

LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Remote Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on Thursday, 10 December, 2020 at 6:02 pm

PRESENT IN CHAMBER:

Councillor G McCleave (Chairman)

The Right Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor N Trimble

Aldermen J Baird and J Tinsley

Councillors R McLernon and A Swan

PRESENT IN REMOTE LOCATION:

Deputy Mayor
Councillor Jenny Palmer

Councillor J Lavery BEM (Vice-Chairman)

Aldermen S Martin and S P Porter

Councillors S Carson, S Eastwood, J Gallen, A Gowan, S Lee, S Lowry and John Palmer

INDEPENDENT MEMBER:

Mr E Jardine (present remotely)

OTHER MEMBERS:

In Remote Location

Alderman A Grehan

Councillor U Mackin

IN ATTENDANCE:

In Chamber:

Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance
PCSP/Member Services Manager
IT Officer
Technician
Member Services Officer

In Remote Location:

Chief Executive
Acting Director of Finance and Corporate Services
IT Manager
Portfolio Manager

Northern Ireland Audit Office

Mr P O'Sullivan (present remotely)

Commencement of the Meeting

At the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman, Councillor G McCleave welcomed those present to the remote meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee, which was being live streamed to enable members of the public to hear and see the proceedings.

At this point, the PCSP/Member Services Manager read out the names of the Elected Members and Officers in attendance at the meeting.

The Chairman, Councillor G McCleave, stated that, whilst the meeting was being live streamed, unauthorised recording was not permitted, as per the Council's Standing Orders. He proceeded to outline the evacuation procedures in the case of an emergency.

1. Apologies

It was agreed to accept an apology for non-attendance at the meeting on behalf of the Risk Officer, the Policy Officer and Mrs C Kane, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO).

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Report from Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance

3.1 Update on Performance Improvement

Councillor S Carson joined the meeting during consideration of this item of business (6.07 pm).

Members were reminded that the Council must produce an annual Performance Improvement Plan and an annual Self-Assessment Report in order to meet the requirements of part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. As a result of these unprecedented times, the Department for Communities (DfC) had advised councils in August that a Performance Improvement Plan was not required for the 2020/21 financial year and that self-assessments should still be published by the statutory deadline of 30 September, 2020. Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council's self-assessment for 2019/20 had been published on its website and was now subject to an ongoing NIAO Performance Audit.

Members were provided with a copy of:

- (a) a letter dated 20 October, 2020 sent to DfC by the Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group (LGPIWG) highlighting actions which needed to be discussed and addressed to ensure performance continued to maintain its valuable profile across the sector; and

3.1 Update on Performance Improvement (Contd)

- (b) a response dated 13 November, 2020 from DfC.

No decision had yet been taken on the 2021/22 Performance Improvement Plan but DfC had agreed to work with the LGPIWG to discuss the arrangements which should be put in place, including proposed processes and timelines and whether any further legislation would be required to facilitate any proposed changes to arrangements.

In the absence of a Performance Improvement Plan for 2020/21, DfC had stated at a meeting of the LGPIWG on 16 November, 2020 that all councils should still be measuring and improving performance. NIAO had been in attendance at that meeting and agreed with this approach.

In line with the Council's Emergency Plan, reporting of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to Committee had been suspended at the height of the pandemic. However, a Covid-19 performance dashboard had been issued to all Members throughout the emergency response phase. It was noted that reporting of KPIs would now recommence and be reported to the home Committees on a quarterly basis, starting in January 2021, and reported to the Governance and Audit Committee in March 2021. It was further noted that a strategic piece of work had commenced to review and refresh the entire suite of KPIs, with the aim of reducing the number of these at service level and only measuring what was relevant and informative. Further updates on this matter would be provided in due course.

3.2 Complaints Report – Quarter 2 2020/21

Aldermen S Martin and A Grehan joined the meeting during consideration of this item of business (6.13 pm and 6.14 pm respectively). The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor N Trimble, left the meeting during consideration of this item of business (6.14 pm).

Members having been provided with a copy of a comparative report taken from the Council's Customer Care System detailing the number of comments, complaints and compliments in Quarter 2 of 2020/21, it was proposed by Alderman J Tinsley, seconded by Alderman J Baird and agreed to recommend that this report be approved.

During discussion of the above item, Alderman J Baird referred to the significant reduction in complaints, especially within Environmental Services, in Quarters 1 and 2 of 2020/21 compared to Quarter 4 of 2019/20. He enquired if there were actually less complaints received or if there had been a change in how these were recorded. The Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance agreed to investigate this matter and advise Alderman Baird accordingly.

In response to a query raised by Councillor J Laverty regarding the timeliness of responding to complaints, the Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance confirmed that responses being time-bound was being considered in the current review of the Customer Care Policy, along with the number of stages in the

3.2 Complaints Report – Quarter 2 2020/21 (Contd)

Complaints process, as per NIPSO's advice at a Local Government Complaints Forum. The review of the Customer Care Policy would be completed by the end of the financial year, in line with a current audit recommendation.

4. Confidential Business

The matters contained in the confidential report would be dealt with "In Committee" due to containing information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information).

"In Committee"

It was proposed by Councillor A Swan, seconded by Councillor R McLernon and agreed that the following matters be considered "in committee", in the absence of members of the press and public being present.

4.1 Closed Session

In line with good practice and the Governance and Audit Committee Terms of Reference, Members now met with representatives from External Audit and Internal Audit in a closed session, the purpose of which was to afford Members the opportunity to ask questions that may not specifically be addressed as part of an audit.

The following Officers left the Meeting prior to the closed session taking place (6.14 pm): Acting Director of Finance and Corporate Services, PCSP/Member Services Manager, IT Manager, Portfolio Manager, Member Services Officer and Technician.

The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor N Trimble, returned to the meeting during the closed session (6.25 pm).

At the conclusion of the closed session the following Officers returned to the meeting (6.32 pm): Acting Director of Finance and Corporate Services, PCSP/Member Services Manager, IT Manager, Portfolio Manager, Member Services Officer and Technician. The Chief Executive also joined the meeting at this point.

4.2 Report from Risk Officer

In the absence of the Risk Officer, her report was presented by the Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance.

4.2.1 Corporate Risk Register

The Risk Officer set out in her report, an update in respect of the quarterly review of the Corporate Risk Register. Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of:

4.2.1 Corporate Risk Register (Contd)

- (a) Corporate Risk Dashboard;
- (b) CRR5 IT/Cyber Risk Report, which detailed the need for mandatory cyber training for staff and Elected Member to completed regularly; and
- (c) National Cyber Security Alert letter.

The Portfolio Manager gave a verbal overview in respect of cyber security risk and, together with the IT Manager, answered several queries raised by Members. Arising from discussion, the Portfolio Manager:

- (a) asked that Members advise IT if emails from trusted organisations (such as NILGA) were being blocked in order that such addresses could be 'white listed' to allow Members to receive those emails; and
- (b) agreed to provide Members with details of the new secure file transfer system that had just been introduced, which would address difficulties in relation to emails containing large files.

IT staff were commended in respect of the systems put in place to protect the Council with regards to cyber security.

4.2.2 Corporate Brexit Risk Register

The Risk Officer set out in her report, an update in respect of the quarterly review of the Corporate Brexit Risk Register and detailed current actions being taken. Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of the Corporate Brexit Risk Dashboard.

4.3 Report by the Policy Officer

In the absence of the Policy Officer, his report was presented by the Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance.

4.3.1 Acceptance of the Six Monthly Statements of Assurance 1 April – 31 September, 2020

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Jenny Palmer, left the meeting during consideration of this item of business (7.01 pm).

Members were provided with a copy of the Statements of Assurance for the period 1 April – 31 September, 2020 in respect of the Chief Executive and each of the Directorates. It was noted that the format of the Statements had changed, which was due to a review carried out by the Audit, Risk & Performance Service Unit. It was proposed by Alderman J Baird, seconded by Alderman J Tinsley and agreed to recommend that the Statements of Assurance be approved.

4.4 Report from Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance

4.4.1 Internal Audit Progress Report – December 2020

Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of an Internal Audit Progress Report – December 2020. This report summarised internal audit

4.4.1 Internal Audit Progress Report – December 2020 (Contd)

work and progress against the Operational Plan since the last meeting of the Committee on 10 September, 2020. A copy of any internal audit reports referred to in the progress report were also provided in full on SharePoint for Members' information.

The Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance agreed to investigate comments by Councillor John Palmer regarding the number of vehicles/trailers in the Central Services Depot and at Comber Road, Carryduff, as referred to under the 'Fleet Management' section of the Internal Audit Progress Report.

4.4.2 Revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy Statement and Strategy

Members having been provided with a copy of (a) an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy Statement and Strategy; and (b) a Policy Framework Document, it was proposed by Councillor A Swan, seconded by Councillor R McLernon and agreed to recommend that these be approved.

In response to a request by Councillor John Palmer, the Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance agreed to provide him with information on the number of cases of fraud that had been reported to the PSNI since 2016.

4.4.3 Governance and Audit Committee Self-Assessment 2020/21

In line with CIPFA guidance that Audit Committees should review their effectiveness on an annual basis, Members were provided with a copy of a Governance and Audit Committee Self-Evaluation Questionnaire for 2020/21. It was noted that questionnaires would be distributed to Members following this meeting and these would require to be returned to the Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance by 29 January, 2021. Responses would be compiled into a summary document, which would be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee meeting in March 2021 when results would be discussed and action plans to address any negative assessments could be agreed. The Interim Head of Audit, Risk & Performance would then assist the Committee in preparing an Annual Report, which would be presented to the June 2021 meeting.

4.4.4 Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Report To Those Charged With Governance 2019/20

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Jenny Palmer, returned to the meeting during consideration of this item of business (7.16 pm).

The Chairman, Councillor G McCleave, welcomed Mr P O'Sullivan, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), to the meeting.

Members were provided with, and noted the contents of, a copy of the final NIAO Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Report To Those Charged With Governance 2019/20.

4.4.4 Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Report To Those Charged With Governance 2019/20 (Contd)

Mr O’Sullivan made a verbal presentation in relation to the report, which had last been considered by the Committee at its special meeting in November 2020. Since that meeting, a number of minor amendments had been made to the report, and these were highlighted by Mr O’Sullivan. Mr O’Sullivan confirmed that the Council’s accounts had been certified on 3 December, 2020 with an unqualified audit opinion.

Resumption of Normal Business

It was proposed by Alderman J Baird, seconded by Councillor A Swan and agreed to come out of committee and normal business was resumed.

5. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

There being no further business, the meeting was terminated at 7.17 pm.

Mayor/Chairman