

MEETING:	Audit and Governance Committee
DATE:	Wednesday 20 September 2023
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present Councillors Lofts (Chair), Barnard and Richardson together with Independent Members – Dr R Adams, Ms K Armitage, Mr G Bandy and Mr P Johnson

32. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members in respect of items on the agenda.

33. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 26 July 2023 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

34. REPORT OF MONITORING OFFICER INTO LGSCO CASE

S Ghuman, Monitoring Officer and Service Director Legal and Governance, presented the Report of Monitoring Officer into LGSCO Case.

It was noted that report was brought to the Committee to comply with the Committee Terms of Reference, in which the Committee should consider any payments in excess of £2,000 or provide other benefits in cases of maladministration by the authority.

Members were informed that in addition to robust quality assurance measures, dip sampling of those teams involved in the case was ongoing, and various learning and development would be implemented across the directorate.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The Committee is asked to receive and consider the report, and acknowledge the actions already taken and plans to address the LGSCO's recommendations.
- (ii) That the Committee note the requirement for the Council to make compensation payments totalling £3,000 to Mr. D and Ms B.

35. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

M O'Neill, Executive Director Growth and Sustainability, attended to present the Strategic Risk Register concerning Zero Carbon and Inclusive Economy.

In regard to Zero Carbon, Action One was rated green, Actions Two through to Six were rated amber and Actions Six and Seven were rated green.

In regard to Inclusive Economy, Actions One through to Three were rated green and Actions Four through Eight were rated amber.

The following key points of the report were noted:

- The Strategic Risk Register was reviewed by the Senior Management Team (SMT) on 5th September and there were no changes to the number or ratings given to the 13 strategic risks.
- The Positive Climate Partnership had taken shared ownership of the zero-carbon agenda at a Borough wide level.
- The Council continued to work closely with Berneslai homes to develop a retrofit strategy.
- The Council would ensure that carbon literacy was a key principle of its procurement strategies and social value requirements for key contracts.
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis continued to have a significant impact on the local economy. The Council had developed a robust response to support local businesses.
- The membership of the Inclusive Economy Board was currently being reviewed to ensure that it was fit for purpose.
- Footfall in the borough had increased with a strong performance reported in quarter one of this year.
- The borough continued to see retail contraction due to national high street chains going into administration.

In the ensuing discussion the following key points were highlighted:

- The Carbon Management Group was already convened with various task and finish groups however it was noted that a broader membership across the Council was needed.
- The frequency and risk of abnormal weather events such as heavy rain and flooding continued to increase, the Council continued to monitor this via the Positive Climate Partnership.
- The Council was at the early stages of understanding the totality of data regarding carbon and therefore detailed reporting would be available in due course.
- The Council was committed to its Zero Carbon 40 and Zero Carbon 45 goals irrespective of any change in national government policy.
- The Committee would be provided with a financial breakdown of the costs associated with the Zero Carbon strategies however it was noted that this was captured in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and efficiencies had been created via carbon reduction strategies.
- Discussion arose regarding the most substantial threats to creating an inclusive economy. It was noted that economic inactivity can cause lack of growth, and that 28% of Barnsley residents were classed as economically inactive which was significantly higher than the Yorkshire and Humber average.
- The Inclusive Economy Board was independently chaired with senior officers fully involved in drafting the Inclusive Economy Strategy.

- Buy in from other Directorates in the Council regarding Inclusive Economy was noted, the risks identified were an SMT risk which required whole Council and partnership working via the Inclusive Economy Board.

RESOLVED that Committee note the update.

36. ANNUAL CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS REPORT 2022-23

C Dobby, Customer Resolution Manager, presented the Annual Customer Complaints and Compliments Report 2022-23.

The key highlights of the report included:

- The number of compliments had increased and complaints had decreased.
- There had been a decrease in the number of complaints progressing to the next stage of procedures.
- 96% of complaints had met corporate and statutory timescales for completion.
- The Council continued to find an element of fault in most of its complaints, so learning from people's experiences and adapting services was essential alongside seeking a remedy with customers.
- The Council received the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual review letter on the 19 July 2023. A summary of performance was:
 - Performance in relation to complaints upheld shows that the Council was slightly above (78%) the average for similar organisations (77%).
 - The Council reported that the compliance with recommendations remained at 100% and was slightly above that of other similar organisations (99%), and performance on satisfactorily remedying complaints was 14% with the average of similar organisations at 10%.

Discussion arose regarding complaints received for events that would include a number of residents, for example a missed bin collection, compared to complaints that were individualised. It was noted that the Sustainability and Growth Directorate received the most compliments as well as complains due to the front facing nature of its services. Work with comms had been undertaken so residents could report instances such as missed bin collections rather than submitting a complaint.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

37. ANNUAL HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT 2022-23

S Dobby, Head of Corporate Health, Safety and Emergencies presented the Annual Health & Safety report for the year 2022-23.

Key highlights of the report included:

- All audits showed a satisfactory level of compliance with governance arrangements for health and safety.
- There had been an improvement in compliance with requirements to develop risk assessments.
- The RIDDOR reportable accident performance when compared to national statistics remained favourable (around 45% lower than national rates at 1.8

incidents per 1,000 employees in the Council compared to 3.2 incidents per 1,000 employees nationally).

- An increase in reported accidents to 74 had been reported, this was albeit remaining below pre-pandemic levels and mirroring increases in reportable accidents nationally.

Member discussion arose regarding the pre-pandemic levels of performance as mentioned in the report. This information could be found in previous years reporting and it was agreed that the Members could be provided with a high-level summary of this.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The Committee note the report; and
- (ii) That Members are provided with a summary of pre-pandemic levels of performance.

38. ANNUAL EMPLOYEE SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT 2022-23

M Potter, Service Director Business Intelligence, HR and Communications, presented the Annual Employee Sickness Absence Performance Management Report for the year 2022-23.

The following key points were noted:

- The outturn figure reported was 11.09 days against a target of 7.5 days.
- The majority of reported absences were due to infectious diseases such as COVID-19 along with mental health in 2022-23.
- Public sector sickness was generally higher than in the private sector. This had been the case since 1995. An ONS report in 2022 found the days lost per worker in the private sector was 5.0 days, versus 7.1 days in local government and 10.7 days in healthcare.
- The report had been received by both SMT and Cabinet and had also been presented at the Scrutiny Committee.

In the ensuing discussion, the following key points were highlighted:

- Variation in numbers by quarter occurred regularly due to seasonal illnesses.
- In regard to the increase in absences, this could be mainly attributed to mental health absences however it was noted that in Q1 of this year these types of absences had fallen to pre-pandemic levels.
- Research was currently being undertaken on any links between the covid-19 pandemic and mental health. The Council had seen an increase in the number of requests for counselling due to difficulties accessing services via the NHS.
- The main priority for the Council was to reduce the number of sickness absences. Various initiatives had been undertaken including working towards wellbeing accreditation and becoming a menopause friendly employer.
- The Council had launched a new managing attendance procedure which included mandatory training for line managers.

- In regard to the PDR data, the Governance and Ethics Board was beginning to review the data and track variation trends. PDRs were undertaken on a 12-month rolling period and Power BI dashboards to monitor which PDRs were ready for review.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Members note the update; and
- (ii) That Members be provided with details of the percentage of staff on sickness leave and the average length of time off sick.

39. THE PEOPLE STRATEGY

M Potter presented the update in regard to The People Strategy.

The following key points were noted as follows:-

- Following the launch of The People Strategy and associated action plan in January 2022, the report provided an 18-month review of progress and achievements against the People Strategy Action Plan.
- The council was undergoing a significant period of transformation and the People Strategy would play an integral part in delivering change and meeting the 2030 ambitions as part of the Enabling Barnsley priority.
- The Council was awarded by Council of the Year at the LGC awards and Local Authority of the year at the MJ awards.
- The Council had achieved gold standard accreditation for well-being through Be well @ Work.
- The next steps included an audit review of action plan and implementation of findings and enhancing the health and well-being offer to ensure the Council maintains gold standard accreditation.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

40. ANNUAL EQUALITY AND INCLUSION REPORT

M Hempshall, Place, Policy and Equality Manager, presented the Annual Equality and Inclusion Report.

The following key points were noted:

- The Annual Equalities report provided an overview of how the Council met the Equality Act 2010 and associated Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED).
- The Council recognised significant gaps in the provision of equalities monitoring data, work was being undertaken to remedy for example collecting equality monitoring data for customer complaints and compliments.
- The Council was in the process of updating the current HR management system. Employees would be able to access the system via self-service, providing the opportunity to keep their own personal data up to date, which would help to the Council accurately capture workforce data.

- New systems in Childrens Social Care had been implemented including a systems audit.
- The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion action plan was currently underway.
- The Council was developing its staff networks including a BAME and Disability network.

Member discussion arose the age profile of the Council's staff. Barnsley had a comparable age profile to similar local authorities which varied across directorates. SMT had pinpointed succession planning as a key piece of work and the Council had worked with the LGA to test their workforce planning tool.

RESOLVED that Members note the update.

41. INTERNAL AUDIT EFFECTIVENESS REPORT

S Bradley, Internal Audit Manager, presented the Internal Audit Effectiveness Report.

The key points were noted as follows:-

- The requirement to have an EQA and to maintain a Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) for the Internal Audit function was required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2017 (PSIAS).
- A framework had been developed to ensure all aspects of the PSIAS are considered and factored into how the Internal Audit function is resourced, managed, audit work is identified and delivered, and personal professional standards are met.
- A self-assessment against the PSIAS would be undertaken once the Service's Transformation Review has been concluded and any changes embedded. The outcome would be reported into the Audit and Governance Committee in due course.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Members considered and assessed the proposed QAIP Framework which sets out how it will meet the requirements set out in the PSIAS; and
- (ii) That the Committee receives an annual update report on the delivery of the QAIP.

42. CORPORATE FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT UPDATE

N Copley, Director of Finance, presented the Corporate Finance and Performance Management Update.

The key points were noted as follows:-

- The Council's 23/24 budget was agreed by Full Council on 23rd February 2023.
- The current forecast was for a year-end cost pressure in the region of £17.5M. This was significantly more than anticipated at budget setting time

and predominantly related to further additional pressures being experienced in Children's Social Care.

- It was likely that some of these pressures would continue over the medium term, therefore it remained imperative that a transformation and efficiency plan was implemented.
- The budget approved in February 2023 assumed an employee pay award of 4% (equivalent to a cost of £4.0M), but it was highlighted at the time that this may not be sufficient given the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. The National Employers Association made a "full and final pay offer", of at least £1,925 (3.88% headline offer) on all NJC pay points 1 and above effective from 1st April 2023 which was still being deliberated by the Unions.

In the ensuing Member discussion, the following key points were noted:-

- Teams across finance and procurement had a stringent checklist for any spend over £10,000 and were currently investigating if spending was needed or could be sourced in a different way.
- The Council had a clear focus on the transformation programme, looking at how to fundamentally change the way services were delivered with a collective responsibility on delivering a balance budget.
- Three quarters of the Council's debt was fixed rate was provided cost certainty and therefore the Council had been less adversely impacted by recent volatility in the markets.
- In regard to the monies as part of the SYMCA Devolution Deal, the Council was planning on drawing down the funds for investment purposes.

RESOLVED that Members note that report.

43. EXTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT/UPDATE

G Mills, representing the External Auditor, attended virtually to provide an update on External Audit progress.

The key points were noted as:-

- Grant Thornton was on target to complete the accounts audit for the end of November and were hoping to complete the Value for Money audit for January 2024.
- It was hoped that the ISA 260 report would be presented to the Committee at the November meeting.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

44. FINAL COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

A Salt, Corporate Governance and Assurance Manager, presented the Final Committee Annual Report 2022-23.

The Committee noted that:-

- The Annual Report had been prepared in accordance with recommended guidance and seeks to demonstrate the Council’s commitment governance. The report set out the role of the Audit and Governance Committee and how it had discharged its responsibilities during 2022/23.
- Subject to the Committee’s approval, the Annual Report would be included as a link document in the Annual Governance Statement and would also be published as a standalone document on the Council’s website.

RESOLVED that the Committee considered the final Annual Report 2022/23 and subsequently recommend it for Full Council on 23rd November.

45. AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2023-24

A Salt presented the Audit Committee Work Plan 2023/24. It was noted that there were two changes included:-

- A report from the Monitoring Officer on a LGSCO Case had been included on the agenda.
- The November meeting has been changed to 15th November.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the updated workplan.

46. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded from this meeting during the consideration of the following item because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

47. GLASSWORKS MANAGEMENT ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

M O’Neill provided the Committee with an update on the Glassworks Management Assurance Framework.

It was noted that it was standard industry practice in both the public and private sector for developers to use capital contributions for fit-out costs. The Committee would be provided with a full breakdown of capital contribution costs in due course.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

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Chair