the Council had already achieved a good standard.

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Councillor D. Norman suggested the fire authority should be invited to complete an assessment of the Council's Fire Control systems.

Councillor Hobbs expressed concerns over the Council's building controls and suggested there was insufficient support for Members and visitors when attending evening meetings. The Head of Finance stated that he would share the concerns raised with the Health and Safety Adviser.

The Committee noted that the self-certify forms would be completed by those using fleet vehicles and casual use drivers. It was also noted that managers would be responsible for ensuring staff had completed the forms.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

46. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Head of Finance presented the Strategic Risk Register to Members for their awareness and consideration. He advised the Committee that the Register was reviewed by Senior Management Team (SMT) on a monthly basis and that there had been a number of changes since it had last been presented to the Committee.

The Chair questioned why the risk regarding the resilience of the senior management structure had been removed. She was advised that all statutory officers were now in post and that if this were to change it could be added to the Register again as an emerging risk.

Councillor D. Norman advised that he had expressed similar concerns but had been reassured by Officers that the risk could be added again should concerns arise over the resilience of the senior management structure.

Councillor McLellan questioned who had been appointed as the Council's Risk Champion. The Audit, Risk and Assurance Manager advised the Committee that he would confirm who had been appointed Risk Champion.

Councillor McLellan questioned why the waste and recycling review had been removed from the register when work on the review was still ongoing. The Head of Finance commented that he would seek clarity over the decision to remove the waste and recycling review and update Members accordingly.

The Committee noted that devolution had been added as a potentially emerging risk due to potential financial risks and the uncertainty of the outcomes of devolution for the Council.

The Head of Finance confirmed that SMT owned the Strategic Risk Register.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND to Cabinet that the Strategic Risk Register be noted and endorsed.

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47. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme.

Councillor McLellan questioned whether the Annual Complaints Monitoring Report would be presented to the Committee. He was advised that the report was traditionally presented to the Committee in June.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be noted.

48. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday, 18 January 2016 at 6:30pm

Time of commencement: 18:30 hours

Time of conclusion: 20:00 hours

Chair