

Audit Committee
20 January 2020

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the AUDIT Committee held on Monday 20 January 2020 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors G.Michaelides (Chairman)
S.Markiewicz (Vice-Chairman)

M.Birleson, E.Boulton (substituting for J.Boulton)
L.Chesterman, F.Marsh and J.Skoczylas.

ALSO SIAS – M.Chalkley
PRESENT: Councillor D. Bell (Executive Member for Resources, Environment and Cultural Services)

OFFICIALS Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services),
PRESENT: K.Ng
Head of Resources (R.Baker)
Risk and Resilience Manager (A.Cremer)
Governance Services Officer (H.Johnson)

16. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:

Councillor E.Boulton for Councillor J.Boulton.

17. APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J.Boulton.

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

20. RISK MANAGEMENT

The report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) set out the current strategic and top operational risks facing the

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Council, as determined by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Heads of Service for Members to note.

The risks had been reviewed at the performance clinic in November 2019 and reflected the assessments in place for the Quarter October 2019 to January 2020. The current Strategic Risk Register was set out in Appendix A and Top Operational Risks scoring greater than 50 on the risk scoring table was set out in Appendix B.

It was noted that the risk posed by a no deal Brexit was reduced due to the increased certainty around outcomes.

Officers confirmed that risks were updated every quarter, and all comments were still relevant, with the date just indicating when the comment was written.

During discussion, Members raised a concern regarding the Housing Land Supply which scored red and was one of the Top Operational Risks, with risks to the Council's reputation and the possibility of approving undesirable developments. Members enquired as to the mitigating factors that could reduce the risk of failing to meet the five year housing land supply and commented that the risk was so succinctly expressed that it ought to be flagged up in more committees.

Officers confirmed that the risks went to the Performance Clinic, the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Cabinet. In addition that report templates for all committees had "risk management implications" which also offered the opportunity to highlight the issue. Officers advised Members that they would ask the Head of Planning to provide a note to the Committee with regards to mitigating factors.

In addition, the Executive Member for Resources, Environment and Cultural Services advised that the Cabinet were well aware of the issue and that it was linked to the Local Plan, where currently a revised timetable had been agreed with the Inspector in order to progress the enquiry. The idea of flagging up the risk at relevant future committees could be progressed. It was also agreed that a more comprehensive note on the 5 year land supply would be prepared by the Head of Planning.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Members note the current Strategic Risk Register (Appendix A of the Risk Management report) and in particular to note comments in respect of each risk where shown.
- (2) That Members note the Top Operational Risks (Appendix B of the Risk Management report) and in particular to note comments in respect of each risk where shown.

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21. SHARED INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE - PROGRESS REPORT

The report of the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) provided an update on the progress in delivering the Council's Annual Audit Plan for 2019/20 as at 3 January 2020.

This was the third report giving feedback on the delivery of the 2019/20 Internal Audit Plan so that the Council had an opportunity to review and monitor the essential component of corporate governance and gain assurance that its internal audit provision was fulfilling its statutory obligations.

Members noted that findings for the period 13 September 2019 to 3 January 2020, details of changes to the planned start dates of audits from the approved 2019/20 Audit Plan (in Appendix B of the report), proposed amendments to the 2019/20 Annual Audit report (of which there were none), the implementation status of previously agreed audit recommendations (part of which detailed in Appendix C of the report) and an update on performance management information as at 3 January 2020.

There had been various updates to the appendices in terms of areas that had now been assessed and SIAS advised that all projects were moving forward well.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- The client satisfaction scores reflected how managers at the Council completed the surveys on the performance of SIAS in conducting audits. Despite the survey's being mandatory, the return rate was quite low. SIAS confirmed that three more had been returned since the report was circulated to Members.
- Members felt it would be helpful to have specific detail as to why a project had been extended. SIAS confirmed that they were working with the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) and the Head of Resources on improving the information provided regarding the revised target date and agreed that more clarity could be provided on why implementation of recommendations had slipped in future.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Members note the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) Progress Report for the period to 3 January 2020.
- (2) That Members note the implementation status of internal audit recommendations and the management response.

Meeting ended at 8.08pm
HJ