

Audit Committee
20 January 2021

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the AUDIT Committee held on Wednesday 20 January 2021 at 7.30 pm via Zoom.

PRESENT: Councillors G.Michaelides (Chairman)
M.Birleson, J.Boulton, F.Marsh, J.Skoczylas, P.Hebden
and M.Holloway

ALSO Councillors D.Bell (Executive Member for Resources)
PRESENT: SIAS M.Chalkley

OFFICIALS R.Baker, Head of Resources
PRESENT: A Cremer, Risk and Resilience Manager

37. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

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

Councillor P.Hebden for Councillor S.Markiewicz; and
Councillor M.Holloway for Councillor L.Chesterman

38. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absences was received from Councillor S.Markiewicz and Councillor L.Chesterman.

39. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and noted by the Chairman.

40. RISK MANAGEMENT

Members received a report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance), which provided the current strategic and top operational risks facing the Council, as determined by the Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service. Following feedback from Members, the reporting process had changed and the report now reflected more up to date Risk assessments, avoiding the time lag previously experienced.

Members raised the following points and sought clarification:

- It was noted that the report only captured the high rated risks, out of approximately 200 risks identified and monitored by Officers.
- A number of the strategic risks related to EU transition areas, which Officers expected to reduce as the full impact of the new trading arrangements became known
- A number of the strategic risks related to Covid-19 and the impacts of lockdown. This will continue to be monitored and assessed as the situation develops
- Members noted the impact of Covid-19 on all council service areas and on the staff themselves. Members noted the Well-being measures being undertaken for staff working from home, and the specific measures being taken with those staff who had returned to work in person.

RESOLVED: That the current Strategic Risk Register and top operational risks be noted; together with comments in respect of each risk where shown.

41. SHARED INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE - PROGRESS REPORT

Members received a report of the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) which provided an update on the progress in delivering the Annual Audit Plan for 2020-21 as at 8 January 2020.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- All audit reports completed thus far had provided assurance levels of either Good or Satisfactory. Members noted that this was a positive reflection on the work Officers were doing
- Members noted that two days had been reallocated from the Website audit to a new project entitled COVID-19 Local Authority Compliance and Enforcement Grant
- There were no high priority recommendations outstanding from 2019/20 and no new high priority recommendations had been made in 2020/21
- A large number of medium priority recommendations were followed up during the last cycle (37 in total). This was more of a reflection that progress and completion had not been recorded rather than actions had not been taken previously. This was reflected by the fact that 86.5% of the recommendations looked at had either been implemented or were no longer applicable
- Implementation of the five outstanding medium priority recommendations, set out in Appendix C, had been delayed by the impact of Covid-19 and resources being stretched. For example the delay to implementing the recommendations around Forward Planning for Apprenticeships was a direct consequence of HR officers having to focus on the well-being all staff and the administration of furloughed staff during the pandemic.

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Members noted that a new Learning and Development officer had been appointed and would be taking this recommendation forward

- It was noted that Performance Indicators showed as being on track, if not slightly ahead of expectation. It compared favourably with other areas of the SIAS partnership and was built on the good level of engagement received from Officers. There had been some postponements caused by resources being stretched in certain areas, but there were no concerns that the work would not be completed on time
- On Appendix A, Members highlighted an omission for the revised target date for Monitoring of Actions identified through Fire Risk Assessment. This revised date would be circulated after the meeting
- On Appendix A, Members noted the medium priority recommendation following the Housing Development Company report. It was confirmed that this concerned the need for Terms of Reference for the Stakeholder Group to be agreed, which was now in place
- On Appendix A, Member noted the medium priority recommendation following the IT Asset Management report. It was confirmed how different assets were accounted for

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 7.53 pm
JA