

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 25 January 2021

PRESENT: Councillor M Charlton (Chair)
Councillor(s): L Green, J McClurey, J McElroy, Mr Stuart Bell (Independent Member), D Burnett, S Green and H Kelly

APOLOGIES: Mr G Clark (Independent Member)

ASC295 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 19 October 2020 were approved as a correct record.

ASC296 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

ASC297 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

The Committee received a report setting out the final LGA Code of Conduct and sought comments from the Committee with a view to making recommendations to full Council on adopting the new model code.

Following work throughout 2020, including consultation with local authorities . The LGA have produced a final version of the Model Code of Conduct which was appended to the main report for information. A draft code was previously submitted to the Audit and Standards Committee at its meeting on 20 July 2020 and authorised the Monitoring Officer to submit a response to the Consultation.

The final version of the LGA Code of Conduct was published on 23 December 2020. It is intended that the LGA will review it annually to ensure that it remains relevant and fit for purpose.

The Committee were dissatisfied that the new model code did not address some of the issues identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, especially in terms of sanctions and which had also been part of the committee's consultation response last year. Members noted that the changes to the available sanctions required a change to legislation. Member asked officers to undertake further work on the model code to incorporate best practice and to ensure that members across the council were aware of the proposals. A further draft would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on 8 March 2020.

The Committee also requested that training be provided on the Council's Constitution and Code of Conduct in due course.

- RESOLVED -
- i) That the information be noted
 - ii) That further work be undertaken and the report be brought back to the next meeting on 8 March 2020 for comment and consideration
 - iii) That training be provided on the Council's Constitution and Code of Conduct in due course

ASC298 LOCAL CODE OF GOVERNANCE

The Committee received a report requesting that the Committee consider and approve an updated version of the Local Code of Governance, based on the CIPFA Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework.

As part of this year's annual review of the Local Code of Governance, the Council's senior management have been requested to make any necessary amendments or additions to be document. The proposed changes were highlighted in the Appendix which was attached to the main report for the Committee's information. The majority of these changes relate to the Council's Performance Management Framework which is currently being reviewed and will be implemented later this year.

- RESOLVED -
- i) That the information be noted
 - ii) The Committee approved the updated Local Code of Governance

ASC299 CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT 2020/21 - QUARTER 3 UPDATE

The Committee received a report to update on Corporate Risk Management during (Quarter 3) 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020 in line with the principles of good corporate governance.

The report included updates on:

- Strategic Risk Management
- Operational Risk Management
- Business Continuity Management
- Corporate Risk and Resilience Group

- RESOLVED -
- i) That the information be noted
 - ii) The Committee endorsed the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements

ASC300 EXTERNAL AUDITOR: AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a report updating on Mazars progress in delivering their responsibilities as external auditor.

The report outlined Audit Progress and National Publications and the external auditor's report was attached as an appendix to the main report for information.

RESOLVED – The Committee noted the contents of the external auditor's report.

ASC301 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

ASC302 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2020/21 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT TO 31 DECEMBER 2020

The Committee received a report outlining progress made by the Internal Audit & Risk Service against the audit plan for the financial year 2020/21 and summarises the main findings arising from audit activity throughout the period 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020.

The audit plan originally agreed for 2020/21 has been revised to take account of the impact of COVID on both the Internal Audit Service and other services across the Council. Work on the Internal Audit Plan was suspended for 3 months at the start of the year in order to allow critical Council services time to cope with the initial COVID impact. The audit plan was therefore revised to a 9-month plan in order to take account of the reduced timescale.

The plan was also revised due to a reduction in staffing resources due to staff redeployment into critical Financial Management (FM) services and to take account of audit requirements in relation to COVID related grant funding. The Chief Internal Auditor is on temporary secondment to support corporate initiatives and is being covered on an interim basis.

A summary of the main findings from audit activity during the period was appended to the main report for information. A total of 16 assignments were completed during the period. The target for implementation of audit recommendations is 100% for high priority recommendations and 90% for medium priority recommendations. The current rate of implementation of all recommendations is 86%, with 88% of all medium priority and 62% of all high priority recommendations having been implemented.

The Committee were also advised that due to the ongoing impact of the COVID pandemic, officers are continuing to work through the backlog in relation to the implementation of recommendations. In addition, many Council Services remain under continued pressure to sustain front line delivery which therefore continues to impact on the capacity and availability of staff to respond to audit challenge. Officers continue working towards this position improving in the next quarter to bring implementation levels nearer the target of 100%

- RESOLVED -
- i) That the information be noted
 - ii) That the revised 2020/21 Audit Plan be agreed

ASC303 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Monday 8 March 2021 at 10.30 am via Teams

Chair.....