

MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING - THURSDAY, 23 JANUARY 2020

Present:

Councillor Galley (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess	Cox	Hugo	Roberts
Callow	Critchley	Mitchell	

Ms Y Russell, Independent Member

In Attendance:

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration

Mrs Tracy Greenhalgh, Head of Audit and Risk

Mr Neil Jack, Chief Executive

Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health

Ms Chloe Shore, Community Engagement and Partnership Manager

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Mr Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships

Mrs Elaine Ireland, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser

Mr Nick Rayner, Senior Manager, Deloitte

Also Present:

Councillor Mrs Callow, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hugo declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 3 Community Engagement Audit Follow-Up due to her position as trustee of the CVS Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 27 NOVEMBER 2019

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2019 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AUDIT FOLLOW-UP

Ms Chloe Shore, Community Engagement and Partnership Manager presented the Committee with a progress report on the recommendations made following the internal audit review of Community Engagement. The scope of the audit had been to review and assess the arrangements in place for engagement with the community across the Council's service areas in order to assist the Community Engagement team in embedding a strategic,

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effective and consistent approach to engagement.

Ms Shore informed the Committee that a steering group had been established in order to provide departmental updates and that tracking of large 'one off' engagement activities would be the aim as it would be unmanageable to track the high volume of every individual engagement that occurred. When asked how the criteria for a larger activity was determined, Ms Shore clarified that this would vary between projects but that anything which would potentially generate a large amount of interest and which would affect a predetermined percentage of the community would be considered, with the Steering Group to discuss and make the final decision.

In relation to R1 'We recommend that the Council produces a Community Engagement Strategy, which should build on existing engagement mechanisms' Ms Shore updated that whilst the initial draft of the policy had been produced, feedback was being gathered in order to inform the final version. In addition, the Committee was informed that a Members' meeting would be held the following week in order to receive their feedback prior to finalisation of the policy. Committee Members questioned how the introduction of the Community Engagement Policy had improved working practices across the Council, with Ms Shore stating that the policy had resulted in a more consistent focus and delivery across departments and that she had received positive feedback regarding the improvements.

A question was raised regarding R3 'We recommend that the Community Engagement team establishes a working link with partner organisation engagement functions to allow for better local engagement coordination, avoidance of duplication and where possible sharing of intelligence and data'. The Committee asked which external partners the team would like further involvement from, with Ms Shore responding that initial conversations had been held with the police and that further collaboration was hoped for. She further explained that she attended external meetings with key partner organisations to help prevent duplication and to share intelligence.

Discussion was held around the importance of informing Members of any potential community engagement activities, as well as a comprehensive directory of services which Councillors could use to direct interested constituents. Ms Shore informed the Committee that community engagement training had been offered in 2019 but that further training could be arranged if required. She went on to explain that the Steering Group had only recently been established but that the information from its meetings could be forwarded to the Members' Support team for distribution to the relevant Councillors. Ms Shore also made it clear that Members were welcome to email her directly with any queries.

Further information was also sought by the Committee in relation to R16 'We recommend that the decision to place the community engagement function in Public Health is reviewed to provide the function with the best positioning and platform to affect community engagement across the Council.' Ms Shore updated that the Transformation Manager was undertaking a review to determine where community engagement would be best placed within the Council, with clarification provided that Public Health encompassed a wide range of provisions not limited to health services.

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Ms Shore concluded by outlining the beneficial outcomes of the internal audit recommendations, advising that they had resulted in a more consistent approach across the Council.

4 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER - FAILURE TO KEEP PEOPLE SAFE

The Committee considered a progress report outlining the individual risks identified within the Strategic Risk – ‘Failure to Keep People Safe’, from the Council’s Strategic Risk Register.

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources provided an overview of the sub-risk ‘Death or Injury to a Member of Staff’, outlining the Health and Safety systems and procedures in place. In relation to the monitoring of staff sickness levels, a question was raised on whether illness caused specifically by mental health issues was monitored and supported. Mr Thompson confirmed that sickness levels were monitored and that absences attributable to mental health issues were identified where possible, explaining that the underlying causes of illness were not always evident. Mr Neil Jack, Chief Executive further clarified that mental health awareness was addressed departmentally as well as by a Council as a whole and that early referral to Occupational Health Services was an important part of the process.

Assurance was sought that the maintenance of buildings under the control of the Council’s Wholly Owned Companies was as vigorously monitored as all other Council buildings. Mr Thompson verified this to be the case, explaining that property compliance audits were being implemented across all of the companies.

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children’s Services addressed the sub-risk ‘Death, Serious Injury or Harm of a Vulnerable Child’. She explained that a robust improvement plan was in place within Children’s Services which was supported by the Council’s partners. The Committee was informed that the Commissioner was satisfied with current progress and that co-working with key partners was improving. She highlighted the key risks to the effective delivery of the improvement plan as recruitment and financial limitations. The difficulties experienced nationally in the recruitment and retention of suitably experienced social care staff was discussed, with Mrs Booth outlining a number of provisions being implemented to try and address this hurdle. She added further assurance that due to the high level of scrutiny from outside bodies and the improvements being implemented across the service, the gross risk scores had decreased.

Mr Neil Jack, Chief Executive answered Members’ questions on the sub-risk ‘Death, Serious Injury or Harm of a Vulnerable Adult’. Mr Jack emphasised the strong links with health providers and explained that the Council’s Principal Social Worker for adults was undertaking deep dive reviews of a number of service provisions. Members were informed that examples of good practice were examined in order to assess what worked well in order that such examples could be shared and learnt from in a positive way. In response to a question on how samples were selected for the in-depth audit of three or four cases per quarter, Mr Jack explained that due to the complexity of the cases, the focus would be on the identification of areas where improvements would be beneficial or where a particular issue had been raised by providers or service-users.

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In relation to the sub-risk 'Death or Injury to a Member of the Public' Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services provided additional information on the controls in place. Discussion was held around the need to consult with affected residents in cases where the removal of trees may cause concern, with Mr Blackledge agreeing that clear communication with residents would be beneficial. The implementation of improved electronic monitoring of playgrounds was highlighted, with a target date for introduction cited as March 2020.

Mr Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration informed Members of the measures in place to address identified risks associated with beach access. The Committee was informed that a beach patrol team was employed all year round and was supplemented by additional staffing in the summer season where risks increased. North and South look out points were in place, with plans being considered to introduce a look out point in the central area. The beach patrol team was equipped with a range of equipment, including quad bikes, to help them respond quickly and lifesaving equipment was subject to a regular and frequent inspection regime by the team. Assurance was sought that the safety signs on the promenade provided the correct information to help maintain the safety of members of the public. Mr Cavill confirmed that the required safety notices were in place at each entry point to the beach and that these underwent regular checks.

Mr John Blackledge responded to Members' questions in relation to the sub-risk 'Residents Do Not Feel Safe in Their Communities.' He explained that responsibility for the Council's Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) had now transferred to his directorate and as such he would be entering into discussions with partner agencies about funding and improved function of the CCTV network. In order to further inform any decisions regarding the feasibility of modernising the current system, an internal audit of the Council's CCTV would be completed sooner than previously planned to ensure that a thorough and robust overview of the system was completed.

Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health informed the Committee that new Drug and Alcohol Strategies were in the process of being prepared. Support for the pursuit of a minimum unit pricing scheme for alcohol was expressed, with Dr Rajpura stressing the beneficial impact such a scheme would bring.

The Committee noted the end date of funding for the Fulfilling Lives project as April 2021 and questioned whether another provision would be replacing its valuable contribution. Dr Rajpura advised that work was ongoing with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to identify a health care model for the group, with the aim of securing funding from the CCG to continue the work started by Fulfilling Lives. In conjunction with the introduction of an app aimed at enabling those in need of support for alcohol use to access help themselves, as well as the potential remodelling of the service, Dr Rajpura anticipated positive improvements to be evident within the next 12 months.

5 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2018/2019 HALF-YEAR REVIEW

Mr Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships presented the Half-Year Review and explained that the Annual Governance Statement represented a review of the system of

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internal control within the Council, with a significant part of this being the action plan designed to further enhance the governance framework.

With regards to mid-term progress, Mr Towers reported that many actions had either already been implemented or would be fully implemented by the financial year-end.

Committee Members sought additional information on the targeted use of social media for specific groups of residents and were informed that the Communications team would be targeting specific messages to relevant individuals in line with their interests, as well as still using more traditional forms of marketing and communication.

The impact of the newly established joint working arrangements with the Department for Work and Pensions was questioned. Mrs Tracy Greenhalgh, Head of Audit and Risk advised that it was too early into the arrangements to identify direct outcomes but that she would provide a further update to the Committee at a future meeting.

Mr Towers advised that the Officer Good Governance Steering Group was overseeing the implementation plan. He noted that government constraints limited progression of some issues but that overall progress had been good.

6 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2018/2019

Mr Nick Rayner, Senior Manager, Deloitte presented the Annual Audit Letter 2018/2019. In response Mr Thompson raised the Council's query over the proposed fee increase submitted within the report. Following discussion the Committee agreed that a Task and Finish group should be established, comprising of suitable Council Officers, representatives from Deloitte and a selection of Members from the Audit Committee in order to consider the matter of the increased fee. The findings of the group would come before the Audit Committee at its meeting on 30 April 2020.

7 AOB

Councillor Galley informed the Committee that Ms Yvonne Russell would be standing down from her role as Independent Member with immediate effect. He extended the Committee's thanks to Ms Russell for her valuable contribution to the work of the Committee, over a near two and a half year period.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting of the Committee was noted as 12 March 2020, commencing at 6pm.

Chairman

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(The meeting ended at 7.47pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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