

Runnymede Borough Council

Standards and Audit Committee

Thursday, 30 May 2024 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors S Jenkins (Chair), M Singh (Vice-Chair), M D Cressey, P Gahir, R King, G Moudgil, M Nuti and S Whyte.

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors J Furey and T Gracey.

1 **Election of Vice-Chair**

Councillor M Singh was elected as Vice-Chair for the municipal year 2024/25.

2 **Notification of Changes to Committee Membership**

There were no substitutions.

3 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 17 March 2024 and those of the Sub-Committee held on 15 March 2024 were confirmed and signed as correct records. The public set of Minutes of the Sub-Committee are attached at Appendix A.

4 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Furey and T Gracey.

5 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

6 **TIAA Annual Assurance Report**

[The meeting adjourned between 7.32pm and 7.40pm.]

Philip Lazenby, Audit Director from TIAA, was present for this item.

The structure of the report, which was compiled annually, was explained to the Committee. Members' attention was drawn to the following areas in particular:

- In respect of the assurance review of Procurement, Management accepted the need to reduce the number of waivers being granted. However, it was not felt appropriate to implement the recommendation to provide a list of reasons waivers should be approved as it was deemed sufficient by Management to allow the Procurement Board to exercise their judgement in individual cases.
- There was a low level of non-conformity with key financial controls, with the small number of instances in the sample attributable to human error. Such instances were less likely to occur once a new finance system was implemented, the target date for which was April 2026.
- Significant progress had been made since the assurance review on risk management had been undertaken. Work on finessing the Council's approach in this area, such as ensuring that there was a focus on risks that the Council was

able to influence, was ongoing. It was accepted that such a task was substantial, and that it required significant support and buy in from across the organisation.

It was noted that all recommendations had been made in the context of substantial or reasonable assurance being provided by the Council. There had been no instances of limited assurance provided, which was received positively by the Committee. The two urgent actions that had been identified related to the meals at home service, both of which had been discussed by the Standards and Audit Committee on 19 March 2024.

Members were reassured that whilst a number of reports were supplied in their draft state, it was now highly unlikely for any recommendations to change at this late stage.

Mr Lazenby thanked the Council's for its support in compiling the report. Members thanked Mr Lazenby for presenting his final report to the Committee.

The report was noted.

7 **Annual Governance Statement 2023/24**

The report was amended as follows:

- The reference to HVO to read "Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil".

The Annual Governance Statement before the Committee was the second iteration in the new format, following a review which aimed to make it more accessible and transparent. The length of the document represented the significant amount of work that had been undertaken during the previous year. An overview of this work was provided to the Committee, along with a summary of the work undertaken against the action plan. The outstanding action, relating to embedding the Nolan principles of public life into the staff code of conduct, was being taken forward by the newly appointed Corporate Head of Human Resources and Occupational Development.

The Committee requested a copy of the Terms of Reference for Business Runnymede to understand how it was governed. It was agreed that this would be provided outside the meeting. A refresh of the corporate values was expected to be undertaken as part of the cultural work associated with the Non-Statutory Best Value Notice.

Resolved that –

The draft Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 (as contained at Appendix A of the officer's report) be approved and signed by the Co-Leaders of the Council and the Chief Executive, and published alongside the Annual Statement of Accounts for 2023/24.

8 **Informing the Audit Risk Assessment 2023/24**

A Member review of this this document was a new requirement of the Council's appointed external auditors. It was confirmed that more detailed questionnaires were completed when new IT systems were implemented.

Resolved that –

The document "Informing the audit risk assessment for Runnymede Borough Council 2023/24" be approved and that the external auditors be notified that there were no additional matters the Committee considered may also impact on the planned audit work and context for the financial year ending 31 March 2024.

9 **Accounting Policies 2023/24**

It was best practice for Members to review the Council's accounting policies annually, even where there were no changes from the previous year's arrangements. Members were reminded that there were strict statutory provisions in relation to accounting.

Resolved that –

The Council's accounting policies for the financial year 2023/24 (as set out in Appendix A of the officer's report), be approved.

10 **Quarter 4 2023/24 Corporate Risk Profile and report**

An overview of the number, nature and direction of travel of certain risks was provided to the Committee.

Developing and improving the Council's approach to risk management was an ongoing task. The format of the risk profile dashboard was previously agreed by the Committee, with further updates due to be made in response to feedback from the internal auditor.

The way in which entries drawn from the national risk register were incorporated into the Council's own risk register, particularly where there was little scope for the Council influence or provide effective mitigation measures, had been reviewed.

A significant amount of work was being undertaken to review the consistency around risk reporting and mitigation measures between service areas. Entries would also be reviewed to ensure that their descriptors were accurate and that there was no duplication. Where similar risks were identified by a number of service areas in their own risk registers, there was the potential for inclusions to be made on the higher profile corporate risk register.

A review of the Council's emergency planning and business continuity arrangements was underway. This would be reviewed by the Committee in due course.

Officers were asked to review references to the tenant at Egham Orbit.

The report was noted.

11 **Response to 2019 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge**

The Committee was reminded of the importance of carrying out periodic external assurance reviews. Runnymede Borough Council last undertook such a review in 2019, although the Council's response was delayed by the pandemic. The next review was currently scheduled to take place in October 2024.

There was a discussion about the Member training programme. Clarification was sought on what training was mandatory and for which Members. Officers were asked to recirculate the annual member training programme (which included information on LGA courses) and provide clarity over mandatory topics. Officers were also asked to review whether it was possible for online training sessions to be recorded for Members who were unable to attend.

The report was noted.

12 **Complaints and compliments Quarter 4 and Year End 2023/24**

An overview of the report was provided to the Committee.

The overall increase in the number of complaints was largely attributable to issues at the Waitrose car park in Egham. This was being reviewed by the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital and Collection Services, with a view to reaching a resolution with the car park operator. Work had taken place to ensure that a request for a service, such as a missed bin collection, was not unnecessarily treated as a complaint. It was however accepted that with this example, in the event of persistent missed bin collections, engaging the complaints process was appropriate. The distinction between complaints and service requests had driven a decrease in complaints for Environmental Services.

The next meeting of the Committee would be reviewing an updated complaints policy.

The report was noted.

13 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

There was no exempt business.

Appendix A Minutes 15.03.2024

(The meeting ended at 9.13 pm.)

Chair

Runnymede Borough Council

Standards & Audit Committee – Salary Re-grading Appeal

Friday 15 March 2024 at 11:00am

Members of the Committee present: Councillors J Hulley (Chair), M Cressey, S Jenkins.

The other Members of this Committee were not required for this meeting.

1. Notification of Changes to Committee Membership

There were no changes to committee membership.

2. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Procedure for the conduct of business

The procedure for the conduct of business was noted.

5. Re-Grading Appeal

The Standards and Audit Committee met to consider an appeal by an employee regarding the grading of their post.

The report and its content were confidential as they identified individuals.

The Committee determined the matter in accordance with the procedure as set out in the agenda papers and had due regard to the advice provided by both the Corporate Head of HR and OD and the Corporate Head of Law and Governance, acting as Secretary to the Committee.

Both the appellant and Assistant Chief Executive presented their cases and there was an opportunity for each to ask questions of each other and the panel to do so also.

The Committee adjourned at 13:30 and re-convened at 14:20.

After careful consideration, the Panel determined that the appeal should be rejected.

As stated in the procedure, staff appeals heard by the Standards and Audit Committee (and Sub-Committee) were the last internal mechanism of appeal open to an employee.

Resolved that –

The appeal be rejected for the reasons given to the appellant at the meeting.

(The meeting ended at 2.29pm)

Chairman